

## Book Reviews

***The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia.* By Bill Hayton. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, xviii + 298 pp. ISBN 978-0-300-21694-3 (pbk)**

The protracted disputes over the South China Sea (SCS) have been widely acknowledged as a major flashpoint of which it involved quite many conflicting parties with most of which are countries situated in the region of Southeast Asia, and these countries are globally known as the five claimants of SCS disputes - the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, China, and Taiwan. What makes this case definitely more intriguing is that these disputes have been taking place for decades (since 1940s-present) - involving some regional and even international law institutions, such as ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum), AMM (ASEAN Ministerial Meeting), UNCLCS (United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf), UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea) ICJ (International Court of Justice), & recently PCA (Permanent Court of Arbitration) - and yet there is still no concrete legal binding resolution to settle these endless maritime territorial sovereignty perplexities. Thereby, these issues of overlapping claims are considerably complicated and to some context sensitive (affected sovereignty & high-level conversation). As a result of that, these international political issues are also constituted as part of critical discussion in the realm of international relations.

As a former BBC senior journalist and Geopolitics Expert of Southeast Asia, Bill Hayton has invested most of his precious lifetime working as a broadcast journalist and at the same time conducting numerous extensive research focusing on issues of the South China Sea disputes and current affairs in Southeast Asia. He even obtained his PhD from the University of Cambridge in 2019 for his stunning research on the history and development of the South China Sea disputes. In this book, he predominantly argues that there are two sets of disputes in the South China Sea. First, there are disputes about the islands, the reefs, and the rocks in the sea.

These are territorial disputes involving the countries around the borders of the sea, among others: China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and to some extent Indonesia as well. Second, there are also disputes about the spaces in between the islands, in particular the spaces whose rules govern what happens in between the islands, and those disputes are apparently about power rivalries, between China and the US. What becomes problematic is that when these disputes overlap - when some questions about who owns which island become mixed up with questions about whose rules rule in Asia.

Generically, this book is composed of Nine Chapters along with four maps and some epilogues, notes and acknowledgements pointed at some people and researchers that he highly appreciated. It indicates that during the book-making process, though it is a single-author monograph Hayton was not working alone. Rather, he involved and interviewed a lot of people by which their perspectives provided worthwhile information as well as enriching the horizon and understanding to better comprehend the complexities of disputing territorial claims and geopolitics in the South China Sea. In addition, the existing four maps within the book are drawn by an Indonesian Scholar and these geographical maps help delineate some tiny features which are claimed by the parties involved. The last map has an interesting short description – *“the South China Sea showing islands potentially large enough to be considered ‘capable of sustaining human habitation or economic life’”* - which alludes hints and motivations for claimants to gain international recognition (attempting to meet UNCLOS prerequisites) as well as to vie for the maritime sovereignty and the adjacent waters. However, what strikes me in the first place is that when Bill Hayton says within his chapters about the involvement of Indonesia as being one of the claimant states. Hayton writes:

[...] the territorial disputes involve six countries, not five, since Indonesia is affected although it pretends it isn't and the 'historic claims' of the disputes are actually very modern. (xvii)

In some ways, this analysis could be true in the sense that China's Nine Dash Line policy (popularly known as 'U-Shaped' Line) has overlapped with Indonesia's 200 nautical miles EEZ near Natuna Island and the water. Hayton unfortunately did not clearly explain how this policy has necessarily overlapped Indonesia's water near Natunas; Does it also claim the seabed and features around it? Is there any statement from Chinese officials that Natuna Islands and the water completely belong to China's mainland? These questions have not been addressed within the book. As a matter of fact, Indonesia firmly rejected the Chinese claim as the policy of U-Shaped Line has no legal basis and only depended upon the historical rights, which is vague and unlawful. Indonesia officially states that she is not part of the claimant states in the South China Sea disputes and even the President of Indonesia recently denounced that any foreign ships entering Indonesia's EEZ without permission would be regarded as a crime - Indonesia's sovereignty is non-negotiable and indisputable. Such bold statement conveyed when the President of Indonesia along with his staff - Minister of Maritime, Navy, others - visited the Natuna sea with warships in 2016. This sort of action was meant to signal China and the World that Indonesia is a strong country in defending its territorial sovereignty. Surprisingly, in the last chapter of the book, Hayton unfolded the truth that is how inconsistent and obscure China with its claim on Nine Dash Line policy.

In some chapters, by applying historical approach, Bill Hayton successfully unraveled two kinds of core motivations why claimants insisting on sticking their flags in some features and islands in the South China Sea: National Pride and Economic Motives. National Pride here means when the littoral states are not willing to release their integrated territory and be undermined by powerful countries. Though China deemed as the strongest rival in the disputes, other countries are not willing to be obstructed and knelt down to China. All of them felt that they carry the same burden by which preserving their territory is part of national independence and identity preservation. In terms of

Economic interest, the South China Sea contains abundant natural resources which drives the conflicting parties to fight for it. The book reveals that in Spratly Islands alone, it contained approximately 25 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 105 billion barrels of oil. This number is supposed to be much more than that, it is estimated around \$2.5 trillion worth of oil and gas resources contained in the South China Sea, that according to some surveys conducted by the U.S. State department. Knowing these tremendous resources, the Philippines had announcement for plans of oil and gas development in 1994. Prior to that, China even had already made its move since 1974 of which China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) had been pushed to drill oil and gas as much as possible.

Another economic temptation is the importance of Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) in South China Sea which also contains economic and strategic significance as well as played pivotal role in ways that it provided link for trade passage to all littoral countries (such as Japan, South Korea, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, etc.) which brought their crude carriers across the strait of Malacca heading to their home countries for the purpose of fulfilling national energy necessities. Accordingly, these two factors - National Pride and Economic Motivations - become sort of inextricably intertwined in the sense that disputing claimants have strong desires to gain much economic benefits derived from their claiming territories. As a consequence, the claimant states never intend to lose their face/dignity in this seemingly diplomatic battlefield, and hence they will maintain their territorial water and sovereignty in the South China Sea at all costs.

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