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What's Really Going On in the South China Sea?

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Abstract

Most analysts and commentators portray China's conduct in the South China Sea as a series of aggressive norm violations by an emerging peer competitor to the United States. We argue that this narrative misreads both the substance and dynamics of recent Chinese policy. Since 2016, China has strenuously sought – and largely managed – not to be in technical violation of the Philippines Arbitration Tribunal ruling despite having publicly disavowed it and has attempted to position itself as a champion of win–win co-operation. This stands in stark contrast to the previous four years in which China rather shockingly began asserting itself with little regard for either legality or diplomatic nicety – the period in which the “aggressive China” narrative gelled. What explains China's whiplash behaviour? Why has the international community largely failed to notice recent changes and adjust the narrative accordingly? We argue that the answers to these questions lie in an eclectic appeal to bureaucratic struggles, the regime's two-level game balancing domestic and international pressures, and psychological considerations. These do not, however, provide satisfactory accounts either of China's behaviour or of the international response in the absence of recognising the crucial importance of second-order rules for making, interpreting, and applying first-order rules in the international system. Social practices of rule-making, in short, provide vital context. Our analysis suggests a series of takeaways both for International Relations theory and for managing relations with China.

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Keywords

China, South China Sea, eclectic theory, international order, social practices

It is hard to imagine a more important body of water than the South China Sea. An estimated one-third of global shipping passes through it each year, representing slightly more than a quarter of all global trade by volume and slightly less than a quarter by value (China Power Project, 2017). Some 3,365 species of marine fish call the South China Sea home, representing 12 per cent of the world's catch at the hands of 55 per cent of the global fishing fleet, providing a crucial source of nutrition for littoral states and livelihoods for at least 3.7 million people (Fridtjof Nansen Institute, 2017). Reliable figures are hard to find on the oil and gas deposits that lie beneath the South China Sea, but it is clear that they are significant (Daiss, 2018). Strategically, it connects the Indian and Pacific Oceans and lies at the eastern end of the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's two busiest narrows and a vital chokepoint (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2014; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2017). China's sole port for its ballistic missile submarine fleet – Yulin Naval Base – lies on the southern side of Hainan Island, making the South China Sea a vital bastion for China's strategic nuclear deterrent (Cook, 2017).

The South China Sea is also the most contentious body of water in the world. China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei all claim territorial and/or maritime jurisdiction in whole or in part and none of the conflicting claims has yet been resolved, in significant measure because of their emotional valence (Welch, 2017). Several non-claimant states have declared the South China Sea vital to their national interest as well, the most important of which is the United States, traditionally a strong proponent of the principle of freedom of navigation and respect for the rule of law. To signal its commitment to these, as well as its rejection of what it considers other countries' "excessive claims," the United States periodically mounts Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in the form of naval transits or overflights. Like-minded countries such as Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom, and France have either shown the flag with port calls or conducted FONOPs as well (Ngo Minh Tri, 2018; Tuan Anh Luc, 2018).

Military activities in the South China Sea, as well as periodic standoffs, clashes, and crises, have been a major source of regional tension for decades and pose a perennial threat to peace and stability. Not surprisingly, from time to time stakeholders have adjusted their South China Sea policies so as to improve their positions or increase the odds of what they would consider a favourable outcome. Two of the most important such changes are China's abandonment in 2012 of what we might call "obstructive engagement" in favour of "assertive unilateralism" and its subsequent abrupt retreat in 2016 to what we might call a policy of "stealthy compliance." What explains these changes, and why has the second largely gone unnoticed?

We approach these questions in an inductive vein, for two reasons: first, recreating a narrative arc is particularly helpful for identifying path dependencies; second, deductive approaches can mask out important or undertheorised causes or reasons for behaviour.¹ The narrative, however, demonstrates the importance of dynamics well understood in the

bureaucratic politics, two-level games, and cognitive psychology literatures acting in combination. Crucially, these interactions play out in a way rendered sensible only when couched in a constructivist story about the importance of actors' concern for, and competence with, international procedural rules.

Our findings are important for several reasons. First, and most obviously, they add vital nuance correcting common misconceptions about Chinese foreign policy behaviour and the South China Sea disputes. Second, they demonstrate the power of an eclectic approach to theorising for explaining important phenomena in world politics (Katzenstein and Sil, 2008). Deductive approaches typically prize parsimony, in what Seva Gunitsky (2019: 708) has called "a sometimes useful capitulation" to the complexity of the social world. While we do not deny the necessity of simplification in theory-building or in empirical research, we believe that our findings justify our intuition that existing accounts of the South China Sea disputes have often purchased too much parsimony at too high a price. A structural realist retrodiction of Chinese behaviour stressing the rational pursuit of power, for example, would be unable to account for seemingly irrational behaviour driven by such things as domestic imperatives or bureaucratic politics. An eclectic approach to theorising is often a better fit for the multi-causal nature of the social world, as well as for the reality that actors typically have mixed motives. Third, the case demonstrates difficulties inherent in threat perception, whether on the part of the practitioner or the observer. Fourth, we demonstrate the relevance of established social practices of rule-making in shaping states' choices and the outcomes of international disputes, as well as the importance of rules as stakes in great power conflict, which International Relations theory has typically treated largely as a matter of relative material power. In this respect, we endorse Stacie E. Goddard and Daniel H. Nexon's call for a more expansive understanding of what counts as power politics and show that competent rule-making is part of it (Goddard and Nexon, 2016). Finally, misunderstanding China's actions increases the risk of inadvertent conflict.

Readers should be aware that, because of the acute sensitivity of the issues we discuss and the fact that they remain unresolved, some of what we relate comes from Chinese officials willing to speak only on strict background. In most cases, we have been able to corroborate their accounts from at least one independent source and we have endeavoured not to rely upon any account that an interlocutor would not have been able to know on the basis of first-hand experience, but we do appreciate that what follows will in many cases have an unfortunately unavoidable "take our word for it" feel.²

Background

The history of the South China Sea is long, murky, but only recently contentious (Hayton, 2014). For centuries, people from communities on all sides of it fished its waters at will, mostly close to shore but occasionally out by the rocks and shoals under such heated dispute today, while ships from near and far plied its coasts or, later, when navigational techniques improved, struck out across open water. For all intents and purposes, the South China Sea was a regional commons subject to no organised political authority. Only in the nineteenth century did questions of sovereign jurisdiction arise, when

France colonised Indochina and, in the process, claimed various territorial features for itself. The concept of exclusive territorial sovereignty was a European import alien to a region unaccustomed to strict borders and tolerant of ambiguous or undelimited authority on the margins of organised politics.

Japan took control of French possessions in World War II. Upon its defeat in 1945, the question of who owned what in the South China Sea became pressing for the first time. In 1947, Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government of the Republic of China (ROC) published a map bounding its claims by means of an 11-dashed U-shaped line intended to delineate territorial, not maritime, jurisdiction (Chung, 2016: 43; Kim and Druckman, 2020: 44). Following Chiang’s defeat on the mainland and his flight to Taiwan, Mao Zedong and his fellow communist rulers of the new People’s Republic of China (PRC) embraced the ROC’s U-shaped line, dropping two dashes in 1953 (Chung, 2016: 56–57). The infamous “nine-dash line” has been a lightning rod for competing claimants ever since (see Figure 1).

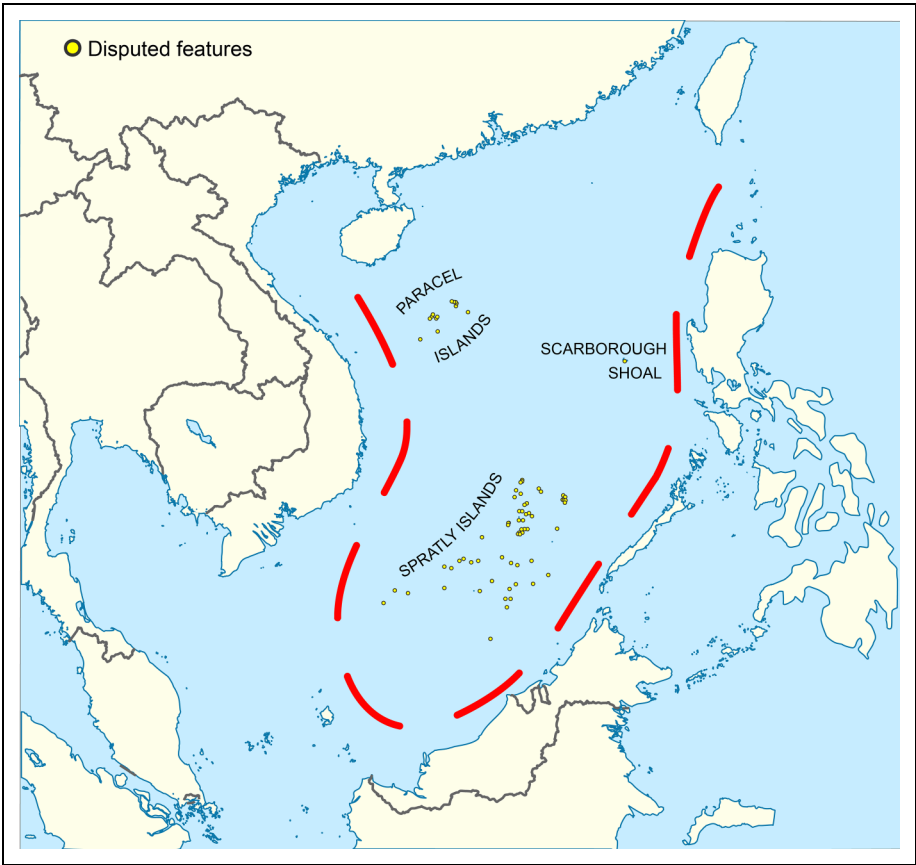


Figure 1. Nine-dash line and disputed features (authors’ rendering).

Much of the anxiety generated by the nine-dash line has been the result of the PRC's unwillingness to clarify what, precisely, Beijing thinks it denotes. The ambiguity dates from 1974, when the government began routinely making vague statements in diplomatic correspondence, national law, and both official and unofficial publications about China's rights not only to the islands of the South China Sea but also to their "adjacent" or "relevant" waters (Chung, 2016: 57–59). Over time, China would embrace the mantra that it had "historic rights" to the islands and waters of the South China Sea (including "archipelagic waters") from "time immemorial" founded in "general international law" (see, e.g., Dupuy and Dupuy, 2017; Hayton, 2018; Ma, 2019; Wain, 2001; Wang, 2017: 201; Zheng, 2014). Beijing's refusal when pressed to provide satisfactory disambiguation led to the assumption that it claimed not only sovereignty over the territorial features of the South China Sea but also maritime jurisdiction within the nine-dash line (Welch and Logendrarajah, 2019).

By ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1996, China effectively pulled the legal rug out from under its most expansive possible claim.³ UNCLOS swept aside all prior international maritime law and for the first time established a uniform set of rights and obligations for all states. *Inter alia*, it restricted "historic" or "internal waters" claims to minor bays (Arts. 7, 8, 10); granted "archipelagic waters" rights only to fully archipelagic states such as the Bahamas, Maldives, or the Philippines (Arts. 46–54); limited territorial seas in most cases to 12 n.m. from the coast (Arts. 2–4); defined an additional 12-n.m. "contiguous zone" in which states could exercise police powers for certain law enforcement purposes (Art. 33); established a 200-n.m. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ, Arts. 55–57); provided for certain additional continental shelf rights (Arts. 76–78); and specified the rights of other countries' vessels within each zone, including, crucially, the right of innocent passage through the territorial sea (Arts. 17–21). Importantly, UNCLOS also specified the maritime rights that attached to territorial features of various kinds. An "island," for example – defined as "a naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide" – was entitled to an EEZ, but a "rock" that "cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of [its] own" was not (Art. 121). The low-water line of a "low-tide elevation" (LTE) – "a naturally formed area of land which is surrounded by and above water at low tide but submerged at high tide" – could be used to fix a baseline for a territorial sea if it were "situated wholly or partly at a distance not exceeding the breadth of the territorial sea from the mainland or an island," but otherwise an LTE had no territorial sea (Art. 13). Neither did an artificial island (Art. 80[8]) or a fully submerged shoal.

UNCLOS said nothing, of course, about territorial sovereignty, so maritime entitlements in the South China Sea depend almost entirely upon two considerations: (1) which country by right enjoys territorial sovereignty over which features; and (2) whether those features are "islands," "rocks," or LTEs. There are no uncontested features in the South China Sea. China and Taiwan claim them all. The Paracel Islands are claimed also by Vietnam, and Scarborough Shoal by the Philippines. The Spratly Islands have several claimants. The largest feature in the Spratlys, Itu Aba, is controlled by Taiwan; Vietnam controls a further twenty-one; the Philippines control nine or ten, depending upon how one counts;

and Malaysia controls either five or eight – again, depending upon how one counts. China controls only seven features that were relatively low-grade in their natural condition: Johnson South Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Subi Reef, Gaven Reef, Hughes Reef, and Mischief Reef (Vuving, 2016).

In some respects, China's policy in the South China Sea has been remarkably consistent in recent decades. It has always insisted, for example, upon resolving disputes through bilateral negotiation and it has always professed a commitment to friendly, peaceful dispute resolution. It has also studiously avoided arbitration, mediation, or multilateral negotiation on jurisdictional questions. China's critics often refer to this as a "divide and conquer" strategy (Chapman, 2017), and, of course, it makes good sense in view of China's enormous power advantages in pairwise comparisons with rival claimants.

Prior to 2010, however, China sought to keep tensions in the South China Sea low while maintaining quiet intransigence on maritime and territorial disputes (Fravel, 2011). While tempers would occasionally flare, often as the result of incidents at sea involving China's attempts to enforce what it understood as its maritime rights, Beijing sought to contain them and actively pursued what seems in retrospect to have been dialogue designed to yield nothing (Amer, 2014). At the same time, it engaged with rival claimants broadly on other issues, primarily economic ones, to cultivate dependencies. While China did not have a label for this policy, we might call it "obstructive engagement." Over the course of the following two years, however, Beijing gradually became more forthright, strident, and inflexible (Zhou, 2016: 871–872). By 2012 it had fully embraced a dramatically different policy, one that we might call "assertive unilateralism."

The new policy had both symbolic and operational components. One important symbolic move was the issuance of new biometric passports that included a map featuring the nine-dash line. Arguably, other countries stamping these passports would qualify as *de facto* recognition of China's expansive claims (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012). Another was to upgrade Sansha on Hainan Island from county- to prefectural-level municipal status, thereby giving it broader powers to police and garrison the Paracels, Spratlys, Macclesfield Bank, and Scarborough Shoal, for which China had given it administrative responsibility.⁴ A key early operational move was China's opportunistic seizure of Scarborough Shoal following what the Philippines, at least, believed to have been an agreement for both countries to withdraw patrol craft as the 2012 typhoon season approached.⁵ With Philippine ships out of the way, China dropped a barrier across the entrance to the shoal and stationed coast guard vessels to chase away Philippine fishing boats, a move that Philippine president Benigno Aquino likened to Nazi Germany's 1939 annexation of Czechoslovakia (Bradsher, 2014).

At almost the same time, assertive unilateralism got a major boost from events elsewhere when Japan nationalised the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands in the East China Sea. Ironically, the Japanese government intended this move to *prevent* a major diplomatic crisis with China: arch-nationalist Shintaro Ishihara, Governor of Tokyo, had announced plans to buy the islands from their private owner with the clear intention of establishing an outpost of some kind to protest what he bemoaned as the Japanese

government's pusillanimous lack of response to Chinese encroachments. Had Ishihara done this, Tokyo would have found itself in a major international crisis. But China misinterpreted the nationalisation as a deliberate provocation and reacted furiously anyway. China dramatically stepped up air and sea incursions; outraged Chinese citizens called for boycotts of Japanese goods and businesses; and violent demonstrations swept dozens of Chinese cities (Lim, 2012).

Not long after the nationalisation crisis, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) began pushing to establish an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea. Planning for such a zone had begun shortly after the 2001 Hainan Island EP-3 incident, but each time the proposal came forward for decision – roughly once a year – the Foreign Ministry had managed to persuade leaders in Beijing that the move would be too provocative (personal communication). On 23 November 2013, however, China suddenly did announce an East China Sea ADIZ, indicating that it would merely be the first. As the Foreign Ministry had feared, the announcement triggered worldwide condemnation (Rinehart and Elias, 2015).

In retrospect, it is clear that China's East China Sea ADIZ was a major misstep, reinforcing fears of what many were beginning to see as China's regional hegemonic ambitions. Ironically, both the impetus to establish an ADIZ and the hostile reaction to it were grounded in fundamental misconceptions of what an ADIZ is, what it is for, and what it implies (Charbonneau et al., 2015; Welch, 2013). The sole purpose of an ADIZ is to reduce both surprise and the need to scramble fighter jets to identify unknown aircraft. All other things being equal, fewer scrambles mean fewer interceptions, less wear and tear on aircraft, reduced pilot fatigue, and reduced risk of accident or inadvertent conflict. An ADIZ is a mere convenience with neither legal status nor legal implication. In particular, it confers no jurisdiction (indeed, Taiwan's ADIZ extends well into mainland China). It is therefore not a useful tool – and accordingly has never been wielded – in a sovereignty dispute. In 2012, this important fact was unclear to the PLA, to leaders in Beijing, to blindsided foreign leaders, and to the media everywhere. The only people, in fact, who fully grasped the concept of an ADIZ at the time were pilots and air defence personnel.

China's East China Sea ADIZ was dangerous in large part because it overlapped both Japan's and Taiwan's, raising the prospect of simultaneous interceptions, conflicting instructions to aircraft, and, *in extremis*, aerial combat. In view of the ubiquitous misconceptions about their status, a second ADIZ over the South China Sea would have been even more dangerous. Rival claimants would almost certainly have responded by announcing overlapping ADIZs of their own, dramatically escalating tensions and undermining aviation safety. But the PLA was not yet in a position to roll out a South China Sea ADIZ in any case. It faced one insurmountable challenge: lack of operational capacity to enforce one. In the East China Sea, this was challenging enough, given the distances PLA interceptors would have to travel from mainland air bases.⁶ In the South China Sea, it was simply not feasible. The extreme southern extension of the nine-dash line lies 1,700 km from Lingshui Air Base on Hainan Island, that is, at the maximum combat radius of China's workhorse J-11 fighter, making timely interception impossible.

The solution to this problem was artificial islands (personal communications). Through land reclamation, China could create airstrips with adequate supporting infrastructure (hangars, supply depots, radars, air defences, etc.) to maintain a forward presence suitable for operating a peacetime South China Sea ADIZ. China set about building three such airstrips, on Subi Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, and Mischief Reef, as well as smaller supporting facilities (without airstrips) on Gaven, Johnson, Hughes, and Cuarteron Reefs. Not only did these artificial islands provide infrastructure for a forward military presence, they also enabled China to establish observation stations to monitor other claimants' activities, and, perhaps most importantly of all, signalled China's seriousness in asserting its claims.⁷ Within a few short years, China went from having the smallest footprint in the Spratlys to having the largest. For rival claimants, this in itself was cause for alarm. But particularly worrisome was concern that China would attempt to assert maritime claims on the basis of these enhanced features despite the fact that UNCLOS expressly forbade it.

As part of its new assertiveness, China also began more rigorously enforcing its annual seasonal fishing ban and, on 2 May 2014 – in a renege of a pledge not to do so – dispatched its largest oil drilling platform, the HYSY-981, to disputed waters off the Paracel Islands (Morton, 2016: 924). The reaction was swift and furious (Zhou, 2016: 884–887). A ten-week standoff followed that saw violent anti-Chinese protests in Vietnam and high seas drama as Vietnamese ships attempted to disrupt the oil rig's operations and Chinese ships sought to keep them at bay, resulting in the ramming and sinking of at least one Vietnamese fishing vessel.

China's assertive unilateralism ended abruptly in the summer of 2016. The immediate cause was Beijing's humiliating loss in *Philippines v. China*, a case under UNCLOS brought to a tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague in 2013 by Philippine President Aquino (Wang, 2017: 188). Frustrated by China's intransigence on maritime and territorial disputes, its high-handed refusal to allow Philippine fishing boats access to traditional fishing grounds (especially in and around Scarborough Shoal), and its artificial island building program – particularly at Mischief Reef, which the Philippines saw as falling well within its EEZ – Manila asked the Tribunal to rule, *inter alia*, on the legal status of the nine-dash line, the status of various features in the Spratlys (i.e., whether they qualified as "islands," "rocks," LTEs, etc.), and whether China's artificial island building campaign and its refusal to allow Philippine boats access to traditional fishing grounds were consistent with its legal obligations. China refused to participate in the proceedings, objecting that the Philippines had prematurely abandoned its obligation to resolve disputes through negotiation; that the real purpose of the case was to undermine China's territorial integrity; that the Tribunal lacked jurisdiction; and that the Tribunal was biased against China because a Japanese judge convened it (Sim, 2016; Wang, 2017). In a stunning tactical mistake, however, China explained in too much detail exactly why it refused to participate, enabling the Tribunal to reconstruct China's strongest possible defence so that it could proceed to decide the case in good faith on the merits.

On every major point, the Philippines carried the day (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016). The Tribunal ruled that the nine-dash line had no legal force or status; that both Chinese and Philippine boats were entitled to fish the waters of Scarborough Shoal; that the manner in which China had reclaimed land to create artificial islands violated its obligations to protect sensitive marine environments; and – perhaps most importantly – that not a single one of the disputed features in the Philippines’ submission qualified as an “island.” This had the immediate effect of simplifying overlapping maritime claims. Since rocks and LTEs can at the most project a 12-n.m. territorial sea, the total area under dispute instantly shrank from a majority of the South China Sea to roughly 2.5 per cent. Accordingly, the Tribunal ruled that South China Sea EEZs could only be calculated from littoral states’ coastlines. This meant, among other things, that Mischief Reef clearly fell within the Philippines’ EEZ, as Manila had maintained, and that China had had no right to build an artificial island on it.⁸

Predictably, China publicly rejected the Tribunal’s ruling. But, remarkably, it quietly began to comply.⁹ China dropped all new references to the nine-dash line in official statements;¹⁰ it restored Philippine access to Scarborough Shoal; it stopped trying to enforce fisheries jurisdiction more than 12 n.m. from features that it claimed; and it stopped building artificial islands (though it did continue to complete infrastructure, including military infrastructure, that it had planned and paid for four to five years earlier).¹¹ Perhaps most significantly, China reached out to engage rival claimants in discussions of joint resource development (Heydarian, 2018) and shelved plans for a second ADIZ in the South China Sea (personal communications). China’s policy of assertive unilateralism, in short, suddenly came to an end.

There are worrisome signs that China may once again be flirting with assertive unilateralism. The passage in 2021 of a new Coast Guard law authorising the use of force against foreign vessels may indicate an increased willingness to enforce Chinese claims more robustly.¹² Moreover, the extended deployment in March 2021 of a large number of maritime militia vessels masquerading as fishing boats at Whitsun Reef in the Philippines’ EEZ is also difficult to explain from a stealthy compliance perspective (Erickson and Martinson, 2021). So also – if true – would a report that China demanded that Indonesia halt drilling in its own EEZ that same year (Strangio, 2021). Time will tell if developments such as these are as ominous as many fear them to be.

Explaining Chinese Policy Change

The story to this point suggests that there are at least two important inflection points in China’s recent policy towards the South China Sea: 2012 and 2016 (whether we are in the midst of yet another is something that we will only be able to judge with the benefit of greater hindsight).

We know that dramatic foreign policy change is rare. Foreign policy is best thought of as a punctuated equilibrium. A variety of considerations explain foreign policy inertia, including organisational culture, organisational routines, the transaction costs associated with dramatic foreign policy change, the limited bureaucratic resources available to effect

it, and a generalised status quo bias (Welch, 2005). From time to time, however, states do embrace dramatic foreign policy change. The evidence suggests that they are more likely to do so to avoid painful ongoing or prospective losses than to secure possible gains. Put another way: framing is a key predictor of foreign policy change. Whether one is operating in a loss frame or gains frame depends crucially upon some reference point specifying what one considers an acceptable state of affairs. In the realm of international politics, states define their own reference points and a wide variety of considerations can bear on them, including physical security, economic security, respect, honour, a sense of justice or entitlement, or any other consideration important enough to warrant inclusion in a conception of “the national interest.” Notwithstanding the rather strong assumptions of certain International Relations paradigms, interest specification is an exogenous, path-dependent process strongly influenced by sociological considerations (Kimura and Welch, 1998). Not all states value the same things in the same degree at the same time.

Scholars of Chinese foreign policy approach their task from a wide variety of angles using a wide variety of paradigmatic lenses. Lively debates persist between those who believe that one can explain Chinese foreign policy fully satisfactorily through the lens of rational choice, history, identity, culture, ideology, nationalism, personality, bureaucratic politics, or – most commonly – various combinations of these (see, e.g., Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1985; Chang Liao, 2018; Duan, 2017; Feng and He, 2017, 2020; Gong, 2018; Heberer, 2014; Hoo, 2017; Poh and Li, 2017; Rosyidin, 2019; Takeuchi, 2019; Wirth, 2020; Wong, 2018; Zhang, 2014; Zhu, 2011). Our task is not to adjudicate these debates as it might be if we sought to explain Chinese foreign policy in general, although we are inclined to suspect that they thrive on a series of false dichotomies (culture, for example, conditions rational choice, and is therefore not an alternative to it).¹³ Instead, our task is to identify some of the key path-dependent drivers of particular foreign policy changes in the hope that insights of broader value may emerge epiphenomenally. But of course, to do this we must start with what we hope is a generally acceptable narrative frame.

We begin by noting the overwhelming post-war imperative for China’s new communist leaders of consolidating control over a war-torn and divided country. Once achieved, their new reference point was a China relatively invulnerable to the predations and humiliations it had suffered for more than 100 years at the hands of European and Japanese imperialism (Blanchard and Lin, 2013; Buckley, 2014; Callahan, 2006; Kaufman, 2010; Wirth, 2020). Under Deng Xiaoping in particular, this resulted in a foreign policy focused on cultivating a congenial international environment for China’s economic development. Under Xi Jinping, China has moved into a new phase in which it seeks to take what Chinese leaders consider its rightful place among the first tier of countries in the world enjoying the appropriate degree of voice, influence, and respect. Though somewhat vaguely formulated operationally, and despite confused and inconsistent signalling (Pu, 2019), slogans such as “a new type of major power relations” and “the Chinese Dream” are meant to convey this sense of rightful place. As the Chinese economy has grown and modernised, China has asserted itself more boldly. Opinions in

the region and around the world have been divided on whether the rise of China represents a destabilising and threatening development or a constructive and benign one, but either way, the expectations in Beijing have risen as China has risen.

Frustratingly, from the perspective of the Chinese political, foreign policy, and security elite, China has systematically been denied the voice, influence, and respect they believe it deserves (Ogden, 2013: 264). The Obama administration's confused and stonily silent response to Xi's feelers about crafting "a new type of major power relations" came across as a major slight and its "rebalance to Asia" as an overtly hostile act (Clinton, 2011; Graham, 2013; Green and Cooper, 2014; Silove, 2016; Simon, 2015). Frustrated by its inability to secure greater sway in lead institutions of global governance such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, China has promoted initiatives such as the BRICS, the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Shanghai Co-operation Organization, and the Belt and Road Initiative to enhance its voice and clout.

China's rather abrupt embrace of assertive unilateralism in 2012 bears strong evidence of loss aversion, although the relevant reference point for leaders in Beijing was something of a moving target. As China grew in power and importance, the refusal of the international community in general and the United States in particular to grant China the voice, influence, and respect it felt it deserved represented an increasingly painful slide deeper and deeper into a loss frame. With respect specifically to the South China Sea, Chinese officials and policy makers worried that rival claimants' increasingly public assertions of their own rights were making China look weak and irresolute, threatening additional loss (Zhang, 2019: 138). Japan's nationalisation of the Senkaku Islands served as a liminal tipping point for hard-line nationalists – primarily in the PLA – who had been complaining loudly in internal policy debates about China losing ground under the relatively kid-glove obstructive engagement policy favoured by internationalists in the Foreign Ministry.¹⁴ In a worsening, seemingly perpetual loss frame, the case for gambling boldly with assertive unilateralism seemed compelling to Chinese leaders, including Xi Jinping. If the international community did not voluntarily give China the voice, influence, and respect to which it was entitled, China would compel it to do so.

The result was a series of missteps and fiascos that made a bad situation worse. These missteps are partially explained by the ways in which domestic politics, bureaucratic politics, and political psychology combined to empower actors within the Chinese state that possessed limited competence with – and insufficient appreciation of the importance of – relevant procedural rules. Dramatic increases in aerial and maritime incursions in and around the Senkaku Islands, for example, coupled with the East China Sea ADIZ debacle, succeeded only in convincing Japan, the United States, and others that China had expansionistic ambitions. The HYSY-981 crisis, China's breakneck artificial island building campaign, and China's stepped-up efforts to enforce its jurisdiction within the nine-dash line cultivated an image abroad of China as an aggressor, triggering balancing behaviour and ultimately resulting in a humiliating legal defeat that painted China as an outlaw state. Notably, the public international response consistently

overestimated the degree to which Chinese policy reflected the deliberate choices of a unitary rational actor. Close observers of Chinese politics note the aggravating role not only of competing bureaucratic interests (the proverbial “nine dragons stirring up the sea”; Lai and Kang, 2014: 311), but also of local governments (Li, 2019; Wong, 2018) and state-owned enterprises (Gong, 2018), both of which pushed for bold action at crucial points during this volatile period (personal communication).

Crucially, Beijing’s choices about how to engage in assertive unilateralism were shaped powerfully by its (incomplete and self-serving) interpretation of procedural rules for determining maritime and territorial entitlements as it attempted to establish a jurisdictional presence in contested areas while preventing rival claimants from doing the same. Although *de facto* control can be an important legal criterion for adjudicating territorial claims under certain circumstances (Schrijver and Prislán, 2015), China’s attempts could not account for the ways in which UNCLOS had foreclosed the kinds of maritime claims it sought to make. Nor could China mount a competent account or defence of its own alternative legal position (United States Department of State, 2022; Waxman, 2022). As Dupuy and Dupuy put it, the vagueness of China’s legal terminology raised the question of whether it was being used “as an element of political strategy” and left China stuck with a legal case that “does not meet the standards of public international law.”¹⁵

Far from advancing China’s interests, then, assertive unilateralism saw China fall even deeper into a loss frame. Internationalists in the Foreign Ministry had predicted this all along but had been forced to toe the line and try to clean up the international mess.¹⁶ Finally, after the Philippines Arbitration Tribunal ruling, they were able to wrest back control. What followed was a concerted effort to rebrand China as a constructive regional and global power committed to win–win co-operation.

The difficulty, however, was that China was now caught in a difficult two-level game (Putnam, 1988). It could no longer afford to be seen as an outlaw state by the international community, but neither could it risk a mobilised and highly nationalistic domestic audience seeing it admit defeat or compromise what everyone in China thought of as China’s legitimate rights.¹⁷ The workaround was a combination of stealthy compliance and attempts to change the channel (Welch and Logendrarajah, 2019). Beijing began doing its best not to stray technically offside the ruling (with two exceptions, one of which it cannot abide by without an obvious admission of error) while at the same time seeking to enlist competing claimants in joint-development and co-operative resource management efforts. China also made a show of reenergizing negotiations designed to result in a new “code of conduct.” Notably, this choice of workaround reflected sensitivity to the importance of established social practices of rule-making and interpretation in shaping outcomes in high-stakes international security cases. It is worth underscoring that China chose to comply with the bulk of an adverse ruling despite its material advantages relative to the Philippines and other claimants and despite the risk that compliance could create significant domestic legitimization problems for the regime.

By all indications, the Chinese public has not noticed any retreat from Beijing’s rather expansive earlier claims – so that part of the strategy has worked well. But by the same

token, the international audience has generally not noticed Beijing's compliance, either (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2019). The dominant international narrative is still that China continues to flout international law, continues its aggressive pursuit to control the South China Sea, and remains a threat to peace, stability, and regional order. The American response, and that of like-minded countries such as Australia, Britain, and France, has been to maintain pressure on Chinese claims through highly visible public statements and FONOPs that could potentially risk undermining the Communist Party's domestic standing as a defender of Chinese sovereignty. Ironically, were this pressure to increase, it might wind up provoking precisely what it is designed to prevent.

The failure of the international community to notice China's rather dramatic post-ruling change in behaviour can likely be attributed to a variety of factors, though of course without detailed and extensive surveys and interviews one can only speculate on the basis of plausibility. Bearing that caveat in mind, China's tightrope walking is itself almost certainly partly to blame. In the course of trying to avoid having to admit loss or error to the domestic audience, the regime has as a matter of course also largely avoided any appearance of admitting loss or error to the international audience. In addition, China's efforts to persuade competing claimants to sign up for joint development and joint resource management have included efforts to deter them from unilateral development efforts in a manner that reinforces rather than undermines the "aggressive China" narrative.¹⁸ Though unconfirmed, reports suggest that in 2017 Xi Jinping may have threatened war if Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte authorised drilling in an oil block that clearly falls inside the Philippine EEZ (Mogato, 2017). If he did so, it was in a one-on-one meeting with full plausible deniability, not in an official or public statement that would have clearly telegraphed a lack of concern for appearing to be offside the Tribunal ruling. Similarly, by dispatching a survey ship to oil blocks in Vietnam's and Malaysia's EEZs in 2020, Beijing sought to chill development efforts without technically falling afoul of UNCLOS, which allows countries to prohibit foreign survey activities only in their territorial seas.¹⁹

There is one issue on which Beijing is particularly exposed: namely, Mischief Reef. The Philippines Arbitration Tribunal clearly found that Beijing had built an artificial island at Mischief Reef in the Philippines' EEZ. Only the Philippines had the right to do this. At any time, Manila could publicly demand that China withdraw. This would force Beijing to choose between admitting defeat to the domestic audience and publicly violating UNCLOS. Manila's forbearance on this issue is one of the more remarkable elements of the South China Sea story. But of course, the threat remains. Mischief Reef hangs over Beijing's head like a Sword of Damocles. Manila likely calculates for the moment, however, that playing the Mischief Reef card would catastrophically destabilise what is at present a tolerable, if awkward, status quo.

Beijing's tightrope walking aside, there is yet another plausible explanation for the international community's failure to notice China's stealthy attempts to comply and to change the channel – perfectly normal cognitive psychology. Schema theory teaches us that we are quick to form beliefs, often on the basis of relatively little information,

but that once we have formed them, we resist changing them (Kelley, 1972; Thorndyke and Hayes-Roth, 1979). We have, as it were, a cognitive double standard. We require much more information to change our minds than we do to make them up in the first place. A classic illustration is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Elizabeth Bennet forms a negative opinion of Mr. Darcy early on the basis of a single two-minute encounter but requires the rest of the novel and a mountain of discrepant information to change it. China's brief but shocking period of assertive unilateralism fixed international beliefs about China's intentions and dispositions quickly and decisively. Small wonder that the resulting "aggressive China" narrative persists. Beijing's tightrope act provides precious little obvious evidence to challenge it. One must look very closely with a nuanced eye and an open mind to catch the clues that China backpedalled from its earlier, disastrously haughty attempts to force others to treat it with the deference and respect to which it felt entitled.²⁰

Explaining China's Missteps

One of the most durable aphorisms in the study of international politics is "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must," a statement Thucydides attributes to the Athenians demanding the surrender of Melos in 416 BCE (Strassler and Crawley, 1996: §5.89, 352). In fact, the strong frequently forbear and the weak frequently play an active role in shaping their fate. It is not unusual for strong states to do worse, and weak states to do better, than one might expect simply by looking at relative material capability. Canada, for example, has traditionally gotten the better of the United States in bilateral trade negotiations despite hugely asymmetric economic vulnerability (Hart, 2002; Keohane and Nye, 1977: 193; Kirton, 1980; Welch, 2005: 168–215). Post-Napoleonic France managed swiftly to reassert its position in Europe despite the best efforts of conservative monarchies to isolate it and keep it down. In both cases, the outcomes are readily explained with reference to the soft-power advantages in commitment and negotiating strategy that often reflect the (materially) weaker party's superior skill at using procedural rules to affect substantive ones in crucial social practices of rule-making and interpretation (Raymond, 2019: 54–56).

In the present case, it is fair to say that China did much worse – and the Philippines much better – than a balance of power calculus would suggest, for essentially similar reasons. China's efforts to advance its goals in the South China Sea evinced stunning procedural incompetence. The Philippines' efforts to undermine China's expansive claims evinced stunning procedural virtuosity. With respect to the former, China put itself on its back foot, as we have seen, by attempting to put forward a theory of the case that cobbled together incompatible bases for claims – UNCLOS plus "historic rights," including rights to "archipelagic waters," founded in "general international law" – when UNCLOS had either swept aside the latter or codified the rights in question in such a way as to undermine maximalist Chinese claims. Aware of these contradictions, Chinese officials studiously avoided disambiguation. It was as though China had

brought to the poker table a combination of cards and mahjong tiles, pretended that nothing was wrong, and simply refused to play.

The Philippines, in contrast – fed up with Chinese intransigence – signed up a team of the world’s most talented international lawyers, marched to the Hague, and posed exactly the right questions to knock China off its game. Importantly, the Philippines’ submission narrowly crafted its terms of reference to render it veto-proof and studiously avoided asking the Tribunal questions it was not empowered to answer, such as anything pertaining to territorial entitlements. The Philippines came away from the procedure with a greatly strengthened hand. Interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly at the time (certainly disappointingly, from the perspective of officials in the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs), President Duterte chose to pocket rather than press home his winnings and offered Beijing a face-saving olive branch in return for restored access to Scarborough Shoal and promises of economic gain.

China’s mishandling of its South China Sea claims is certainly one major cause of the rise of the “aggressive China” narrative that persists to this day. Although many countries have been wary of China’s growth and ambitions for decades, others – including the United States – studiously avoided casting China as an adversary or hostile power, justifying this position in part by appealing to China’s generally good record of engaging constructively in regional and global governance initiatives. At the U.N. Security Council, for example, China has wielded its veto far less often than either Russia or the United States. China was (and remains) an active member of more than seventy international organisations. On most issues, Chinese officials have displayed high levels of competence with procedural rules, which makes the contrast with China’s handling of South China Sea issues particularly perplexing and concerning. Threat perception is an imperfectly understood phenomenon, but deviation from established rules is one well-documented predictor that has not featured prominently in recent International Relations scholarship (Cohen, 1978, 1979).

China’s full embrace of assertive unilateralism in 2012 turned perplexity and concern into shock and fear. Suddenly, China abandoned even dubious legal argument for indifference to it, creating facts on the ground that Beijing did not even attempt to justify. The international audience reacted strongly to the appearance that China was abandoning its commitment to crucial rules governing the adjudication of competing claims, suggesting a strong attachment to those rules.²¹ Not everything that China did was either illegal or unprecedented; nothing in international law prohibited China from announcing an East China Sea ADIZ in 2013, for example, and China was not the first claimant in the Spratly Islands to engage in land reclamation activities, merely the most ambitious. But China’s evident disregard for optics and for the concerns of neighbouring countries on issues such as this made it virtually inevitable that others would read nefarious intentions into Chinese actions.

China’s indifference to its rival claimants did not apply to the Philippines, whose submission to the Permanent Court of Arbitration triggered in Beijing both fury and alarm (personal communications). To a large extent the fury was the result of a perception that the Philippines – a small, upstart country – would treat China with such little

respect that it was willing to put Beijing in a position whereby it stood to lose considerable face in the eyes of the world community. The alarm was largely a function of the fact that Beijing knew that Manila had a strong case. One unconfirmed but plausible report has it that when word of Manila's intention to submit reached Beijing, Chinese leaders met to decide whether and how to mount a legal defence but quickly discovered that they would have to put in a B-team to take on the Philippines' all-stars. Instead, they decided to pretend that the case was duplicitous, ungrounded, and unworthy of dignifying via participation (personal communication). Arguably, this in itself was a mistake; had China at least participated through the initial jurisdictional stage, it would have had the right to appoint one of the judges and might have been able to shape procedure in its favour (Wang, 2017: 195). Given the decision to boycott, however, China would have been well advised to remain silent and aloof. Instead, it issued a poorly argued White Paper detailed enough to allow the Tribunal to reconstruct a good-faith Chinese defence in China's absence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs PRC, 2014). Both China's inability to resist the temptation to mount a legal defence of some kind and the Tribunal's reliance on it clearly indicate the strong compliance pull of widely accepted international rules for rule-making and interpretation and a shared concern for the norm of fair play.

Chinese officials are aware that they overreached and have many regrets. Perhaps the strongest regret, if we read our interlocutors for this piece correctly, is promoting and overselling domestically an unrealistic and indefensible understanding of China's rights in the South China Sea. Had Beijing clearly and consistently represented the nine-dash line as it was originally conceived, for example – as a cartographic convenience delineating territorial rather than maritime claims – it would have been legally unobjectionable. Had China defined its maritime claims in a manner consistent with UNCLOS, it would have avoided arousing fears abroad about attempting to turn the South China Sea into a Chinese lake and would have made it easier for the regime to maintain face at home when the Tribunal ruled that none of the features in the Philippines' submission was a fully entitled island. Indeed, the regime could have portrayed this as a welcome clarification that did not affect its territorial rights, seizing the opportunity to trumpet its law-abidingness (Quek and Johnston, 2017/2018). Only China's artificial island at Mischief Reef would have posed an awkward domestic problem. But if the more knowledgeable internationalists in the Foreign Ministry had been calling the shots all along, it is unlikely that China would have exposed itself by building an artificial island there in the first place.

Lessons of the South China Sea for International Theory

We believe that our tale offers several useful takeaways in the quest for a more accurate and more useful understanding of the dynamics of interstate relations on what is possibly the highest of high politics issues.

The first is the value of inductive theorising. Telling the tale of developments in the South China Sea in an inductive vein draws our attention to the vital relevance of a

variety of considerations that rarely interact in deductive scholarship – bureaucratic politics, two-level games, cognitive psychology, and the importance of competence with procedural rules as both a soft-power and productive-power resource. It also enables us to provide compelling explanations for China's embrace of assertive unilateralism, the outcome of the Tribunal's deliberations, and China's awkward effort to comply with an adverse ruling as far as possible while pretending that it had lost nothing. Weaving these elements together rigorously in a deductive mode, we submit, would be impossible, not least because deductive theorising from any particular paradigmatic base would be bound to screen some of them out. Inductively recreating a narrative arc allows one to draw productively from diverse bodies of theory. The result may well be a fully satisfactory "explanation" only of a particular case at hand, but even that has value as a proof-of-concept for eclectic theory, particularly when there are plenty of cases in which the relevance of the individual elements is well established (Katzenstein and Sil, 2008).

Second, threat perception is difficult to get right. In our telling, the "aggressive China" narrative only fits a particular constituency of the Chinese state – assertive unilateralist nationalists, primarily in the PLA and other security organs – and only tolerably well characterised Chinese policy as a whole during their brief period of incompetent ascendance. Moreover, to the extent that China has been "aggressive," it has been in pursuit not of hegemony, domination, or territorial expansion (we are convinced that the Chinese genuinely believe that all of the territorial features in the South China Sea are sovereign Chinese territory), but of respect and standing. Others may agree or disagree with Chinese nationalists that Beijing is entitled to the voice, influence, and respect it feels it is being denied, but the belief is entirely understandable when seen against the backdrop of the "century of humiliation" a proud civilisation suffered at the hands of modern imperial Great Powers whom earlier Chinese dynasties would in their turn have considered backward and barbaric from a cultural point of view. Pride matters. And to see that pride matters, empathy matters. Empathy is key to accurate threat perception, yet it has shockingly little foothold in International Relations theory (Galinsky et al., 2008; Head, 2012; Hoffman, 1990; Welch, 2022).

Third, rules matter. And rules about rules matter. Skill with rules matters, too. Successful contestation on the world stage requires much more than raw hard power resources; it requires being able to make a persuasive case that A is more appropriate than B, and this, in turn, requires appreciating the value of the ideational edifice that makes A, B, and the concept "appropriate" intersubjectively intelligible. The case demonstrates that relevant actors understood the ways that Chinese policy mattered not just for the disposition of South China Sea maritime and territorial claims but also for the foundational rules that underpin contemporary international order. In advancing its claims, China engaged in an array of actions that make sense only with reference to existing international rules for adjudication. That is, these rules are required to render intelligible important aspects of Chinese policy, such as the ultimately disastrous position paper and reactions to it. The fact that the stakes of the conflict expanded to encompass the possibility of change to rules for the adjudication of claims, generating strong responses not

only from rival claimants but also from powerful extra-regional states, suggests that IR scholars have often misunderstood the stakes of great power conflict. Rather than simply a matter of control over geography and material resources, the ultimate stakes in the great power game are the rules and institutions of the international system. It follows from this that constructivist scholarship has a great deal to offer attempts to understand power transitions and debates over the future of international order that have typically been investigated mainly by realists and institutionalists in ways that do not engage with constructivist insights. In this regard, we echo Goddard and Nexon's call for more ontologically expansive understandings of power politics (Goddard and Nexon, 2016).

Fourth, and finally, failing to understand all this not only impoverishes international theory – it poses real, tangible risks of inadvertent conflict. China may well be a major threat in various respects – for example, by meddling in other countries' domestic affairs to shape narratives and policies congenial to the parochial interests of the Communist Party of China, misappropriating intellectual property, penetrating critical infrastructure, engaging in cyber espionage, and conducting offensive cyber operations – but it is not at the moment the dire hard-power military threat in the South China Sea that many countries continue to believe that it is because it is playing defence, not offence. Treating it as though it were playing offence can only fan the flames of hostility and mistrust and increase the dangers of accidental or inadvertent conflict. It may also empower assertive unilateralists who undoubtedly believe that China's recent period of stealthy compliance has yielded neither tangible nor symbolic benefits. If recent developments such as the Whitsun Reef incident are any indication, it may already have done so – in which case the international community's failure to notice changes in Chinese behaviour following the Philippines Arbitration Tribunal ruling may ultimately prove both tragic and costly.

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1. On causes and reasons, see Hollis and Smith (1991).

2. For the most part, the testimony of the officials to whom we spoke does not paint Chinese policy or Chinese policy making processes in a flattering light. In all cases, they professed a desire to be heard because of their fears that misunderstandings on these heads greatly increase the risk of inadvertent conflict. The former point blunts the usual self-interest ground for skepticism about anonymous testimony; the latter largely explains its motivation.
3. When asked why China had embraced UNCLOS if it jeopardised its own position in the South China Sea, a senior Chinese official replied in a moment of unguarded candour: “Well, the Americans were against it, so we assumed it had to be good for us.”
4. Macclesfield Bank is, in fact, fully submerged even at low tide, and therefore confers no maritime rights under UNCLOS. No state would have legal jurisdiction over it unless it fell within a territorial sea, EEZ, or continental shelf claim recognised in accordance with the provisions of UNCLOS Art. 76.
5. There is debate about whether Chinese ships remained after the Philippines withdrew or briefly withdrew and returned (see, e.g., Taffer, 2015: 96; Zhang, 2019: 146).
6. In fact, China has essentially abandoned operating its East China Sea ADIZ, having underestimated this challenge.
7. A common misconception is that the main purpose of the three airstrips on China’s artificial islands was to defend China’s nuclear submarine fleet (see, e.g., Chan, 2016). This is incorrect. In peacetime there would be no occasion to fly such missions, and in wartime the airstrips would themselves be early casualties. Personal communication.
8. Kim and Druckman mistakenly claim that the Tribunal also found that Gaven Reefs, Johnson Reef, and Hughes Reef fell within the Philippines’ EEZ, but as the Tribunal ruled that these are all either rocks entitled to a 12-n.m. territorial sea of their own, or within 12 n.m. of a feature so entitled, they would only fall within the Philippines’ EEZ if the Philippines had sovereignty over them, which was a matter outside the Tribunal’s remit (Kim and Druckman, 2020: 52; Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016: 473–474).
9. For a detailed point-by-point analysis, see Welch and Logendrarajah (2019). See also Hayton (2017).
10. Notably, at the time of writing the Chinese foreign ministry website included no references to the nine-dash line or its cognate expressions (such as “dotted line”) – or even the Mandarin original (九段线) – more recent than 4 August 2016, and the number of pages that returned hits had shrunk dramatically since that date, indicating a deliberate effort to downplay the term.
11. Personal communications. The great fear was that China’s next project would be at Scarborough Shoal, prompting an unusually blunt deterrent threat in 2016 from U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter (Batongbacal, 2016). Notably, as of the time of writing China has never landed a military aircraft on any of the three airstrips it constructed in the Spratly Islands, which indicates a remarkable degree of restraint.
12. There is debate about whether the Coast Guard law is benign or menacing (cf. Luo, 2021; Okada, 2021).
13. Lai (2012). Interestingly, as Zhang puts it (2014: 902), “The traditional Chinese explanation of their foreign policy is that Chinese leaders calculate the international situation correctly and make foreign policy choices rationally.” Our analysis challenges this simplistic view.
14. Personal communications; You (2017). Ambiguity about where to draw the line between diplomatic and security issues further complicates the bureaucratic division of labour (You, 2017).

15. Dupuy and Dupuy (2017: 124, 141). China's detailed post-ruling rebuttal of the Tribunal award – presumably the best that Chinese legal scholars could muster, and apparently prepared without time pressure (Chinese Society of International Law, 2018) – does no better, essentially presuming rather than demonstrating the truth of its major claims and objections. It is plainly an attempt to dress up in quasi-legal garb Beijing's political objections to the Tribunal ruling.
16. For example, the Foreign Ministry learned of the HYSY-981 deployment on the morning it hit the news (personal communications).
17. Personal communications; Ferdinand (2016: 949). Note, however, confusion about whether Beijing considers the South China Sea a "core interest" (see, e.g., Nie, 2018; Tham, 2018; Zhou, 2019a: 33–34).
18. Zhou (2019b). As Xue notes, improved bilateral relations are a requirement for – not the result of – successful joint development ventures (Xue, 2019).
19. See, for example, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (2020). With respect to China's recent survey vessel deployment, Mohd Zubil bin Mat Som, Director-General of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, remarked, "We do not know its purpose but it is not carrying out any activities against the law" (Ananthalakshmi and Latiff, 2020).
20. In 2018, one of the present authors spent a full hour in a one-on-one briefing of a high-level Obama administration state department official detailing all of the ways in which China had stealthily complied with the Tribunal ruling, prompting the response: "That's fascinating; I don't believe you."
21. Strong emotional attachment to internalised procedural rules for rule-making is evident in other international contexts as well (see Raymond, 2019: 142–202).

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