

Filipino Media and Public Opinion on the Philippines-China Disputes in the South China Sea: A Preliminary Analysis¹

Sascha M. Gallardo and Aileen S.P. Baviera²

1. Introduction

The role of the press in politics or governance has been widely discussed and for quite a long period of time. Mark Hampton, for example, explained how the press initially gained the status of being a “fourth estate” in the 18th century whereby – although not provided for by the constitution – the press enjoyed a certain form of power because of its relationship with the public or readers. It was thought even then that the press serves as a venue to discuss differing ideas in order to come up with the

¹ Paper presented at the 4th International Workshop on “The South China Sea: Cooperation for Regional Security and Development,” organized by the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam and the Vietnam Lawyers’ Association, held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on November 18-21, 2012. Also available at *Viewpoints on International Relations: Commentary on the Philippines and the Asia Pacific*. Aileen SP Baviera. Web. September 15, 2013.

² Dr. Aileen San Pablo-Baviera is a professor of Asian Studies and International Relations while Sascha M. Gallardo is a researcher, both at the Asian Center, University of the Philippines.

‘truth’ or that which will benefit everyone (Hampton 3).

The role of the media is often examined in relation to democracy. It is even believed that for democracy to exist, there must be the presence of a free press (Coronel 4). According to contemporary democratic theory, it is the media that help guarantee the accountability of the government, bridge the people and the government and therefore encourage discussion towards the improvement of government policies (Coronel 4-5). This role of being a “watchdog” and “guardian of the public interest” continues to be played not only by the press but by the media in general even up to the present time (Coronel 1).

In the Asian region, Philippine media is considered a good example of a press that serves such a purpose. As is widely known, “Philippine media is among the oldest and the most free in Asia and its top journalists are also well-known for their aggressiveness (Pertierra 13). That the media affect public opinion and politics in the Philippines is an understatement considering its role in toppling two former presidents Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 and Joseph Ejercito Estrada in 2001.

As a democracy, the Philippine government has to pay attention to public opinion in the formulation of foreign policies. Mass media performs several functions in a democratic state, particularly in connecting public opinion with the management of state affairs.

Among its functions which may be relevant to the management of foreign policy crises are:

1. educating the public, raising awareness and promoting discourses on important issues,
2. transmission of government’s messages to domestic constituencies and the general public, and
3. as a mechanism for the public to provide feedback to government about its policies and actions.

This paper shares preliminary findings from a review of public

opinion and the views of various stakeholders in the Philippines, in response to tensions in Philippines-China relations that arise from conflicting claims to territory and maritime rights and jurisdiction. It draws largely from open media sources, and covers the years 2011-2012, significant because of two major incidents that led to crises in Philippines-China bilateral relations.

2. Reed Bank Incident 2011

The first incident occurred in March 2011, in the wake of an announcement by the Philippines that it would commence oil and gas exploration activities in the Reed Bank, a submerged area offshore of its Palawan province and well within the Philippine exclusive economic zone and continental shelf. Forum Energy plc, a British-registered firm operating under Philippine contract, had sent the *MV Veritas Voyager*, a French-owned, Singapore-registered survey vessel to the Reed Bank, where two Chinese patrol boats approached it, ordered it to leave and maneuvered as if threatening to ram the vessel. Apprised of this, Philippine authorities responded by dispatching two small aircraft to investigate but found that the Chinese boats had already departed. The Department of Foreign Affairs handed a protest to the Chinese Embassy, stating, among other things, that Reed Bank was not disputed territory (Jamandre "China").

This incident was significant for the Philippines because it directly challenged its right to use resources that it considered to be under its maritime jurisdiction, and had some bearing on the country's energy security program. Chinese actions in the Reed Bank were also notably consistent with previous incidents in the South China Sea where their ships had cut the cables of Vietnamese exploration vessels, and reported attempts in 2007 and 2008 to intimidate foreign oil companies (BP and Exxon

Mobil) against working with Vietnam, with the threat that their business interests in China would otherwise suffer (*ASEAN Studies Centre Report 8*: 1-78).

When the previous Philippine government under President Gloria M. Arroyo allowed in 2004 the inclusion of the Reed Bank in a trilateral "non-governmental" agreement among the state-owned oil companies of the Philippines, Vietnam, and China to conduct pre-exploration research in certain areas of the South China Sea, she was severely criticized and even accused of treason by some quarters in her own country. Against this backdrop her successor Benigno S. Aquino III, addressing the issue of joint development after the *MV Veritas Voyager* incident, was quoted as saying: "What is ours is ours, and with what is disputed, we can work towards joint cooperation." He blamed the Arroyo government's misguided support for the joint seismic research as responsible for recent problems with China.

To further set things straight, Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario, in an op-ed published simultaneously in major Philippine dailies in June 2011, clarified the position of the Aquino government on Reed Bank: "Since the Recto (Reed) Bank is ours, it can only be exclusively developed by the Philippines. The Philippines may however invite foreign investors to assist in developing the area in accordance with Philippine laws" (*INQUIRER Online*).

3. Panatag Shoal Incident 2012

The second crisis in relations occurred in April 2012, when Philippine naval authorities intercepted Chinese fishermen aboard eight vessels in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal (Panatag or Bajo de Masinloc). The shoal is far away from the long-disputed Spratlys and the recently controversial Reed Bank

area. Upon inspection, some of the vessels turned up corals, live sharks, and giant clams, the capture of which was prohibited under Philippine laws as well as the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). Two Chinese maritime authority vessels arrived and positioned themselves between the Philippine navy ship and the fishermen, thus, reportedly preventing their arrest (as it had been a past practice by the Philippine side to arrest those engaged in illegal fishing). Since the matter was a fisheries concern, the Philippine Navy eventually withdrew its ship, and Manila instead sent vessels from Coast Guard and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to handle the matter.

However, the Chinese patrol ships would not leave the shoal, in fact adding one more ship the following day. Thus, a standoff arose involving civilian official vessels of the two sides, lasting from early April until June. Around these two incidents, there was much public reaction and commentary on the Philippine side. Officials of the Aquino government, including the President himself and more prominently the secretary of Foreign Affairs, initially took a posture of articulating and explaining the positions to the Filipino public through mass media.³ A tit-for-tat word war between the two countries broke out as Chinese media provided wide latitude to nationalist sentiments criticizing the Philippines. These were in turn widely covered in the Philippines, thus sparking an action-reaction situation where both sides accused the other of bullying and intimidation.

China was, in the eyes of Filipinos, waging an all-out propaganda war both to intimidate the Philippines and to undermine the Philippines' credibility in the eyes of the

³ One example is this op-ed published in Philippine dailies: "Philippine Foreign Secretary Del Rosario on the South China Sea." *CogitASIA*. Center for Strategic and International Studies Asia House. June 7, 2011. Web. September 15, 2013.

international community. Outstanding examples of this were statements published in editorials of the Communist Party's official organ *People's Daily* and the quasi-official *Global Times* (also owned by the *People's Daily*), conveying the following messages: that the Philippines should be "punished" (for offering to host more U.S. troops) (Agence France-Presse "China"), "taught a lesson" (Long "Time"), will "face due consequences" ("People's Daily" *Xinhuanet*) including a "small-scale war" (Avendaño, Yap, and Esplanada "China daily"), should not "play with fire" ("Don't" *China Daily*), and that China should "cut business links" with Manila ("China calls" *AlexJones' Infowars Online*). The most controversial editorial from *Global Times* came out in October 25, 2011, even before the Scarborough Shoal standoff, warning the countries involved in the South China Sea dispute to "mentally prepare for the sounds of cannons." (Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu, however, said that the editorial does not represent the Chinese government's position).⁴

These statements, while not completely representative of the reporting on the issue in these two Chinese papers, were widely quoted and played up in Philippine media as further evidence of Chinese "bullying." This led a columnist and now publisher of the largest daily, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, to ask a question now uppermost in the minds of many Filipinos: "Whatever happened to China's much-touted 'peaceful rise'? Since when did it become vicious, and why?" (Pangalangan "ASEAN").

⁴ Jiang Yu was quoted as saying: "China's media have the right to freely say what they like, but we hope that they play a constructive role and deliver a truthful message." See "Sounds of cannons: Warning on South China Sea dispute," *NTD Television Online*. New Tang Dynasty Television. October 26, 2011. Web. September 5, 2013; "China paper warns of 'sound of cannons' in sea disputes." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. October 24, 2011. Web. September 10, 2012.

4. Public Opinion Highlights

In this section, the opinion of the Filipino public in relation to the Reed Bank and Scarborough Shoal incidents in 2011 and 2012 are examined. This was done by analyzing relevant survey polls of Social Weather Stations and Laylo Research Strategies, opinion articles of online news outlets of the three biggest news dailies: *Philippine Star* (www.philstar.com), *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (www.inquirer.net), and *Manila Bulletin* (www.mb.com.ph), as well as *GMA News Online* (www.gmanetwork.com/news/),⁵ and *Rappler* (www.rappler.com).⁶ Opinion articles concerned with the March 2011 Recto Bank incident and the April 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident were included in the analysis. Writers of the said pieces include columnists that are observers of Philippine governments' foreign policy, former government officials and former diplomats, academics, lawyers, students and political activists. The blogs of a regular foreign policy commentator and journalist Ellen Tordesillas (www.ellentordesillas.com) were also examined, as were editorials and write-ups of unaffiliated individuals.

Primary attention of the research was focused on gathering opinions on the foreign policy of the Philippine government, and on policies and actions of President Benigno S. Aquino III and his administration (specifically officials of Department of National Defense and the Department of Foreign Affairs). Comments about the policies of the Peoples' Republic of China and the United States were also surveyed.

⁵ Online news edition of one of the country's largest television networks.

⁶ Rappler describes itself as "a social news network where stories inspire community engagement and digitally fuelled actions for social change," composed of "veteran journalists trained in broadcast, print, and web disciplines working with young, idealistic digital natives eager to report and find solutions to problems." *Rappler*. December 14, 2011. Web. September 5, 2013.

4.1. Opinion on General Philippine Government Foreign Policy Approach

Many of the articles reviewed consider the Philippine government's foreign policy as weak and lacking in strategic planning in general. The view that it is weak, however, can be seen in two aspects. On the one hand, it is considered weak because of the lack of military or defense capabilities to back up government in asserting the territorial claims. While the government is commended for pursuing a diplomatic or peaceful track in the resolution of its territorial disputes with China, a number commented that the Philippines has no other choice since it does not have the capability to face China militarily. This viewpoint was expressed both during the Reed Bank incident and the Scarborough Shoal Standoff. In his June 17, 2011 column in *Philippine Star*, for example, a lawyer-columnist commented that,

"Obviously, based on our country's military size and capabilities, we cannot go to war with China. Hence, the better moves still consist of exhausting all peaceful and friendly means to solve this problem..." (Sison "Historic").

On the other hand, the adjective "weak" was also used to refer to the government's stance when faced with problems that challenge territorial sovereignty. This referred to officials' lack of political will and negligence. Most articles of this tone express worry that the country might lose Scarborough Shoal the same way Mischief Reef was lost to China in 1995.

The April 24, 2012 editorial of the *Philippine Star* is a case in point. Comparing the actions of the Philippine government — or the lack of it — to assert the claim over Mischief Reef in 1995 and Scarborough Shoal in 2012, the editorial highlighted

similarities such as the government's inability to halt the expansion of what China called "shelters for its fishermen" in the former and its failure to "confiscate the banned items" (corals, giant clams, live sharks) and allowing the Chinese's boats to leave the vicinity in the latter. The editorial cautioned that "if that is the way the Philippines enforces its territorial claim, it's not farfetched to expect another Chinese military garrison to rise soon over Panatag (Scarborough Shoal)" ("Enforcing" *PhilStar Online*).

A *Philippine Star* columnist expressed the same worries in June, even suggesting that the government is already developing a pattern when confronted by another claimant in the contested areas in the West Philippine Sea. After the Philippines had withdrawn its ships from Scarborough Shoal, he remarked (Pascual "Phl losing"):

"PATTERN: We can only watch now if China would also withdraw its vessels. If it does not, we would have lost to a bullying neighbor another crucial marine outpost within our 200-mile exclusive economic zone. Still fresh in our mind is the government's similarly weak handling of the feud, also with China, over Panganiban (Mischief) Reef close to Palawan.

He also commented that the government was slow in addressing the Reed Bank incidents with China the previous year. In the column titled, "We'll lose Reed Bank by timidity, by default," he said that, "At the rate we allow legitimate territorial claims to slip away through our negligence or lack of political will, more aggressive neighbors are likely to end up gobbling them up little by little, together with their rich oil deposits" (Pascual, *PhilStar Online*).

The criticisms regarding the 2011 and 2012 incidents involving China, however, were not directed at the present government alone. Some remarked that these were an offshoot

of former President Arroyo's Joint Marine Scientific Undertaking with China which compromised Philippine claim in the Reed Bank (Pamintuan "Balancing").⁷ In another article, the same author lamented that government had failed to come up with a long term strategy in terms of how it would deal with a rising China. One said "we wallowed in complacency" that is why we failed to see the possibility that China would create such threat to us (Pamintuan "Because"). This criticism is even sharper when juxtaposed with perceptions of China's approach. As one stated, "While China is dealing with us in a most comprehensive way, it seems no one is masterminding our foreign policy strategy. Our response is disentangled, shortsighted and trapped in tokenism" (Magno "Comprehensive").

In sum, most of the opinion articles suggest that the Filipino public sees the need to improve foreign policy making, and that it was necessary for government to craft a strategic approach in dealing with China.

4.2 Specific Comments on the Aquino Administration

If the Filipino public sees their government's foreign policy towards China as mostly negative, specific comments in opinion articles suggest that they perceive President Benigno S. Aquino III and his administration both positively and negatively

⁷The Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking was an agreement concluded in 2005 among the Philippine National Oil Company, PetroVietnam, and the China National Offshore Oil Company to conduct seismic research in the disputed areas, including Reed Bank, for three years. For more background, see Baviera, Aileen S.P. "The Influence of Domestic Politics on Philippine Foreign Policy: The Case of Philippines-China Relations since 2004." *RSIS Working Paper*. 241 (2012): 1-53. Print. Also available at *RSIS Working Paper Online*. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. June 5, 2012. Web. September 5, 2013.

depending on particular situations.⁸ The opinion survey of Laylo Research Strategies that was conducted from August 7-17, 2012 showed that 56 percent of the respondents were “satisfied” with the performance of the Aquino administration in “resolving the dispute between the Philippines and China on the Scarborough Shoal issue” and only 14 percent said they were not satisfied (Laylo “Pinoy”). While previous governments – in particular the Arroyo government – were seen as too accommodating of China, Aquino and his top foreign affairs officials were at least assertive and sought clear public support for such a posture. However, the number of negative specific comments on the President and his administration increased, especially after it was revealed that the President had allowed backdoor channeling to China by a certain individual (Senator Antonio Trillanes IV) who was widely perceived to be an inappropriate choice (Doronila “Bootleg”).

President Aquino was praised for his “firm defense of Philippine sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea” (Bello “Needed”) or for “standing pat on Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal” (De Quiros “Battle”). Aquino was also commended for “staking its position on legal and moral principles” (Batongbacal “PH”) to defend our claim in Reed Bank. Positive general assessments of Aquino

⁸ Among those who commented positively on the actions of Aquino and/or his administration are former National Security adviser Jose T. Almonte, former Department of Foreign Affairs Secretary Roberto R. Romulo, University of the Philippines College of Law professor Atty. Jay Batongbacal, columnists Marichu A. Villanueva, Carmen N. Pedrosa, Conrado de Quiros, William M. Esposito, and Federico D. Pascual Jr., and columnist and Akbayan party list Representative Walden Bello. Negative comments, on the other hand, came from former diplomat Hermenegildo C. Cruz, Kalikasan party list national Secretary General Frances Quimpo, U. P. professor and columnist Bobby M. Tuazon, former Arroyo official Rigoberto Tiglao, columnists Federico D. Pascual Jr., Alex Magno, Amando Doronila, Rina Jimenez-David, and columnist and Bayan Muna party list Representative Satur C. Ocampo, among others.

included those saying that “the President Noynoy Aquino (P-Noy) administration has done the best that our country could do in this row with China” (Esposito “Factor”) and a former National Security adviser saying that “given the constraints under which it’s working, the administration of President Benigno Aquino has so far done all that could possibly be done, in the short term, to defend our nation’s interests in the West Philippine Sea” (Almonte “No one”). The latter commentator, however, noted that “...in this case it’s not enough to deal with the immediate problem. Our nation’s long-term security hangs in the balance” (Almonte “No one”).

Criticisms of Aquino’s actions, on the other hand, are directed mainly at three things: the President’s directive to pull-out the ships from Panatag Shoal in June because of inclement weather (Pascual “Phl losing”; “Panatag”, “P-Noy can” *PhilStar Online*; Magno “Fiasco”), his issuance of too many statements on the subject, and his having more than one spokesperson (Pascual “We’ll lose”; Magno “Escalation”; Jimenez-David “The ‘realpolitik’”). A political analyst commented that “In dealing with China particularly on territorial disputes, the Philippines’ foreign policy makers still live in the Cold War era. The Aquino administration lacks strategic thinkers and talks through variant voices...” (Tuazon “China’s”).

4.3 Specific Comments on the Defense Department

The country’s defense department in general and the Philippine Navy in particular did not fare better especially since it is the weakness in defense capabilities that is considered as one of the main constraints faced by our foreign policy. Comments of this tone include the saying that “A military skirmish would be futile...” (Bondoc “China’s”). Also, *Philippine Star* editorials on May 20, 2011 and April 13, 2012 noted the need to

improve defense capabilities. Moreover, two columnists cited the reasons why we have a weak defense, pointing out that the modernization of our armed forces failed to materialize since the government simply paid “lip service to the principle of AFP modernization” (Farolan, “Testicular”) and “that proceeds from the sale of military reservations...were not entirely used for intended purposes” as stated by “several retired military officers” (Pamintuan “Because”). But aside from this, the latter source added that “left-leaning policymakers also blocked efforts to increase defense spending, fearing (admittedly with good reason) that stronger military capability would be used in counterinsurgency, specifically against communist rebels” (Pamintuan “Because”).

Aside from the general assessment of the status of our defense capabilities, several opinion articles also commented on the sending of the navy vessel *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* to the Scarborough Shoal when Chinese fishing vessels were seen in the area. Most of the comments, except for one, were against this decision saying it had instigated friction between the Philippines and China (Sanchez “One idiot”; Tiglao “Scarborough”).⁹ One article, for example, commented that “the escalating tensions between the Philippines and China over the Scarborough Shoal were caused by a stupid decision made by someone high up in the Philippine military hierarchy” (Tundag “Disgrace”).

But still, despite the criticisms on our defense department, the Philippine Navy in particular was also commended for fighting for the country’s sovereignty in relation to the recent Scarborough Shoal dispute. This includes a letter to the editor saying, “We highly commend our Philippine Navy for always vigilantly conducting marine patrols to protect our marine resources in

⁹The exception was Avila, Bobit S. “Phl navy not prepared for combat duty?” *PhilStar Online*. April 14, 2012. Web. October 7, 2012.

the Scarborough Shoal and to maintain our sovereignty and sovereign rights” (Cruz “Diplomatic”).

4.4 *Specific Comments on the Department of Foreign Affairs*

The DFA received very little attention compared with the President and the defense department. With the handful of articles that mentioned the DFA, one indicated trust in its capacity to resolve the issue but another stated otherwise. While one considered it correct for the AFP to leave the issuing of statements regarding the Reed Bank incidents to the DFA (Villanueva “All bark”), another, referring to the Scarborough Shoal dispute, said:

President Aquino should take hold of this issue and quickly develop a strategy. It is beyond the capacity of the DFA to provide both leadership and a comprehensive national policy response to the rapidly evolving situation. Time is of the essence here (Magno “Scarborough”).

Other negative comments on the said agency pertain to its issuance of statements that tend to worsen the dispute as well as its lack of action concerning China’s claims. In a June 25, 2011 article, one columnist commented that “Some DFA and military personnel are getting gung ho with their aggressive talks against some provocative statements from the Chinese...” (Paradiang “Uneasy”). In an April 15, 2011 blog, on the other hand, a well-known foreign policy blogger criticized as “pathetic” DFA’s supposed reasoning: “We are no match to the power of China” as the explanation why the government was slow to protest China’s submission with the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf “which claimed as part of their territory the whole of the South China Sea” (Tordesillas “Please”). But even as the comments received by DFA were

negative, Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario received more positive comments. Former DFA Secretary Roberto R. Romulo for example, when referring to Del Rosario's policy of "strengthening... ties with ASEAN, as well as with China, India, Japan... and Indonesia," considered it as "a commitment to balance the interests of competing powers to serve our own interests..." (Romulo "Learning"). A *Philippine Star* columnist, on the other hand, commended Del Rosario for what was considered an improvement of the situation in Scarborough Shoal just a few days after the dispute broke out in April this year. "It is a good sign that both countries have withdrawn the diplomatic protests lodged against each other. Foreign Secretary Del Rosario is handling this quite well" (Chanco "Patient").

In sum, the opinion articles on the Philippine government's policy in relation to the Reed Bank and Scarborough Shoal disputes with China suggest that in general, the government is perceived weak both in terms of defense capabilities and in handling the disputes. Specific comments on both the Aquino administration and the national defense, on the other hand, include both positive and negative comments although there were more negative comments after the back-channeling affair involving Senator Antonio Trillanes. The few commentaries on the DFA are more critical of the department while its Secretary received more positive comments.

4.5 Public Opinion on China and the U.S.

Aside from the opinion of Filipinos on the Philippine government's policies in relation to the territorial disputes in Reed Bank and Scarborough Shoal, also of interest was opinion on both China and the U.S. The public's negative perception of China is expected considering that it is the one the Philippines is in dispute with, and possibly because of concern over the uncertain

outcomes of its rise in military power status. The comments on the U.S., on the other hand, showed inconsistency.

Among the opinion articles that were related to the Reed Bank and Scarborough Shoal disputes, the majority reflected views about China. Almost all of the articles spoke negatively of China, with very few exceptions. The adjectives used to describe China include "arrogant" (Caoile "International"), "aggressive" (Jimenez-David "Realpolitik"), and with the word "bully"¹⁰ appearing most frequently. Others said that China is "overwhelming" (Mercado "Skewed") or "intimidating" (Duque "Hegemon") the Philippines while yet another simply said he was "upset by the action of the Chinese government" (Montelibano "Sardine").

Most of the articles also show lack of trust with China in different aspects. In relation to the Scarborough Shoal standoff, one columnist suggested that "...there is every indication that the Chinese provocation has been orchestrated..." (Romualdez "Scarborough"). In a similar vein, another columnist described the Chinese fishermen as "state-sponsored poachers" (Bondoc "China's"). Some expressed disbelief regarding pronouncements that China was not using the banana export issue to pressure the Philippines in relation to the Scarborough dispute.¹¹ One

¹⁰ See for example Padilla, Efren. "The price of sovereignty in our conflict with China." *GMA News Online*. June 28, 2012. Web. October 12, 2012; Villanueva, Hector. "Some Lessons to be Learned." *Manila Bulletin Online*. June 25, 2012. Web. October 12, 2012; Oposa, Antonio A. Jr. "Declare Spratlys an international marine reserve." *Rappler*. April 25, 2012. Web. October 14, 2012.

¹¹ In the first few days of the standoff, China disallowed entry of Philippine banana imports on grounds of sanitary and phytosanitary concerns. This was interpreted by many as the use of economic pressure against the Philippines. See for example, Habito, Cielito. "Could China's sanctions choke us?" Opinion. *INQUIRER Online*. May 15, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.

commentator, on the other hand, cautioned that the Philippine government should not trust China's fishing ban as "it is a classic Chinese shadow play, with Manila being lured back into the table of negotiations" and if successful will just allow the issue to drag "rather than risk international arbitration with no clear positive outcome for itself" (Roque "Chinese").

The lack of trust in China was also reflected in the May 2012 Social Weather Stations survey wherein China received a -36 net trust rating. This is the same rating China received in June 1995 following the Mischief Reef confrontation between Philippines and China ("Second Quarter" *Social Weather Stations Online*).

Date of Survey	Context		Net Trust Rating
June 1995	Four months following Mischief Reef incident		-36 (Bad)
June 1999	Renewed tensions on Mischief Reef/Scarborough Shoal		-32 (Bad)
December 2008	Tainted milk scandal in China		-33 (Bad)
June 2010			+17
September 2010			+15
March 2012	Before the April 8 Scarborough Shoal incident	"Little trust" -29% "Much trust" -39%	+10 (Moderate)
May 24-27, 2012	After Scarborough Shoal incident of April 8, 2012, with standoff still ongoing*	"Little trust" -55% "Much Trust" -19%	-36 (Bad)

*During this poll, 48 percent of Filipinos said they were paying close attention to the territorial row. Source: Flores, Helen. "Pinoy's have little trust in China," citing Social Weather Station findings. *PhilStar Online*. August 11, 2012. Web. September 6, 2012.

China	-36 (Bad)
North Korea	-34 (Bad)
United States	+62 (Very Good)
Australia	+39 (Good)
Japan	+32 (Good)

Not a few articles also questioned China's commitment to peace ("Intruders", "Tit for tat" *INQUIRER Online*; Bondoc "China's naval"; Pascual "Lee"). A 2011 editorial, for example, stated that "China...has been projecting itself as a 'soft power' and reassuring the world of its 'peaceful rise.' Such avowals of its benign rise and commitment to global peace fly out the window each time China uses military resources to assert its claim over disputed areas in the South China Sea" ("Peaceful rise?" *PhilStar Online*).

Netizens in the Philippines have, like their Chinese counterparts, had a field day criticizing China and also holding their own tit-for-tats. In the early stages of the disputes, hackers from both sides in fact defaced each other's websites with maps showing their respective claim areas, and using abuse words too colorful to use in this paper, so much so that Aquino's deputy spokesperson, Abigail Valte, was compelled to urge both Filipinos and Chinese to refrain from escalating tensions (Avendaño "Hackers").

But despite all the negative comments on China, a few articles expressed hope believing that there is still room for cooperation between China and the Philippines. A political science professor, for example, said that "Our hope as students of politics is that the continuing low-politics areas of cooperation will increase in level and scope and will ramify or spill over into

Figure 3: Filipinos' Preferred Approach to the Disputes

THE ARBOROUGH SHOAL ISSUE August 7-17, 2012 National Survey (in Column %)	PH (Total for Philippines)	NCR (National Capital Region)	North/Central Luzon	Southern Luzon/ Bicol	Visayas	Mindanao
Most preferred means to resolve the dispute between the Philippines and China on the Scarborough Shoal Issue. Diplomacy should be used and not a show of force from both parties.	33	42	41	37	27	21
There should be negotiations between the Philippines and China for joint venture on any environment protection or resource use in Scarborough Shoal.	11	12	11	8	10	16
An international Court should decide on this issue to resolve whose territory the Scarborough Shoal is part of.	11	8	9	12	14	12
The Philippines should stand its ground in claiming Scarborough Shoal as part of its territory	9	9	4	8	14	9
They should make this an international marine reserve and disputing nations should help preserve it.	8	5	9	10	7	7
The Philippines should ask help from the US to defend Scarborough Shoal and send forces to guard the Scarborough Shoal.	9	5	9	4	6	15
Don't know.						

Source: Laylo, Pedro Jr. "Pinoy worried about PH-China sea dispute." *Rappler*. September 22, 2012. Web. September 6, 2013.

the high-politics area later..." (Carlos "Low-politics route"). Similarly, although still with caution, a commentator said that "...if China, now a recognized economic superpower, wants to do business in the country, in particular, exploring and developing those God-forsaken atolls for oil...what's wrong if we enter into a profitable venture and viable joint venture? As long as it's not along the terms similar to the infamous ZTE deal of recent memory" (Lansang "What's wrong").¹²

When it came to the United States, although it received a general +62 net trust rating in the May 2012 SWS survey (without reference to the territorial disputes), most opinion articles expressed doubts on whether U.S. will really help the Philippines should it be in need of military assistance against China. Among the reasons cited for this doubt are:

1. "The U.S. will act militarily only if its action is clearly in its self-interest" (Pascual "Why");
2. "The U.S. economy will be severely and negatively affected because China is one of America's most important trading partners" (Esposito "Factor"); and
3. "...the U.S. needs, or may need in the future, Chinese cooperation on a host of global issues" (Severino "United States").

Another criticism against U.S. pertains to the Balikatan military exercises it has been holding together with the Philippines, such as Representative Walden Bello's comment that "Taken in the context of Obama's pivot to Asia strategy, which everyone knows is aimed at China, the Balikatan war games are downright provocative" ("Needed" *INQUIRER Online*). The few comments that did suggest obtaining support from the U.S. argued so

¹²This refers to a corruption-tainted agreement under the Arroyo administration, where Chinese company ZTE was to have helped establish a national broadband network.

because "...we've largely neglected development of a credible defense capability" (Pamintuan "Dependence"). A September 6, 2012 editorial in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, on the other hand, said that "the hard reality is that the somewhat porous Asean bloc itself must present a united stand, and it is only possible to do so if the U.S., China's rival Pacific power, is a factor in the diplomatic equation" ("Reassuring noises").

The public's perception of China and the U.S. was also reflected in the August 2012 survey (Laylo Jr. "Pinoy") of Laylo Research Strategies. Respondents were asked to choose their "most preferred means to resolve the dispute between the Philippines and China on the Scarborough Shoal issue", among which choices include:

1. "diplomacy should be used and not a show of force from both parties" (33 percent);
2. "there should be negotiations between the Philippines and China for joint venture on any environment protection or resource use in Scarborough Shoal" (20 percent);
3. "an international court should decide on this issue to resolve whose territory the Scarborough Shoal is part of" (11 percent);
4. "the Philippines should stand its ground in claiming the Scarborough Shoal as part of its territory" (11 percent);
5. "they should make this an international marine reserve and disputing nations should help preserve it" (nine percent);
6. "the Philippines should ask help from the U.S. to defend Scarborough Shoal and send forces to guard the Scarborough Shoal" (eight percent); and
7. "don't know" (nine percent).

The survey results indicated that 33 percent considered diplomacy as the best option, while 20 percent chose joint venture with China while only eight percent chose seeking assistance from the

U.S. These results, however, are consistent with the opinion articles only in terms of diplomacy being the most preferred option.

While the survey ranked "joint venture with China" higher than "seeking help from the U.S.," the opinion articles show that despite lack of trust in the U.S. willingness to help, more suggested seeking assistance from the U.S. and almost none trust pursuing a joint venture with China. This difference in the survey results and opinion articles somewhat raises the question of whether there is a gap between mass opinion (which the survey tends to capture) and elite opinion (expressed in columns and analyses in print and electronic media).¹³

5. Special Stakeholders and their Opinions

There are two potentially influential groups of Filipinos whose opinion on the handling of the disputes, particularly the geopolitical dimension of its potential to pit US against China, may be colored by association with either China or the U.S. The first is the group of Chinese Filipinos (known colloquially as Tsinoy), defined here as Filipino nationals of ethnic Chinese descent and who are still culturally identifiable as Chinese (i.e. they speak a Chinese language/dialect or have transnational family or business ties to the mainland). The second is the group of Filipino Americans, defined as U.S. nationals of ethnic Filipino descent, with transnational ties to the Philippines.

¹³ However, an article by Rood, Steven, titled "U.S. Military and the Philippines: What do Philippine Citizens Really Think," argues the opposite – that U.S. presence/involvement is in general noncontroversial among average Filipino citizens even if debated among the policy elite, e.g. with respect to the Visiting Forces Agreement. *Asia Online*. February 1, 2012. The Asia Foundation. Web. September 5, 2013.

5.1 Chinese Filipinos

A special sector of the public with unique characteristics as far as opinion on the disputes with China are concerned would be the Filipinos of Chinese descent and ethnicity. Members of the community were divided on this issue, in part along generational lines which also reflected the amount of exposure to and internalization of Chinese education and culture, with the older generation being more pro-China and the younger ones more pro-Philippines.

One community leader who because of her pro-integration advocacy probably straddles both sides, mirrored the dilemma of hyphenated identity in an editorial she wrote for an English-language Chinese community newspaper, *Tulay Fortnightly*:

Being Chinese Filipinos, ...we absolutely cannot condone Chinese fishermen poaching in Philippine waters. Many of these fishing vessels have encroached into our protected marine areas not once but several times. The Tsinoyos cannot and should not render assistance to these people who destroy our environment. ...Tsinoyos are the ones caught in the crossfire. No matter which side is right or wrong, they cannot play favorites at this point lest it backfires on them and they also fall into the hands of our (Filipino) hawkish generals. What Tsinoyos can do is to use their influence as backdoor channels to cool the fever of conflict (See "Handshake").

As she explains further, "one must accept the reality that one can be staunchly pro-Philippines, yet lend some understanding to China's claim; just as one can be pro-China yet understand where the Philippines is coming from."

On the other hand, there were Tsinoyos (see Appendices I and II for samples of articles) who had no problem taking the Filipino perspective. One Chinese-Filipino community leader in Baguio City called for China to withdraw its interest in the shoal to maintain good relations with the Philippines. He was quoted as saying, "Filipinos have treated the Chinese who live and have set

up businesses here very well (*Naging maganda ang pakikitungo ng mga Filipino sa mga Chinese na naninirahan at nagpatayo ng kanilang mga negosyo sa bansa*).” He called on China to “be calm in its decisions about the disputed territory (*huminahon ang China sa mga desisyon nito ukol sa pinag-aagawang teritoryo*)” (*Cheng PSSST! Online Magazine*).

A well-known member of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Inc. (FFCCCII) also joined a group led by prominent Filipino-American Loida Nicolas-Lewis in calling on all patriotic Filipinos in the Philippines and abroad to join the International Day of Protest against China's intrusions on Philippine territory.

In general, however, the Chinese community avoided discussions on the issue.¹⁴ What was interesting was that with the eruption of hostilities between China and Japan over Diaoyutai, some of the organizations in the community issued statements in their Chinese-language media in support of China and condemning Japan. The biggest organization, the FFCCCII, did not issue such a statement. As our informant explained, “most of them (members of Chinese federations) are Filipino citizens. They know that siding with China against Japan in Diaoyutai will be tantamount to siding with China against the Philippines in Scarborough Shoal.”

Another interesting insight was that because they could not criticize the Philippines nor sympathize with China, there was a tendency for Chinese Filipinos across generations to take the stand that U.S. was at fault for causing tensions between the two. This was an indirect criticism of Aquino but most especially Del Rosario, who was seen as having allowed the Philippines to be used for U.S. interests.

At one point during these crises, Philippine officials urged the Chinese-Filipino community to consider investing in the country's

¹⁴ Interview with a long-time observer of Chinese-Filipino affairs.

offshore energy exploration projects, including in the resource-rich Reed Bank off western Palawan which China claims as part of its territory. No reaction has been recorded so far, but this would seem to be a highly risky proposition for those of them that have business interests in the mainland (Del Callar “PHL urges”).

5.2 *Expatriate Filipinos*

Filipinos are well represented in many immigrant communities across the globe. Not too many political issues on the home front would receive as much attention and excitement, or inspire patriotism as much as the Scarborough Shoal standoff has. On the one hand, Philippine embassies and missions in various countries may have played an active role in reaching out to these overseas Filipinos to explain what was happening, as the media coverage both in the Philippines and internationally, communicated messages that tended to increase fear and anxiety. On the other hand, in certain locales the well-networked overseas Filipinos needed no prodding to take interest in the issue.

From the U.S., *balikbayan* (returning Filipino) philanthropist, civic leader, and lawyer Loida Nicolas-Lewis urged the government to “show courage” by hitting back at China for “bullying” small countries like the Philippines and violating the country’s territorial sovereignty. Nicolas-Lewis is chairperson of the New York-based group U.S. Pinoys (Filipinos) for Good Governance (USP4GG). She called for worldwide protests among overseas Filipinos, including permanent migrants, to be held simultaneously on May 11, 2012. Responding to Chinese restrictions on imports of Philippine bananas and travel bans that were seen as “economic sanctions” being imposed by China for Manila’s defiance, she called for the imposition of trade tariffs on Chinese goods. (Similarly a provincial governor had earlier called for a boycott of Chinese products in the Philippines in response to

the Reed Bank harassment.)

“If China files a case against us before the World Trade Organization for violation of the free trade agreement, then we could pursue our plan to bring the Scarborough Shoal case to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (based in Hamburg, Germany),” she said (Esplanada “Ph urged”).

As the Chinese vessels remained in Scarborough Shoal, the organization USP4GG also held a rally in front of the United Nations headquarters in New York City in June, and even launched an “essay-writing contest” urging young Filipinos and other people of Filipino descent to write about the “West Philippine Sea.” Filipino organizations in Liverpool, e.g. the Alliance of Philippine Community Organizations, and in Australian cities also mobilized. (Chinese and Hong Kong citizens meanwhile organized counter-protests in front of Philippine missions in Hong Kong and Beijing).

6. Observations

Foreign relations have long been considered an arena reserved for experts and policymakers. In the particular case of territorial conflicts and the security threats that they may represent, there is even more sensitivity and a need to secure many of the processes from the glare of mass media. However, because of the perceived high stakes involved, public interest and attention tend to be high.

Governments can easily make use of public opinion and information dissemination campaigns to generate strong support for their positions. In the case of the Philippines, mass media has played a prominent role in the domestic handling of the crisis in a number of ways. Mass media was a conveyor of the official messages that government wanted to deliver, either to the domestic constituents or internationally. Some of the key

messages on the issues at hand that were being communicated by government were on the need for unity (and possibly of sacrifice if this problem were to persist) (“DFA” *GMA News Online*), the importance of staying the course and standing up to China on the principle of dispute settlement based on international law, and reminding allies and partners in the international community of the importance of the issue and for the need for solidarity.

Mass media, through opinion columns and letters to the editor, also provided government a gauge of how not only opinion leaders and the intellectual elite felt about the issues, but of how the issues were affecting ordinary citizens (e.g. through feedback mainly via television, radio, and the Internet).

But public opinion can also be a double-edged sword, whether in a democratic setting or otherwise. Rather than blame China solely for the crises, many Filipino observers would put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the Philippine government, for being too weak, complacent, and for lacking a strategic approach even as they stood behind government in its face-off with China.

The picture that emerges from this review is mixed, as one might expect from a lively democracy like the Philippines. By and large, the perception of a growing threat from China following the two incidents we mention have helped unite opinion on

1. the importance of the sovereignty issue and territorial integrity in the face of an external challenge,
2. the appropriateness of the Philippine approach with its emphasis on reliance on diplomacy and international law,
3. the desirability of solidarity with neighbors, allies and the international community as a whole, and
4. the need to strengthen the nation’s capability for dealing with similar concerns in the future, including military and law enforcement capability.

There is less clarity or unity of perception in relation to specific strategies – is the government being too provocative in its language criticizing China? Is it too transparent and does it signal too much to the other side? Should the U.S. play a role? Is joint development of resources still an option for future consideration? That there are many different views reflected in the mass media simply attests to the relatively recent awareness of the issues and the freedom of expression in the country.

The Chinese Filipinos and expatriate or overseas Filipino communities are special constituencies that can provide interesting insights not only on attitudes towards a perceived threat to the national interest, but as a mirror on issues of identity.

Ultimately an enlightened and informed public – rather than a rabble aroused – can play a role in developing rational and principled solutions to foreign policy problems, and generating strong political will that will help decision makers forge the way forward.

Appendix 1

Churning Stormy Seas

Teresita Ang See

The faceoff between China and the Philippines at the Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal has not eased off and the tension, now nearly a month long, is in danger of escalating. The posturing of politicians, who just love to hear themselves speak and see their names in the newspapers, is not helping matters any. It makes diplomacy much harder to undertake because tempers have flared up and misunderstandings intensified.

Tsinoyos are often asked, "Who do you think owns them?" Few dare venture a direct answer. If they say the Philippines, the older generation will get mad at them. If they answer China, then their loyalty to the Philippines will be questioned.

The elder generation always says that since grade school, seven to eight decades ago, their Chinese geography lessons included Nansha and Xisha (known as the Spratlys) as part of China's territories. They add that our children's geography lessons, on the other hand, never included them as part of the Philippine map.

The younger generation, however, says those islands are nearer the Philippines so it should be ours. The elders will retort, Guam and Hawaii are nearer Japan than the U.S., but do they belong to Japan? The young ones will reply, China is the Middle Kingdom (中國), it ruled everyone in the region in ancient times, it exercised suzerainty over Korea and Japan then, can you say now that Korea and Japan belong to China? In fact, ancient documents in China's national archives contain a letter from the Sultan of Sulu offering to be a part of China and requesting China to protect the kingdom from the Spaniards.

The debate is endless. Each side has its maps and treaties to prove ownership of the disputed islands. China has historical claim; but some of the islands are within Philippines maritime boundaries. The endless debates have no conclusion. At this point, the answer is: neither one owns the islands.

Ownership is being disputed, isn't it? Therefore, it belongs to nobody and to everybody who has a right to its sea lanes. No one should go to war over these disputed islands and disrupt the free exercise of commerce in its sea lanes.

In earlier times, fishermen from Hainan, from the Malay archipelago (including the Philippines) have been fishing freely in those waters and helping one another in stormy weather until politics entered the picture.

Bullying

The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Raul Hernandez said a Chinese fishery patrol ship "bullied" several Philippine vessels in the area April 28, and generated a two-meter wave to threaten them. The Chinese side responded to the DFA statement: "The Philippines' allegation about the Chinese fishery patrol ship 'bullying' Philippine vessels is sheer subjective assumption," *Xinhua* on April 29 quoted Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Liu Weimin as saying.

The term "bullied" is certainly good copy. It evokes anger. But it is very bad diplomacy. Our DFA is expected to help resolve and ease the tensions, not use provocative language that aggravates already-ruffled feelings.

China's army on April 27 vowed to protect their country's interests in the shoal. The Philippines dismissed the warnings as "pure rhetoric." Even President Benigno S. Aquino III waded in saying that China will not dare strike at the Philippines. The riposte and counter-riposte serve only to churn up already stormy waters where diplomacy could have brought calm.

Uncle Sam's help

DFA Secretary Albert del Rosario and Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin met in Washington on April 30 with their U.S. counterparts – State Secretary Hillary Clinton and Defense Chief Leon Panetta – in a crucial dialogue that discussed a planned increase in American military activities in the Philippines. Both sides likewise discussed Manila's request for additional defense capabilities like radar, fighter jets and warships to secure its territorial borders, particularly in the South China Sea.

But where the South China Sea conflict is concerned, the U.S. – with ever-increasing economic ties to China – has always maintained, it is not taking sides. It exhorted the Philippines to solve its problems with China through diplomatic channels. True enough, the meeting ended with great embarrassment for the Philippine side. The pathetic plea for pity and commiseration went unheeded. What does our government expect? Even before our emissaries left Washington, Clinton flew to Beijing to meet with her counterparts. Naturally, she did not want Beijing to slam the door on her. China had earlier warned the U.S. not to dip its hands into a purely Asian problem.

Pseudo patriotism

Senators, during a hearing by the upper chamber's foreign relations committee, expressed support for Malacañang's decision to seek American assistance on China's intrusion in Panatag Shoal. The consensus is, there is nothing wrong with seeking help from the U.S. since Washington and Manila have long been allies, especially on ensuring national security.

This clearly reminds me of Claro M. Recto's commencement speech at the

University of the Philippines 60 years ago. Its title, "Our Mendicant Foreign Policy," still rings true today.

Former U.P. College of Law dean Merlin Magallona, however, warned that dragging the U.S. into the country's worsening tiff with China over Panatag Shoal dispute may backfire as it could only further complicate the Philippines' claims in the resource-rich area. It may prod the Chinese government to stand firm against any diplomatic resolution of the matter.

"The interest of the U.S. is not the settlement of the dispute. As a matter of fact, the intervention of the U.S. will complicate the matter, as it (China) is now saying that the intervention of the U.S. is siding with the Philippines in the dispute," he told the panel chaired by Sen. Loren Legarda.

Both Malacañang and the Senate's stance to seek U.S. assistance on the matter shows utter disregard for our own country's dignity. On one hand, the Philippines fears China's encroachment on its territorial waters and wants to fight China. On the other hand, it also wants to surrender our country's sovereignty despite America's long record of imperialistic encroachment on all aspects of our nation's independence. Is it okay that we fight China over our sovereignty on some disputed islands yet sell out the same sovereignty to the U.S. by asking for U.S. interference in our own affairs? Politicians and ultra nationalists are whipping up a frenzy of pseudo patriotism.

Our national interests

We all know the conflict is not over the obscure islands, reefs and shoals but over the unquantifiable trillions of gallons of oil that lie underneath. We are being goaded to fight the U.S. proxy war because it is against American interest for China or the Philippines to gain a hold on the rich oil deposit.

If the Philippines should attain sovereignty over the area, it would no longer be mendicant and dependent on the U.S. Why does our government, who can ill afford it, spend several million dollars to refurbish derelict military vessels and cutters the U.S. transferred to us? Why do we have to go begging the U.S. for arms and ammunitions and increased presence in our own soil?

Even if we double what we already have now, we still cannot go to war with China. Instead of squandering our limited resources on futility, we should instead deploy these to develop our ports, roads and bridges to grow our economy and alleviate poverty.

*Source: Tulay Fortnightly. 24.23 (May 8-21, 2012): 5-6.
Beats and Bytes. Print.*

Appendix 2

Give Diplomacy a Chance

Teresita Ang See

Both China and the Philippines have agreed on a cooling-off period after controversy over the Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal affair reached fever-pitch. Hope and pray diplomacy gets a chance to work. Using the environmental green card as a high moral ground should not just be face saving but a means to a wise solution as well.

Those reef and shoal belong to humanity. If God means for us to enjoy the rich resources under the ocean floor, He would have made them accessible to everyone. Political rallies, hotheads, slogans and badmouthing only pour oil into the fire. It will take much more effort to douse it, especially with China's hurtful economic sanctions against us.

Even cultural and historical events have been cancelled. Among those I know of: more than 100 guests from Beijing, Xiamen, Quanzhou, Fuzhou and Guangzhou arriving May 17-20 for the 70th anniversary of the Wha Chi 48th Squadron guerrillas in the Philippines, the most active guerrilla group in the anti-Japanese war; cultural performers from China arriving for the June 9 celebration of PH-China Friendship Day to perform in Manila, Cebu, Bacolod and Iloilo; and even the Cultural Center of the Philippines' plans to bring Shanghai Ballet dancers and trainers to perform with Ballet Philippines this July were put on hold by Shanghai.

This would have been the first item in the cultural exchange under the "Year of People to People Exchanges" signed by President Benigno S. Aquino III during his first state visit to China. These cultural, historical and people-to-people exchanges should have been intensified during these times of trouble. Cancelling them deprive both sides a good opportunity to learn from one another and experience friendship rather than hostility.

Wise counsel

Tony La Viña, dean of the Ateneo School of Government, recently gave good advice in his column Eagle Eyes (*Manila Standard*, May 15, 2012) titled "The China I like." Let me quote some parts:

Why will I not like China with the richness of its culture? I have always been fascinated by Chinese movies and Chinese literature. I am a fan of Chinese artists like Yimou Zhang, Kaige Chen, Kar Wai Wong and many others. But most of all, I love Chinese philosophy. The philosopher Chuang Tzu, whose thoughts I studied under Ateneo professor Dr. Manny Dy more than 30 years ago, strongly influenced

my thinking about life and its challenges. My work on governance has made me appreciate more Confucius's wisdom. And when I was a young activist, Mao's red book inspired and guided many in my generation.

Why will I not like China when I grew up, studied together and work with so many Chinese Filipinos? Nobody should question their loyalty to our country just because of tensions with the ancestral motherland. For the record, for sure, I too have Chinese blood. How could I not like China for its success in economic development and especially in addressing poverty? For this we should emulate China while avoiding or minimizing the environmental and human rights costs of its development.

Finally, why will I not like China for its sense and pursuit of national purpose? In environmental negotiations, the Chinese are always clear about objectives and ferociously fight for its national interest. I do not like what China is doing in Scarborough Shoal. But the answer to that is not demonstrations or rhetoric or even trade and economic measures that could easily get out of control.

Among La Viña's recommendations is to appoint a competent and savvy ambassador to China now.

Chinese studies experts

Philippine Association for Chinese Studies members contributed comments that should enrich the debate. Fr. Ari Dy, S.J., writing from London, says:

It is in the best interest of both to move forward and explore joint exploration treaties rather than react emotionally every time shipping vessels are spotted in the disputed islands. There is nothing new with the proposal to pursue joint exploration, but it has not been done after years of empty talk. The present standoff must be taken as opportunity to find a long-term solution to the dispute, before things escalate into military aggression that will leave no victors.

Prof. Aileen Baviera, expert on the South China Sea and PH-China relations, writes:

We hope this standoff will be resolved quickly and peacefully, using reason and diplomacy rather than force or confrontation. It is not in the Filipino's interest to give in to bullying by any country, near or far, big or small. Nor is it in our interest to antagonize neighbors who are trade partners, investors, potential sources of economic support and political solidarity in the greater challenges we face in promoting Philippine growth, development, and our people's welfare.

Beyond territorial disputes are complex questions that require careful study, strong political commitment, and an atmosphere free from threat or coercion. Most important is a readiness by all concerned parties to engage in dialogue at whatever level and modality may be necessary to reach a just and lasting solution.

South China Sea vs West Philippine Sea

Glenn Ang, from the Ateneo de Manila University's Department of

History, questions the Philippine government's decision to shift from the internationally-accepted English-language name of the South China Sea to the West Philippine Sea.

The Chinese themselves never named it the South China Sea. It was the British Empire and later the U.S.A. which named it as such in their language, because China was the most significant country with a coast along that body of water. The Chinese-language name for it is Nanhai, or the Southern Sea.

There is already an internationally-accepted English-language name Philippine Sea for the body of water east of the Philippines. By introducing this nomenclature, this will further confuse people in geographical references, because the West Philippine Sea could be taken to mean the western part of the Philippine Sea.

The standard approach used by China and Germany in their own languages is more accurate. For example, the Baltic Sea is called the Ostsee, or East Sea in German. The Germans never attempted, even at the height of their nationalistic fervor during the First and Second World Wars, to change the English-language name to East German Sea.

Hence, we can easily refer to the South China Sea in Tagalog as Kanlurang Dagat and the Philippine Sea as Silangang Dagat, without being any less nationalistic. Even if the Philippine government was to change our national language to English, the South China Sea would still be the West Sea and the Philippine Sea would still be the East Sea.

Cacophony of noises

Fr. Dy learned this from the Scarborough Affair forum at the Philippine Embassy in London: The names Scarborough and Spratlys both have a British connection! Richard Spratly "discovered" the islands in 1843; the British then gave his name to the islands. The Scarborough was a ship of the East India Company that was shipwrecked on one of the rocks in the shoal (everyone perished!) in 1784. Whatever name we use to call the contested waters, let us not add to the cacophony of noises but instead work to calm the stormy seas of dispute.

Source: *Tulay Fortnightly*. 24.24 (May 22-June 18, 2012): 5-6.
Beats and Bytes. Print.

References

- Agence France-Presse*. "China should punish the Philippines over U.S. offer – report." *INQUIRER Online*. Inquirer Group of Companies. January 29, 2012. Web. Global Nation. November 1, 2012.
- AFP/ Yahoo! News*. "China calls for calm after Philippine offer to U.S." *AlexJones' Infowars Online*. Alex Jones. January 31, 2012. Web. September 5, 2013.
- Almonte, Jose T. "No one can stop China in Spratlys but China or the power of world opinion." *INQUIRER Online*. July 20, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.
- Avendaño, Christine O. "Hackers bring PH-China dispute to cyberspace." *INQUIRER Online*. April 23, 2012. Web. Global Nation. October 6, 2012.
- _____, DJ Yap, and Esplanada, Jerry E. "China daily warns of 'small-scale war' with Philippines." *INQUIRER Online*. April 25, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.
- Avila, Bobit S. "Phl Navy not prepared for combat duty?" *PhilStar Online*. STAR Group of Publications. April 14, 2012. Web. October 7, 2012.
- Barongbacal, Jay. "PH correctly stands its (maritime) ground." *INQUIRER Online*. June 29, 2011. Web. Opinion. October 6, 2012.
- Baviera, Aileen S.P. "The Influence of Domestic Politics on Philippine Foreign Policy: The Case of Philippines-China Relations since 2004." *RISIS Working Paper* 241. (June 5, 2012). Web. September 5, 2013.
- Bello, Walden. "Needed: Firm but Deft Diplomacy, not War Games." *INQUIRER Online*. April 12, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 6, 2012.
- Bondoc, Jarius. "China's naval flexing at Philippine expense." *PhilStar Online*. April 13, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "China's state-sponsored poachers will be back." *PhilStar Online*. July 30, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 7, 2012.
- Caoile, Bert. "International laws-backed claim to Spratlys is strongest." *INQUIRER Online*. June 10, 2011. Web. October 6, 2012.
- Carlos, Clarita. "Low-politics route to cooperation in South China Sea." *INQUIRER Online*. June 2, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.

- Chanco, Boo. "Patient, quiet diplomacy needed." *PhilStar Online*. April 16, 2012. Web. Business. September 5, 2013.
- "China paper warns of 'sound of cannons' in sea disputes." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. October 24, 2011. Web. September 10, 2012.
- Coronel, Sheila S. "The Role of the Media in Deepening Democracy." *United Nations Public Administration Network*. 2004. Web. September 5, 2013.
- Cruz, Catharina. "A diplomatic solution to row over Panatag Shoal." *INQUIRER Online*. April 28, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 6, 2012.
- De Quiros, Conrado. "Battle, War." Opinion. *INQUIRER Online*. April 25, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.
- Del Callar, Michaela. "PHL urges Fil-Chinese to invest in offshore energy projects." *GMA News Online*. GMA Network, Inc. May 11, 2012. Web. October 15, 2012.
- Del Rosario, Albert. "A Rules-Based Regime in The South China Sea." *INQUIRER Online*. June 7, 2011. Web. September 5, 2013.
- "DFA seeks business sector boost in tiff with China as BFAR imposes fishing ban." *GMA News Online*. May 16, 2012. Web. September 6, 2013.
- "Don't play with fire." *China Daily*. April 12, 2012. Web. October 15, 2012.
- Doronila, Amando. "Bootleg diplomacy." *INQUIRER Online*. September 27, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 6, 2012.
- Duque, Feza. "Hegemon and Jejemon." *INQUIRER Online*. June 4, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.
- "Energy and Geopolitics in the South China Sea: Implications for ASEAN and its Dialogue Partners." *ASEAN Studies Centre Report*. Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies. 8 (2009): 1-78. Print.
- "Enforcing a claim." *PhilStar Online*. April 24, 2012. Editorial. Web. October 7, 2012.
- Esplanada, Jerry E. "PH urged to hit China with trade tariffs; overseas filipinos set May 11 rallies." *INQUIRER Online*. April 29, 2012. Web. Global Nation. September 5, 2013.
- Esposo, William. "Factor these when dealing with China." *PhilStar Online*. April 26, 2012. Web. October 7, 2012.

- Farolan, Ramon. "Testicular fortitude." *INQUIRER Online*. April 22, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 6, 2012.
- Flores, Helen. "Pinoys have little trust in China." *PhilStar Online*. August 11, 2012. Web. September 6, 2012.
- Habito, Cielito. "Could China's sanctions choke us?" *INQUIRER Online*. May 15, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 6, 2012.
- Hampton, Mark. "The Fourth Estate Ideal in Journalism History." *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*. Stuart Allan. Ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. 3-12. Print.
- "Intruders." *INQUIRER Online*. May 24, 2011. Web. Editorial. October 6, 2012.
- Jamandre, Tessa. "China fired at Filipino fishermen in Jackson atoll." *ABS-CBN News Online*. June 3, 2011. Web. September 10, 2012.
- Jimenez-David, Rina. "The 'realpolitik' of size," *INQUIRER Online*. April 21, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.
- Lansang, James. "What's wrong with a profitable joint venture?" *INQUIRER Online*, August 20, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.
- Laylo, Pedro Jr. "Pinoys worried about PH-China sea dispute." *Rappler*. September 22, 2012. Web. September 6, 2013.
- Long Tao. "Time to teach those around South China Sea a lesson." *Global Times Online*. September 29, 2011. Web. September 5, 2013.
- Magno, Alex. "Comprehensive." *PhilStar Online*. May 3, 2012. Opinion. Web. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "Escalation." Opinion. *Philippine Star Online*. July 7, 2012. Web. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "Fiasco." *PhilStar Online*. June 23, 2012. Opinion. Web. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "Scarborough." *PhilStar Online*. April 19, 2012. Opinion. Web. October 7, 2012.
- Mercado, Juan L. "Skewed view." *INQUIRER Online*. May 4, 2012. Opinion. Web. October 6, 2012.

- Montelibano, Jose Ma. "A sardine and two sharks." *INQUIRER Online*. April 26, 2012. Opinion. Web. October 6, 2012.
- Oposa, Antonio A. Jr. "Declare Spratlys an international marine reserve." *Rappler*. April 25, 2012. Web. October 14, 2012.
- Padilla, Efren. "The price of sovereignty in our conflict with China." *GMA News Online*. June 28, 2012. Web. October 12, 2012.
- Pamintuan, Ana Marie. "Balancing act." *PhilStar Online*. May 18, 2011. Sketches. Web. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "Because they can." *PhilStar Online*. April 25, 2012. Sketches. Web. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "Dependence." *PhilStar Online*. June 11, 2012. Sketches. Web. October 6, 2012.
- Pangalangan, Raul C. "ASEAN: No elephant in the room." *INQUIRER Online*. July 20, 2012. Opinion. Web. September 6, 2013.
- Paradiang, Lorenzo Jr. "Uneasy is the peace over Spratlys – I." *PhilStar Online*. June 25, 2011. Freeman. Web. October 7, 2012.
- Pascual, Federico Jr. "Lee right choice as Phl ambassador to China." *PhilStar Online*. June 21, 2011. Web. Opinion. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "Panatag: Too many cooks and amateurs." *PhilStar Online*. June 21, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "Phl losing territory bit by painful bit?" *PhilStar Online*. June 19, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "P-Noy can cash in on tiff with Beijing." *PhilStar Online*. July 8, 2012. Web. Opinion. September 5, 2013.
- _____. "We'll lose Reed Bank by timidity, by default." *PhilStar Online*. May 24, 2011. Web. Opinion. October 7, 2012.
- _____. "Why U.S. is not likely to scramble for Phl." *PhilStar Online*. April 22, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 7, 2012.
- "Peaceful rise?" *PhilStar Online*. March 8, 2011. Web. Editorial. October 7, 2012.
- Pedrosa, Carmen. "Tact and back-channeling: Japan's role." *PhilStar Online*. September 22, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 7, 2012.

- "People's Daily warns of consequences over South China Sea issue." *Xinhuanet Online*. August 2, 2011. Web. September 5, 2013.
- Pertierra, Raul. "The New Media, Society & Politics in the Philippines." *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*. Berlin: Fesmedia Asia Series. 2012. Friedrich Ebert Foundation. 2007. Web. September 5, 2013.
- "Philippine Foreign Secretary Del Rosario on the South China Sea." *CogitASIA*. Center for Strategic and International Studies Asia House. June 7, 2011. Web. September 15, 2013.
- PSSST! Online Magazine*. Web. June 21, 2012.
- "Reassuring noises." *INQUIRER Online*. September 6, 2012. Web. Editorial. October 18, 2012.
- Romualdez, Babe. "Are we all going to Scarborough?" *PhilStar Online*. April 15, 2012. Web. October 7, 2012.
- Romulo, Roberto R. "A learning curve in foreign policy." *PhilStar Online*. March 11, 2011. Web. October 7, 2012.
- Rood, Steven. "U.S. Military and the Philippines: What do Philippine Citizens Really Think." *In Asia Online*. The Asia Foundation. February 1, 2012. Web. September 5, 2013.
- Roque, Harry Jr. "Chinese shadow play." *INQUIRER Online*. June 4, 2012. Web. Opinion. October 6, 2012.
- Sanchez, Korina. "One idiot." *PhilStar Online*. April 13, 2012. Freeman. Web. September 5, 2013.
- "Second Quarter 2012 Social Weather Survey." *Social Weather Stations Online*. August 13, 2012. Web. October 3, 2012.
- See, Teresita Ang. "Handshake better than fistfight." *Tulay Online*. April 24-May 7, 2012. Web. Beats and Bytes. September 5, 2013.
- Severino, Rodolfo C. "The United States and the South China Sea." *GMA News Online*. June 6, 2012. Web. October 12, 2012.
- Sison, Jose C. "Historic right and legal title." *PhilStar Online*. June 17, 2011. Web. Opinion. October 7, 2012.

- "Sounds of cannons: Warning on South China Sea dispute," *NTD Television Online*. New Tang Dynasty Television. October 26, 2011. Web. September 5, 2013.
- Tiglao, Rigoberto. "Scarborough fail: How Aquino blew it." *INQUIRER Online*. May 3, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.
- "Tit for tat." *INQUIRER Online*. May 13, 2012. Web. Editorial. October 6, 2012.
- Tordesillas, Ellen. "Please, not Domingo Lee to China." *Ellen Tordesillas Online*. April 15, 2011. Web. Blog. October 11, 2012.
- Tuazon, Bobby. "China's agenda." Commentary. *INQUIRER Online*. October 15, 2012. Web. October 6, 2012.
- Tundag, Jerry. "Disgrace as soldier, shame as senator." *PhilStar Online*. September 21, 2012. Freeman. Web. September 6, 2013.
- Villanueva, Hector. "Some lessons to be learned." *Manila Bulletin Online*. June 25, 2012. Web. October 12, 2012.
- Villanueva, Marichu A. "All bark, no bite." *PhilStar Online*. May 25, 2011. Web. October 7, 2012.