

National Identity Analysis and Foreign Policy China Aggressive Stance in South China Sea under Xi Jinping

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Abstract: China's influence in the escalation of the South China Sea dispute tension cannot be denied. The country has made a claim of maritime sovereignty coupled with reclamation and construction in the territorial waters. These measures were conducted unilaterally and aggressively to encourage responses from countries involved in the South China Sea sovereign conflict of Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam, as well as the United States. During Xi Jinping's reign, China had a peaceful development program to defend China's sovereignty and core interests. This peaceful development strategy seems far from reality, because China is showing its decisive stance by building a formidable military force. This paper will present an analysis of China's aggressive posture linked to China's national identity under the rule of Xi Jinping. The authors then argue that national identity has an important role in the decision-making of a country..

1 INTRODUCTION

South China Sea or SCS is a semi-enclosed archipelago territory, as defined in Article 122 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the International Sea (UNCLOS). The islands are grouped into three islands namely Spratly, Paracel and Pratas, as well as Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Shoal. The uninhabited islands then cause international disputes involving many countries, especially those countries directly bordering on LCS. The disputes over the sovereignty claims of the islands and the surrounding seas, involving China and five ASEAN countries are Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia. The Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia claim a marine zone in the LCS adjacent to their territorial waters, while China and Vietnam claim a wider sea territory. This dispute involves complex issues relating to the Law of the Sea or UNCLOS which does not offer clear guidance on the claims of maritime territories, islands and Exclusive Economic Zones or overlapping ZEE (Buszynski, 2013).

The South China Sea is an important commercial gateway for most of the world's trade. More than half the world's total oil tankers are sailing through these waters every year. In addition, this area is also important for naval forces due to crossings between

the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean. The other virtue of this LCS is an ecosystem that is integrated with extraordinary biodiversity. LCS is one of the richest marine in the world in terms of marine flora and fauna, coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, and fish. In addition to marine resources, LCS is also predicted to produce abundant oil and natural gas reserves so that LCS is sometimes called the second Persian Gulf. But apart from these privileges, these waters are vulnerable to piracy, poaching, theft of resources, drug trafficking, illegal migration, and terrorist threats (Li, 2014). Therefore, ASEAN and China countries want to secure their rights in LCS.

Here are the claims and policies made by some countries including the Philippines, Vietnam, and China. These three countries are taken as examples to see how they compare their attitudes to claims in the LCS. The Philippine claim to Spratly's sovereignty was originally based on a personal claim by Captain Thomas Cloma, who declared in 1956 that he had found a group of islands in the South China Sea called Kalayaan (Freedom) Island. Later in 1978, the Philippine government determined that the LCS was included in its country ZEE for a distance of 200 miles from the country's bottom line. The legal basis of such claims was re-patented through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea or UNCLOS in 2009 (De Castro, 2013). In this case, the Philippines tends to rely on international legal

institutions to support its archipelagic claims. This is also evident in 2013 when the Philippines submitted its claims dispute with China to the UNCLOS Arbitration Board for dispute settlement.

Next up is Vietnam's claim over LCS which is divided into two periods. The first period was after the unification of Vietnam in 1975. At that time, Vietnam was ambitious to have full sovereignty over the whole island of Paracel and Spratly on the basis of history as stated in Hoang Sa and Truong Sa. This claim is also reinforced by evidence of three White Papers published in 1979, 1981, and 1988 that present various historical data. This ambition is accompanied by decisive measures such as navigation restrictions on LCS claimed as Vietnam's maritime zone (Hi, 2013). However, Vietnam's attitude began to change in the second period around the 1980s where Vietnam's focus began to shift to economic development, so the attention on the LCS began to soften. While still maintaining its claims, Vietnam seeks to resolve existing disputes peacefully on the basis of international law or UNCLOS. Vietnam wants to find a solution about the LCS problem through negotiation dialogue so that this issue does not become an excessive security threat (Shoji, 2011).

Claims are also filed by the Chinese who want full sovereignty over the LCS. This claim is based on historical factors that the territorial waters are part of the Manchu Empire. But the conditions that must be met for sovereignty in the LCS is to show clear legal evidence, so that historical evidence is unacceptable to most international jurists. Moreover, China is considered indiscriminate in showing evidence because it is actually in Manchu or Qing dynasties, its southernmost territory on China's border is Hainan island, not the island of Paracel and Spratly (Malik, 2013). In connection with the claim, Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng said that his country would oppose any provocative military behavior of other countries and was willing to use force to protect national sovereignty and maritime rights in the LCS. Chinese courage is also reflected in the development of artificial islands above the Spratly in 2014 which led to the escalation of tensions in the LCS (Zhou, 2015).

From these three comparisons can be seen significant differences between countries in the effort and attitude to address each dispute in the LCS. The Philippines and Vietnam are categorized as small countries with relatively low economic and military power. So these two countries have not been able and dare to show their resistance militarily in the LCS. In addition, the Philippines and Vietnam are incorporated in the Association of Southeast Asian

Nations or ASEAN countries which have the ASEAN Way Principle with an important point is non-intervention and consensus. This also underlies the attitude of the Philippines and Vietnam in the LCS dispute, namely by filing a claim with the authorities and avoiding any action that may cause tension, especially among ASEAN members. Compared to China, the country has rapid economic growth making it possible to play a greater political role in global affairs and able to strengthen its military to cope with the potential threats. In addition to strong economic and military factors, China's aggressiveness in the LCS can also be understood through an analysis of national identity that will be discussed further in this paper.

1.1 National Identity and Foreign Policy

National identity can affect a country in making foreign policy. Sometimes in becoming a policy-making guide, national identity is coupled with cultural factors that are both dynamic in time and context (Hudson, 2007). National identity is a very complex multi-dimensional aspect. National identity is formed through the idea of citizenship and patriotism of ethnic, racial, and cultural differences with the logic of assimilation of cultural equations or also called melting pot (Gilroy in İnaç & Ünal, 2013). According to Hudson (2007), national identity is about how we define self image with the key points being "who we are", "what we do", and "who they are". This is in line with the opinion of Richard Ned Lebow (2008) that then identity can be the basis or foundation for social or political action, because the identity is derived from collective equations between group members in certain categories (Lebow, 2011).

The nature of the national identity is exclusive and dynamic. Breuilly (in İnaç & Ünal, 2013) says that national identity has an exclusive character because national identity is the result of the relationship between culture and nationalism which then distinguishes one country from another. In addition, national identity is also dynamic because in it there is a relationship between nationalism, culture, historical powers, ethics, and changing political circumstances that then also affect the change or shift of a national identity. Then how does the national identity affect the foreign policy of a country? The national identity is the result of constructivist thinking put forward by Alexander Wendt in 1999 and Peter Katzenstein in 1996. This approach is a challenger to a rationalist perspective in which constructivism has proved that the identity of the state can offer another alternative

to rational choice theory in policy making (Alexandrov, 2003).

The concept of identity makes it possible to integrate the changing interests of the actors into the research framework. According to constructivist reasoning, the interests of countries formed by national identity may change in the process of interaction between subjects. So constructivists claim that foreign policy can be analyzed through international interaction (which carries national identity) perpetrated by actors (Alexandrov, 2003). Added by Clunan (2009), this identity can be learned through aspirational constructivism, a perspective that states that national identity is shaped by past history and present situation. These two dimensions of time will shape the paradigms and perspectives of political elites, bureaucrats, and decision-makers who will guide them in determining the direction of their foreign policy (Clunan, 2009). The statement implies that the national identity is the essential foundation in formulating policy instruments. But Hudson (2007) expresses a different opinion. Hudson assumes that national identity is regarded as the Last Resort or the basis of the last consideration in making a decision. Because the national identity is a complex and dynamic aspect because it can be constructed under certain conditions (Hudson, 2007).

The advantage of national identity analysis is to provide another option to explain the background of a policy. The national identity can be traced by looking for some components in the course of a nation's history. In addition, the environment also gives its influence in shaping the identity that ultimately also affects the thinking decision maker (Clunan, 2009). On the one hand, national identity can make it easier to analyze the comparative policies of one country with another because each country must have a distinct and distinct identity. But on the other hand, the analysis of national identity has a tendency to look at aspects of the past and sometimes it is no longer relevant to the condition of the country in the present. The level of national identity analysis is also biased because identity sometimes does not represent the whole self image of the whole society. This happens because the identity is constructive and subjective which is usually only declared by state officials as representation of the interests of the group.

1.2 National Identity Analysis and China Aggressive Stance in SCS

National identity is something that can be constructed and is complex and dynamic. This is also the case

with China's national identity. His identity is currently shifting slightly due to the construction of policymakers under the leadership of president Xi Jinping. Xi Jinping is the president of China who was confirmed on March 14, 2014 after previously had replaced Hu Jintao as Secretary General of the Party and Chairman of the Central Military Commission in November 2012. As is well known, the leaders of the country can construct a national identity which he considers to be able to represent the interests of society and state overall. The construction of China's national identity is influenced by several factors, namely other regional powers, the existence of big countries such as the United States and Japan, as well as China's own economic growth. The President as the leader of the state then also has a role in determining national identity. Whether to continue the existing identity, or to create a new identity that is implemented in its foreign policy. The following discussion will focus on national identity in Xi Jinping era as the motive of China's aggressiveness in South China Sea claim dispute.

1.3 National Security State

China's national interests have undergone significant changes based on different presidential presidents. In the era of Mao Zedong's government, China understood his country as a military-national security state with a focus on building a stronghold for China. While in the reign of Deng Xiaoping, the focus of national interest changed into economic development that is since 1970 end to early 2010. He undertook economic reforms and open the country for economic cooperation as widely as possible. Meanwhile, national security issues are of secondary importance. As a result of this neglect, national security began to disrupt and threaten the process of economic reform, especially in 1989 with Tiananmen Square protests and again in the mid-1990s when tensions across the Taiwan Strait threatened to escalate into military conflicts. Thereafter comes the consideration of finding a more balanced relationship between economic development and national security, although economic problems remain a dominant priority (Cheung, 2016).

This national interest began to change when Xi Jinping took office as president. The balance will be maintained, but Xi Jinping looks more supportive of national security considerations. The national identity of China has finally returned to the era of Mao Zedong's national security state. There are several types of national security states, including predatory security states, garrison states, and control states. The

predatory security state is the deployment of the security apparatus to use its power and influence to gain control in the economic aspects. An example is Russia under Putin rule is a classic predatory security state in which its intelligence bureaucracy extends its reach to the control of the entire economy. The second type is the garrison state, a security state born out of an awareness of a serious external threat. The state ends up using the military as a dominant actor who plays a role to maintain its security, for example Pakistan. Then the third type is the national security state controlled state, the government oversees the bureaucratic system in internal and external security by controlling some aspects of security. For example traditional security such as military and public security, legal security, and information diffusion (propaganda system). It is this controlled country that Xi Jinping (Cheung, 2016) wants to establish.

The construction of this national identity is motivated by three main reasons related to the dynamics of China's current state of affairs. As Clunan argues, that state conditions can affect the national identity of a country. The first reason is the threat of invasion, subversion, and division. This threat is related to maritime sovereignty disputes involving China. China is involved in two maritime claim conflicts with Japan in the seizure of Diaoyu or Senkaku Islands, and again with Southeast Asian and US countries over the LCS conflict. In addition, China also faces a divisive threat that comes from its internal sphere. Like the problem of Taiwan who want to get their own sovereignty and ethnic riots in Tibet and Xinjiang. The second reason is the threat of reform, economic development, and stability. Xi Jinping is promoting a reform agenda to guard social stability in China. It contains ambitious plans to improve China's economy and security. But the implementation is difficult because there are some resistance from some parties such as state institutions and SOEs. The third reason is China's socialist development is disrupted (Cheung, 2016).

Three reasons that have been mentioned before then make the Chinese government to return its identity to national security state. Many internal and external threats require the government to take firm steps to build China's strength and defense. The implementation of the national security state's firmness relating to the LCS can be seen from its policy of fortifying control over the Spratly Islands. China unilaterally reclaimed the island since 2014 by dredging seven reef centers estimated at 3000 hectares. The reclaimed island is largely the right of Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines and Taiwan to be captured by China. However, Xi Jinping said it would

not militarize the islands of reclamation. But in fact China is actually building three airfields that can accommodate bombs. Furthermore, China deployed air and jet missiles at Woody Island, Paracel. This move was justified by China on the grounds of defending his rights, so the country built both civilian facilities and defensive facilities on the island (Hunt, 2016).

1.4 Re-emerging Power

Currently China can be regarded as a re-emerging power country. This is also realized by China itself and most analysts consider China to be more aggressive in recent years, especially in issues related to LCS. The position of re-emerging power in the international system then influences the interests and behavior of the Chinese. Logically, any newly emerging power naturally has the desire to drive away the main world power that exists, namely the United States. As stated by Hugh White, Professor of Strategic Studies at Australian National University that "China wants primacy not because they're communist, not even because they're Chinese, it's because they're normal". It is understandable that every country with great powers has a tendency to be number one. History has proved just like Persia, Athens, Sparta, Rome, and America, they will want something or have the same goals as other rival civilizational goals. Still, the virtues of each civilization will be very different and reflected from certain cultural, historical, and political bases (Varrall, 2015).

The national identity of China as re-emerging power becomes supportive in performing aggressive steps in the LCS. This attitude reflects his national interests at the same time. China's interest in the LCS also relates to its goal of becoming a super power, by strengthening the influence and firmness of China in the LCS to undermine US dominance in the Asia-Pacific region and potentially challenge the power of hegemony. China's aggressive posture in this case is reflected in its policy of issuing the White Paper in 2015 on its defense strategy. China's State Council announces a new military strategy that changes from 'defensive posture' to 'active defense posture'. This policy is implemented by increasing the number of navies in the surrounding area, including the LCS to protect its strategic interests (Zhou, 2015). In essence, the Chinese self image as re-emerging power gives a psychological effect that is the desire to overthrow the hegemon power and replace that position. China considers that what should be done to expedite the

business is by being aggressive as strengthening its defense and firmly in running diplomatic relations.

1.5 Chinese Dream

The Chinese Dream or Zhongguo Meng is the motivational slogan for the Chinese leader in governing his government. This phrase is a characteristic of traditional culture which means looking to the past to articulate future goals. If based on classical Confucian texts, the goal is to achieve the life of a prosperous society (Xiaokang shehui 小康社会). In addition, the Chinese Dream is also presented as a vision for the development of China for decades with its core concept of national rejuvenation (Fuxing, 复兴) (Barmé, t.t.). The term then evolves as the government and the media use the word 'dream' (梦) as an allusion to describing the country's re-emergence as a major force and other contemporary national aspirations. The Chinese Dream became the ideological basis in Xi Jinping's government as well as previous Chinese leaders who had their own ideology. Like Mao Zedong with "class struggle", Deng Xiaoping with "four modernizations" Jiang Zemin with "three represents" and Hu Jintao through "harmonious society" (Denton, 2014).

Although the term Chinese Dream has been popular before, this slogan has begun to become the ideological platform of China since it was declared by Xi Jinping. So it can be articulated that the Chinese Dream is a culture that then forms the national identity of China under the leadership of president Xi Jinping. This is also clarified by Xi Jinping's statement "China Dream means the dream of a people, and it is also the dreams of each Chinese person" (Denton, 2014). This national identity based on the Chinese Dream can explain the background to China's aggressiveness in the LCS dispute. Xi Jinping through his ideology of government has led to a transformation in China's domestic and foreign policy. Xi wanted to abandon an old-fashioned strategy like Deng Xiaoping's "keeping a low profile" to turn into an "active and creative" strategy. The strategy is to realize "Two 100s" which means China will become a moderately well-off society by 2020 to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (Sinaga, 2015). It was also "rich and strong socialist country" in 2049 as China's 100th year of independence (Sørensen, 2015).

The Chinese Dream illustrates China's ambitious determination to fight for its national interests which include sovereignty, territorial integrity, and sustainable socio-economic development. In his article entitled The Significance of Xi Jinping's

"Chinese Dream" for Chinese Foreign Policy: From "Tao Guang Yang Hui" to "Fen Fa You Wei", Sørensen (2015) states that the approach in the Chinese Dream is a peaceful development strategy development strategy. But in its implementation, not all development is done peacefully with the principle of win-win solution. China tends to be firm in maintaining Chinese sovereignty and core interests. This is implicit in some of Xi Jinping's speeches and statements that emphasize regaining international status, rights and power (Sørensen, 2015). The new grand strategy drafted for the Chinese Dream has attracted much attention from the international community, particularly those related to LCS, as China has claimed with its nine dashed line (Sinaga, 2015).

"While we pursue peaceful development, we will never relinquish our legitimate rights and interests, or allow China's core interests to be undermined. We should firmly uphold China's territorial sovereignty, maritime rights and interests and national unity, and properly handle territorial and island disputes." - Xi Jinping, November 2014.

China's firm stance in its core interests is seen in some of its policies at LCS. First, China is actively conducting military exercises at the LCS to strengthen its claims. China sends patrol boats regularly and has built military posts and airstrips on several islands. In December 2013, China sent its first aircraft carrier, Liaoning, to LCS. Some are concerned that China will declare Air Defense Identification Zone or ADIZ at LCS as it has done in the East China Sea. Secondly, in 2014, China is placing a rig or drilling tool for Haiyang Shiyou-981 oil at a location that belongs to ZEE Vietnam. This Chinese move sparked a major anti-Chinese protest in Hanoi and eventually China National Petroleum Corp closed the rig and moved closer to Hainan Island in southern China. Subsequently, in June 2014, The Hunan Publishing House Map published a new map of China featuring a ten-dashed line at LCS which Taiwan described as a territory incorporated with mainland China. China's aggressive attitude was also seen when China blocked two civilian ships hired by the Philippine navy to send logistics to the Philippine Marine Unit at Second Thomas Shoal. Though the area has been claimed as part of the continental shelf of the Philippines (Sinaga, 2015).

2 CONCLUSION

From the above explanation it can be concluded that the conflict over overlapping claims in the South

China Sea is difficult to solve. This is resulted from the behavior of actors involved in it as a giver of influence on the tension that occurred. The dominant actor who worsen the situation was China. Periodically this country has conducted controversial activities in disputed areas, especially on Spratly Island and Paracel. There are several factors that underlie China's actions. First is China's desire to explore the various natural resources offered by the LCS archipelago. The island's islands are believed to have marine biodiversity that can be utilized as a source of economy, coupled with abundant natural oil resources. His uninhabited status prompted China to exploit its resources to explore these privileges. Second is China's desire to erode slowly the influence and strength of the United States in the Asia Pacific region. As it is known that the United States as a hegemon country has the capacity to influence the policies of small countries and develop through its diplomacy. Therefore, China responded by doing bold actions to show China's strength and bargaining position.

In this regard, China's aggressive posture can be analyzed not only by its purpose, but can also be analyzed from national identity during Xi Jinping's reign. The national identity becomes the guidance and motivation for the actors to formulate national interests and then determine the direction of their policies. National identity is something that can be constructed by circumstances, environment, even individuals or groups, so that identity is subjective. Furthermore, China's national identity under Xi Jinping's presidency was China as National Security State, China as re-emerging power, and China with Chinese Dream ideology. These three identities were a shift and counter to Chinese self-image in the reign before Xi Jinping. The Chinese identity since 2013 tends to portray China as a revisionist force aimed at overhauling the global order. The posture is supported by rapid economic progress to support the formation of military power as the identification of superpower states. Thus it has been found a common thread between Chinese identity and aggressive attitude in the LCS, namely that every posture and firm policy of China is a reflection of its national identity as a security state that will play an antagonistic role in order to maintain its sovereignty and its core interests.

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