

Philippines – China Relations: The Case of the South China Sea (Spratly Islands) Claims

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Abstract: *The research is focused on examining by describing historically the relationship between the Philippines and China in the disputed claims over the islands in South China Sea. To crystalize this goal, the discourse in the paper heavily employs inter-textual analysis that is logically arranged into an opening idea on the context of the conflicting issue over the islands situated in Spratlys, then followed by an extensive illustration of the relationship between the Philippines and China concerning the territorial claims over the islands of South China Sea. Subsequently, a brief reflection guided by the principle of territoriality is portrayed with the goal to authoritatively explain the idea of jurisdiction over the islands in the Spratly area. After that, the paper briefly concludes with a prospectus on the issue of South China Sea.*

Keywords: Territorial dispute, Neoliberal Institutionalism, South China Sea

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most contending, more disturbing and glaring issues affecting the relations between the Philippines and China is the jurisdictional claim over the groups and chains of islands in South China Sea. China is claiming jurisdiction over all the littoral islands sitting on South China Sea while the Philippines' claims jurisdiction on some. Claims by both countries overlaps with one another, thus producing friction and conflict in their foreign relations.

The aim of this research undertaking is mainly focused on examining and describing historically the development of the dispute over the claims in the islands in South China Sea shaped the geopolitical relations between China and the Philippines. This issue demands a critical discussion since a dearth of literature is painfully missing to explain. To answer this gap, the discourse of the paper employs inter-textual analysis that is logically congregated into the following: an opening idea on the context of the conflicting issue over the islands situated in Spratlys, then followed by an extensive illustration on the relations between the Philippines and China concerning the territorial claims over the islands if South China Sea. Subsequently, a brief recapitulation guided by the principle of territoriality is portrayed as it is significant in an authoritative attempt to explain the ownership on the

Spratly claims. After that, the paper concisely concludes.

II. Contextualizing the South China Sea Claims

The South China Sea

The disputed South China Sea is defined by the International Hydrographic Bureau as the “body of water stretching in a Southwest to Northeast direction, whose southern border is three degrees South latitude between South Sumatra and Kalimantan, and whose northern border is the strait of Taiwan from the northern tip of Taiwan to the Fukien coast of China” (Global security, 2008). A more specific geographical coordinate on the location of the islands situated in South China Sea is said to lie between “four degrees and eleven degrees north latitude and 109 degrees and 117 degrees east of longitude” (Joyner,1999; CIA Fact Book, 2004).

The South China Sea is composed of estimated 100-230 islands, islets which refers to a small island that is usually submerged in water, shoals, banks, atolls, cays and reefs that covers an area of approximately 180,000 square kilometers (69,500 square miles) (Joyner, 1999 & CIA fact book, 2004). These hundreds of islands comprise four main archipelagoes which include the Pratas, Macclesfield Bank, Paracels and the Spratlys

(Energy Information Administration, 2002). However, most of the islands are scientifically proven to be small in size and barren to support any permanent human settlement independently (Chin, 2003). Most of the claimant states are interested to have a jurisdiction of the islands in South China because of its strategic, political and economic significance in the Asia Pacific Region.

Natural Resources

There are three most prominent reasons on why the South China Sea is tagged as economically significant by the claimant countries. First, those countries claiming some parcels of islands or islets are convinced by the belief that the location has significant deposits of oil, natural gas and minerals under the ocean floor. Second, the South China Sea, particularly near the location of the islands, is abundantly supplied with marine species. Third, in general, South China Sea is considered to be second busiest international sea lanes where ships passes through the carry trade materials.

It has been argued by Joyner (1999), Raman (1999), Chin (2004) and the CIA Fact Book (2004) that in the 1960's, there are initial internationally coordinated undersea seismic surveys conducted in South China Sea, specifically on the location of the Islands like Spratly group of islands. In subsequent years, China's Geology and Mineral Resources Ministry announced an estimate of the reserves amounting to 17.7 billion tons of oil and natural gas. This is even greater than what Kuwait has with an estimate of 13 billion tons of oil. After, the pronouncement of China on the oil and natural gas reserves in South China Sea, it is then considered as the fourth largest reserve of natural resources of oil and natural gas.

In 1998, the Philippines, through a study conducted by the Philippine Office of Strategic and Special Studies of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, announced that South China Sea is abundantly supplied with more or less 314 species of fishes and marine biodiversity species (AFP, 1998 cited in Joyner, 1999). It is also stipulated in the study that South China Sea is one of the world's richest fishing ground yielding up to 7.5 tons of fish per square kilometer in the 390,000 square kilometer area of the group of islands (Joyner, 1999; Raman, 1999; Chin, 2004 & CIA Fact Book, 2004).

The region is also the second busiest shipping lanes in the world. It is more than half of the world super tanker and cargo ships passes through the region's waters. Most of the oil and material imports from the

Middle East and Africa pass through the strategic Strait of Malacca into the South China Sea. There are at least 270 ships passing each day in the region's water. Hence, the South China Sea has a very important geopolitical role in the region (Joyner, 1999; Raman, 1999; Chin, 2004; CIA Fact Book, 2004 & Energy Information Administration, 2008). It is because, if a particular state controls the entire South China Sea, that state can also control trade and oil economic activities in the region. In times of conflict, the archipelagoes in South China Sea can also serve as strategic locations for landing and replenishing of aircrafts and ships.

Claimant Countries

Because of the presence of natural resources and the strategic position of the islands in South China Sea, there have been several littoral countries claiming for territorial jurisdiction over the area. There are six countries proclaiming an entire or partial ownership over the coveted Spratly Islands. These countries can be enumerated as follows, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. It is China, Taiwan and Vietnam that are claiming jurisdiction over the entire South China Sea area while Philippines and Malaysia are claiming partial of the area. However, Brunei is the most passive among the other claimant since it is not vocal in contesting for a small part of the South China Sea near to its territory.

Granados (2007) asserts that China is the most aggressive among the claimant countries as it asserts rights on all of the islands in South China Sea. It has also been involved in military confrontation and skirmishes with other claimants in declaring its territorial claim. China claims all of the Spratly Islands (Nansha Islands in Chinese), and occupies several of the islands with its military. In 1974, China seized the Paracel Islands from Vietnam and continues to maintain sovereignty over the islands. Additionally, China claims the Pratas Islands. China's claims to the South China Sea are based on the EEZ and continental shelf principle as well as historical records of the Han (110 AD) and Ming (1403-1433 AD) Dynasties (Chin, 2003).

Taiwan claims almost all of the South China Sea. Taiwan claims all of the Spratly Islands (Nansha Islands in Chinese) and has announced its intention to build an airstrip on Taiping. Taiwan claims all of the Paracel Islands (Energy Information Administration, 2004; 2008). Additionally, Taiwan occupies the Pratas Islands. Taiwan's claims are based on principles similar to those of China.

Raman (1999) is saying that Vietnam claims a significant portion of the South China Sea based upon its EEZ and the continental shelf principle. Vietnam claims all of the Spratly Islands (Truong Sa in Vietnamese), and has occupied twenty of them. Vietnam claims all of the Paracel Islands (Hoang Sa in Vietnamese) despite being forcibly ejected by China in 1974. Vietnam also claims the Gulf of Thailand based upon its EEZ and the continental shelf principle. In 1982, Vietnam signed *The Agreement on Historic Waters* with Cambodia, setting the stage for later cooperation between the two countries. In 2006, Vietnam and Cambodia announced their intention to share the oil resources of the Gulf of Thailand. In 1992, Vietnam and Malaysia signed a *Joint Development Areas* agreement. In 1997, Vietnam and Thailand signed an agreement setting the delimitation of their respective sea boundaries.

Chin (2003) as cited in his thesis saying that Malaysia's claim to the South China Sea is limited to the boundaries of the EEZ and continental shelf. Malaysia claims three islands of the Spratlys, having built a hotel on one and bringing soil from the mainland to raise the level of another. Malaysia makes no claim to the Paracel Islands. Malaysia also claims portions of the Gulf of Thailand, based upon its EEZ and the continental shelf principle. Malaysia signed a cooperative agreement for exploration and development with Thailand in 1979. In 1992, Malaysia and Vietnam signed a *Joint Development Areas* agreement. Malaysia has no such agreement with Cambodia.

Chin (2003) together with Joyner (1999) is articulating that the Philippines claim a sizeable portion of the South China Sea. The Philippines occupy eight of the Spratly Islands (Kalayaan in Filipino). The Philippines do not claim the Paracel Islands. Filipino claims are based upon the EEZ and continental shelf principle, as well as a 1956 Filipino explorer's expedition. It was in 1947, certain Thomas Cloma allegedly discovered islands situated in South China Sea and in 1956 he proclaimed the creation of a new island state and named it "Kalayaan". However, the official claim of the Philippines in the Kalayaan Group of Islands came only in 1978 when then President Ferdinand Marcos proclaimed the annexation of the archipelago under the administration of Palawan province.

Brunei's claim to the South China Sea is limited to its EEZ, which extends to one of the southern reefs of the Spratly Islands. However, Brunei has not made any formal claims to the reef nor to any of the Spratlys.

Brunei makes no claims towards any of the Paracel Islands (Joyner, 1999).

In a report published by the Global Security Organization (n.d.), the organization is asserting that there were two other littoral countries in Southeast Asia claiming some parts of the islands in South China Sea. It is Indonesia who possess claim on the Natuna Islands by virtue of the provision of the 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that one country can assert in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Likewise, Thailand invoked the provision on the UNCLOS on its overlapping claim on some islands in South China Sea with Vietnam. However, these two countries, like Brunei are, not aggressive in their claims over the islands and did not position any military troops in the islands it tends to claim.

All claimant countries, claiming either parcels or the entirety of the South China Sea for jurisdiction, have occupied and stationed their military troops on some islands. There are several countries in the East and Southeast Asian Nations that claims over disputed islands in the South China Sea where a number of troops in each claimant country are stationed in the islands. In addition, the occupation and stationing of military troops in the islands located in South China Sea is a requirement in asserting jurisdiction over a territory.

Activities by Claimant Countries

There have been seismic and survey studies conducted by claimant countries in the islands where they assert jurisdiction. In a report made by the Energy Information Administration in 2002, Indonesia had conducted research and studies on the potential reserves of natural gas on Natuna Islands. In addition, it was also the site of the largest military exercise conducted by Indonesia. China did not contend this activities conducted by Indonesia.

On one hand, according to Feria (2008) and Raman (1999) many of Malaysia's natural gas fields located offshore Sarawak also fall under the Chinese claim, but as with the Philippine gas fields, China has not specifically objected to their development. In July 2002, a new oil discovery by Murphy Oil (working under a construct with state-owned Petronas) about 100 miles offshore from Sabah on island of Borneo rekindled interest in a latent dispute between Malaysia and Brunei over offshore rights. Brunei had asserted a 200-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off its coastline in 2000. Negotiations between the two governments to resolve the issue are continuing.

Ian Story (2006) have reported that the Philippines, recently, is extracting oil and natural gas from Malampaya and Camago islands. These two islands are primarily situated the disputed South China Sea but neither Vietnam nor China opposes the activity. In 2000, the Philippines, Vietnam and China further contracted an agreement on joint seismic and survey studies on the Spratly islands to exactly have information on the extent of the oils reserves. It entails that Vietnam and China have agreed on an amicable settlement on their dispute on South China Sea claims.

Shaping the Philippines – China Relations

The relations between Philippines and China was greatly affected and continued to be affected by the jurisdictional claim on the group of islands located in South China Sea. It is often described that the relationship between the Philippines and China is more on diplomatic rather than military conflicts in asserting their claims over the Spratly Islands. Moreover, the history of relationship between the Philippines and China develop from nearly military confrontation to cooperation through confidence building measures (CBM) recently.

Joyner (1999) and Chin (2003) narrated that after the alleged discovery of the Spratly Islands by Thomas Cloma in 1946, he established himself as the protectorate and declaring the island as a state in 1956 with the informal help from the Philippines. In the same year of declaration, Taiwan, China, Vietnam, France and United Kingdom and Netherlands were swift to send naval troops to occupy the Spratly Islands and the Itu Aba Islands and declaring that the act of Cloma was an aggression by the Philippines. Also, in the same year, Thomas Cloma asserted its claims by going to the United Nations and pleads for his claims. In 1968, the Philippines assumed as the protectorate of the islands posted military troops in three major islands concerning the claim of Cloma.

In 1971, the Philippines sent a diplomatic note on behalf of Cloma to Taipei demanding it to withdraw its military troops from Itu Aba. In the year of July 10, then President Ferdinand Marcos proclaimed the annexation of the Spratly Islands under the administration of the province of Palawan. However, it was only in 1972 that islands were officially incorporated into the province of Palawan. Military conflict started in 1977, when Filipino troops attempted to land and occupy Itu Aba islands but the attempt failed. Hence, Taiwan maintained the possession of the Itu Aba up into the present. In 1978, the Marcos

administration made formal claims on 57 islands as part of Philippine archipelago (Chin 2003 & Baker, 2004).

From 1980 until 1990 there was no significant military conflict the Philippines and China since the former is subjected to military conflict by Vietnam over territorial jurisdiction on the islands of South China Sea. However, in 1992, China began installing sovereignty markers on various shoals and islets in Spratlys but this action was curbed by the “Declaration on the South China Sea” by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Baker, 2004).

In 1995, China resumed its expansionist policies and occupied Mischief Reefs wherein the Philippines have been occupying the islands. China constructed structures justifying that it will serve as rest houses of Chinese fishermen. ASEAN was alarmed protested against the actions of China by declaring a “Code of Conduct on the South China Sea”. The code is aimed at reducing chances of military conflict over the Spratlys (Joyner, 1999).

In 1995, China resumed its expansionist policy over the Spratly Islands when the Chinese troops occupied Mischief Reef which is being occupied by the Philippines. This act of China further escalated the territorial dispute as well as the bilateral relationship between the two countries. However, the conflict did not result to military confrontation; rather the Philippines filed a diplomatic protest over the actions of China. It even went to the filing of case against China by the Philippines in the World Maritime Tribunal in Hamburg. However, China rejected the Philippines challenge (Global Security, n.d.).

At the turn of the 21st century, China became less confrontational on the issue of Spratly claims because of its foreign policy on “new security concept” and “China’s peaceful rise”. As part of this foreign policy, China held talks with ASEAN countries aimed at realizing a proposal for free trade area as well the acceptance and enforcement of the “Code of Conduct on the South China Sea” in 2002. It is vital in the agreement that claimant nations resolve the problem of sovereignty without further use of force (Baker, 2004 & Joyner, 1999).

Because of China’s economic growth and large potential market share, claimant countries are avoiding diplomatic and military confrontation with China over the claims on Spratly Islands. No one in the claimant countries wanted to jeopardize bilateral ties with China because of its tremendous economic and trade impact. One of the so called “ASEAN Way” of resolving conflict on Spratly islands claims is through *Joint*

Resources Development and Confidence and Building Measures (Joyner, 1999). In the Joint Resources Development approach, there will be a creation of a “Spratly Resource Development Authority”. This body will facilitate joint ventures among claimant countries on exploiting the natural resources available in the South China Sea. This body will ensure that sovereignty claims will not be taken for granted by the claimant countries. Moreover, in order to create this body and achieve its goals, it is important that countries must have the willingness to cooperate and possess the basic character in relating with one another.

Subsequently, one of the most sought after strategy to resolve the issue on Spratly claims is preventive diplomacy through Confidence Building Measures (CBM). The most important nature of the CBM is to have a harmonious relationship between contending claimant countries but not dominating or intimidating one another with violent means. It is the main thrust of CBM to involve disputing countries over the Spratly Islands in a constructive negotiation aimed at solutions satisfying the different interests of the actors involved through peaceful means. It is one of the most important assertions made by Joyner (1999) that “building confidence depends on nurturing mutual trust and understanding”. Nurturing mutual trust and understanding entails that claimant countries understand each other’s motives and rationales behind policies of other states in the region through an increase transparency of national policies and capabilities.

Raman (1999) and Feria (2008) reported that along with the practices of confidence building measures among the claimant countries, Philippines and China relations greatly improved and went beyond the dispute on Spratly Islands to a better economic and trade ties. There are several factors that lead to these improve relations. First, there is a burgeoning economic ties between the two countries. Manila looked at China as one of the key economic players in the region that could pull up Philippine economy. Second, China assured ASEAN members that its growing power does not pose a threat to regional stability. This is mainly attributed to China’s adherence to the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. Lastly, China is no longer gravely wary on the role of US in the Philippines after the later withdrew its troops from Iraq in 2004. Hence, China can confidently work with the Philippines without any intimidation that US influence might prevail.

Truly, Philippines and China relations went a long way as both countries go beyond territorial dispute to

more productive relations through economic ties. This economic relation between the two countries does not necessarily precipitate the issue on Spratly claims neither both countries do not want to hinder themselves with economic opportunity.

The Framework of Analysis: Neoliberal Institutionalism

To better explain the relationship between the Philippines and China concerning territorial disputes in the region, one of the fitting paradigm to utilize is the neo-liberal institutionalism. As a framework of explaining issues in international relations, neoliberal institutionalism is composed of six major concepts. Baldwin (1993) pulled together these conceptual areas of theory with the end goal to illustrating a concrete approach on issues concerning conflict and cooperation in the international arena. Each of the components can be enumerated as follows:

First, anarchy is inevitable to occur in the international arena. It is known to be the absence of a government in the international community. Sovereign states as the main actors in world politics cannot be subjected to a single and dominant power. As a consequence, there are states that will manifest dominant behavior towards other states. However, in the context of neoliberal institutionalism (Keohane & Axelrod, 1985 cited in Baldwin, 1993), interaction among states can still be carried-out. For Grieco (1988 cited in Baldwin, 1993), states will still be motivated to interact with one another for reasons of survival. In the case of the relationship between the Philippines and China concerning the issue in Spratly Islands, both countries will still be compelled to interact either on diplomatic, financial and trade activities. The Philippine state will still behave in a cooperative manner with China so as not to jeopardize exchanges of goods and services.

Second, cooperation among states in the international arena is difficult to achieve. It is the behavior of states to advance their interests through foreign policies. Hence, there are states that will act on aggression to pursue their interests. However, most neoliberals are optimistic that states will accommodate opportunities for cooperation. In the relationship between China and the Philippines, each state, despite the presence of tensions and aggressions, would be engaged in diplomatic negotiations.

Third, the neoliberals asserted that most states will try to maximize their absolute gains than relative gains. Absolute gains happen if a state will prioritize its own

interest at the expense of other states. On one hand, relative gains are manifested when the state prioritizes its interest in relation to the interest of another state. However, Grieco (1988 cited in Baldwin) argued that in most cases, states will prevent other states to achieve advances in relative gains. In conjunction with the state's absolute or relative gains, the framework also highlights the intentions and capabilities of every state involved in either conflict or cooperation with other states. In the case of the relationship of China and the Philippines, the former is expected to advance absolute gain while the Philippines advances relative gains. Another example is the case of Japan's territorial dispute with China. Since both countries are politically and economically, each of them will behave to advance absolute gains. The behavior of each state to behave in absolute or relative gains is dependent on intentions and capabilities. These intentions can be rooted in their foreign policies while capabilities lie in the economic and military areas.

The fifth characteristic of the neoliberal institutionalism framework is founded on the goals of the state and the institutions or regimes that carry out certain goals. There are two folds in state priority, the security and the economic part. In terms of security issues, no single state is willing to cooperate, especially in cases of conflict, on matters pertaining to security. Each state will more likely be anarchic in showing their military prowess. On one hand, most states will be more than willing to cooperate on issue pertaining to economic relationships. This argument of the framework is more likely to illustrate the case of China-Philippines territorial dispute. Both countries are hesitant to solve the issue in opportunities provided by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Security Forum. Each of these countries will brag their military powers in their claim to certain parts of the islands situated in South China Sea. In terms of economic relationship, these states are willing to engage in joint ventures like oil exploration, confidence building measures and other diplomatic means. To further expand the analysis, most ASEAN countries that are claiming either parts of the islands or the all the islands situated in South China Sea, are more willing to cooperate on economic matters that pertains to the territorial dispute in Spratlys.

Issues on Neoliberal Institutionalism: The Principle of Territoriality

The disputed South China Sea is covered by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

which provides guidelines concerning the status of islands, the continental shelf, enclosed seas, and territorial limits. Among the most relevant to the South China Sea dispute are the following provisions:

1. Article 3, which establishes that "every state has the right to establish the breadth of its territorial sea up to a limit not exceeding 12 nautical miles";
2. Articles 55 - 75 define the concept of an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which is an area up to 200 nautical miles beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea. The EEZ gives coastal states "sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or non-living, of the waters superjacent to" (above) "the seabed and of the seabed and its subsoil...".
3. Article 76 defines the continental shelf of a nation, which "comprises the seabed and subsoil of the submarine areas that extend beyond its territorial sea throughout the natural prolongation of its land territory to the outer edge of the continental margin, or to a distance of 200 nautical miles...". This is important because Article 77 allows every nation to exercise "over the continental shelf sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring it and exploiting its natural resources".
4. Article 121, which states that rocks that cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.

The establishment of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) created the potential for overlapping claims in the semi-enclosed seas like the South China Sea (EIA, 2003; Spring, 2004; Steinberg, 2005 & Swastrom, 1996). It is because any littoral country can extend territorial jurisdiction to conform to the UNCLOS provision. Most of the claimant countries built military outpost on the islands which they believe and in accordance with the EEZ part of their territorial jurisdiction.

For the Philippines, there are two primary reasons for claiming parts of the islands situated in South China Sea. The first is by the provision of the UNCLOS on EEZ. According to geological studies, the Philippines

can assert claim on the basis that when the points of extremities are connected, then an extension of 200 nautical miles from this point of extremities is followed, parts of the South China Sea namely the Spratly Islands will be part of Philippine territory and jurisdiction. Hence, by enforcing the UNCLOS provisions, the Philippines can strongly assert a claim on the Spratly Islands.

The second argument is more on geographical evidences. The Philippines founded its claim over the sovereignty of the Spratly Islands on the principle of *res nullius* and *geography* (Chin, 2003 & Baker, 2004). This principle rests on the claim that there was no effective sovereignty enforced over the islands until a certain period of time. When the Japanese renounced sovereignty over the islands in the Treaty of Peace in 1951, there was a relinquishment of the right to the islands and became *res nullius*. Therefore, the Spratly Islands is available to annexation by the Philippines.

Third critical argument rests on the municipal laws of the Philippines and China. In their laws, both countries adhere to the principles of international law concerning measurement of territorial boundaries. For the Philippines, it enacted the Republic Act No. 9522 that defines through concrete measurements the specific extent of the Philippine Archipelago. It is the same act that China did with the passage of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone* or the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Order of the President of the People's Republic of China No. 55. It can be observed in these peculiar laws of both countries that they adhere to the principles and provisions mandated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Minor argument is also presented by the Philippines as a justification for its claim over the Spratly islands. It is the discovery made by Thomas Cloma in 1947 and expressing a Deed of Assignment and Waive of Claim on the Spratly Islands. However, this is contested by China in claiming that Chinese monks and mariners were the first to station in the islands by the presence of monasteries and artifacts found on the islands.

III. CONCLUSION

The primary essence of the Spratly dispute lies in the question of territorial sovereignty and jurisdiction not on the provision of enforcement stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Hence, it is elusive to find an end in this territorial dispute because no nation-state among the claimant countries would like to give up its sovereignty.

It is because sovereignty is an inviolable and sacred right that each nation holds and fights for. With the pronouncement of the provisions in the UNCLOS on the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the problem further exacerbated since each littoral countries can extend claim over 200 nautical miles that makes an overlapping claims by each claimant country.

However, in the relations between the Philippines and China, both countries are not hindered by their dispute claims over the Spratly Islands as evidenced in two circumstances. From the discussion on historical development on Philippines-China geopolitical relations, the former was never involved in any aggressive confrontation through the use of military with the latter. Second, it is convincingly shown that the two countries are manifesting efforts together with the other claimant countries to employ measures of diplomatic relations. These can be used as indicators that both countries supports the principles of cooperation and preventive diplomacy concerning the territorial dispute on Spratlys. Through confidence building measures, relations between the Philippines and China went beyond on just merely disputes over islands in the South China. Rather, both countries engaged in economic ties that may bolster regional economic growth and stability.

Hence, it can be expected that both countries will remain claimants of the Spratly Islands but with the effort to undertake joint exploration and exploitation of resources available over the islands through peaceful settlement. This relation between the Philippines and China is optimistically expected to contribute in regional peace and stability.

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