



CoC in South China Sea: Cultural and Nationalist Position of Non-claimant ASEAN States

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Abstract

Interstate policy is a post-Cold War global phenomenon, and it is a prevailing discourse in the Asia-Pacific. This cross-sectional study analyses the cultural and nationalist position of selected non-claimant states in mainland (Myanmar and Thailand) and maritime (Indonesia and Singapore) Southeast Asia on the code of conduct in South China Sea which needs to be implemented by all ASEAN member-state claimant nations. Critical expert discussion involving authorities from non-claimant states gives the study an in-depth focus on investigating policy implications, and the practical, generative framework in the light of Southeast Asian Exceptionalism.

Findings revealed that non-claimant states have a balancing power encouraging regional stability and security in the region, undermining conflict and geopolitical tension caused by unclear rules in asserting sovereign rights. It appears that cultural nationalism is necessarily a reliable or strong predictor of the non-claimant's decision process. Historical details of the predictor may vary from mainland to maritime Southeast Asia. But the grounding is similar: all are post-colonial sentiments. Results also suggest that Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia are independent of their concurring position towards a binding code of conduct. In sum, cultural nationalism in Southeast Asian context posits economic inclusiveness and regional peace guided by respect for culture and ideology.

Keywords: policy, geopolitics, cultural nationalism, South China Sea

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Introduction

The West Philippine Sea maritime row implies a risk to transnational cooperation and regional peace initiatives. However, an interstate policy may build stronger ties and economic prospects for nations in Southeast Asia. Thus, the implications of the policy can bridge understanding of cultural and nationalistic gaps already existing in the region. The function of non-claimant ASEAN states and the code of conduct are vital in balancing power and calling for a peaceful resolution in the disputed waters. Another role of non-claimant states is to pursue consensus-based solutions in the face of the significant power interests of China.

Thus, the United States desires to maintain its engagement in Asia with some muscle in its international relations-not necessarily to provoke China but to strengthen deterrence to combat China's hegemony and to persuade Beijing there is nothing to be gained by threatening its neighbors. Similarly, nothing decent can come from unreasonably 'pushing China, which has its apprehensions about America's character in Asia, hooked on a corner' (New York Times, 2014).

In an inexistence of a legally binding instrument, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have to further elevate relations utilizing peripheral controls and must desire to lessen reliance on China in

terms of politics and finances which partially concerns China's rapid expansion in the region. However, increasing self-reliance within ASEAN is what the region most urgently needs. To achieve this, it is necessary for the region to be extremely united and to find an innovative approach of making decision based on consensus. As a result of its self-reliance, ASEAN is better able to safeguard its shared ideals and citizens without sacrificing the ASEAN grouping for any one member's national interest (Nguyen, 2019).

In 2017, according to Baviera, the South China Sea dispute will be an extremely difficult case for the scope of ASEAN's effort to create a politically safe community. It will settle or handle conflicts affecting not only the security and wellbeing of member states but also the stability and peace of the region. The south China sea dispute serves as a test of the region's commitment to rules-based order, the direction and centrality of ASEAN's shared norms and identity, and the extent to which a logic of consequentiality has begun to yield cause..

Southeast Asia, having mainland and oceanic halves and continental and maritime passage is sandwiched between these two continental powers heading towards the ocean. It is a miniature of the international pressures between inland and naval supremacies. Along with, harmony and order and forthcoming commercial progress of the entire South East Area would be patchy and spread throughout the region by how Asia advances. It is impossible to separate the fate of Asia from these changes. This is the new world we face (Gungwu, 2017).

The study is critical because it focuses on the cultural and nationalistic position of non-claimant ASEAN member-states, especially the Thai government, the Myanmar government and the sovereign states of Singapore and Indonesia, in the implementation of guidelines in the disputed sea. People in mainland Southeast Asia are considered continental, while in maritime SEA, the inhabitants seemed to be more open-minded. So, the cultural and nationalistic position of non-claimant states plays a primary role in transnational cooperation and regional peace initiatives in Southeast Asia.

Problem Statement

The study investigates an interstate policy primarily aimed to secure transnational cooperation and achieving regional peace in the Southeast Asian region. This paper sought to answer the primary question: What are the cultural and nationalist positions of non-claimant ASEAN states on COC in South China Sea towards transnational cooperation and regional peace initiatives in Southeast Asia?

Research Methods

This policy paper highlights the cultural and nationalist position of non-claimant ASEAN member states on the implementation of the rules of conduct with Prof. Carl Thayer as an expert validator. Data was collected by conducting key-informant interviews from selected experts of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar (mainland SEA) and the Republic of Indonesia (maritime SEA). A scholar in Thai studies from the University of Michigan gave additional input. An academic on Buddhism and Hinduism in Singapore from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) was also interviewed. Lastly, the dean of the Department of International Studies of the University of Mandalay in Myanmar principally played as a key expert.

Results and Discussion

The ASEAN signatories declare their loyalty to the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter. Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship in South Eastern Asia the 1982 UN a treaty on the law of the sea, the five principles of harmonious relations and other widely accepted rules of international laws which uphold these principles as the fundamental standards regulating relations between states. All international policies mentioned above are towards the same goals: (1) mutual respect for each other's rights to liberty, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, (2) the right of every State to determine how their country is run (3) 4 not to get involved in one another's private affairs (5) use of peaceful means to resolve dispute refusal of using force or threatening to use it and (5) practical collaboration in world economy.

These goals seem vibrant and practical; however, external factors shape member countries' diplomatic and trade choices in the Southeast Asian region.

It is important to note that the U.S. agenda organized UNCLOS. However, it signed the agreement in 1994 but is not a signatory of the convention. Meanwhile, the Chinese government directed the five pillars of amicable relations. The United States and China have separate geopolitical interests designed to gain the upper hand in economic and military agendas.

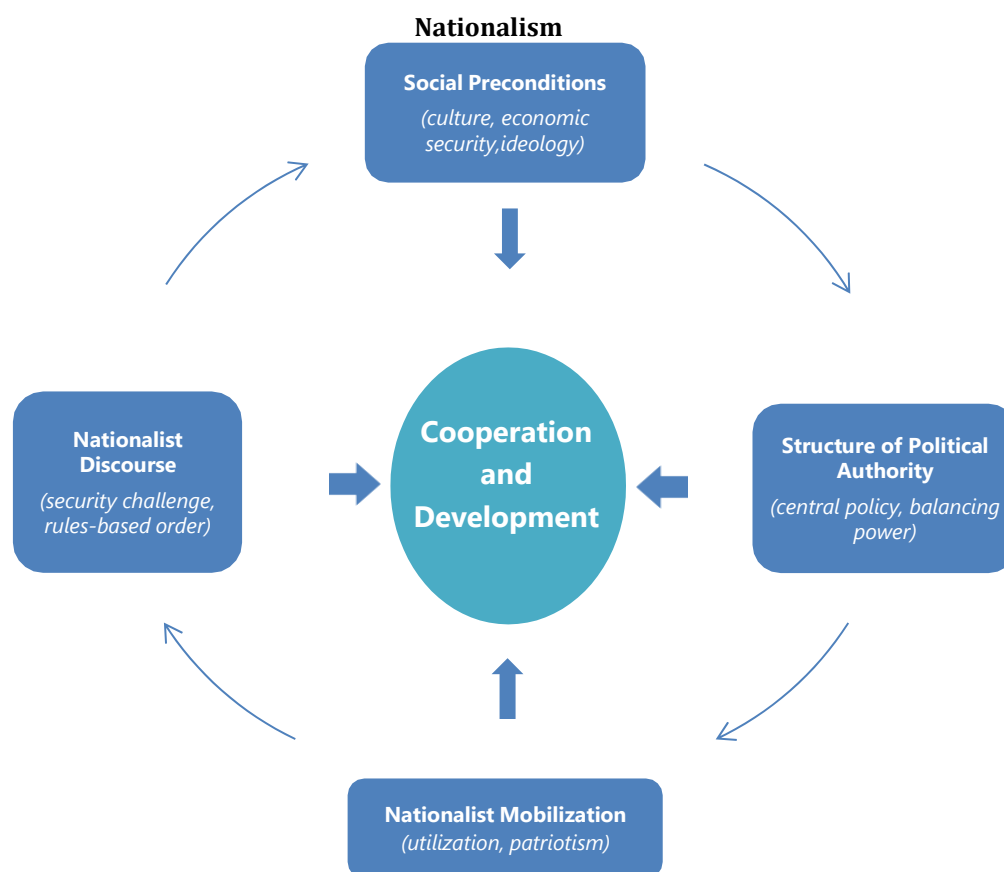
Only Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singaporean and Thai founded the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation on February 24, 1976. In addition, The South China Sea Parties Agreement of protocol is a formal declaration affirmed by ASEAN member countries that would direct to a code of conduct in the South China Sea. However, since 2002, there has yet to be progress.

The regional matter is a basket case from a Western and Westphalia perspective. Therefore, a different approach in the policy analysis on the code of conduct must anchor on the cultural and nationalist position of claimant and non-claimant states.

Southeast Asian Exceptionalism posits that the unique cultures and differences in ideology of Southeast Asian countries are not indicators of conflict and threats to security and peace. The four countries must support a regional policy that advocates for transnational cooperation and peace guided by Southeast Asian culture. The data set anchors on the conceptual framework that the author of this study devised. At times, it may even be perceived that the understanding of non-claimants on COC is based on a historical account, and the relation with China and Southeast Asian partners is not taken critically as a geopolitical interruption.

Below is the visual model of *Southeast Asian Exceptionalism* based from Maiz's (2012) Cultural Nationalism.

**Figure 1. Southeast Asian Exceptionalism
based from Maiz's (2012) Cultural**



Social preconditions of non-claimant countries like Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia can be elaborated in their culture, economic security, and ideology. These indicators are core fundamentals of their governance and how they assume their position in ASEAN affairs. These social preconditions are functioning nationalist beliefs that have existed in the countries mentioned after World War II, which the key experts strongly argued.

The **structure of political authority** includes but is not limited to central policy toward regional development and balancing power on a code of conduct. In order to implement the code of conduct, these would come together to establish varied but unified nations. Balancing the power of these countries on the code of conduct is also rooted in their collective social conditions... Their understanding and acceptance of COC are based on cultural politics. The impact of balancing power is essential in recognizing non-claimant states' economic and geopolitical interests in the region.

Nationalist mobilization can be best described in the non-claimant's position and view on utilitarianism and patriotism. Based on the findings, this variable would constitute a primary predictor of influence since differences in political ideologies significantly view geopolitical tension. Utilitarian belief and patriotism affect the decision process in holding up for the code of conduct. Its effect on cooperation and development in SEA through COC is geared towards economic success and lasting regional peace and harmony.

Nationalist discourse remains a contemporary issue in Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia. This can be expounded in two ways: it is all about security challenges and rules-based order. The study also relates to identity-based strategies and the post-colonial framing of each Southeast Asian country on their position in implementing COC. This identity is enclosed in cultural nationalism, aiming for a rules-based and legally binding agreement. Its influence in achieving regional cooperation and development is vital because it allows for more discussions and long-term solutions to the maritime dispute.

With all the factors combined, the cultural and nationalist positions of non-claimant ASEAN member states are deeply entrenched in the national interest, economic stability, and internal security. By this preoccupation, the positions of Myanmar and Indonesia are also outward-looking to attain transnational cooperation and regional peace. Applying their core values enshrined in their government affairs gives way to the implementation of COC.

Conclusion

In sum, based on the textual analyses performed on the data obtained from interviews, it was found that of these five themes, cultural nationalism was an equipped feature as a balancing power of non-claimant states. Their country's colonial past is the core perspective of non-interference and non-alignment pose on the issue.

As can be seen the code of conduct to maintain peace and cooperation between nations in Southeast Asia is built on the culture and nationalism of non-claimant governments. Economic security is another ground or a social precondition in Myanmar's and in The code of conduct is supported by Indonesia in the South China Sea. However, ideologically, these countries oppose China's expansion infrastructure in the disputed waters.

Non-claimant states may appreciate economic assistance extended by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The former's efficacy or willingness to take the advice or help may not be a reason to violate their sovereign rights. though, in the first place, no portion of South China Sea is claimed by them. These countries only dream of regional peace and transnational cooperation.

Comparatively, the balancing power of the governments of Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia are coupled by a central policy leaning towards regional peace in Southeast Asia. These nations might not directly benefit from the economic and marine resources of the South China Sea. However, their stand can make or break mutual relations with China and neighboring Southeast Asian countries.

Citing Article 22 on General Principles of the charter of ASEAN (2008), it decreed two provisions: (1) Member nations must make every effort to reach a peaceful resolution to all these problems through

dialogue, consultation. and negotiation; and (2) In all areas of ASEAN cooperation, ASEAN shall maintain and implement a conflict resolution system.

The present condition or state of the South China Sea row is arguably not a crisis just yet. ASEAN and China are evaluating an impactful rules-based order in the region.

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