

NATIONALISM AND FOREIGN POLICY

**-THE CASE OF CHINA`S *NANSHA*
RHETORIC**

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1

Introduction

The Spratly (*Nansha*) islands in the South China Sea (*Nanhai*) are today the focal point of a territorial dispute that represents a serious threat to the regional security in Southeast Asia. Six governments - China, Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei - have laid claims to all or some of the more than 230 islets, reefs and shoals in the Spratly archipelago.¹

The Spratly conflict has broad geo-political implications reaching beyond the mere question of sovereignty to the islands. The strategic significance of the Spratly archipelago might enable the powerholder to control the entire South China Sea. In this respect the Spratly issue involves not only the interests of the claimant states, but also the navigational and economic interests of extra-regional powers. More than 70 % of Japans' oil import is shipped through the South China Sea and Japan and its ally, the US, both see freedom of navigation as an overriding concern. And, as stated by a senior US naval official, also for military purposes it is crucial for the USA to defend the sealanes of communication (SLOCS) in the South China Sea.²

1.1 China's veiled ambitions in the South China Sea

The Peoples Republic of China (PRC) is a key player in the South China Sea conflict. China is the most significant claimant in terms of size, economy and military power,

¹China first stated her territorial claims in the South China Sea in 1951. In the same year also France, on behalf of the State of Vietnam, proclaimed ownership to the islands. These conflicting claims went unopposed by the other coastal states in the region until large oil and gas resources were discovered in the early seventies. In the eighties all actors in the conflict, except Brunei, established military installations on one or more of the islands in the Spratly archipelago. So far, no large scale confrontation between the actors has occurred, but violence has flared up on several occasions. In 1988 more than 70 people were killed in a naval confrontation between Chinese and Vietnamese naval forces.

² Personal communication, Singapore, 11 February, 1998. It could be, however, that this was the officer's *personal* opinion and not USA's official policy.

and has put forward the most extensive territorial and maritime claims.³ China has laid claim to both the Paracel Islands in the north and the whole Spratly Island group in the southern sector of the South China Sea.⁴ China's claim to the islands is based on historical usage. The PRC maintains that the South China sea has been used by Chinese ships since the Han-dynasty (206-220 AD).

China's policy towards the conflict in the last decade has been both promising and disappointing for the possibility of reaching a solution. On the one hand, the PRC has repeatedly signalled that she wants to co-operate with the other claimants involved in the dispute.⁵ On the other hand, China has continued to push forward its military position.⁶ Hence, as argued by Valencia (1995: 14), in the last decade there has been a marked distance between China's words and deeds in the South China Sea.

The PRC's hegemonic ambitions coupled with its persistent, non-compromising stance in the Spratly dispute has caused a growing concern in other Southeast Asian countries in recent years. In a series of interviews carried out by Stein Tønnesson and myself in Southeast Asia in early 1998 diplomats, researchers and naval officials all expressed their concerns about China's regional ambitions. However, the persons interviewed had divergent interpretations of the driving forces behind China's policy. Some argued that China is pursuing an anachronistic naval *realpolitik* and that the PRC intends take control over the entire South China Sea by military means. Others believed that China is determined to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict.

In the international South China Sea literature many hypotheses have been offered to explain the motives for China's South China Sea policy. Sheng Lijun (1995) argues that the policy is decided in a broad, *strategic* framework. He maintain that it is

³ It should be noted that China's claims have only limited support in international law.

⁴ In Chinese the two groups of islands are named *Xisha* and *Nansha*. China actually claims four groups of islands in the South China sea. However, the two other groups of islands, *Dongsha* and *Pratas*, are partially submerged.

⁵ During a visit to Singapore in August 1990, Li Peng for the first time put forward the possibility of joint development of the resources in the South China Sea while putting the question of sovereignty aside. This proposition has since been repeated on many occasions, but has not led to any concrete results.

⁶ In 1994, China made a concrete territorial move in the South China Sea that confronted the claims of an ASEAN-member. China built structures on Mischief reef, a feature also claimed by the Philippines.

crucial for China to occupy the Spratly islands since the strategic significance of this archipelago enable the powerholder to control the entire South China Sea. Mamdouh Salameh (1995-96: 133-146) argues that it is the looming *resource shortage* in China that is the main factor behind China's offensive policy. He claims that China's hunger for new supplies of energy and fish makes the Spratly islands valuable pieces of land for China. A third hypothesis, which will be pursued in the present work, is that China's policy is strongly influenced by *nationalism*. Chinese propagandists often portray China as a "humiliated" country legitimately pushing its historical claims in the South China Sea to regain national pride.

This thesis will address the puzzle of China's intentions in the South China Sea. Hence, it will provide an input to the ongoing "pros and cons" debate on China's veiled regional ambitions. In order to gain a deeper understanding of China's motives in the South China Sea, it is necessary to grasp the mechanisms *behind* the formulation of China's policy. In this thesis focus will be put on *one* possible determinant: *the thesis will discuss the influence of nationalism on China's Spratly policy.*

1.2 The agenda

Many authors have implicitly suggested or indicated a link between nationalism and China's Spratly policy. Mark J. Valencia states this more explicitly when saying that that: "...Chinas actions [in the South China Sea] are the result of a rising tide of nationalism that seems to be replacing socialism as preferred societal glue"(Valencia, 1995: 15). Gerald Segal (1994: 45) and Chen Jie (1994: 894) follow Valencia's line of argument when they link the nationalist factor to the Chinese regime's attempt to strengthen its internal legitimacy. Segal stresses this point when stating that " ...the [Chinese] regime copes with the internal consequences of reform by taking a tough stand on *nationalist* issues, *hence* (my emphasis) Beijing's active and vigorous pursuit of claims in the South China Sea. In the same tune Chen Jie argues that "...the communist claim that they are the true champions of China's *nationalism* and their need for legitimacy and unity has given even the smallest reef in the Spratlys a

symbolic value". Hence, both of the scholars suggest a causal link between *regime legitimacy*, *nationalism* and *foreign policy*.

Few scholars, however, have discussed the possible *mechanisms* through which nationalism influences the formulation of China's Spratly policy. This anomaly in the South China Sea literature corresponds with a similar anomaly in the general body of theories covering foreign policy analysis. Few existing theories explicitly address the relationship between nationalism and foreign policy. One of the major challenges in this thesis is to find a fruitful way of analysing the possible impact of nationalism on China's Spratly policy.

1.3 The independent variable: Nationalism

As a scientific term, nationalism is understood in a number of ways. Carlton Hayes lists four: an actual historical process of nation and state building; a theory or ideology; a set of activities, often led by the party, and finally - a sentiment of pride or loyalty (Smith, 1994: 24). In this thesis nationalism will be understood as an *ideology* and as a *legitimizing device*.

Steven I. Levine distinguishes between formal and informal ideology. Nationalism may be both. A *formal* ideology is defined as a "...coherent and systematic body of ideas that helps to explain the nature of social reality and provides a programme of action for changing that reality in order to achieve certain desired social goods and values", while *informal* ideology consists of "...assumptions, prejudices, cultural values and expectations that are not explicitly formulated or systematically linked together." (1996: 33) As an example of the distinction between formal and informal ideology Levine points at China. While Marxism-Leninism is the formal ideology in China, *nationalism* is the most prominent informal ideology, he argues. In the same tune Joffe (1997: 59) holds that nationalism is China's *authentic* ideology. Nationalism will in this thesis be understood as an *informal ideology*.

Nationalism may also be understood as a *legitimizing device*. In the assertions put forward by Segal and Jie the idea is that China's South China Sea policy is influenced by the Chinese regime's *use* of nationalism to legitimate its power. Thus,

nationalism is by the two scholars regarded as a *tool* employed by the regime to strengthen legitimacy. Østerud (1994: 52) argues that nationalism can function as a *programme of mobilisation* for leaders who need to strengthen their legitimacy. This instrumental understanding of nationalism refers to the third definition in Hayes' list. The inclination of political regimes to use nationalism to legitimate power is by Leslie Holmes (1993: 17) termed *official nationalism*. This concept refers to a cluster of legitimation techniques that both use and create nationalist sentiments in the population.⁷ A regime that uses nationalism as a legitimating device may in turn be forced to follow up by satisfying a nationalist public opinion. Then nationalism becomes a driving force behind national politics.

1.4 The dependent variable: China's Spratly policy

China's long term policy towards the Spratly conflict seems to be aimed at precluding a settlement while at the same time avoiding open conflict that could engage external powers. China has offered to negotiate with the other claimants on a bilateral basis⁸, and has put forward a suggestion of *joint development*. In official terms, China wants to "shelve the dispute, exploit the resources together".⁹ This policy resembles China's approach to the territorial dispute with Japan in the East China Sea. (Hyer, 1995: 68).

Since 1988, China has conducted a *push* and *pull* strategy in the South China Sea. Aggressive actions has regularly been followed by more conciliatory moves. Two episodes, one in 1992 and one in 1995, may serve as typical examples. When China in 1992 passed its "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and the

⁷ Benedict Anderson (1992:88) uses the term "official nationalism" to explain strategies employed by rulers to maintain power in the transition from empire to nation-state.

⁸ On several occasions China has signalled that she could be willing to participate in multilateral negotiations. However, these suggestions has not been followed by action.

⁹ The PRC position is summed up in a report published in Beijing in 1990. It reads: "Experts participating in the symposium expressed great indignation over such aggressive action against PRC claimed territories and stressed again the stand of resolutely defending the motherland's territorial rights as well as marine interests and rights. At the same time, the experts advocated resolving the Nansha problem through talks, friendly co-ordination and consultation. Before the dispute is resolved, China can, according to international precedent, adopt interim measures, under the condition that sovereignty be recognised, jointly exploit offshore petroleum and gas resources with neighbouring countries." (Quoted in Austin, 1998: 303).

Contiguous Zone"¹⁰, the other claimants protested by promulgating the ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea.¹¹ The mounting criticism that followed the adoption of the 1992 law sparked China to signal a willingness to negotiate the Spratly disputes and to assure that the PRC would not use force to defend its claims. (Valencia,1997: 79). In February 1995, the Philippines discovered that China had built structures on Mischief Reef, a feature also claimed by the Philippines. For the first time China had made a concrete territorial move that confronted an ASEAN-member, and this episode sparked great anxiety and criticism in the region. In August the same year, China's foreign minister, Qian Qichen, stated that China was willing to negotiate the conflict on multilateral terms and on the basis of international law (Austin, 1998: 37). This hard/soft pattern in China's policy could indicate that the Chinese regime see an interest in keeping the conflict "warm", while avoiding that it develops into a major crisis.

1.5 Essential questions, method and sources

The main aim of this thesis is to explore the possible impact of nationalism on China's Spratly policy. It is, however, difficult to *decide* the extent to which nationalism influence on actual policy. In order to do so, one need access to the hearts and minds of the policy makers in China. Instead, I have chosen to carry out a preliminary investigation of how the Chinese regime *presents* its policy to Chinese audiences. I will analyse articles published in Chinese newspapers and journals between 1988 and 1997, and samples from Chinese books discussing China's foreign policy challenges in the next century. The articles will be divided into two categories; the journals and books will mainly be analysed as *elite communication*, while the newspapers will be analysed as the regime's official political *rhetoric*. My hope is that the thesis, by exploring the role of nationalism in the public discourse in China, may contribute to a

¹⁰ This law identifies *Nansha* as Chinese territory. It also underlines that the PRC, if necessary, will use force to defend its sovereignty in the South China Sea.

¹¹ This declaration urged all the claimants to settle the dispute peacefully and called for regional co-operation.

better understanding of how nationalism influences on China's actual policy in the Spratly conflict.

The thesis is *exploratory* in its design and entails few possibilities for generalisations applicable to other countries. The analysis will combine concepts from semiotic theory with hermeneutic perspectives of textual interpretation. By using these methods one can reveal how the Chinese policy makers *perceive* China's interests in the South China Sea and hopefully also the culturally defined meaning of *signs* and *symbols* in the Chinese regime's *Nansha*-rhetoric. In this way, I hope to gain a deeper insight into not only the *message* communicated by the Chinese regime, but also the *obligations* entailed by this message on the regime itself.

Studies of *how* foreign policy issues are intentionally and un-intentionally conceptualised in the domestic public sphere may inform us of the driving forces behind certain policies. Domestic political rhetoric is in this thesis used as a main source to elaborate upon one aspect of China's foreign policy, namely its policy in the South China Sea. Consequently, the thesis highlights the importance of understanding and interpreting *domestic political rhetoric* as an informant - and possibly also a contributing *determinant* - of actual foreign policies.

1.6 Structure of thesis

Chapter 2 discusses issues relating to research design and methodology. *Chapter 3* addresses the possibility of assessing the relative influence of domestic and external variables on foreign policy, with particular reference to China's South China Sea policy. I discuss the possible impacts of *nationalism as ideology* and *as a legitimating device* on the formulation of China's Spratly policy and deduce from this some assumptions that need further investigation. Then, in the same chapter, three common approaches to language analysis in studies of foreign policy are outlined, and the fruitfulness of using the different perspectives is discussed. *Chapter 4* provides an overview of the Spratly conflict. I discuss why the Spratlys have become such a hot spot in the Southeast Asian region and present China's claims in the South China Sea. In chapter 5, the main chapter, I analyse the South China Sea discourse in China using

a sample of journal and newspaper articles. Four topics are prominent in the discourse: *resources*, *security*, the *historical basis* for China's claims and the activities of *the others*. The last chapter sums up findings, discusses possible implications and provides some concluding remarks.

The contested *Nansha* islands

2.1 The treasure of the Spratlys

With the exception of military troops, visiting fishermen and scientists and the staff and clients of a Malaysian tourist hotel, the Spratly archipelago is uninhabited. Virtually all of the islands, islets, reefs and shoals are too small to sustain human occupation. The largest island, Itu Aba, is only slightly larger than one square kilometre and only a few of the "islands" are not submerged during high tide. The lack of an indigenous population and the general unfriendliness of the place make one wonder why the Spratlys are so much treasured. Why are they so important that some coastal states could be willing to go to war in order to control them? The answer can roughly be summed up in three words: *naval power*, *resources* and *nationalism*. The strategic significance of the islands, the potentially large deposits of oil and gas, the hope to use the islets as a basis for delimiting Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ's) and the symbolic value of the island group in a nationalist perspective all contribute to make the islands highly prized and contested. In this chapter I will outline the history of the Spratly conflict, discuss the relevance of international law to resolving it, present three possible future scenarios and introduce the basis for China's claim to the archipelago.

2.1.1 History, occupation and power relations

The Spratlys got international attention for the first time in 1933 when France declared sovereignty over 9 islands in the archipelago. China immediately delivered a protest and stated that the Spratlys were Chinese territory. In 1939 Japan seized control over the islands, and Japanese troops remained there until the end of the Second World War. After the Japanese forces had redrawn in 1945, the islands were left unoccupied for more than a year. From 1946 to 1949 the nationalist government in China laid claim to

the archipelago as its southernmost territory.¹² However, after winning the Chinese civil war, the new communist government did not have the naval capability to establish a physical presence in the Spratlys, and when the International Peace Conference opened in San Francisco in 1951 no regional government occupied the islands. The San Francisco Peace Treaty did not address the question of sovereignty to the Spratly islands¹³ and thus left the stage open for all the littoral states to present their claims.¹⁴

Over the two decades following the Peace Conference in 1951 the sovereignty issue in the South China Sea seldom figured on the regional political agenda. The 1954 and 1958 crises in the Taiwan strait, involving the USA, Taiwan and China, the Sino-Soviet split in 1959 and the Vietnam War (1964-1975) were the major conflicts at that time, and the US navy dominated the South China Sea with bases in the Philippines and Vietnam. However, in the shadow of the major events of that period the claimants undertook important steps that affect the conflict today. In 1956 South Vietnam occupied the Spratly Island, not the largest island in the archipelago, but one of the large ones. In the same year a Filipino businessman named Thomas Cloma claimed 53 islands in the Spratly chain and established what he called "Kalayaan" – Freedom land. In 1956 Taiwan re-occupied Itu Aba, the largest of the islands in the archipelago, which the nationalists had abandoned in 1946. The Philippines sent troops to occupy three islands in 1971 and officially announced her claims to parts of the archipelago in 1978. In the following year Malaysia also joined the contest by claiming twelve "islands" in the southern part of the archipelago. In the 1980s the island snatching intensified. Malaysia occupied three islands, the Philippines another four, China six and by the end of the decade the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which had taken over the islands of South Vietnam in 1975, had more than twenty islands under its control (Sheng Lijun, 1995: 23). At this point the dispute was accentuated, and in March 1988 the first and so far only military confrontation in the dispute took place between

¹² For details, see Marwyn Samuels (1982).

¹³ In the treaty, Japan gave up its claim, but did not specify to whom.

¹⁴ China did not participate at the conference, but The Soviet Union issued a protest stating that the islands were a part of Chinese territory. The French-sponsored State of Vietnam also delivered a protest proclaiming the territory to be a part of Vietnamese territory.

Chinese and Vietnamese naval forces near *Chigua Reef*. The two navies fought a 28 minutes battle, and more than seventy Vietnamese soldiers were killed.¹⁵

In recent years there have been attempts to establish a multilateral dialogue among all claimants. However, although annual, unofficial conferences have been held since 1990, the states involved still rely heavily on military occupation of reefs and islets to bolster their claims. Today all the claimants, with the exception of Brunei, occupy some features in the archipelago. Malaysia is said to occupy three islands, the Philippines eight, Taiwan one, China six¹⁶ and Vietnam more than twenty.¹⁷

2.1.2 The conflicting claims and international law

The major issue in the Spratly dispute is the question of *sovereignty*— who owns the islands, islets, reefs and shoals? The relevance of international maritime law to settling this dispute is limited. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) can be used to decide if there are islands at all in the archipelago¹⁸, but not to decide to whom islands and rocks belong. UNCLOS starts with an unstated premise that the question of sovereignty has already been resolved.¹⁹ International Law in general, however, provides some guidelines for resolving sovereignty disputes. The main premise for legal authority over land territory is *discovery*.²⁰ However, discovery

¹⁵ The Chinese navy landed on Chigua reef and removed a Vietnamese flag planted there. A naval confrontation between Chinese and Vietnamese ships took place, one Vietnamese soldier was killed and 74 others reported missing. Allegedly there was only one Chinese casualty. China and Vietnam have presented different versions of what happened (Chang Pao-Min, 1990: 27).

¹⁶ All of the features occupied by China are naturally submerged features, although some have been converted into artificial islands.

¹⁷ The number of islands occupied by each claimant is contested. The numbers here are taken from Valencia (1995: 5) and Amer (1996: 4-6). In September 1998, Vietnam was accused by China of having occupied two additional reefs.

¹⁸ UNCLOS, Article 121.

¹⁹ Cordner, 1994: 68.

²⁰ According to the principles of International Law, the earth's surface may be categorised into three broad types of territory: that which rightly belongs to a given state, that which belongs to no state (*terra nullius*) and that which belongs to all states (*terra communis*). Only the second territorial designation can be lawfully *appropriated* by a state.

in and of itself does not entail permanent authority. It must be followed by continuous occupation and effective jurisdiction.²¹

Vietnam, Taiwan and China refer to historic evidence of discovery and occupation. Malaysia and Brunei base their claims on the continental shelf principle in the UNCLOS-convention, while the Philippines refer to the occupation by Thomas Cloma in 1956 asserted to be *terra nullius*. However, none of the claimants seems to have a clear-cut case in juridical terms²², and the significance of international law for solving the dispute seems limited. According to Valencia *et al* (1997: 40) international legal principles do not point to a clear-cut solution. Valero (1993) even argues that to focus on international law will be counter-productive. Insistence on determining which of the claimants that have the best claims will prompt the conflicting states to use military means to establish continuous occupation and as a result *deepen* the conflict. This argument is also put forward by Shepard (1993: 184). He argues that the ambiguity in the paragraphs of UNCLOS has given legitimacy to the "creeping annexation" carried out by the naval troops of littoral states. This line of argument is also supported by the Malaysian scholar Hamzah (1995: 125).

While referring to international law when proclaiming the islands, the claimants have simultaneously and continuously tried to bolster their claims by using military force, occupying islands and "showing the flag". This behaviour may have been motivated by ambiguities in international law in general and UNCLOS in particular, but also by the hope, fear or expectation that the islands at some point will be divided

²¹ The Permanent Court of Arbitration issued a definitive statement of the factors necessary to establish sovereignty over an island under international law when it decided the *Island of Palmas* case in 1928. This case involved conflicting claims by the US and the Netherlands to an isolated island off the Philippines coast. The arbitrator awarded the Palmas to the Netherlands, holding that the *discovery* of an island is not enough to establish sovereignty; discovery must be followed by an effective and continuous display of authority. The term "effectively" was not clarified, but in 1933 the International Court of Justice in the *Legal State of the Eastern Greenland Case* defined two elements as essential: the intention and will to act as a sovereign and some actual display of authority.

²² On this point there is a considerable degree of controversy in the juridical literature on the conflict. Although none of the claimants seems to get a complete backing for all claims, some of the claims get more support than others. According to Park Coon Ho (1978) and Valencia (1994) it could be argued that Vietnam *may* have a legitimate claim to the western part of the Spratly chain, that Malaysia and Brunei's continental shelf claims could have partial legitimacy in international law, that the Philippines could refer to the archipelagic state-principle in international law and that there are some, albeit vague, support for the act of discovery and occupation asserted by China and Taiwan.

between the littoral states, not as the result of a fair evaluation of the claims but according to the number of islands occupied by each claimant.

2.1.3 Future scenarios

In the 1990's the military landscape in Southeast-Asia has been characterised by military build-up and rapid modernisation and mutual distrust and suspicion. In a fragile post cold war security setting lesser conflicts could easily turn into a regional conflagrations. Thus, the Spratly conflict represents a serious challenge to regional stability.

However, few observers seem to believe that the dispute will escalate into a large-scale armed conflict. The unstable security environment, the current economic crisis in the region, the multilateral character of the dispute and the uncertainty of the US Navy makes it difficult, however, to predict the path of future development. In the next section I will briefly present three possible scenarios and discuss the likeliness of each of them to occur.

Armed conflict:

In 1997, two British journalists published a book of fiction entitled *Dragon Strike - the Millennium War in the South China*. In this book, which mixes political and military analysis, Simon Holberton and Humphrey Hawksley outline a war scenario. China is portrayed by the two authors as the aggressor who initiates an attack on Vietnam, seizing its possessions in the Spratlys. The book reflects the "China threat" theory, which is widespread in some Southeast Asian countries, notably Vietnam, the Phillipines, Indonesia and Malaysia. In interviews carried out by Stein Tønnesson and myself in January and February 1998 many of the respondents argued that China's military modernisation over the last decade had spurred anxiety in the region.²³ Many feared that China would, if not launch an outright war, so at least occupy more and more features while strengthening its naval presence.

It is not likely that China has the capacity to seize and keep the whole Spratly archipelago. The islands are scattered out in a large area, and it is logistically difficult to keep control over the air in a situation of external threat. China lacks air-refuelling capacity for its bombers, and even though she has launched plans for building an aircraft carrier this will take a long time, and one carrier will be too vulnerable to venture far out at sea. Besides, there is no evidence that China actually has such intentions. China's military capability indicates that the "China threat" seems to have been somewhat exaggerated.

However, some analysts have argued that if a military confrontation occurs in the Spratlys, it will not be initiated as a large-scale attack from one of the claimants. Rather, it will be isolated and involve no more than two claimants. Such an armed conflict could be initiated as a consequence of *misunderstandings* between the actors. In February 1998 Vietnamese soldiers fired at Filipino fishermen outside a Vietnamese occupied reef in the Spratlys. In an interview with Vietnamese officials the same month, it was explained to me that the soldiers only followed orders to shoot at anyone who came closer to the reef than 200 meters. Such incidents could spark dangerous misunderstandings among the claimants and in a worst case scenario lead to armed conflict. It is my impression, however, that the claimant countries in Southeast Asia, at least those who are members of ASEAN, have channels of communication that can help prevent such unwanted consequences.²⁴ Hence, for the time being the likeliness of armed conflict seems limited.

Solution:

All the claimants have called for talks in order to settle the conflict, but have taken few conciliatory steps in the direction of a solution. Instead, several of them continue to strengthen their military foothold in the Spratlys. Despite efforts made by Indonesia

²³It should be noted that the PRC is not the only country that have used force in the conflict. In the early 1980s, Vietnamese troops stationed in the Spratlys fired on all unauthorised vessels, including yachts, in an undeclared military exclusion zone around the islands that they occupied.

²⁴ Officials from the Vietnamese Department for Treaty and Law explained to me in an interview how they had sorted out the matter with the Philippines immediately after it had happened. They assured that such incidents would never lead to armed conflict between ASEAN-members.

and ASEAN's Asian Regional Forum (ARF) to establish multilateral dialogues among the claimants²⁵, little progress has been made towards a solution. The obstacles to a peaceful settlement of the conflict are many. First of all, the number of involved actors and the nature of the dispute indicate that multilateral negotiations are necessary.²⁶ A multilaterally negotiated *joint development* scheme would have to be based sharing costs and as well as benefits of exploring the seabed. How should this be done? Should the output be divided equally, according to the number of islands occupied by each claimant or according to some other measure? Many argue that multilateral negotiations would presuppose an acceptance of *status quo* and for Taiwan, Vietnam and China this move would mean to back down from their claim to the whole area.²⁷ The idea of joint development has been put forward mainly by China and may be a device to divide the other claimants. China may hope to institute joint venture bilaterally with Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia in certain defined areas.

So far, no formal multilateral *negotiations* have taken place. All the claimants, however, have participated in an informal workshop process. The unofficial character of the *South China Sea workshop process* initiated by Indonesia in the 1990s has made it possible to discuss matters of co-operation that do *not* touch upon the question of sovereignty. However, Ambassador Hasjim Djalal, the main initiator of the Workshops, was hoping at the outset that the claimants would eventually discuss possible *solutions*.²⁸ After eight years, however, Hasjim Djalal is now less optimistic than ever. In an interview, he expressed disappointment and disillusion, particularly with China's unwillingness to agree to concrete moves.²⁹ During my trip to the region

²⁵ For an overview of attempts of confidence building attempts, see Hearn and Stormont (1996).

²⁶ Because of the conflict's multilateral character the prospects for fruitful bilateral negotiations are poor.

²⁷ Besides, China would be unwilling to compromise with Vietnam (Chen Hurgn-yu, 1991).

²⁸ The possibility of *joint development* in the Spratlys is the most frequently discussed option for a peaceful settlement. The *Antarctic Treaty* has often been cited as a model. This treaty was signed in 1959, and is basically a consultative system with scientific research as its main objective. Valencia (1992) has suggested the formation of a "Spratly Authority" – a consultative body put together by the involved states, Indonesia, Russia and the USA – that will manage the exploration of the resources and co-ordinate scientific research. Some have argued that a legal settlement by the International Court of Justice will be the preferable basis for a *joint development* agreement.

²⁹ Hasjim Djalal was interviewed in February, 1998.

in January and February 1998, however, I also met younger legal experts that expressed optimism and hope for the future.³⁰ Such experts, who had been engaged in the workshop-process, explained that they had reached an "intellectual understanding" of the basis on which a solution could be negotiated. This "intellectual understanding" did not, however, seem to include experts in the PRC.

Status quo:

The *status quo*-option seems to be the most likely one for the time being, and may well be seen by Beijing as being in China's interest. A solution is out of reach and none of the claimant countries seem willing to risk war. However, this situation is unstable and misunderstandings could lead to the outbreak of an armed conflict even if no one wants it. While tension is relatively low, the claimants should be vice to use the opportunity to move towards a negotiated solution.

2.2 China's claim to the Spratlys

China claims that the Spratly islands have been Chinese territory since ancient times. The archipelago falls within what has been termed China's "nine dotted line" in the South China Sea. The expression refers to a map issued by China in 1947. The line swings deep into the South China Sea, and the Vietnamese sarcastically describe it as the "Chinese cow tongue licking up the South China Sea". In Chinese mythology the islands in the South China Sea are correspondingly described as a part of the "tongue of the dragon" (Austin, 1998: 67).

The Chinese claim to have first recorded using the Spratlys for fishing activities during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC to AD. 24). Between the 10th and the 16th centuries, the South China Sea was used as a principal transit route for Chinese maritime world trade, and China claims to have surveyed, worked and administered the islands during much of this period. The Chinese navigator Zheng He of the Ming dynasty (AD 1368-1644) drew a map of the archipelago, and in 1730 a Chinese scholar

³⁰ Interviews with *Lotilla* in Manila 1. February, *Virachai Plasai* in Bangkok 4. February and *Ms Than Ha* in Hanoi 17. February 1998.

published a book that described the geographical features of the area. The Chinese claim that this area was "terra nullius" at the time of discovery and that the islands have been effectively occupied by China from then and until the French intrusion in 1933.

In the international literature on the South China Sea-conflict, China's historical claim is not given much credence. Lee G. Cordner (1994: 62) argues that ancient records are sparse, incomplete and do not provide sufficient evidence of routine occupation and effective administration. He argues that China's claim is further weakened by the fact that an official Chinese government report published in 1928 shows the southernmost delineation of China's territory as the Paracel (Xisha) islands and makes no reference to the Spratly (Nansha) islands. To the contrary, Greg Austin (1998: 160) argues that the PRC's claim to sovereignty over the entire Spratly group finds considerable support in international law. He holds that China's claim to the whole group of islands in 1946, and the subsequent occupation of Itu Aba by the Chiang Kai Shek government, predate any verbal claim or physical act by the other current claimants. According to Austin, the Chinese state can demonstrate both an intention and a will to retain the sovereignty in the Spratlys in the period since 1946.

2.3 China's policy

Among the littoral states in Southeast Asia, China's ambiguous policy towards the dispute is creating uncertainty. Is China to be understood as a co-operative and benign neighbour or as a hegemonic power that seeks to extend her sphere of physical dominance in Southeast Asia? Among the persons Stein Tønnesson and myself interviewed in January and February in 1998, many argued that one has to look into the Chinese *domestic politics* to solve the riddle. How does the domestic situation in China interplay with China's regional policy? According to one of those interviewed, there are both "hawks and doves" in China and it is important to identify their relative strength. Others described the *rising nationalism* in China as an important destabilising factor. They feared that the current leadership in a given situation would *use* the Spratly conflict to boost its legitimacy at home. In the next chapter I will examine China's domestic South China Sea discourse in order to disclose how the regime *thinks*

and *speaks* about the Spratlys. By analysing journals published by different segments in the Chinese elite, I will try to identify the "hawks and doves". Further, I will explore the extent to which the Spratly conflict is to be considered a part of a domestic discourse of official nationalism in China. First, however, I will give a brief introduction to the foreign policy decision making structure in China.

2.3.1 Foreign policy decision making in China.

The thesis explores the language used in *civil* and *military* journals and newspapers in China. One of the questions the analysis will try to answer is whether civil and military elites perceive China's interests in the Spratly conflict differently. If there is a significant difference, this could indicate that the extent to which the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) influences foreign policy *matters*.

As in most other nations, the ultimate authority to make foreign policy decisions is concentrated to a few leaders. Until his death, Chairman Mao made almost all the big decisions in close co-operation with Zhou Enlai (Barnett, 1984: 7). Deng Xiaoping, by contrast, did not occupy the highest formal position in the party or the government, but it was he who made the main foreign policy decisions. His style, however, tended towards consultation and consensus rather than the Mao-type imposition. In the post-Deng era the foreign policy making process has become more fragmented. Today, the influence of the politburo and its seven-man standing committee is considerable, and it is likely that the party secretary and president Jiang Zemin has to rely on formal instruments of power and take the views of bureaucratic interests into consideration when formulating China's foreign policy. According to Ellis Joffe (1998), this is especially so with regard to military issues. Although PLA's influence *formally* has been reduced over the last few years, Joffe argues that the PLA has *increased* its role in the foreign policy making process in China in the transition period. The main explanation for this shift is, according to Joffe, that Jiang Zemin lacks a personal military authority.

Two institutional channels are particularly important for the PLA's exercise of power. The *Military Affairs Commission*, where Jiang Zemin despite his lack of

military background is chairman, is the supreme party organ for military affairs. In this forum military matters are discussed before they are presented to the politburo's standing committee. When military issues are to be finally decided upon, the Military Commission has thus already made up its mind. Hence, the PLA's position to influence decisions concerning military affairs is considerable.

Another institutional channel for the PLA's influence is the *Foreign Affairs Small Leadership Group*, which formulates policy proposals for the politburo and oversees the operation of the ministry of foreign affairs. Since the late 1980s, the PLA has had at least one representative in this group. This position gives the PLA an opportunity to communicate the views of the military also in matters that not directly concerns military affairs. Thus, the role of the PLA in the foreign policy making process in China indicates that its views really do matter. What we do not know is the extent to which the military, and in particular the navy, prepare and dominates the formulation of China's South China Sea policy.

Conceptual framework

3.1 Western images of China

Many contemporary academic studies of China have been flawed by the so-called *culturalist approach*. The main argument of the culturalists is that China cannot be perceived in Western terms. Instead, one has to interpret China through the lense of China's own history. Voltaire touched upon this in 1771 when he wrote: "The great misunderstanding over Chinese rites sprang from our judging their practises in the light of ours".³¹ June Dreyer has termed this approach "China is China is China-school" (1993: 23). Adherents to this school assume that communist China's social structure, psychological mind-set and bureaucratic processes are essentially the same as those of imperial China. All Chinese governments will eventually act in a similar fashion because of the force of tradition. Most culturalist studies see China's political culture as determined by the heritage of Confucianism. Lucian Pye provides an illustrative example of culturalist explanation in his book "The spirit of Chinese politics" (1992).

The culturalist approach has been widely criticised. What the critics say is that that even though it is possible to identify parallels between imperial and contemporary China, they are incomplete. A rigid culturalist approach fails to explain some of the major trends in modern China. Culture as an explanatory variable must be combined with more universally applicable modes of analysis. The critics agree that the approaches of Western political science may prove to be of limited value, but still argue that one needs a functional and understandable frame of reference when China is to be examined.³² In this thesis I will use concepts and models developed in the West and apply these terms to the Chinese context in order to gain knowledge of the determinants of China's foreign policy formulation in regard to one specific foreign

³¹ Voltaire. "Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations" (1771:36) as quoted in Spence, 1990:133.

policy issue. I shall do so, however, while paying attention to the limited applicability of Western concepts in China.

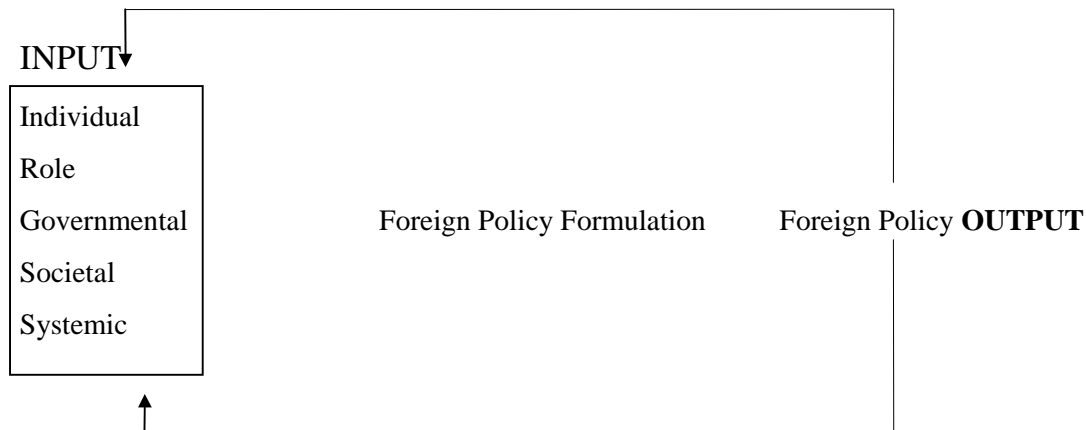
In this chapter I will develop the analytical framework in which to interpret the sources. I will discuss the possibility of assessing the relative influence of domestic and external variables on foreign policy, and outline the theoretical foundations for suggesting a causal relationship between nationalism and foreign policy. In the last section I present three different approaches to textual analysis, and discuss the relevance of each of them for the purpose of this thesis.

3.2 The study of foreign policy

3.2.1 Sources of foreign policy

The large body of theories focusing on foreign policy formulation provide the researcher with a wide range of tools. Rosenau (1980: 119) singles out five sets of variables that are frequently used in foreign policy analysis: individual, role, governmental, societal and systemic variables. Each source category is treated as a causal factor. The first set of variables emphasises characteristics of the individual decisionmakers who determine the foreign policy of a nation. The so-called "Mao in command" approach falls into this category. The second group of variables focuses on different roles in the process of foreign policy formulation. This kind of approach is close to what Allison (1969) terms the "bureaucratic-politics" model. The third category refers to those governmental structures that limit or enhance the foreign policy options of decision makers - the so-called "organisational process" model. The fourth cluster of variables consists of those non-governmental aspects of a society which influence its external behaviour. The systemic variables category refers to factors in a state's external environment that influence foreign policy formulation and output. There is a "feedback-loop" between foreign policy *input* and foreign policy *output* (fig. 2.1).

³² See Dreyer (1993) and Lieberthal (1995).



(fig.2.1)

Kegley and Wittkopf use Rosenau's five-level categorisation of variables in their thorough and exemplary analysis of American Foreign Policy (1996). Zhao (1996) uses more or less the same categories as Rosenau when he structures approaches to the study of Chinese foreign policy into three *levels* of analysis; (A) the "international constraints" level, (B) the "domestic determinants" level and (C) the "decision-makers influence" level.

3.2.2 The interplay of domestic and external variables

Foreign policy behaviour is simultaneously a reaction to both external and internal stimuli, and the distinction between the two levels of analysis is made only for analytical purposes. In the early age of the political science discipline the external behaviour of a nation-state was considered almost exclusively as a reaction to external events, and little or no attention was paid to internal causes of foreign policy behaviour. This approach was placed within the "realist" school of foreign policy analysis which perceives the nation-state to be a rational and unitary actor pursuing her national interest. The study of *domestic sources* of foreign policy began to assume prominence as scholars took issue with the realists. Gradually the foreign policy behaviour came to be viewed as the product of both domestic and external factors acting in conjunction.

The literature discussing the dispute in the South China Sea is illustrative of this perspective. Points of departure have differed. A major theme in this literature has been China's national interests and her "real" intentions. This perspective has been prominent among Chinese researchers. Some scholars have used the traditional realist - or neorealist - approach as point of departure and focused on China's "national interest" in terms of her security needs. Some of them argue that China is currently undertaking a huge programme of naval modernisation in order to control the entire South China Sea in the future.³³

Others have explained the contradictions in China's policy as an outcome of a factional strife between civil politicians and military leaders. Using the so-called "bureaucratic politics" school as a starting point they have focused on the power-game between the People's Liberation Army and the civilian leaders in the party.³⁴

Some have emphasised China's "dilemma of modernisation"; in order to continue on the path of modernisation China must on the one hand increase her energy supply - a fact that could suggest an aggressive policy in the South China Sea - but on the other hand she also depends on a co-operative regional climate in order to sustain her economic growth - a fact that could suggest a more conciliatory policy towards the conflict. In order to predict China's "way out" of this dilemma some have focused on China's general trends of foreign policy formulation, asking whether or not China prefers to find co-operative solutions allowing her to become an integrated member of the international community.³⁵

³³ See for example Leszek Buszinsky. "Southeast Asia in the Post-Cold War Era", *Asian Survey* vol. 32 September, 1992:830-47.

³⁴ See John W. Garver. "China's push through the South China Sea: The interaction of Bureaucratic and National Interest" *China Quarterly* December 1992:999-1028 and Samuel Wu and Bruce Mesquita. "Assessing the dispute in the South China Sea: a model of China's security decision making" *International Studies Quarterly* Vol.38, 1994:379-403.

³⁵ See , Mark J.Valencia. "The Spratly Imbroglia in the Post-Cold War Era" in Wurfel, David and Burton, Bruce (eds), *South East Asia in the New World Order; The Political Economy of a Dynamic Region*, New York: St.Martin's Press, 1996: 244-269.

Both domestic and external factors are thus invoked as determinants of China's foreign policy in the South China Sea. Depending on the approach chosen, the researchers have ended up with different conclusions concerning how to explain China's contemporary and future South China Sea policy. One of the reasons for this divergence is the fact that these approaches use particular, not general, theories of foreign policy formulation. They regard different variables as constants, and make different assumptions about the nature of the Chinese state.

In this thesis focus is put on domestic determinants of China's foreign policy, in particular the impact of *nationalism*. The thesis may thus run the danger of overfocusing one possible determinant of China's South China Sea policy. Is it possible to avoid this trap? Is there a way we could assess the *relative potency* of this variable and thereby reach a more valid conclusion on the driving forces behind China's foreign policy?

3.2.3 The relative impact of the independent variables

James Rosenau's Pre-Theory:

A theory that indicates the relative potencies of causally related variables in different situations could be useful in order to evaluate the relative influence of nationalism on China's foreign policy. James Rosenau asks in his book *The scientific study of foreign policy* (1980) for a grand theory of foreign policy formulation. His point is that as long as foreign policy output is sometimes attributed to domestic factors and sometimes to external factors without a *rationale* for the one or the other, the study of foreign policy will lack scientific coherence. Even though many foreign policy analysts avoid single-cause deterministic explanations and put effort into explaining events in multiple ways, few have tried to put these different variables into a general framework. Rosenau argues that one needs a comprehensive system of testable generalisations in foreign policy analysis in order to meet the demands of a scientific inquiry. That is, he asks for a theoretical framework in which one can predict the *interplay* of internal and external variables in determining foreign policy.

Rosenau ranks his five sets of variables according to their relative potencies in sixteen types of societies and three types of issue areas. His aim is to construct a general framework of *if-then* theories concerning the relative impact of different sets of variables on foreign policy. This theory, or *pre-theory* as Rosenau terms it, indicates the clusters of variables that, under different circumstances, have the greatest influence on the formulation of foreign policy. The five sets of variables in Rosenau's pre-theory are those presented above - individual, role, governmental, societal and systemic. The different societies are categorised according to size, type of economy, degree of openness and the extent of penetration. The issue areas are "non-human resources", "status issues" and "other issues".

Can we, by using Rosenau's concepts and typology, decide why China acts as she does in the South China Sea? Let us give it a rough try. China is a *large country* with a still *underdeveloped economy*, a *closed but penetrated* society, and the particular policy in focus (the Spratly conflict) can be classified as a *non-human resource* area. Which cluster of variables will then have the greatest influence? According to Rosenau's scheme the cluster of *individual variables* will in this case be the main determinant. Hence, the top Chinese leaders and their main decisions have considerable leeway in determining Chinese policy, and the analysts should read the hearts and minds of these decisionsmakers. In my opinion this conclusion is not particularly useful for analytical purposes. The only thing it could indicate is the *level* on which one should focus the analysis. But, given the broad categories and the simple dichotomies in Rosenau's model, this hint could also easily be misleading.

Rosenau's quest for a testable *if-then* theory of foreign policy is placed well within the *positivist* umbrella of the social sciences. A *positive theory* is a theory that can be falsified by empirical evidence and claim validity only if it can avoid falsification. In line with the positivist tradition, Rosenau's pre-theory can be tested in a Popperian way. Rosenau's line of inquiry has many opponents. Some oppose all *grand theories*. The task of constructing a *grand theory* necessarily implies an extreme simplification of reality, and some argue that reality itself easily disappears in such attempts. The fruitfulness of developing grand *if-then* theories is limited given the

uniqueness and complexity of each case. Quantitative comparisons on a vast number of variables will not empower the study of mechanisms in the making of foreign policy, they argue. One of Rosenau's opponents, Walter Carlsnaes (1993: 245-270) criticises the whole methodological approach to the study of foreign policy and argues for a shift from studies of cross-national variations in foreign policy *output* towards an *institutional* perspective. According to Carlsnaes, it may be useful to abandon efforts to search for general or universally applicable explanations of what states *do* and instead search for categories that are valid only for certain explicitly described outcomes. ".....it is *from* this world we have to extrapolate theoretically, not *to* it that we can wilfully impute our theoretical constructs" (1986: 41).

An even more critical assessment is articulated by *postmodernists*. They argue that there are no laws or mechanisms to discern, and that Rosenau's task of constructing a grand theory therefore is a "mission impossible". Jim George (1994: 29) outlines the postmodernists' perception when he stating that "the objects and subjects of reality are sociolinguistically constructed, and their meanings are not given but made and remade by people in different times and places, representing themselves and their world as a part of a discursive practise".

I sympathise with the more modest critique of Rosenau's positivist attempt. There are mechanisms to be discerned, but the way to reveal possible causal relationships in foreign policy analysis does not go through construction of grand theories. In my opinion, if one consider the vast number of potential causal variables and the methodological problems the task of constructing a grand theory would have to overcome, the chances of getting an accurate picture of the relative influence of different variables in such analysis is indeed small. Consequently, Rosenau's pre-theory, even if applied consciously, will provide a rather poor information on the determinants of China's South China Sea policy.

Alternatives?

Even if I do not follow Rosenau's faith in *grand theories* of foreign policy formulation, I still think his *quest* for a scientific evaluation of the relative potency of

different variables is sound. The vast number of theories focusing on specific clusters of variables have made important contributions in the understanding of the dynamics of foreign policy formulation. In the same way, the different approaches applied to analyses of China's South China Sea policy have contributed to a better understanding of the Chinese foreign policy. However, what they do *not* deliver is a judgement of the different variables' relative potency. Such insight could enlarge our understanding of the processes and imperatives of foreign policy formulation and make the rather uncertain game of prediction a little more accurate.

Øyvind Østerud (1996: 328) argues that it is necessary - and possible - to conduct detailed studies of *each specific case* in order to evaluate the relative potency of different variables. In regard to the particular case focused in this thesis, the ideal situation would be to use Chinese policy makers as informants and to analyse internal governmental documents discussing strategies and policy options in the South China Sea. This is, of course, impossible. The main problem in contemporary foreign policy is that it is impossible to get access to the necessary sources. This is especially so in the case of China. Even though it is more easy to get access to relevant materials today than it used to be, qualified guessing on the basis of open sources is still in some cases the only method available.

Thus, it would not be possible for me to get hold of secret (*neibu*)³⁶ documents that could reveal the thoughts and priorities of the foreign policy makers in Beijing. Instead, I have collected articles published in Chinese newspapers and journals between 1988 and 1997. It could be argued that these articles cannot contribute to a deeper knowledge of how policy makers in China perceive the Spratly conflict. Sheng Lijun, a scholar from the PRC now based in Singapore, has emphasised that all articles on the South China Sea published in China are censored. Hence, he argues, such articles reveal nothing but officially sanctioned opinions.³⁷ However, since I am particularly interested in how the Chinese regime present their arguments in the public sphere in China, Sheng Lijun's argument does not reduce the value of the sources for

³⁶ *Neibu* is the Chinese term for secret documents.

³⁷ Interview in Singapore 10. February 1998.

the purpose of this thesis. Besides, a preliminary examination of the articles has revealed that there are considerable variances in how authors argue. Consequently, the articles should not be considered exclusively as propaganda.

This thesis will discuss the possible impact of nationalism on the formulation of China's Spratly policy. And, even though I will not be able to measure the *relative* influence of nationalism, the analysis should at least provide useful knowledge about how nationalist arguments are used in the Chinese public sphere.

3.3 Conceptual framework

In this section I will discuss the theoretical foundations for suggesting a causal relationship between nationalism and foreign policy. How can nationalism understood as (informal) ideology, and as a legitimating device, influence foreign policy? Studies of the relationship between *ideology* and *foreign policy* have a long tradition in foreign policy analysis. The relationship between *official nationalism* and *foreign policy* has not been discussed in similar depth, and I will develop a tentative causal model where official nationalism is treated as an intervening variable between regime legitimacy and foreign policy output. The suggested causal mechanisms in this chapter will not be tested as such, but rather be used as a framework for the interpretation of the sources. First, however, I will present some main features of Chinese nationalism viewed in the context of international relations.

3.3.1 Chinese nationalism in the context of international relations

The central question to ask when one is to describe Chinese nationalism is how the Chinese think and feel about themselves and others. In this thesis, my intention is not to enter the ongoing debate on the content of contemporary Chinese nationalism.³⁸ I

³⁸The "culturalism-to-nationalism" thesis has for long been *the* prominent theory in the scholarly debate. According to this thesis, the imperial China was a cultural entity defined in terms of Confucianism. When China "met" Japan and the West in the nineteenth century it became important to save China, even at the possible expense of China's traditional *high culture*. In the language of the

will give only a brief introduction to the content of Chinese nationalism viewed in the context of international relations and discuss how the Chinese view themselves in relation to others. I will present the *humiliation narrative*, the concept of *race* and Levine's "checklist" of Chinese nationalism. These factors will be used as a point of departure when the journals and newspapers are analysed.

The *humiliation-narrative* tells that the Chinese nation was humiliated by the colonial powers in the 19th and early 20th century. The opium war years and the "unequal treaties" forced the Chinese emperor to give up territory and pay huge reparations. Ever since then the goal of regaining lost territory has been important in the attempt to restoring China's position as a regional and global power. These events have been repeatedly been evolved or "re-invented" in China, and have fostered a sense of "national humiliation" in the Chinese psyche. According to Joffe (1997: 58) there is now a feeling among Chinese leaders that in the last few years China has again been subjected to interference by hostile powers.

Frank Dikötter (1992) argues that *race* is a central element in Chinese identity. He traces this back to Sun Yat Sen's (1866-1925) *racial nationalism* (Minzu zhuyi). In 1927 Sun Yat Sen stated that "...Chinese belong to the yellow race because they come from the bloodstock of the yellow race. The blood of ancestors is transmitted by heredity down through the race, making kinship a powerful force".³⁹ According to Dikötter, race has become gradually more important in contemporary China. He argues that the Chinese leadership are now trying to use *race* as a glue to hold the nation together at a time when differences between regions are widening. This tendency may be illustrated by an episode from April 1993. Jiang Zemin visited the tomb of the

thesis this was the essence of the transition from culturalism to nationalism in China. When entering the family of nations China needed a new identity, and nationalism emerged as a part of a new state formation. Many scholars have criticised the "culturalism-to-nationalism" thesis. Townsend (1997:25) argues that the thesis' main weakness is that it *overstates* the dominance of culturalism and the weakness of pre-modern nationalism in imperial times, as well as it *underestimates* the importance of culturalism in contemporary Chinese nationalism. This argument is supported by Lodèn (1996:27), who argues that *culturalism* was an essential element in the transformation process that took place in China between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1920s.

³⁹ Quoted in Dikötter (1992: 123).

yellow emperor⁴⁰ in Shaanxi province together with thousands of Chinese. By emphasising the importance of the "yellow emperor" as the ancestor to all Chinese, the leadership underlines a genealogical *unity* of the national state. The concept of *race* is important when the Chinese define themselves in relation to others, and hence a pivotal part of Chinese nationalism in the context of international relations.

In his article "Perception and ideology in Chinese foreign policy" (1994: 43) Steven I. Levine summarises how the Chinese view themselves in relation to the international community:

1. The Chinese are a great people, and China is a great nation.
2. The Chinese nation deserves a much better fate than that which it has experienced in the modern world.
3. China should be accorded compensatory treatment from those powers which have insulted or injured it in the past.
4. As a great nation, China naturally occupies a central position in world affairs and must be treated as a great power.
5. China's national sovereignty must be respected absolutely, and such respect precludes any foreign criticism of China's international politics.
6. China's special virtue in international affairs consists in the fact that its foreign policy is based not on expediency but on immutable principles that express universal values such as justice and equity.

Sovereignty, morality, national pride, the humiliation narrative and the concept of race are particularly important elements in contemporary Chinese nationalism. Thus they have been explained here. In the next section I will outline the theoretical foundations for suggesting a causal relationship between nationalism and foreign policy.

⁴⁰ There has been a discussion of what the colour *yellow* actually refers to. Is it the colour of the skin *or* could it be a reference to the emperors clothes or the colour of the soil and the yellow river? However, what is important is that in the contemporary period it is the yellow *skin* that is emphasised. Thus, the colour yellow has become a racial denominator.

3.3.2 Ideology and foreign policy

Perceptions and foreign policy:

In one form or another, perception and ideology play a role in the foreign policy of every state. How leaders read reality will influence their priorities when they formulate foreign policy. Conceptions about political realities structure their ideas about options, inform their considerations of the various courses of action and provide rationalisations for the choices they make.

However, different traditions of foreign policy analysis disagree on the extent to which perceptions have an influence on foreign policy. The impact of this variable will vary from time to time and from case to case. The literature on belief systems and foreign policy decision making has centred on how elements of one's belief system interrelates. It is often argued that there is a strong tendency for people to recognise what they expect to see, and assimilate incoming information into pre-existing thought.

David Shambaugh in his book *Beautiful Imperialist. China perceives America.* (1992) elaborates on the mechanisms through which perceptions or belief systems inform policy decisions. He formulates a model where the belief system of individual decision makers is included as an intervening variable between the independent variable of external stimuli (information) and the dependent variable (policy output).

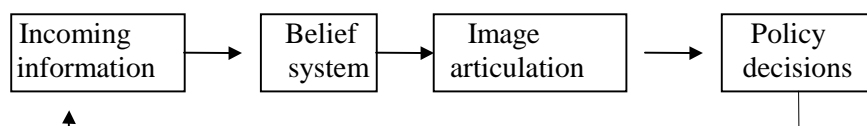


fig. 2.2 (Shambaugh, 1992: 19)

When introducing the *belief variable* to the study of foreign policy, scholars try to look into the "black box" of decision making. This attempt, however, entails methodological difficulties. Says Ole Holsti, one of the most prominent researchers in this field: "...Unlike the analyst who can index his variables with such measures as GNP per capita, arms budgets, public opinion polls.....those interested in beliefs of decision makers have no yearbook to which they can turn for comparable evidence, much less quantitative data presented in standard units" (1969: 2). In this thesis, I will use publicly available newspaper and magazine articles as a clue to how Chinese *policy makers* are likely to perceive China's interests in the South China Sea and evaluate to what extent their belief systems are influenced by nationalism. I will analyse how the Chinese *research journals* express China's interests in the Spratly conflict. In China, as elsewhere, such journals to some extent serve as interpretative prisms for the decision-makers.

Essential Questions and assumptions:

The main question to be asked in this thesis is *how* and *to what extent* nationalism influences on China's South China Sea-policy. In the first part of the analysis, I will explore how Chinese research journals write about the conflict. I will try to reveal if the authors of the articles view the Spratly conflict through Levine's "nationalist glasses", and try to identify the level of aggressiveness in the nationalist arguments expressed. The analysis will be guided by the assumption that nationalism, as summarised by Levine, to a great extent influences how the authors view China's interests. Hence, my assumption will be that nationalism is an important independent variable. I also assume that the level of aggressiveness in the expressed nationalism is fairly low, and not sufficient in itself to push China to launching a war in the Spratlys.

3.3.3 Domestic rhetoric and foreign policy

Official nationalism and foreign policy:

The importance of domestic political influences is a common theme in the analytical literature on foreign policy. Joe Hagan (1993) has produced an exemplary study of the linkage between domestic opposition and foreign policy. His paragraphs on *political*

legitimation are of particular relevance for this thesis. According to Hagan, it is often observed that a regime manipulates foreign policy issues as a means of enhancing its legitimacy. This is done by pursuing nationalist politics, demonstrating strong leadership or diverting attention away from divisive domestic problems.

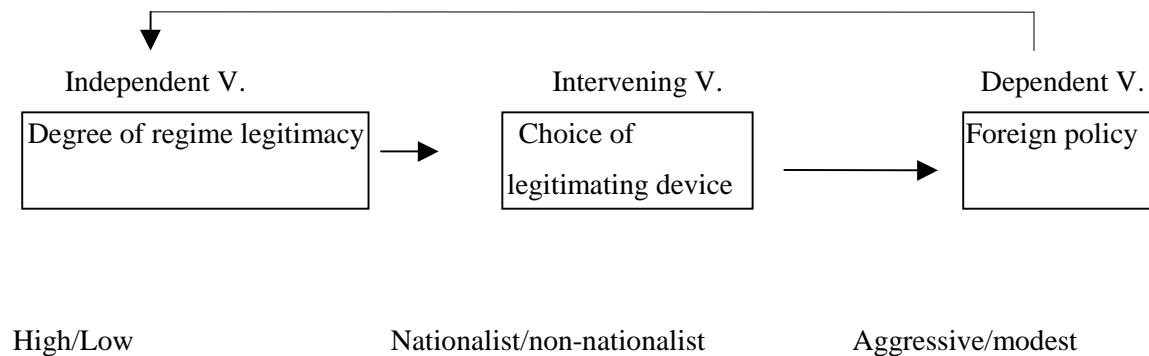
Joe Hagan (1993) has evoked a well-known assumption of a causal link between *regime crisis* and *aggressive foreign policy*. This argument says that regimes in domestic trouble intentionally raise the spectre of a foreign threat in order to bolster political support at home. Such a strategy gives the regime an opportunity to call for national unity and consolidation under the prevailing regime.

The Falklands war is often used as an example. The timing of the war was hardly coincidental to the fact that the two regimes involved were both facing a situation of declining legitimacy. At the outset of the war the Thatcher regime was facing a severe lack of public support. As soon as the war had been won the polls made a turn upwards for the Tories, and eventually they won the next election. The Buenos Aires Junta's campaign to regain what the regime argued was Argentina's lost territory can also be interpreted as an attempt to strengthen the legitimacy of a crisis-ridden regime. It could be argued that *regime legitimacy deficit* actually led to the outbreak of armed conflict. More recent examples include the USA's threat against Iraq in early 1998.⁴¹ Many have argued that Bill Clinton's regime used the conflict between UN and Iraq to underline its ability to defend USA's national interest in a period where the regime's legitimacy/popularity was constrained.⁴² In both of the examples cited above regimes were using foreign policy as a legitimating device and this, as a consequence, were provoking international conflict.

⁴¹ The USA indicated a willingness to go to war in order to force Iraq to comply with the weapon-inspection agreement imposed after the Gulf-war of 1991. Fortunately, UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, was able to prevent open conflict.

⁴² During the "second Iraq crisis" millions of Americans watched the movie "Wag the Dog". This is an ironic film that portrays how the American president tries to manipulate the electorate during a legitimacy crisis. In order to boost his popularity he creates an imagined foreign threat (Albanian terrorists), a national soldier-hero (who almost dies for the nation), a new national anthem. The film must have contributed to cast doubt on Bill Clinton's contemporary rhetoric and foreign policy action.

Using this suggestion as a point of departure, one could formulate a suggestive model of the mechanisms through which regime legitimacy may influence foreign policy:



(fig. 2.2)

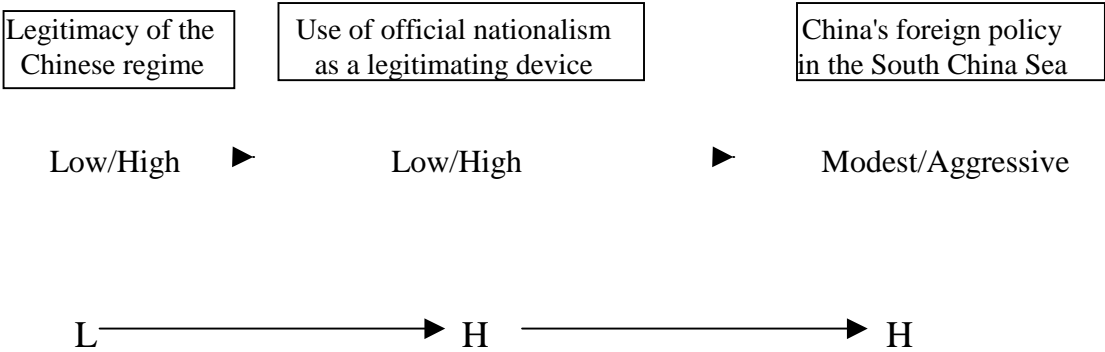
The logic of the model presumes that political regimes constantly try to secure or strengthen their *legitimacy*, using different legitimating devices.⁴³ The choice of strategies is likely to be affected by the regime's degree of domestic legitimacy, and different legitimating strategies carry different rationales for foreign policy formulation. Thus, the extent to which the regime is legitimate may affect its foreign policy. The outcome of a certain foreign policy may in turn affect the legitimacy of the regime. Hence, there is a feedback-loop between the dependent and the independent variable, which is intended to be positive but may turn negative if the outcome of a policy is negative (as for Argentina in the Falkland war).

The model suggests a possible framework for a systematic investigation of the relationship between regime legitimacy and foreign policy and raises a number of questions: How does the degree of regime legitimacy affect the regime's choice of legitimating devices? Does a regime with strong popular support use different

⁴³It is important to note that regimes normally use more than one device at the same time, although some may be more dominant than others.

techniques than a regime facing a legitimization crisis? How and in what ways do different legitimization strategies affect the formulation of a regime's foreign policy? And how does a regime's foreign policy affects its legitimacy?

Gerald Segal (1994: 45) and Chen Jie (1994: 894) propose a causal link between the Chinese regime's *use* of nationalism to bolster its declining domestic legitimacy and its active and vigorous pursuit of claims in the South China Sea. If we dichotomise the variables included in the suggested causal frame, Segal and Jie's assertion could be modelled as follows:



(fig. 2.3)

Jie and Segal's assertion involve four assumptions: First, that the Chinese regime uses *official nationalism* in an attempt to improve on (low) degree of legitimacy. Second, that the dynamic between *rhetoric* and *action* is present in China. Third, that the South China Sea conflict is integrated in the Chinese regime's use of nationalism to legitimate power. And fourth, that this entails an "aggressive" foreign policy.

The suggested model will in this thesis be used as an *analytical framework*. It highlights the relevance of investigating official nationalism to understand foreign policy. Political rhetoric forms an essential part of the legitimating process, and since

different techniques entails different policy obligations, the way the regime rhetorically defines its basis of power may in turn affect its foreign policy. Thus, it is interesting to see how Chinese media define Chinese foreign policy interests.

Basic concepts - regime legitimacy and legitimation strategies:

Preoccupation with *legitimacy* can be identified throughout both ancient and modern history. The content of the concept has in western political thought changed with political and philosophical trends. It has been influenced by Greco-Roman theories of law, by ideas of divine kingship, by Christian political ideology and by ideas of popular sovereignty. Today, regime legitimacy is in general understood as an interactive process in which the ruler tries to legitimate his power and the subjects try to define their subordination in acceptable terms.⁴⁴ This understanding of the concept implies that the legitimacy of a regime is never a given. Rather, it assumes that legitimate authority must continuously be nurtured, created and re-created by powerholders.⁴⁵

Despite its historical importance, regime legitimacy has in general been "understudied". This tendency has been explained with the difficulty of finding a satisfactory way to operationalize the concept (Alagappa, 1995: 6). Barker (1990: 11) follows Alagappa's line of argument when stressing that few have found the necessary evidence required to support cause-and-effect propositions linked to the regime

⁴⁴ This definition is based on the definition used by Alagappa (1996). Scholars often distinguish between elite legitimacy (ruler/elite) and popular legitimacy (ruler/people). However, some also use a tripartite distinction between ruler/higher elite, ruler/intermediate cadres and ruler/public.

⁴⁵ For analytical purposes it may be fruitful to distinguish a regime's procedural legitimacy from its *substantial* legitimacy. Max Weber made important contributions to the understanding of the regime legitimacy concept in "Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft" (1922), when he defined three pure types of legitimate authority: The *traditional*, the *charismatic* and the *rational*. These concepts refer to the *procedural* legitimacy of a regime. He Baogang (1996: 317) defines substantial legitimacy as referring to the processes, mechanisms and techniques which secure the validity of the authority of governmental power. Harry Harding (1987:184) illustrates the difference between these two concepts when arguing that the Chinese regime's procedural legitimacy in the reform period has changed from charismatic to rational-legal authority, while the regime's substantial legitimacy is increasingly being based on the concepts of modernisation and nationalism. In this thesis it is the Chinese regime's *substantial legitimacy* that will be addressed. Relative to the differences between procedural and substantial legitimacy is the distinction between *regime legitimacy* and *regime legitimation*. The latter refers to how legitimacy is acquired.

legitimacy concept. Samuel Huntington, in his effort to explain "the third wave of democratisation" in 1991, critically added that the regime legitimacy concept is "mushy" and thus only has a moderate value as an analytical tool in theory building attempts. The limited explanatory power of the regime legitimacy concept has not, however, prevented scholars from using it. Numerous studies have referred to regime legitimacy when explaining domestic conflict, political reform and revolution, regime survival and change. However, not much scholarly attention has been paid to this relationship, despite the fact the connection between legitimacy and foreign policy often suggested in discussions of foreign policy formulation processes. The conceptual difficulties entailed to the regime legitimacy concept could to some extent explain the lack of theory-building in this field.

Political regimes can choose from a wide range of legitimating devices, such as economic and social welfare performance, ideological mobilisation, entertainment and nationalism. The choice of devices may vary depending on, among other factors, degree of legitimacy (which is focused in the suggested causal model), type of regime, level of modernisation and degree of social and ethnic homogeneity.

Proposed mechanisms - domestic rhetoric and foreign policy:

According to Leslie Holmes (1993), when using *official nationalism* to legitimate power, rulers seek the right to rule by depicting themselves as national "hero-leaders". In order to do so they *communicate* culturally and politically defined signs and symbols. These signs and symbols can be transmitted through concrete *action*. This is what Anthony Giddens terms the "*institutional mode*" of legitimation. However, in order to empower the symbolic content of the *action* it is necessary that it is followed or preceded by a "*discursive mode*" of legitimation (Giddens,1984: 184-93). That is, in order to "activate" social conduct it is necessary to entail an interpretative frame (language/rhetoric).

Alagappa (1996: 37) argues that persuasion through *argument* and *reason* between the ruler and the ruled constitutes the *core* of the legitimation issue in all societies. In his mind, *political discourse or rhetoric* forms an inextricable part of a regime legitimation process. Further, he highlights the *internal dynamic* between rhetoric and action. The employment of a certain political rhetoric in order to legitimate power may in turn affect policy formulation, he argues. As outlined above, the purpose of *rhetoric* is to convince someone about something. Hence, the way the regime communicates its goals may in turn affect on the population's criteria for considering the regime legitimate. Different legitimation techniques in this way entail divergent policy obligations. Where emphasis on eudamonic legitimation⁴⁶ demands economic efficiency, emphasis on official nationalism demands the realisation of what is culturally defined as the obligation of the national hero-leader.

Following Alagappa's line of argument, it really matters *how* foreign policy-issues are conceptualised in the domestic sphere. As outlined above, *official nationalism* can stir up nationalist sentiments in the population. Since foreign policy issues may be integrated in such strategies, it is possible to argue that the formulation of foreign policy can be influenced by the *dynamic* between rhetoric and action. As mentioned, if a specific foreign policy issue is used rhetorically as a part of a nation building process this could force the regime to act more aggressively than it actually wants to. In this sense, the regime could be trapped by it's own (nationalist) rhetoric.

The feedback process between an interactive concept of regime legitimation and public perceptions of political issues high lights the importance of understanding and interpreting *domestic political rhetoric* as one of the determinants of foreign policy formulation.

Essential questions and assumptions:

The essential question to be asked in this part of the thesis refers directly to the *third* assumption deduced from Jie and Segal's assertion. By analysing the *content* of the domestic South China Sea-rhetoric in the public mass-media, I will try to reveal

⁴⁶ Eudamonic legitimation strategies refer to *social and economic efficiency*. (Holmes, 1993)

whether or to what extent the South China Sea conflict is used as a legitimating device. I assume that the language used in the articles and the frequency in which they are published will indicate that the Spratly conflict is embedded in a official nationalism campaign in China. Hence, that the formulation of China's Spratly policy may be informed by the suggested interplay between rhetoric and action.

3.3.4 Summary

The analysis will be organised in two parts. First, I will examine articles copied from research journals and books in order to explore how the authors of the articles present China's interests in the South China Sea. The main task in this part is to identify the *role of nationalism*. Second, I will analyse how the Chinese authorities *speak* about the conflict in the Chinese mass media. The critical question to be answered in this part is whether or to what extent the South China Sea conflict is used as a legitimating device in China.

The arguments used in Chinese journals and newspapers are thus the main focus of analysis. In foreign policy analysis *language* has formed the basis of knowledge in different ways. In the next section I will outline three common approaches to textual analysis in studies of foreign policy, and discuss the fruitfulness of the different perspectives in relation to my case.

3.4 Language as object of social enquiry

Language has in foreign policy analysis been understood both as a *referential* system, a *relational* structure and as *intentional* action. It should be noted that these categories do not represent clear-cut divisions between different modes of analysis. Rather, they should be understood as analytical distinctions.

3.4.1 Language as referential system

In foreign policy analysis language is most often treated as what Iver Neumann⁴⁷ terms a *referential system*. That is, language is treated as a system that *transmits* meaning.

⁴⁷ The language used *refer* to the thoughts of the authors. Iver Neumann. *Russia and the idea of Europe modelled* (unpublished).

Language has been focused in order to map out the "belief systems" or basic perceptions of foreign policy makers. David Shambaugh's "Beautiful Imperialist - China perceives America" can serve as an paramount example⁴⁸. The basic premise of Shambaugh's study is that behaviour is principally a function of perceptions. He analyses the *language* used by professional "America watchers" in China when expressing their opinions about the United States. Shambaugh argues that since these Chinese "America watchers" serve as interpretative prisms for their leaders, their perceptions of America will in turn influence how policy makers formulate China's policy towards the United States.

Shambaugh's study is placed well within the "decision-making" approach to foreign policy analysis. Focusing primarily upon perceptions and belief systems this tradition represents a crucial turn away from the realist position in foreign policy analysis. The origins of this approach may be found in the work of Snyder, Bruck and Sapin (1983). They developed a model of foreign policy analysis that drew upon aspects of communication theory. Language is in their model treated as a "byway" into the cognitive structures of policy makers.

3.4.2 Language as relational system

Foreign policy analysis spinning off from what Neumann⁴⁹ terms "the linguistic turn in social enquiry" treats language as a system that *constitutes* rather than *transmits* meaning. This tradition of foreign policy analysis regards language as a *reality* in itself: "language is a system", says Ole Wæver, "and we can study its structure as an independent/separate stratum of reality".⁵⁰ As such, this approach implies a turn away from the concrete actions of individuals in foreign policy analysis towards a re-conceptualisation of foreign policy as *discourse*.

⁴⁸David Shambaugh. *Beautiful imperialist: China perceives America, 1972-1990*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. Other important works in this field include: Robert Jervis. *Perception and misperception in international politics* Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976 and Robert Keohane and Judith Goldstein. *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1993

⁴⁹ Neumann (*ibid.*)

⁵⁰ Ole Wæver et al. (forthcoming) *The Struggle for "Europe": French and German concepts of State, Nation and European union*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, as quoted in Neumann (*ibid.*)

The point made by the discourse analysts is that concrete events, such as a baby being born or a thunderstorm, are *conceptualised* and given meaning through textualisation. How the concrete events are interpreted depends on the structuring of the discursive field (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). The objects and subjects of reality are understood as sociolinguistic constructions, and as such they cannot be *accessed* outside of language. Shapiro (1989: 11) puts it like this: "...the familiar world cannot be separated from the interpretative *practises* through which it is made". The discourse or text is thus understood as the *frame* out of which preferences or prisms are formed. Perceived in this way analyses of language have been used in order to conceptualise the conditions out of which foreign policy emerges. David Campbell's book *Writing Security. United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (1992) reads US foreign policy as a discursive practice of constructing identity. Foreign policy is understood as a narrative identity formation through discursive "othering" of the others. Another example of the post-structuralist tradition of foreign policy analysis is Der Derian and Shapiro's book from 1989 which highlights international politics as intertextual practise.

3.4.3 Language as intentional action

A very different approach focuses the *intentional* use of language to influence others. This kind of analysis investigates how language is *used* in a particular way in order to mold or influence individual or collective perceptions of reality. Political rhetoric is in this context understood as a mean of political persuasion. In foreign policy analysis this approach has most often been used in order to understand inter-state communication processes, but can very well also be used to analyse a regime's attempt to explain a policy to its own population.

Analyses of this kind define *political rhetoric* as intentional action and *language* is understood as a tool in the hands of independent agents. Semiotic theory is commonly used as a point of departure in such analyses.⁵¹ Many scholars have also

⁵¹ Semiotic analysis highlight cultural understandings of textual *signs*, and has been described as "the science of signs in society" (Daniel Heradstveit og Tore Bjørgo, 1986:51)

added the insights of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur (1981) contrasts *language* with *discourse*. Where semiotic theory focuses exclusively upon the cultural meaning of signs in language, Ricoeur's discourse concept also pays attention to the subjects, objects, time and substance of the text. Using this concept we can thus interpret a text or "speech-act" as a concrete *event*.

However, in Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory it is argued that the text is detached from the agent as soon as it has left his or her hands. At this point there is no longer any correspondence between the intention of the author and the text. Or, termed in the language of post-structuralists, there is no correspondence between text and "external" reality. In most analyses of political rhetoric the text has been read not in the "Ricoeurian way", as an organic body detached from the author, but rather in relation to the political context in which it was construed.

3.4.4 Inclusive or exclusive approaches?

Based on the discussion above, the internal South China Sea discourse can be used or understood in at least three different ways. Depending on the approach chosen, one can interpret the language used in the sources as a transparent system out of which cognitive "mappings" can be read, as a relational system out of which insights into the sociolinguistic construction of reality can be acknowledged or as an attempt at political persuasion.

As mentioned earlier, the categories do not represent clear-cut distinctions. Is it then possible to combine insights from these traditions of language analysis in order to gain deeper knowledge of the determinants in foreign policy processes? Yes and no. To a certain degree the basic premises of the different approaches exclude combinations. It could, for example, prove difficult (but yet not impossible) to *simultaneously* interpret a text both as intentional (political rhetoric) and as non-intentional (critical theory). In the former, the agents or subjects of the discourse are understood as sovereign individuals somewhat abstracted from language. In the latter, the question of agency seems less significant. Michael Foucault (1989) described the subjects as *captured* by the discourse. Although many post-structuralist discourse

analysts today are well aware of agency in discourse, there is still a substantial difference between analyses of political rhetoric and post-structuralist analyses in terms of defining the status of the subject. This is partly due to a divergent understanding of the discourse concept itself.

It is, however, possible to read *the same text* into all the three different traditions of language analysis. A text can contain both self-revealing and manipulative elements. The approaches also share some common features. For example, analyses of political rhetoric and the post-structuralist analyses of discourse both focus on how language *constitutes* meaning. What distinguishes the different approaches is mainly that the adherents to each tradition *ask different questions*.

3.4.5 Conceptualisation of China's South China Sea discourse

The articles published in journals should be regarded as part of the *elite communication* in China and may influence on how Chinese policy makers *perceive* the conflict. These articles will be interpreted according to the "language as referential structure" approach. This means that I will interpret the arguments used as an expression of how the authors of the articles perceive China's interests in the conflict. The articles published in official newspapers in China are more standardised and exposed to a higher degree of censorship and may not in the same way contribute to the disclosure of "cognitive mappings" of the Chinese elite. Here it seems rather more fruitful to read the text as intentional action, written in order to mold public opinion. Hence, in the analysis of the newspapers I will use the "language as intentional-action" approach. As a third option, the sources could inform us of the structuring of the "discursive field" and consequently about the *framework* out of which preferences are formed. However, as this chapter has revealed, theoretically speaking I am interested in the role of the *agent* in the discourse. I am looking for the thoughts and priorities of those who *construct* the discourse. In this respect, although the "language as relational system" approach could provide useful information about the influence of nationalism on the formulation of China's South China Sea policy, I shall concentrate on the two other modes of analysis.

4

Methodology

4.1 Method of analysis

4.1.1 Analysis of content

In this thesis I will use *content analysis*. According to Robert P. Weber (1990: 9), content analysis can be defined as "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text". The rules of this inferential process "vary with the theoretical and substantive interests of the investigator". Budd (1967: 3) describes content analysis as "...a method of observation. Instead of observing people's behaviour directly, or asking them to respond to scales, or interviewing them, the investigator takes the communications that people have produced and asks questions of the communications." Guido Stempel, editor of the *Journalism Quarterly*, describes content analysis as a "system for doing something we all do rather frequently, drawing conclusions from observation of content".⁵²

In the social sciences, content analysis of texts has primarily been made quantitatively. However, in recent years we have seen a gradual move towards more qualitative studies. For several decades political scientists have debated the pros and cons of quantitative vs. qualitative analysis. The two traditions appear to be quite different. Where quantitative research uses numbers and statistics, qualitative research focuses on one or a small number of texts. However, despite the differences in style and technique, King, Keohane and Verba (1994) argue that the *same underlying logic* provides the framework for each research approach. Both quantitative and qualitative research should be based on systematic and scientific *inference*.

In this thesis I will primarily use a *qualitative method*, extracting the arguments used in each article and interpreting them. This, because I believe that this approach

⁵² Quoted in Carney, T. F. (1972:23)

will provide a better clue to the intentions of the particular writer than more standardised techniques. The results of the analysis may then be more insecure than they would have been if I had used quantitative method, but the advantage of qualitative interpretation is its greater sensibility for nuance: one can discover a wider range of aspects in the text. Robert Weber (1990) has identified the following units that can be used in order to carry out a content analysis of newspaper articles; the article itself, its focus, passages, sentences, words and the meaning of each word. I will use this as a starting point for my analysis.

4.2 Research design

The thesis will apply what Rosenau terms a "historical, single country approach". The study may be categorised as a "single-case study" (Yin, 1994: 40). The main aim of the thesis is to generate hypotheses about foreign policy making in China, and the theoretical assumptions put forward will only be used as tools to understand certain, empirical mechanisms. The thesis is *exploratory* in its design and entails few possibilities for generalisations applicable to other countries.

4.2.1 Validity

The analysis will be based on *descriptive inference*.⁵³ That is, I will use observations from the real world to learn about unobserved facts. (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 8). The validity of the study depends on the extent to which the rules for inference are respected. According to Yin (1994: 32) there are *three* conditions that must be met for a casestudy to be useful: First, *validity must be constructed*. That is, the researcher has to develop correct operational measures for the concept being studied. In this thesis, I want to investigate the extent to which nationalism influences the formulation of China's South China Sea policy.

Nationalism is operationalized as *ideology* and as a *legitimizing device*. The possible influence of nationalism is measured through a critical examination of how the South China Sea discourse in China is conceptualised. Information on how Chinese

research journals express China's interests in the South China Sea gives us answer to the first research question: Does a nationalist *ideology* inform Chinese policy maker's conflict perceptions? Information on how the authorities *speak* about the conflict in the mass media gives us insight into the second research question: Does the regime use the conflict to legitimate power? By abiding strictly to the two-fold definition of the nationalism concept, I avoid encountering problems when *constructing* validity. This, since the operational definition of the nationalism concept corresponds with what the thesis aims at investigating.

Second, *internal and external validity must be considered*. The former refers to the establishment of causal relationships. The latter refers to the delimitation of the domain within which the findings of the study can be generalised. This condition are of little or no relevance for my thesis. The *external validity* criterion in *case studies* refers to the concept of analytical generalisation. As mentioned above, my thesis is exploratory in its design and there are few possibilities for generalised conclusions. One could argue, however, that *internal validity* is crucial since I have formulated two arguments about how nationalism might influence the formulation of China's foreign policy. That is, I have formulated an argument about the causal relationship between two variables. However, my aim is not to *test* the validity of the suggested causal relationship between nationalism and foreign policy. My thesis is exploratory and has no intention of *establishing* a definitive causal relationship between variables. I have only used the theoretical assumptions as an analytical frame to understand reality. At best, this thesis is only a pre-liminary exploration of the possible fruitfulness of investigating the relationship between nationalism and foreign policy. Hence, the internal validity criterion is irrelevant in this thesis.

The last of Yin's conditions is that *reliability must be secured*. That is, the method for collecting data must be reliable. This needs some further comments.

4.2.2 Reliability

⁵³ This, in opposition to *causal inference* where the aim is to learn about *causal effects*.

The articles were collected during two trips to China, the first to Shanghai from August 1996 to March 1997, and the second to Hong Kong in September 1997. In the autumn of 1996, when I went to Shanghai to study Chinese at Fudan University, my hope was that during one year of language studies in Shanghai I should be able to collect the necessary material. It proved difficult, however, to get permission from the library at Fudan to copy newspaper and journal articles about the South China Sea conflict. For a while I was allowed to look through official magazines and newspapers, but I was not allowed to copy anything that could, in the words of the librarian, "harm China's national interest".

The refusal to let me copy public material came as a surprise. I was aware that the Spratly conflict was a sensitive topic, but since 1992, there had been a more open attitude in China for dissemination of information.⁵⁴ And, from talking with China experts in Norway before I left, I had the impression that it would not be too difficult to get access to the material I wanted, especially since I was only interested in articles printed in *public* newspapers and magazines.

After a few months, I hired a student from the English Department at Fudan for translation work. I told her about my problems at the library, and asked her to copy three articles in the *Peoples Daily* as a test.⁵⁵ As it turned out, she also saw her request turned down. Furthermore, the librarian informed her supervisor at the Department of English Studies of the request. As a result, she got a warning from her institute not to engage herself in anything that could harm China's national interest. Simultaneously, all the students at the English Department got a similar warning and were told not to co-operate with foreign students.

This episode indicated to me that it could be difficult indeed to collect the material I needed and I decided to concentrate on my language studies. However, after a few months I was approached by a student from the Department of Finance. He told me that he had heard about my problems at the library, and offered to help me to get

⁵⁴ Later I learned that the librarians in China had been severely criticised for handing out sensitive information to students prior to June 1989. Consequently, they have since been careful not to trust the spirit of (relative) openness.

⁵⁵ The Chinese name for People's Daily is *Renmin Ribao*.

hold of the material I wanted. He explained to me that he had "good contacts" at the library. Of course, he wanted me to pay a lot for the material he collected. I decided to give it a try. I informed the student about my project and detailed to him what kind of articles I was looking for. During the next few months I met him regularly, and each time he brought some articles about the Spratly conflict from different journals and newspapers.

When I went back to Norway in the spring of 1997 I carried with me 20-30 articles about my topic. It was clear to me, however, that this was not sufficient as source material for a thesis. In the autumn of 1997 I went back to China, this time to the University Service Centre at the Chinese University in Hong Kong. This Centre has a collection of more than 400 Chinese language newspapers and about 1,400 Chinese periodicals. Together with one of the assistants at the library, I was able to go through 22 relevant journals and 2 newspapers for articles about the South China Sea conflict systematically.⁵⁶

The important thing to discuss in this paragraph is how the problems I met in Shanghai when collecting the sources have affected the *reliability* of the sources. When at Fudan University, I had no control over the selection of the articles. I had told my assistant to copy *all* articles about the South China Sea conflict in the journals he searched through. This, in order to get a picture of the *frequency* of such articles. However, as it appeared, the student from the Department of Finance did not search systematically through the magazines I had picked out as most relevant. Since I had no possibility to control the method he used, I do not know if he copied all the articles that he found. It could be that he was allowed - or advised - to copy only a certain type of articles. In Hong Kong I was able to search systematically through some of the journals

⁵⁶ The difficulties I experienced in Shanghai illustrate how sensitive the South China Sea conflict is in China. The episode also shows, however, the anxiety of some Chinese to circumvent the rules in order to satisfy foreigners and gain money. Since my aim was to copy public material printed in newspapers that sell millions a day in China, the reaction I got to my request seemed over-dimensioned tending towards paranoia.

from which articles had been copied, and I discovered several articles which he had not copied. However, I could not find any pattern in the type of articles, which had been left out.

The reliability is further weakened by the fact that all sources have been translated to English for me by a Chinese student at the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute. However, to control the quality of the translation, I have made a new translation of some of the articles. A Chinese friend of mine, with a master degree in English, translated five of the articles. When I compared these translations, I found them very similar. This seems to indicate that the translations are sufficient, at least for my purpose

Since my Chinese is not yet fluent, but allows me to read only slowly, the analysis will be based primarily upon the English translations. This is, of course, a weak point since the *rhetoric* used in the sources is one of my focus points. I will pay attention to the original language each time I come across essential terms or concepts, and for the most important sections of the articles I have used both the translation and the Chinese version.

China's *Nansha* rhetoric

5.1 Structure of analysis

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate the possible influence of nationalism on China's Spratly policy. The analysis of the sources will be divided in two parts. In the first part I will examine the language used in the *journals* and discuss the fruitfulness of the first research question put forward in chapter 2: *How does Chinese research journals express China's interests in the South China Sea?* The second part will analyse the articles copied from *newspapers* in order to answer the second research question: *To what extent does the Chinese regime use the conflict to legitimate power?*

5.2 The journals

5.2.1 *The discourse*

I have collected articles about the Spratly conflict from 21 Chinese journals.⁵⁷ I found these journals particularly important for my research since they all cover issues of

⁵⁷The Journals published in Beijing are: *Asia Pacific Studies* (Ya Tai Yan Jiu), published by Institute of Asia Pacific Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Science and Society of Asia Pacific Studies (Zhong Guo She Hui Ke Xue Yuan Ya Tai Suo and Zhong Guo Ya Zhou Tai PingYang Xue Hui). *China Economy Study* (Zhong Guo Jingji Shi Bao), published by Development Research Centre of the State Council (Guo Wu Yuan Fa Zhan Yan Jiu Zhong Xin). *Contemporary Asia* (Dang Dai Ya Tai), published by China Institute of Social Sciences (Zhongguo Shehui Ke). *Foreign Studies Journal* (Wai Jiao Xue Yuan Xue Bao), published by Foreign Affairs College (Waijiao Xueyuan). *Asia Data* (Ya Tai Zi Liao), published by the Institute of Political Science (Zhengzhi Xueyuan). *Defence* (Guofang) is published by the Military Defence Institute. (Guofang Junshi Xueyuan). *Contemporary International Relations* (Xian Dai Guoji Guanxi), published by Institute of Contemporary Foreign Relations. (Xiandai Guoji Guanxi Yan Jiu Suo). *International Relations Journal* (Gujoi Guanxi Xue Yuan Xue Bao), published by Institute of International Relations (Gujoi Guangxi Yanjiu Suo). Journal of modern history (Jin Dai Shi Yan Jiu), published by Institute of Modern History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Zhong Guo She Hui Ke Xue Yuan Jin Dai Shi Yan Jiu Suo). *Modern Navy* (Dang Dai Hai Jun), published by PLA Naval Political Department (Renmin Jiefang Jun Hai Jun Zhengzhi Bu).

The journals from **Shanghai** are: *Asia Pacific Forum* (Ya Tai Lun Tan) published by Shanghai Institute of Social Science (Shanghai Zhengzhi Xueyuan) *International Survey* (Gujoi Guanxia) published by Foreign Language Institute (Waiyu Xueyuan). *World Outlook* (Gujoi Zhan Wang) published by the Shanghai Institute of International Relations (Shanghai Guoji Yanjiu Suo). *World*

foreign relations. The journals are published in different parts of China. Ten of the journals are published in Beijing, four in Shanghai, two in Yunnan province, one in Fujian province, one in Jinan and one in Guangxi province. As for three of them, the publisher is unknown. My aim was to search through all copies from 1989 to 1997, and for most of the journals I managed to do that.

The journals are all public, but not aimed at *mass consumption*. To my knowledge none of them are sold in public bookstores or newspaper stalls. The limited availability of the journals indicate that they may be considered as a medium for internal communication among the educated elite in China. It would have been useful to know the numbers of copies sold of each of the magazines, the intended and actual readers etc. In Shanghai, no one could give me such information. I also asked at the University Service Centre in Hong Kong without result. As a last option, I sent a request to H-ASIA, an edited e-mail list for researchers interested in matters concerning East and Southeast Asia, but no-one replied. The lack of such information represents a serious weakness of this study.

What first struck me when looking through the sources, was the relative absence of articles about the Spratly conflict. This was surprising, given the fact that this issue has been *relatively* high on the foreign policy agenda in China over the last decade. In the journals and books, I found only 64 articles. In order to get a more accurate picture of the frequency of these articles, it would have been useful to count the number of articles discussing issues thematically close to the South China Sea conflict, for example Taiwan or the issue of economic relations between China and Southeast Asia.

Economy Study (Shi Jie Jingji Yan Jiu) published by the Editorial office of Shi Jie Jingji Yan Jiu. (Shijie Jingji Yanjiu Bianjibu).

The journals from **Yunnan**, **Guangxi**, **Fujian** and **Jinan** are: *International questions* (Guoji Wenti) published by Yuannan Institute of International Studies (Yunnan Guoji Guanxi Yanjiu Suo) Yunnan province, *East Asian Affairs Journal* (Nan Yang Wenti Yan Jiu) published by East Asia Institute (Dongya Yanjiu Suo) in Xiamen, Fujian province and *Indo China* (Yin Du Zhi Na) published in Nanning, Guangxi province. *Southeast Asian Studies* (Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu), published by Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (*Dong Nan Ya Yanjiu Suo*), Jinan University. For three of the journals I have not been able to locate the publishing unit. These are *Survey of foreign Social Studies* (Guowai She Hui Ke Xue Qing Kuang), *Dong Nan Ya Zhong Heng* and *Survey of Asian and International relationship* (Ya tai Di Qu Guoji Guanxi Gai Lun).

Unfortunately, due to lack of time and resources, I was not able to conduct a search like that. However, since most of the journals I have looked at concentrate on Southeast Asian affairs, one would have expected more attention to the most immediate security issue in the region. Some of the journals, for example *Ya Tai Lun Tan* (Asia Pacific Forum) and *Ya Tai Yan Jiu* (Asia Pacific Studies), published only one or two articles about the South China Sea conflict in the eight year period from 1989 to 1997.

The relative absence of such articles may indicate that the conflict is a minor issue in the research environment in China, but could also be interpreted to mean that rigid censorship prevents a lively and open discussion of this issue among Chinese Southeast Asia specialists. The latter explanation is in line with Sheng Lijun's opinion that the arguments put forward in the journals are nothing but officially sanctioned opinions.⁵⁸ However, in this chapter I will show that the journals display interesting variations between factions and provinces. Consequently, that there must be a certain degree of leeway for publishing different views. There is also a substantial difference between the articles published in the journals and those of the official state newspapers. In this thesis the newspaper articles are to be considered primarily as propaganda, while the journals to a greater extent express the views of the authors or publishing units.

5.2.2 The arguments

In the international literature discussing the South China Sea issue *oil, fish, security needs, the necessity of sustaining economic growth* and *nationalist rights* are the factors most often invoked as the driving forces behind China's drive for full control in the Spratlys. These factors are, of course, intertwined. However, the authors of these articles often disagree on which of these factors that are most important for the Chinese leadership. Is it China's looming energy-crisis, the hunger for fish and other seafood, economic concerns, security needs or a nationalist drive for power that motivate the insistence that the Spratlys belong entirely to China?

All of these factors to some extent influence on the formulation of China's Spratly policy. In this thesis the aim is to look in particular for the influence of *nationalism*. Territorial conflicts often entail national sentiments and there is no doubt that nationalism in one way or another is a part of China's drive for control of the Spratlys. What would be intriguing to know is *what kind* of nationalism that is at play. Allen S. Whiting (1995) has suggested a tripartite typology that may be useful in this respect.

According to Whiting, *affirmative nationalism* centres exclusively on "us" as a positive in-group with pride in attributes and achievements. *Assertive nationalism* adds "them" as a negative out-group that challenges the in-group's interests and possibly identity. *Aggressive nationalism* identifies a specific foreign enemy as a serious threat and requires action to defend vital interests. Whiting argues that the implications for foreign policy of the different types of nationalism vary. The consequences of the first type are minimal, but for the third potentially major. The second lies between the two, sharing the attributes of each and tending towards either depending on its intensity. In the analysis I will use Whiting's typology to discuss the *level of aggression* in the Chinese regime's *Nansha* rhetoric. The categorisation will depend both on the *language* used by the author and the *policy prescribed*.

It is not enough to discuss the type of nationalism involved. I will also pay attention to the influence of nationalism *relative* to other factors. In chapter three I discussed the difficulties of *measuring* the relative influence of various independent variables. In order to do so, one would need access to the hearts and minds of the policy makers. Hence, it is not possible to *decide* the relative influence of nationalism simply by analysing 122 articles written by scholars and journalists in China. The articles may at best only *indicate* the relative importance of different factors.

In order to get a overview of the arguments used in the South China Sea discourse I will analyse five of them in some depth. Then I will compare these findings with the general pattern in the total number of 64 articles that I have translated. The five articles are chosen so as to represent the main trends in the material. By paying

⁵⁸ Interview, 10. February 1998.

particular attention to these exemplary articles, one get an overview of the most important arguments employed.

5.2.3 Five selected articles

Article 1: Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu (Southeast Asian Studies) 1991, No. 4

Title: "How the surrounding countries exploit oil and gas resources in our Nansha" (Zhou bian guo jia ru he lue duo wo Nansha you qi zi yuan)

The journal is published by the *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu Suo)* at Jinan University. Jinan is a coastal province, located between Beijing and Shanghai. This journal has published 15 articles about the South China Sea-issue in the period between 1989 and 1997.

The major theme in this article is the oil and gas resources in the South China Sea. The author briefly outlines the possible amount of resources in different basins in the Spratly area. Then he discusses how the other claimant countries have behaved towards China.

The first sentence in the article resembles the general "prescription" for the South China Sea articles in the newspapers. "Nansha has been our territory since ancient times" (Zigu yilai Nanhai jiu shi Zhong guo ling tu). With a few variations, this sentence is repeated in most of the articles I have examined. The *Nansha* question is thus seen in a historical perspective. This may have two reasons: First, it could be that all the authors believe in China's historical rights. Second, it could be that this sentence is *obligatory*. The Chinese regime needs domestic support for its claims in the South China Sea and, if a statement is repeated sufficiently often, it may become the truth. Besides, China's *historical legitimacy* in the Spratlys counts in Chinese rhetoric. By stressing this element, it is underlined that the current government is defending what has *always* belonged to China. The ability to maintain the unity of the empire was a central pillar of legitimacy in imperial China.

And, as the Taiwan issue illustrates, this aspect is no less important in the contemporary PRC. Hence, as a second option, it could be that this standard sentence has to be repeated due to formal or informal censorship prescriptions.

In the next section the author outlines a rather optimistic, if not exaggerated, prediction of the amount of petroleum resources present in the South China Sea. "Lidong, Zhengmu, Wan'an and other basins have a prospective reserve of 35 billion tons of crude, of which 20-22.5 billion is within our traditional boundary. Therefore, Nansha is called the second Middle East in the international community." If these estimates are compared with the expected 15 billion tons of reserves in Kuwait, it is clear that the author has great expectations indeed.

Chinese vessels started to survey the sea bed near the Spratlys in 1986.⁵⁹ The estimates in the article in *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu* are extremely optimistic, but they do not deviate from the general expectations in China. According to Pan Shiyong from the Foundation for International and Strategic Studies in Beijing, hydrocarbon resources in the Spratly Region could amount to 17.7 billion tons.⁶⁰ It should be noted, however, that the geological evidence is disputed. In 1992 E. Durkee, a petroleum geologist, challenged the Chinese calculation when stating that "...there is not even good or valid geological evidence to show it will ever become an oil producing province".⁶¹ In August 1998, USA's Energy Information Service argued that "...there is little evidence outside of Chinese claims to support the speculation that the region contains extensive oil reserves. There are no proven oil reserves estimates and no commercial oil and gas has been drilled there".⁶² And, although *international oil companies* apparently believe that it may be economically viable to drill in this area, they have also presented rather low estimates.

⁵⁹ As early as the late sixties an extensive seismic survey was conducted in the area under the sponsorship of the United Nations Committee for the Co-operation of Joint Prospecting in Asian Off-shore areas. They reported optimistic estimates on the potential for oil and gas exploitation in the seabed around the Spratlys.

⁶⁰ Pan Shiyong refers to a survey conducted by the Chinese Geology and Mineral resources Ministry (Windows, September 1993).

⁶¹ *International Herald Tribune*, 14 April 1992

⁶² USA's Energy Information Service, 10. November 1998

Why then, are the Chinese estimates so optimistic? Is it because they have conducted their surveys more carefully than others? Or, could it only be a strategy aimed at attracting companies for joint venture deals? It is clear that the governments involved have an interest in exaggerating their estimates to attract international oil companies. Earlier reports in international media about the potential for oil exploration in the Spratlys seem to have been based on insufficient information and the area is not a high priority for oil companies (Valencia, 1993: 58). This might explain the divergence between the estimates of Chinese geologists and the estimates of international oil-companies. On the other hand, the oil companies themselves have an interest in down-playing the expectations in order to negotiate better joint venture deals.

The last section of the article discusses how the oil and gas resources have given the other countries an incentive to occupy islands in the Nansha archipelago. As the author writes in the first sentence: "...Because of the abundant resources, some surrounding countries have occupied our islands." According to the author, the other claimant countries "first violated China's sovereignty, then they began to exploit our oil and natural gas resources". The author uses "our" instead of "China's", and thus *personalises* the ownership to the resources. It becomes a part of his own fortune as a member of the Chinese nation. Further, he describes in quite aggressive terms how the others "...exploit Nansha in a fast, violent way, attempting to loot the oil as rapidly as possible". China is portrayed as the *victim* of foreign aggression. While China is waiting, the others are using their chance to steal what rightfully belongs to China. According to the author, the other countries are also *conspiring* against China. They are "...forgiving each other in order to exploit Nansha together". It is, by other words, *all the others against us*.

At the end, the author depicts Vietnam as the most aggressive country. Vietnam is "military invading our territorial waters, attempting to grab all the resources by force." Here, a new element is brought in. While the author accuses the other countries of exploiting, and even looting China's resources, he uses the word "force" only for Vietnam's actions. Vietnam is for the author the most

hostile of all the involved countries. When Vietnam is referred to, the author's tone is more aggressive. The author outlines how Vietnam repeatedly has encroached upon China's territory in the South China Sea. The problematic relationship between China and Vietnam has been regarded as the most immediate obstacle to a peaceful solution of the conflict, and the views of the author indicate that China's approach to the dispute is intertwined with the general, hostile climate between the two countries.

In sum, the article stresses the huge amount of resources in the Spratlys, depicts Vietnam as the most aggressive country and conveys how other countries have united against China in the *Nanhai* (South China Sea). The possible *oil-resources* seem to be the most important factor for this author, not only because China needs them, but because they motivate *others* to grab Chinese territory and exploit Chinese resources.

The language used in this article resembles what Whiting terms *Assertive nationalism*. That is, the author portrays the other claimants as a "*negative out-group* referent that challenges the *in-group's* interest." (Whiting,1995: 297). The author also reveals that he is influenced by the Chinese "humiliation narrative". China is treated in an unfair manner by other countries in the same way as imperialist powers used to do.

Article 2: Ya Tai Yan Jiu (Asia Pacific Research) 1994, No.2

Title: No title

The journal is published in Beijing by the *Institute of Asia Pacific Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Science and Society of Asia Pacific Studies* (Zhong Guo She Hui Ke Xue Yuan Ya Tai Suo he Zhong Guo Ya Zhou Tai PingYang Xue Hui).

This very different article discusses how the Spratly problem was treated at an ASEAN-summit in Manila in 1992. Rather than accusing other countries of aggressive or illegitimate actions, the author regards their attitude as quite conciliatory.

The writer first makes clear that the Nansha islands were "developed, exploited and managed by China" before other countries showed any interest in them. He then lists oil and gas resources and the strategic position of the islands as

the main reasons why other countries in the region have invaded the archipelago. He suggests that there are proven resources of "more than 63 billion tons of oil in addition to mineral resources." Thus, his estimate is three times higher than the optimistic prognosis in *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu*, three years earlier.

In the next section, the author talks rather positively about the attitude of the involved parties at the conference. He writes: "Most of the other countries do not want the Nansha problem to become a hot issue. Some countries have a dispute with China about the sovereignty to some of the islands in the South China Sea, but at the conference they showed sympathy for our advocacy of finding a peaceful solution to the conflict." This attitude deviates from the "mood" in the article in *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu*. There is not so much of the "us" against "them", rather are "they" accepting China's good intentions.

China is by the author described as a *generous* country: "China understands the other countries' need for economic benefit, and puts forward: Sovereignty belongs to China, exploit Nansha together." This sentence expresses China's new official position towards the conflict. China wants the other countries to accept Chinese sovereignty, while in return China will generously share with the others. This policy raises the issue of China's concept of *hegemony*. Officially, China is against any form of hegemonic dominance. However, while China in official terms is willing to share the resources in the Spratly area with the other countries, she at the same time demands that they acknowledge Chinese sovereignty. This attitude resembles basic features of the *tribut system* that existed between China and her neighbour countries for centuries.⁶³ The Chinese empire tried to control countries such as Korea, Burma, Thailand and Vietnam without excessive military expenditures. These countries had to acknowledge Chinese custom

⁶³ However, none of the other involved parties have signalled any support for China's "compromise-preposition." Some have argued that China will not be willing to share anything as soon as she is strong enough to establish a military foothold in the whole Spratly archipelago. Besides, governments are not oil-companies. Governments have to pay attention to public opinion when they act, and a political regime's authority and legitimacy can easily be affected by the governments ability to protect the territory of the nation state. This common resistance against China's official policy is, of course, not mentioned by the author.

and culture, and their emissaries had to make *kowtow* to the emperor in royal audiences. In return, they were allowed to conduct a controlled volume of trade with China, mainly through special delegations termed *tribute missions* by the Chinese.

China is also portrayed as a *rational* country: "Facing the fact that Nansha has been occupied, the Chinese government managed to control its emotions and behave rationally. China takes into account the necessity of keeping a peaceful environment in the Asia Pacific." Although China definitely had a lot to defend at the conference, her attitude was, according to the writer, that of a *responsible* country. This component is important in terms of the Chinese discourse. China's basic principles of foreign policy formulation - "the five principles of peaceful coexistence"⁶⁴ - stress the element of *morality* in international politics. This doctrine has long been put forward by the Chinese as the basis for all interstate relations. And, according to Samuel S. Kim (1994: 403), China has for long been *haunted* by the necessity of remaking the hard facts of its international behaviour to validate its moral self-image. The delineation of China's position at the conference may be seen in this light.

In the last section of the article, Vietnam is mentioned separately, while the other claimant countries are listed as a group. This correlates with what seems to be the general attitude in Chinese journals. Vietnam is depicted as the most aggressive country in the conflict: "...thus, Vietnam and *the other countries* have invaded the islands" (my emphasis).

In sum, the article discusses the amount of resources embedded in the South China Sea and characterises China's and the other claimants behaviour at an ASEAN meeting in Manila in 1992. Also for this author the *oil resources* seem to be the most prominent factor in the dispute. However, not as much as a motivating factor for China to establish control in the archipelago, but as an explanation of why the others have grabbed China's territory. The representation of China's attitude at the conference resembles one of the points in Levine's checklist for nationalism. China is depicted as a great and responsible nation with a foreign policy based on universal values such as

justice and equity. The attitude the author reveals in the article resembles what Whiting terms "*affirmative nationalism*". The other claimants behaviour are perceived as a *threat* to China's interests.

Article 3: "China's Naval history 1846-1949" (Book published in 1993)

Title: *Opinions on the Nansha dispute*

Unfortunately, I do not know by whom this book is published. This, because the article from the book was given to me by the Chinese student at Fudan. When I asked him for more accurate references, he told me he did not know and that it was impossible for him to ask one more time for the book at the library. The only thing he knew was that the book was published in 1993. This article focuses on historic evidence backing China's claim to the Spratly islands. The author explains the course of events that has created the current situation, and argues that China has been treated *unfairly* by the international community.

In the first section, the author presents two factors to explain why China in this century has lost her full sovereignty to the archipelago. First, it is the discovery of oil. "Now, the surrounding countries get benefits from robbing the oil resources in Nansha." However, not only the Southeast Asian countries have tried to benefit from stealing China's resources: "Western powers have not intervened, but must be associated with their oil companies. Hence, they have intervened in secret." In the same vein, the author focuses on the sufferings faced by China as a result of colonialism. The author blames the west for occupying Nansha: "In the last 100 years, imperialist countries have occupied Nansha because of Nansha's strategic position. China remembers well. Colonialism brought people slavery and pain. Chinese people have suffered from colonialism. The imperialist powers have forced China to give

⁶⁴ The five principles are: Mutual respect for each others integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, peaceful co-existence.

away territory and pay money. Still, China is acting calmly and constrained in the Nansha problem".⁶⁵ The author underlines that the imperialist powers who humiliated China so severely in the last century are back in disguise to exploit China's oil in the South China Sea. However, the article also stresses that China is *not* seeking revenge. China is again portrayed as a *responsible* country.

The second reason listed by the author to explain the misery of China's current position, is the cultural revolution: "In the 1960s and 1970s, China faced the disorders of the cultural revolution. At that time, China could not be concerned about these islands so far from the continent." The author argues that China in the early seventies did not realise the *value* of Nansha. According to the author, the Cultural Revolution explains why China was not able to defend her interests in the process leading towards the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The author holds that the maritime boundaries of the sea decided by China in 1947 should be the foundation on which to judge who has the right to the islands. "The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea has been valid from 1994 onwards, but *history cannot be denied* because of this convention" (My emphasis). The author puts that historical evidence of a Chinese ownership should have precedence before the UN convention, and he is apparently unaware of the fact that UNCLOS does not regulate the question of sovereignty to islands at all. The attitude expressed in the article corresponds with what an officer in the PLA-Navy, who I met in January 1997, told me.⁶⁶ He argued that UNCLOS is not favourable to China's interests in the South China Sea.⁶⁷ There is a possible contradiction, however, between UNCLOS and the Chinese view. In UNCLOS only so-called archipelago states have a right to ocean territories. Other states have sovereignty only to land and to zones around the *land*

⁶⁵ Japan controlled the Spratly archipelago from 1936/37 and until 1945, and it is interesting that the author does not mention Japan when writing about aggressive actions of foreign powers in the South China Sea. Japan, however, is not a part of the *humiliation narrative* so often referred to in China. That story is based on the experiences from the Opium War in 1839.

⁶⁶ I interviewed Officer Xia Liping in Shanghai the 13th of January 1997.

⁶⁷ As outlined in chapter three, UNCLOS does not decide upon *ownership*, only on the rights that ownership *generates*.

territory. The inclusion in UNCLOS of a category called archipelagic waters⁶⁸ is a modern adoption of the historical-waters notion, but China does not fit UNCLOS' description of an archipelago state. (Valencia,1998: 27). However, the officer maintained that since China had been too distracted to defend her interests in the process leading up to UNCLOS, the value of the convention as a source of law had to be questioned.⁶⁹

In addition to the chaos of the cultural revolution, the author lists China's *good intentions* as one of the reasons why China failed to protect her interests in the UNCLOS process: "China also fought for the interests of the third world, neglecting to think of her own possible benefit." China is thus portrayed as a *moral* country, helping other countries while being careless about her own interests.

In sum, China's *historical rights* is the most important factor. The author is convinced that the Nansha islands form an inseparable part of Chinese territory. It is not so much the resources as China's *honour* and *rights* that are important. China's historical suffering has to be rightened. In this respect, the author's attitude resembles one of the points in Levine's "nationalism"-checklist: the "humiliation narrative". Western countries have treated China badly, and now it is time for China to be accorded compensatory treatment. This is underlined by the fact that the author not only focuses on the behaviour of other states in the region, but also includes the Western powers as participants in the conflict. In sum, this article, like number one, may be classified as *assertively nationalist*. China has to stand up against the *others* and claim her rights.

Article 4: Ya Tai Zi Liao (Asia Data) 1994, No.39

Title: "The influence of Taiwan's economic relations on the Nansha dispute" (Taiwan jing mao guanxi de fa zhan dui Nansha shi de jing xiang)

⁶⁸ UNCLOS, Article 46-54

The journal is published in Beijing by the *Beijing Institute of Political Science* (Beijing Zhengzhi Xueyuan).

This article discusses and severely criticises Taiwan's attitude, and expresses anxiety that other countries in the region are *conspiring* with Taiwan against China.

The first line in the article is again typical for the South China Sea-articles: "The South China Sea has been a part of China's sacred territory since ancient times" (Nanhai shi Zhong guo shengjing ling tu) The only new word is "sacred". By using a word with religious connotations the author portrays the Chinese territory as something mythical and untouchable, and this strengthens the emotional aspect of the text.

In the next section the author draws long historic lines, tracing the common heritage of the two Chinas. According to the author, "people on Taiwan and the people on the mainland are both descendants of the yellow emperor." (Ying huang zi sun). The yellow emperor is supposed to have lived 5000 years ago, and is considered the ancestor of all Chinese people. (Bøckman, 1997: 99). When referring to this myth, the author stresses a common, genealogically defined Chinese identity. In this way, a strong association between Taiwan and the mainland is asserted.

The main theme in the article is Taiwan's economic relations with countries in Southeast Asia. The author holds that Taiwan's economic relations with *Vietnam* are making the situation in the South China Sea more difficult: "The development of economic ties between Taiwan and Vietnam will produce new instability in Nansha." Instead, Taiwan should concentrate on strengthening its relationship with the PRC: "Both sides should hold their hands together and share the benefits. Taiwan and the mainland should develop and protect Nanhai together." In November 1993, Taiwan announced its *Southward* policy with the aim of expanding Taiwan's economic, trade and investment relations with Southeast Asian countries (Samuel Ku,

⁶⁹ China ratified the UNCLOS in 1996

1995: 283). Since this article is written in 1994, it is likely that the article is a reaction to the formalisation of Taiwan's economic orientation towards Southeast Asia.

In the next section of the article, the author describes how Taiwan now tries to *align* the countries of Southeast Asia against China: "Last December, Taiwan's foreign minister stated that Taiwan's co-operation with communist China was too small, and that Taiwan's Nansha policy should be to join the Asia-Pacific against China. Alone none of them can harm China's interest in the Nanhai, but together they can." The author expresses a fear that Taiwan will shift sides and leave China alone in the *Nansha* question. Such a development would indicate a deeper cleavage between China and its Taiwanese province, and threaten the idea of a united China. According to the author, the greed of the Taiwanese people has made them forget what is important. "Because of the development of Taiwanese-Vietnamese relations, some Taiwanese do not care about the benefit of the country anymore." Here, the author identifies Taiwan as an enemy *within* the Chinese nation. The author blames the Taiwanese for betraying China. This is a serious accusation, and it is surprising given the fact that all along Taiwan has been acting in solidarity with the PRC on this issue. In March 1993, Taiwan adopted "Policy Guidelines for the South China Sea", which restated a sovereignty claim almost similar to the one issued by China. In April 1995, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs re-emphasised this position by saying: "Undoubtedly, our government has sovereignty over the historic U-shaped territory, including the Spratly Islands" (Valencia, 1998: 29). The mainland authors attempt to accuse someone *within* for betraying the nation and aligning itself with China's enemies may be interpreted as a nationalist strategy aimed at strengthening the feeling of *unity* among those who have been betrayed.

The author also fears *Vietnam's* membership in ASEAN: "In time Vietnam will join a military union. If the Taiwan government for its own benefit aligns itself with them against us, this will make the Nansha situation much more complex and unstable." The author clearly has a rather paranoid fear that all the countries involved will eventually turn against China.

In the last section the author urges action to prevent the development of a Taiwanese-Vietnamese alliance: "We should as soon as possible take action to remove this bad influence on the Nansha situation.» Three courses of action are prescribed: "First, we should change the investment environment to attract Taiwan's interest. Second, we should develop trade between China and Vietnam so that Taiwan loses influence in Vietnam. Third, it is important to develop co-operation between China and Taiwan in Nansha. We could build an oil-construction together." It is interesting that the author wants to develop economic ties with Vietnam to prevent increased co-operation between Taiwan and Vietnam. The relationship between China and Vietnam was normalised in 1991, and after that the two countries have gradually opened up for bilateral trade. Second, it is even more interesting in our context that the author wants to develop co-operation between Taiwan and the PRC in Nansha. Taiwan and the PRC, however divided, have put forward a similar claim in the South China Sea, and rumours say that Chinese soldiers in the Spratlys have received fresh water from the island Taiwan occupies, Itu Aba. (Valencia, 1997: 30).

In sum, the article is concerned with the effects of the Taiwan-Vietnam relationship on the Nansha dispute. The article expresses an attitude that lies in-between *assertive* and *aggressive nationalism*. The author identifies a specific *threat* that requires action to protect vital interests. It should be noted, however, that this threat is not foreign, but *semi-internal*. Further, the author prescribes a *non-violent* recipe. Economic means, not force, is suggested as the way to prevent an alignment of China's enemies.

Article 5: Guofang (Defence) 1994, No. 4

Title: "Our Second homeland" (Women de di er guo tu)

This journal is published in Beijing by the *Military Defence Institute* (Guofang Junshi Xueyuan). This institute is run by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Guofang is a military journal concerned with matters related to the national defence.

The article in *Guofang* can be read as a call for stronger emphasis on the *sea*. The first words are: "The sea is the most important space for the survival and development of human beings. The sea is our second territory. The protection and exploitation of the sea is a great responsibility, it concerns the safety and development of the Chinese people." The author stresses the *military* value of the sea: "The sea is the defensive outpost of coastal states, and thus it has an important military value."

A thousand years ago, China was a maritime power in Southeast Asia. During the Song dynasty the navy was made an independent branch of the military, and in 1132 the emperor established the Imperial Commissioner's Office for Control and Organisation of Coastal Areas. The coast was defended by an ocean-going fleet and China was active in naval development, shipbuilding and trade. In this period China established herself as a naval power in Southeast Asia (Leonard: 1984). However, in the 15th century China's naval expansion ceased. The Ming dynasty suddenly turned inwards. The great Chinese voyages conducted in 1400-1433 were stopped, and shipbuilding was restricted to small-size vessels (Fairbank, 1992: 138). The *Yonglo* emperor adopted a policy that prohibited domestic ships to travel overseas and did not allow foreign ships to enter Chinese waters.

Under the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), China's foreign relations were for a long time almost *exclusively* concerned with the Inner Asian frontier. The Manchus concentrated their attention on internal security rather than coastal defence. This made China vulnerable to encroachments from the sea, and when Great Britain launched the Opium war in 1842 China was unable to defend herself. Hundred years later, Mao was also mostly concerned with the defence of the *land territory*. In the post-Mao era, however, China has redirected her attention to the sea. The PLA-Navy has undergone a huge transformation, and China has declared that she wants to develop a blue water navy (Goodman, 1997: 72).

The author of this article refers to *Ma Han*, an American naval strategist, in order to underline the significance of the sea.⁷⁰ According to the author, Ma Han (1840-1914) once stated that "...the thriving and fading of every country is decided by whether it controls the sea or not." According to the author this sentence became the truth in the 19th century. "In the age of colonialism, China's gate to the sea was broken by the strong ships and powerful cannons of the imperialist powers." Here, the author tends to use China's weak naval power in the last century as an *explanation* for the "fall" of China. In the context of China's "history of humiliation», this is a strong argument for paying more attention to the sea. Hence, the author gives the *sea* a superior status in the development of China in the next millennium.

After a brief outline of the range of China's maritime territory and China's history of *discovering, managing, exploiting* and *protecting* the Nansha islands, a history that in great detail corresponds with what is told in the other articles concerned with China's historical rights in the South China Sea, the author discusses the failures of China's naval policy through history. According to the author the Chinese emperors in earlier centuries failed to pay proper attention to the sea. This, at the same time, gives an advice to the current leaders. They must not repeat the failures of their predecessors. Rather, the author stresses: "we should focus on naval strategy, care about seas, study seas, exploit seas, protect our maritime rights and uphold state sovereignty."

In the concluding section of the article, the author discusses the challenges China is facing. He describes how other countries have been invading Chinese waters because of the abundant resources and great economic value of the South China Sea. According to the author, the surrounding countries have occupied more than 40% of China's "second territory". To underline the seriousness of this fact, he compares this number with the similar percentage of China's disputed land territory: "this is eight or nine times as much as the disputed area on land." In the following, the author uses rather strong terms when describing the actions of the other claimants in the South China Sea. They have "invaded and partitioned our

⁷⁰ The naval strategists' *American* name is Alfred Thayer Mahan.

waters, and grabbed our resources. Our maritime rights have been violated so severely that it has rarely happened to any country in history." Again, the author stresses how grave the incursions upon China's second territory have been.

In this last part of the article, the author underlines that there is no time to lose. He holds that "man is stepping into a maritime time. Developed countries have already sounded the call to march towards the seas." This picture underlines a modernising spirit required by the passage from an old to a new period. Western countries are already on their way, and China has to act now. In the last sentence of the article the author warns: "The mortifying history and the harsh facts ring an alarm bell for the Chinese people: either we rise in the contest for the sea, or we fail again."

When reviewing the content of this article, one has to decide whether it should be read as an expression of how the military *perceives* the situation in the South China Sea, or whether it should be interpreted as a *petition* from the PLA-Navy to the central leadership. According to You Yi (1998: 85) there has been a rising *sea-power mentality* (*haiyang yishi*) in China in recent years. This *Guofang*-article emphasises the importance of the sea, and links it up to the history of Chinese humiliation. The emphasis on sea-power is by this interwoven with strong nationalist sentiments. It is obvious that the PLA-Navy would be favoured with generous budgets (and prestige) if the Chinese leadership decided to put more emphasis on the sea. PLA has a clear interest in such a development, and the article could be read merely as an attempt to underline the importance of the PLA-Navy.

However, there is also reason to believe that the article expresses the general emotion among the naval commanders in the PLA-Navy. According to Ellis Joffe (1997: 59) a strong sense of *nationalism* is especially prominent in the Peoples Liberation Army. This has two reasons. First, Chinese officers work in an intensely nationalist environment and are continuously exposed to nationalist values. Joffe argues that there is a widespread feeling among the PLA commanders that "China is again subjected to encroachment on her independence which is

reminiscent of past imperialist humiliations and which continues to obstruct the pursuit of its rightful place as a major power" (1997: 60). The second reason is that Chinese officers perceive themselves as the chief protectors of China's objectives and pride. Hence, the article examined here gives a glimpse into how the PLA perceives China's position in the South China Sea. According to You Yi (1998: 87), the navy now functions as the link between the growing sea-power mentality and the rising nationalism in China. The self-interest of the PLA-navy and nationalist sentiments in its ranks thus form a potent mix.

The author of the article emphasises China's *security* as the most important factor in the Spratly dispute. However, a nationalist drive for sea power seems to be the overriding motive. It could also be that the commanders in the PLA use a nationalist rhetoric in order to increase its influence in the central leadership. In order to underline the seriousness of the encroachments upon China's sovereignty the author *uses* the humiliation narrative. He draws parallels between contemporary challenges and historical failures. The language used in the article resembles even more than in the others what Whiting terms *aggressive nationalism*: "a specific foreign enemy is identified as a serious threat that requires action to defend vital interests" (Whiting,1995: 297). The foreign threat is identified as the *other countries* involved in the Spratly dispute. They try to grab China's *resources* and take control over Chinese *territory*.

5.2.4 Summary of the findings in the five articles

I started by making a study of five selected articles. One was published in 1991, one in 1993 and three in 1994. All of them assumed that there is a wealth of resources in the *Nansha* area. They discuss the activities and attitudes of other countries and outline the historical basis for China's right to the South China Sea. The authors repeatedly stress that the *Nansha* is an integrated part of China, and most of the arguments used are built on this unquestionable assumption. The authors all share a conviction that China's sovereignty has been violated.

Three of the articles depict Vietnam as the most aggressive of China's adversaries. In the same way as China, Vietnam claims that the whole Truong Sa (Spratlys) belongs to it by historical right. In 1974, China invaded and occupied the part of the Paracels (Huong Sa) which had been held by South Vietnam. The climate between the two countries remains tense, despite the official normalisation of their relationship in 1991, and the fact that they intend to solve their boundary dispute in the Tonkin Gulf before the year of 2000. The hostile attitude towards Vietnam in the articles from 1991-1994 indicates that it is the Sino-Vietnamese conflict which in China is conceived as the most serious obstacle to solving the South China Sea dispute. Four of the articles refer to the "humiliation narrative", comparing the current situation with encroachments upon China's territory in the 19th century. The historical parallel is further underlined by the fact that some of the authors use the term "imperialist powers" for current actors in the conflict. The "mood" in the articles varies from *affirmative* to *aggressive* nationalism. The article in *Ya Tai Yan Jiu* has the most conciliatory tone, while the article in *Guofang* urges China to immediately march forwards. The other three articles are expressions of an *assertive* nationalism. The PLA Journal is the one with the most aggressive tone. This is not surprising. As discussed, in China as elsewhere, the military more often than other segments perceives reality through "nationalist" glasses.

There is a marked difference in emphasis between the articles when it comes to what kind of elements they stress as important. There is also a difference in the degree of aggressive language as well as in policy prescriptions. The number of articles is too small, however, to identify any *pattern* in the variations. In the next section I will categorise the contents in all the 64 articles I have translated. If it is possible to trace significant differences *over time* and *between journals* using the above mentioned criteria of variation, this could indicate two things: First, changes in the way the Spratly conflict has been perceived by the research elite. Second, that different kinds of research environments have diverging interpretations of China's interests and policy options.

5.2.5 64 Articles

Thematically the other articles explore the same ground as the five articles already analysed. However, some other subjects are also introduced. Among them the effects of the "China threat", the danger that the dispute may become internationalised and the consequences of interdependence. I have categorised the 64 articles as what is to be considered their primary topic,⁷¹ and have tried to explore whether it is possible to trace significant changes in the way the authors argue *over time* and in *different kinds of magazines*.

Oil and fish resources:

8 of the articles, which all appeared in 1991 and 1992, focus mainly on the resource aspect. This could indicate that the resource dimension has become less important in recent years. None of the eight "resource" articles were printed in Beijing magazines. They appeared in journals published in Jinan, Shanghai and Yunnan. This could suggest that the southern provinces have been more concerned with the energy dimension than the the north. However, since most of the articles *to some extent* emphasise this dimension one should be careful not to pay too much attention to differences over time or between provinces.

Estimates for the resources in the South China Sea vary. As we have seen, the article in *Ya Tai Yan Jiu* (1994, No.2), cited 63 billion tons of oil. The same figure is used in more than ten of the other articles. In the rest, the authors operate with lower, but still optimistic, estimates. Hence, expectations *seem* to be great.⁷² One should ask, however, whether the authors actually believe in these estimates. An official from the Department of Treaty and Law in China revealed in a personal communication in 1998 that he thought China would be less patient in the South China Sea if the Chinese

⁷¹ The evaluation is based on the *title* of the article and the *space* used discussing each subject.

⁷² Until 1993 China was a net exporter of oil. However, China's oil production now no longer covers the demand. North-eastern oil fields like Daqing and Shengli are on the decline, and the prospects for finding offshore oil in internationally recognised Chinese waters are quite limited. The Tarim Basin in Xingjiang province, however, is expected to carry nearly 250 billion barrels, but is extremely difficult to exploit (Calder, 1996:56). Hence, the 63 billion tons in the South China thus would make a *difference* for China.

estimates were *proven* to be realistic.⁷³ This could indicate that the positive numbers are to be understood more as an example of *overstatements* than as real calculations.

Only two of the total number of articles mention fish resources. This is surprising, given the fact that the Spratly area is an important fish ground, notably for Taiwanese, Chinese, Filipino and Thai boats.⁷⁴ Estimates place the fish yield in the Spratly area alone at 7.5 tons per square kilometre.⁷⁵ As the traditional fishing grounds along the Chinese coast are depleted as a result of overfishing, China is now redirecting her fishing fleet toward the South China Sea.⁷⁶ However, for some reason this is not a major part of the South China Sea discourse in China.

Historical rights:

The historical basis for Chinese ownership to the islands is mentioned in all the articles, but discussed in depth in 17. These articles appear in magazines from all over China, but are most numerous in the Yunnan based journals.

The historical arguments refer to the principles of *discovery* and *occupation* in international law. Most of the authors also emphasise that the international community earlier in this century acknowledged Chinese sovereignty in the Spratlys. Says one article in *Nan Yang Wenti Yan Jiu*: "Our people first discovered Nansha. Our people first exploited and managed Nansha. This has been acknowledged by other countries."⁷⁷ However, even if the terms used in China to some extent correspond with those of UNCLOS, China has not yet specified her territorial claims in accordance with positions of the convention.⁷⁸

China's "historic claim" or "nine dotted line" in the South China Sea is vague. It is unclear both where the precise borders are thought to be and on what kind of legal

⁷³ Personal communication to Johan Henrik Nossun, July 1998.

⁷⁴ The South China Sea ranks fourth among the world's nineteen fishing zones in terms of total annual marine production (Coulter, 1996:375).

⁷⁵ *Philippine Star*, 19 June 1995, quoted in Francisco Magno (1996: 353).

⁷⁶ Plans for the development of the new Hainan province pay considerable attention to the fishery resources in the South China Sea and in the Spratly islands maritime facilities and fishing shelters have been erected in support of fishing activities in the disputed zones (Austin, 1998:264).

⁷⁷ October 1991.

⁷⁸ Nevertheless, on May 15 1996 China announced baselines around the Paracel (Xisha) islands.

basis the claim is made (Valencia, 1998: 24). When China in 1992 issued her Territorial Sea Law, she claimed a 12 nautical mile territorial zone around each of the Spratly islands, but she has never specifically delineated exclusive economic zones or delineated continental shelf around these features. Hasjim Djalal, ambassador at large in the Indonesian foreign ministry and the "founder" of the regional workshop process in Indonesia, feared in February 1998 that China would specify her claims according to the convention and thus provoke the other claimants to do likewise. According to Djalal, this would make the negotiation climate even more difficult.⁷⁹ In July 1998, a Chinese official from the Department of Treaty and Law, Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a personal communication revealed that China would relatively soon publish baselines around the Spratlys.⁸⁰ This indicates that China is now eager to base its claims more clearly in international law.

In the articles, however, the authors do not try to tackle legal intricacies, but concentrate on rhetorically defending China's nine-dotted line. They put weight on *historic evidence* of Chinese presence, as relics found on the islands, old Chinese maps and ancient Chinese names for the islands. Callahan (1998: 12) holds that China through articles of this kind is *constructing* a history of habitation. He thinks that it is curious that China talks about sovereignty in the Spratly archipelago at all, since what he calls the *language of sovereignty* is normally associated with land, population and administrative authority. The Spratlys are not populated. Thus no one is really administered, and it is questionable if the features above sea level can be called islands at all. Following Callahan's perspective, one could see that the historical articles should be interpreted as an *imaginative construction*. Journals and newspapers construct an idea of the Nanshas as some kind of territory, similar to land. This imaginative construction can only with great difficulty, however, be accepted in the terms of international law. Still, indications are that China is moving away from its *historically imagined nine dotted line* to claims grounded on the paragraphs in UNCLOS.

⁷⁹ Personal communication, Jakarta, 6. February 1998.

⁸⁰ Personal communication to Johan Henrik Nossun, July 1998.

The adversaries:

27 articles focus mainly on the activities of adversaries in the Nansha area. The main theme in these articles is that regional and Western countries are *uniting against China* and that they are trying to *internationalise* the dispute.

It seems to be a strongly held view among the PRC's elite that the international community is unfair when pointing its fingers at China for its actions in the South China Sea. Many authors refer to how hostile foreign powers are creating an imaginative idea of a "China threat". This idea is then used as an excuse to contain China. In *Guoji Guanxi Xue Yuan Xue Bao* (1995) one author writes: "The China threat theory is a fallacy. China's normal military actions have caused attention in the surrounding countries. What they fear is China's rapidly growing economy." In China, it is argued that the "China threat" is a result of a conspiracy aimed at containing China. Chinese authorities are careful not to provoke any idea of a "threat".

In early 1998, an author based on *Hainan island* published a book that may be put in the same basket as the much debated "The China that can say No" (*Zhong guo keyi shuo Bu*) from 1996. In contrast this book, however, the Hainan-based author did not primarily discuss domestic issues, but focused on China's foreign relations. In a nationalist manner the book discusses strategies and options for China as a superpower in the next millennium. Only a couple of weeks after it was published, the authorities in China withdrew the book. Apparently, they feared that the book might "feed" the "China threat" theory and consequently could give regional and extra-regional actors an excuse to contain China. This fear explains the tendency in the South China Sea articles to argue against accusations that China carries out an expansionist policy in the South China Sea.

More than half of the articles depict Vietnam as China's most aggressive adversary. In 5 articles Vietnam's actions in the South China Sea are the *main topic*. This either means that the Sino-Vietnamese relationship is the most troublesome from the Chinese point of view or that it is less risky to attack Vietnam than other regional countries. The two countries conflicting claims to the Parcel and Spratly islands are deeply intertwined in the generally, hostile climate between Vietnam and China.

However, in recent years the two sides have started talks on the negotiation of a border line in the Gulf of Tonkin. The results of these talks have been mixed. No negotiated treaty are signed yet. However, officials from Vietnams Department of Treaty and Law used the word "successful" when they described the Gulf of Tonkin-process.⁸¹ There is hope that these negotiations may lay the ground for talks between the two countries on the South China Sea-issue as well. This hope is reflected in one article in *Nan Yang Ya Yan Jiu* (1995). The author writes: "...The conflicting claims between China and Vietnam to Xisha (Paracel) and Nansha (Spratly) is a part of the general Sino-Vietnamese dispute. The improvement in the relationship between China and Vietnam now increases the hope that we can resolve the whole South China Sea problem."

China's economic relationship with Southeast Asia is also a frequently discussed topic. Some of the authors outline the consequences of China's *economic dependence*. An article in *Nan Yang Wenti Ya Yan Jiu* from 1991 writes: "...under this condition, the advantage of using force will be less than the disadvantage. China's main duty is still focused on economic development. A military conflict will damage the opportunity for co-operation between China and the countries of Southeast Asia" (*Nan Yang Wenti Yan Jiu*, July, 1991). The same thoughts are reflected in an article in *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu* from 1995⁸²: "In the Nansha dispute, what choice China should make is difficult. Chinese reform and modernisation will be damaged if a war breaks out in the South China Sea. In other words, if we use arms, China will pay the heaviest political costs. The regional environment that China so painstakingly has built up since the cold war and that now is in such a good condition, will worsen again and China will sink into a passive situation surrounded by enemies. If a compromise is reached this will be the best solution» (*Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu*, 1995, No 6). This article is written in the aftermath of the Mischief incident between China and the Philippines in February 1995, and may be interpreted as an

⁸¹ Official from the Ministry of Treaty and Law, Vietnam. (Personal communication, Hanoi, February 1998.)

⁸²

advice to the government to be careful not to provoke an armed conflict between the two countries.

Economic growth may both have a *push* and *pull* effect on China's *Nansha* policy. On the one hand, the need for additional resources to sustain the growth could lead China to an expansionist policy with the aim of securing oil resources. On the other hand China's economy is heavily dependent on continued trade with the other neighbouring countries, as well as with Japan, the USA and Europe. According to Goodman (1998: 13) China's current leaders have *accepted* the mechanisms of economic interdependence, but have not quite realised its political implications. The reluctance to realise these implications may be stronger among military officers than civilian bureaucrats and party cadres with civilian education.

The above statements reflect an awareness of the *dilemma* China is facing. Some authors recommend that China stay away from military actions in order to maintain a good economic relationship with Southeast Asia. At the same time, however, they stress that the *Nansha* islands have been a part of China since ancient times, and that China's sovereignty must be protected. This ambiguous attitude can be seen in an article published in *Shi Jie Jingji Shi Bao* (1994): "The important challenge that currently confronts Chinese diplomacy is how to protect our sovereignty in the *Nansha* islands, and at the same time not incite destructive effects on the political relationship between China and ASEAN" (*Shi Jie Jing Ji Shi Bao* 1994, No. 6). Hence, even in the articles that focus on the necessity of maintaining good relations with China's neighbours for economic reasons, the Chinese sovereignty claims are stated *absolute* and not negotiable. This seems to be an obligatory view. If someone wrote an article about the South China Sea without mentioning this obligatory statement, the article would probably not be published.

When the articles discuss *the others*, the fear of a *conspiracy* takes a prominent place. Oil is listed as the single most important factor to explain the eagerness of other countries to encroach on China's rights. Some authors also discuss the implications of China's interdependent economy. These authors represent a liberal segment of the elite. They endorse the obligatory view that China's sovereignty in the Spratlys is

unquestionable, but recommend a conciliatory policy in order to secure China's overall *economic* interests.

Security:

12 of the articles discuss in depth the strategic significance of the Nansha islands, and the security dimension is mentioned in most of the other articles as well. The twelve articles were printed between 1993 and 1996. As could be expected, four of them were printed in the military journal *Guofang*.

Many of them stress the necessity of maintaining a good relationship with the ASEAN countries. Says *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu* (1996, No.6): "The South China Sea is a natural focus for security co-operation in the Southeast Asian region. In order to solve the Nansha conflict, China will further strengthen her security co-operation with Southeast Asia." The same attitude is expressed in *Guoji Wenti* (1993 No.1) and *Zhong Guo Jingji Shibao* (1996, No.8). Another article in *Guofang* (1996, No.10) states: "The South China Sea is China's great wall at our southern gate. It is important to defend this part of our territory." With one exception, the *Guofang* articles use an aggressive language when discussing the security dimension. The authors all underline that it is *urgent* to China's leaders to pay more attention to sea defence.

It is a bit surprising that the security dimension is not *more* prominent. One possible explanation could be that there are few military journals among those I have surveyed. It should be noted, however, that the journal published by the PLA Military Defence Institute only printed six articles about the Spratly dispute over a ten years period.

5.2.6 Change and differences

Above, I have discussed the content of 64 articles. What can they tell us about how the Chinese South China Sea discourse is structured?

In the five-year period from 1989 to 1993 I found 21 articles about the South China Sea conflict. In the following four years there were 43 articles. Even if the numbers are small, the increase should indicate that the issue was getting more attention in the mid-

90s. Journals based *outside* Beijing have published articles about the South China Sea more frequently than the ones in the capital. The magazine that has published most articles is *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu*, based in Jinan province, north of Shanghai. In general, the journals based in the south (Shanghai, Fujian, Yunnan and Guangxi) discuss the South China Sea conflict more frequently than the Beijing-based journals. With the exception of Shanghai these provinces border the South China Sea, and are consequently more directly affected by developments in *Nanhai*.

The South China Sea discourse in China centres around four subjects: *resources*, the activities of *others*, *security* and the *historical basis* for Chinese sovereignty. If we part the articles in categories according to which of the four themes that figures most prominently, we find that the smallest category is *resources* and the largest is the *others*.⁸³ Second and third, are *security* and the *historical basis* for Chinese sovereignty. All the topics, except for *resources*, are discussed frequently in the whole period from 1989 to 1997. Hence, it is not possible to trace any significant changes over time when it comes to what kind of topics that dominate.

In the international South China Sea literature, the potential oil and gas resources are often listed as the *primary* factor behind the assertiveness of China in the Spratlys. The relative absence of articles focusing primarily on this topic could indicate that oil is not *the* most important motivating factor for China, although the Chinese seem to think it is the main motive of the others. Since most of the authors are well *aware* of the oil dimension it is likely that the resource-factor will become far more important *if* major discoveries should be made.

The activities of the *others* is the topic most frequently evoked. Hence, the relationship between China and other countries can be said to *dominate* the Chinese discourse. More often than not, other countries are considered *hostile* adversaries, in particular Vietnam. The discourse seems a part of an identity formulation process where *China* is portrayed as a victim with a right to defend itself but also with an interest in displaying moderation.

⁸³ This observation is based on what is reckoned the main theme in the article.

32 of the 64 articles should to be considered "nationalistic". That is, they use a language that resembles the elements in Levine's "check-list". The other articles use a more *neutral* language. However, only eight of the articles can be said to express an *aggressive nationalism*. Three of those articles were printed in *Guofang*.⁸⁴ Ten articles express *assertive nationalism*, while fourteen should be characterised as only affirmatively nationalistic. According to Whiting (1995: 295), only *aggressive nationalism* pushes governments toward military confrontation. Since only half of the articles are nationalistic, and the aggressive variant is only to be found in eight, I will argue that authors of the articles are only to a limited extent influenced by a hostile form of nationalism. And, if one follows the argument that elite perceptions may in turn influence the formulation of foreign policy, one could argue that the negative effects of nationalism on the formulation of China's Spratly policy is minor.

5. 3 The newspapers

Two newspapers will be analysed in this thesis: *Renmin Ribao* (The Peoples Daily) published by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee and *Jiefang Junbao* (Liberation Army Daily). *Renmin Ribao* is printed in millions of copies every day. Since it is the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, all editorials and commentaries represent the party view. *Jiefang Junbao* is published by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and is also sold in huge numbers all over China. Few other newspapers cover foreign policy issues. It would still have been useful to examine the contents of one or two larger newspapers published outside Beijing, for example in the southern provinces. In particular it would have been interesting to go through *Hainan Ribao* (Hainan Daily). Hainan province plays a special role in relation to the Spratly dispute. Hainan *island* is located in the the South China Sea and is of vital strategic importance for the PLA Navy. Besides, the contested Spratly and Paracel Islands are administratively a part of Hainan province. Geographically Hainan province is the main basis for the PRC's claims in the South China Sea. Unfortunately, I did not manage to get hold of *Hainan Ribao* while in China to collect sources.

⁸⁴ The others were printed in *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu*, in *Ya Tai Zi Liao* and in *Dang Dai Hai Jun*.

Both *Renmin Ribao* and *Jiefang Junbao* are important parts of the propaganda machinery in China. Hence, articles copied from these newspapers are ideal for the "language as rhetoric" approach to textual analysis. This approach is similar to what has been termed the "outside approach" to studies of communication. (Wu Guogang, 1994: 194). This tradition focuses on the social effects of propaganda, and asks *how* the party state controls or persuades its citizens through the media.

While at the Hong Kong University Service Centre in 1997 I looked through all copies of *Renmin Ribao* and *Jiefang Junbao* from 1988 to 1997. Although I looked with an owl's eye I could not find more than 24 articles about the Spratly conflict in *Renmin Ribao* and 34 in *Jiefang Junbao*. Most of the *Renmin Ribao* articles are very short and may be characterised as *news bulletins*, while the ones in *Jiefang Junbao* are considerably longer. In the next paragraph I will present in detail three articles, two from *Renmin Ribao* and one from *Jiefang Junbao*. Then, I will survey the rest of the articles in order to explore whether it is possible to identify a pattern in the way the newspapers *speak* about the conflict.

5.3.1 Three articles

Article 1: *Renmin Ribao* 23.02.1988

This article refers to a statement made by Prime minister Li Peng during a visit to Singapore in February 1988. Li Peng put forward an offer to the other regional countries. He suggested that China and the other littoral states should develop the resources together, and asked if Singapore would like to be invited. He then underlined that the *sovereignty* to the Spratly islands belonged to China: "Nansha qun dao de zhu quan you Zhong guo".

The notion of *sovereignty* is highly important in all nationbuilding, and Chinese foreign policy has been characterised by the "centrality of sovereignty issues" (Kim,1996: 67). The word "Zhu quan" was first introduced to China through a translation for the Chinese court of an international law book (Callahan, 1998: 13). The Chinese word "quan" has been chosen as translation for *rights*. *Ren quan*, for example, means *human rights*. "Zhu" means *ruler*, and "Zhu quan" thus means the *right of the*

ruler. Definitions of sovereignty in modern Chinese dictionaries make a distinction between the internal and the external sphere. The sovereign state must be united domestically, in order to defend itself against external forces. Hence, in China the sovereignty concept refers not only to the protection of Chinese territory against *others*, but to the need for *internal unity*.

The idea of a *united empire* played an important part in the legitimation of past dynasties. The emperor's legitimacy was based upon whether or not he was in possession of «the mandate of heaven». This mandate was based upon the emperor's ability to defend the territorial borders against barbarians, and to keep law, order and prosperity internally. Ever since the opium war, the goal of regaining lost territory has been important in attempts to restore China's integrity and power. The defence of China's borders and the idea of a united China were a central element in Mao's revolutionary project, and many argue that this aspect plays an even more important role in the CCP's current legitimation strategies.

The regime's official policy is to "shelve the dispute, exploit resources jointly". Domestically it is important for the regime to simultaneously underline that it will keep peace and protect Chinese territory. By stressing China's sovereignty to the islands and waters of the South China Sea, the regime makes a point of defending even the smallest reef of the Chinese territory. Hence, it is the *territorial* and not the economic aspect that seems most important. In sum, since the article in *Renmin Ribao* so strongly underlines the *sovereignty* aspect, I will argue that it is possible to interpret this article in a perspective of *regime legitimation*.

Article 2: Renmin Ribao, 17.05.1995

This article refers to a press conference held by the ministry of foreign affairs. Its spokesperson had explained China's view on Philippine actions in the easternmost part of the Spratly archipelago. In February 1995 the Philippines discovered that China had built constructions on *Mischief Reef*, a feature close to the Philippines and considered by Manila to be Philippine territory. The Philippines immediately issued a strong

protest against what it termed "Chinese aggression in the South China Sea."⁸⁵ The incident sparked great anxiety in the region since this was the first time China had acted aggressively against other countries than Vietnam. In early May the Philippines sent a team of journalists to Mischief Reef. According to José Almonte, who at that time was the security adviser of the president of the Philippines, this was done in order to mobilise an international awareness of China's actions. The press conference in Beijing was held in order to state China's reaction to the Filipino protest.

According to *Renmin Ribao*, the spokesperson of the foreign ministry stated that: "the fact that the Philippines' army organised a press conference in Nansha is considered a serious violation of Chinese sovereignty. The Chinese government has issued a strong protest. Before this cruel action, the Chinese government had requested that the Philippines should cancel the press conference. However, they decided to proceed with this aggressive action and brought with them two warships and a fleet of other ships."

The article stresses that the Chinese government always reacts strongly when China's sovereignty in the Nansha is violated. Thus, the government's determination to defend China's territory is underlined. Three times in this rather short news bulletin it is repeated that the Philippines had violated China's territory severely, and that the Chinese government had issued protests. In the last section, the Chinese government's *seriousness* is underlined when the newspaper delivers the following warning: "We advise the Philippines not to misunderstand China's power, and hope that they return to the right course of resolving disputes through negotiation. If in desperation it persists with the current course of action, it must be ready to handle the consequences."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ President Ramos security adviser, José Almonte, explained in an interview he gave to Stein Tønnesson and myself 29 January 1998 that he saw the South China Sea as the *Maritime Heartland* of Southeast Asia, and wanted this vision to be spread to the international community.

⁸⁶ The Mischief reef-incident did not result in military confrontation. However, reports in the Philippine press indicate that PRC naval vessels appeared as a Philippine navy tank landing ship was launching helicopter sorties over Mischief reef carrying reporters. As soon as the PLA vessels appeared, the Filipino naval tankers left the area. (Austin, 1998:88).

This article in *Renmin Ribao* was *not primarily* aimed at foreign consumption. Statements that are directed at foreign countries are broadcasted by China's English news service *Xinhua*. The article is written for a domestic audience and affirms that the Chinese government is determined to oppose any encroachment upon Chinese territory. Even though the article does not specify how far the government is willing to go in order to prevent further aggression by the Philippines in Nansha, it indicated that the consequences could be serious. In this respect, the language used belongs to Whiting's category "aggressive nationalism". In sum, given the emphasis on the regime's ability to protect Chinese sovereignty, this article can be interpreted as an attempt to boost the regime's legitimacy domestically through a nationalist call for military action against the enemy.

Article 3: Jiefang Junbao, 16.10.1991

This article is dedicated to "the protectors and builders of China's maritime territory", and describes the living conditions for Chinese soldiers stationed in Nansha. The Chinese soldier is portrayed as a *national hero* defending his country in the South China Sea.

In the first section, the article stresses the value of the *Nanhai*: "Today, the Chinese people keep a watchful eye on this sacred and extensive maritime territory. As people's consciousness is awakening, they ask themselves: What should we do? The Chinese soldier is the answer. In Nansha, the soldiers have the special kind of fighting spirit: time waits for no man. When the soldiers think of our country's dependence on the sea they feel a burning sense of urgency in their bodies."

In the following, the article describes how the soldiers in Nansha suffer from typhoons, heat, draught and hunger. "They were exposed to the sun, worked under moon and stars, and fought against the sea." Moreover, since the soldiers work so hard in the Nansha, they will, according to the article, "be rated as the iron army at sea". The rest of the article describes in detail what the soldiers have to go through, and it ends with a declaration: "In the isolated

islands so far from the mainland, what a heroic scene, what a group of heroic people!"

This article does not underline Chinese sovereignty in Nansha in straight terms as do the two articles in *Renmin Ribao*. Rather, by portraying the heroic soldier as the protector of China's valuable territory in the *Nanhai*, the article tries to create a sense of emotional bounding to Nansha. The national heroes in the Spratlys function as national role models, and appeal to the readers' patriotic feelings. Hence, the article evokes *national sentiments*, and could in this respect be regarded as a part of an *official nationalism* campaign.

5.3.2 Change and differences in 58 articles

The three newspaper articles examined above have been selected because they are *typical*. They frequently invoke Chinese sovereignty and express national sentiments. In *Renmin Ribao*, most articles are short and repeat statements made by the ministry of foreign affairs. The language in these articles are held in a rather neutral tone, but even such brief reports always stress that China has indisputable sovereignty to the islands in the Spratly archipelago and often emphasise that China advocates a peaceful solution to the conflict. The government seems to have two basic messages to its population: First, the sovereignty issue is non-negotiable and second, China promotes international peace and stability.

The *Jiefang Junbao* articles are longer. They are not just news reports, but provide stories about the hardship of life in the Spratlys. In 1988, *Jiefang Junbao* printed a series of letters from Nansha. They carried titles such as "Understand Nansha, Love Nansha, Protect Nansha" (Liao dui Nansha, Re ai Nansha, Bao wei Nansha) and "Nansha remember Yang Zhi Liang" (Nansha ji zhe: Yang Zhi Liang). Yang Zhi Liang was a Chinese soldier who died in a storm while he was building constructions on a Chinese occupied reef. The use of words like *love* and *protect* in relation to a unloveable place like the Spratlys is ment to invoke national emotions and create a sense of pride and responsibility in the reader.

Of the 24 articles in *Renmin Ribao*, nine were published in 1988. In that year there were no less than seventeen such published in *Jiefang Junbao*. Hence, more than one third of the *Renmin Ribao* articles and more than half of the *Jiefang Junbao* articles were published in the year when China and Vietnam clashed in the Spratlys. *Jiefang Junbao* printed eight articles about Nansha in 1989, four in 1990, two in 1991 and then none until 1997. *Renmin Ribao* printed some every year except in 1993. What should be noticed, however, is that *Renmin Ribao* paid, in relative terms, considerable attention to the Sino-Philippines dispute over Mischief reef in 1994-1995, while *Jiefang Junbao* did not at all mention the Nanshas in this period. I will briefly comment upon the press coverage in these two periods of high tension.

The eight articles in *Renmin Ribao* in 1988 all refer to the conflict between China and Vietnam, and *Renmin Ribao* expressed itself rather aggressively. The articles underline China's sovereignty in the Nanshas and warn Vietnam that it has to take the responsibility for its hostile actions in the South China Sea. As the article published on february the 23rd writes: "If the Vietnamese government stands in the way of our actions in the South China Sea, it must take responsibility for the consequences". The *Jiefang Junbao* articles printed in the same period also issued strict warnings to Vietnam. It published eight *Nansha letters* evoking the Chinese people's emotional ties to the Spratlys. All these articles, both in *Renmin Ribao* and *Jiefang Junbao*, express an assertive nationalism, bordering on the aggressive one.

After 1989 *Renmin Ribao* made a marked shift towards a more conciliatory tone, while *Jiefang Junbao* continued to print assertive and aggressive articles. One should be careful not to interpret too much from a modest selection of articles printed in a military newspaper, but it is tempting to mention a rumour that I have picked up during interviews early in 1998. Someone with good access to decisionmaking circles in China told me that the PLA had planned to invade the Spratlys in the summer of 1989. However, the invasion had to wait til after the president Gorbachev's visit in June, and by then the Chinese leadership had got other problems to tend to on Tien An Men Square. According to my informant, China at that time "lost a great opportunity to

regain her lost territory". It could be that the PLA had the same feeling, and that they in the aftermath tried to keep the issue "warm" by printing articles using a language resembling an aggressive nationalism.

In 1995, when the Philippines had protested that China was building shelters on Mischief Reef, *Renmin Ribao* eight times from February to July criticised the Philippine government for its attempts to draw international attention to a bilateral dispute, which should be solved peacefully. In contrast to 1988, this time the regime did not seem to stir up sentiments in view of a conflict, but instead accused the adversary for doing so. Only one article identifies the Philippines' actions as a serious threat to China's interests. Beijing does not seem to have felt any need to mobilise national emotions in connection with the conflict with the Philippines. Again, however, the articles stress that the government *has* already reacted against encroachments upon China's sovereignty.

Jiefang Junbao printed no articles about the Nanshas in the first half of 1995. This is a bit peculiar, given the central position of the PLA-navy in the incident. According to Greg Austin, (1998: 90), rumours say that the PLA-Navy had built the structures on Mischief Reef without approval from the central government. He claims that local commanders in Guangzhou province took the decision to occupy Mischief reef on their own. It could perhaps be expected that the PLA's official newspaper would back this decision by directing attention to the South China Sea. At the same time, however, it could also be that the PLA wanted to keep a low profile not to irritate the central leadership or that the party leaders had a firm grip on the newspapers editorial policy.

The Spratly conflict - a legitimating device?

If the Spratly conflict were to be considered a part of an *Official nationalism - campaign* in China, articles discussing this subject should be expected to appear frequently and contain a language heavily loaded with nationalist connotations. The articles in *Renmin Ribao* and *Jiefang Junbao* are written in a language that to some extent either uses or stimulates *national sentiments*. Hence, it could be argued that the

South China Sea conflict has become a focus for Chinese *Official nationalism*. Thus, policies chosen by Beijing could in turn be influenced by the *interplay* between rhetoric and action. A strong rhetoric could provide a momentum leading to real actions. However, in order to fulfill such function, the rhetoric would probably have needed to be more frequently used. The fact that South China Sea articles appear only rarely in the Chinese press would seem to indicate that Beijing has been careful not to *use* the South China Sea conflict to boost national sentiments in the population in a way that could later tie its hands.

5.4 Principal findings

In this chapter I have analysed 64 articles from Chinese research journals and 58 articles from two of the main newspapers in China. The South China Sea-discourse in China centres around four subjects: *resources*, the activities of *others*, *security* and the *historical basis* for China's claims. In the journals, authors express their views on the Spratly conflict in nationalist terms. However, in sum their perceptions seem to be influenced more by an assertive or affirmative type of nationalism than a more aggressive one. The regime's *official rhetoric* is also influenced by a moderate form of nationalism. Only on certain occasions does the regime use a more aggressive language. However, the articles discussing the Spratly conflict do not appear frequently enough in the main newspapers to be considered a part of an *official nationalist* campaign. In the last chapter I will discuss the principal findings in more depth elaborate on possible implications and provide some concluding remarks.

Concluding remarks

Nationalism and China's *Nansha* rhetoric

The aim of this thesis has been to explore ways of assessing the impact of nationalism on China's South China Sea policy. This means that I have directed the attention to the impact of one specific domestic determinant of foreign policy in one specific case. *Nationalism* has in this thesis been identified as *ideology* and as a *legitimizing device*. In chapter two I discussed the possibility of measuring the relative influence of different independent variables. I criticised Rosenau's attempt to model a general theory that can definitely establish the relative strength of independent variables in the working of foreign policy. Then I outlined the theoretical foundations for suggesting a causal relationship between nationalism and foreign policy. Using these foundations as my point of departure, I analysed China's South China Sea discourse in order to reveal *if* and *how* nationalism seemed to influence foreign policy formulation in this particular case. In the analysis of the discourse, I used the "language as referential structure" and "language as intentional action" approach. Hence, I focused on the role of the *agent* in the discourse, in opposition to the "language as relational system" approach.

1. Findings

In the first part of the analysis I explored the statements used in journals and magazines. Using the *language as referential system-approach*, I found that there is a liberal segment in the elite that argues for a conciliatory policy towards the dispute in order to secure China's economic interests in Southeast Asia. In Chinese writings on international relations, there is a growing recognition of an "interdependent" reality. Over the last decade, there have been frequent references to *interdependence* in texts on international relations in China,

whereas this was completely absent in the earlier period. (Yong Deng, 1998: 317). The emphasis on China's *dependence on others* is reflected in some of the journals, and is in line with a more *pragmatic* orientation towards the conflict. At the same time, the voice of the *hard-liners* is also heard. They implicitly call for *confrontation* in the South China Sea. However, as assumed in chapter 3, in *sum* the articles in the journals only to a limited extent expressed a hostile form of nationalism. Rather, it was the *assertive* and *affirmative* types that were predominant in the discourse.

In the next part of the analysis, I explored the content of the newspaper articles. When doing this, I used the *language as intentional action*-approach. Contrary to what was assumed in Chapter 2, the analysis revealed that the Spratly conflict was only to a *limited extent* embedded in an official nationalism discourse. Hence, indications are that the regime is careful about using the conflict to boost nationalist sentiments as a way of legitimating its power. This may be underlined by an episode that took place while I was a student at Fudan University in Shanghai in 1996. In the early autumn of that year, China and Japan's territorial conflict in the *East China Sea* over the Dianoyutai (Senakaku) Islands sparked huge demonstrations in Hong Kong and on Taiwan. This was because anti-communist factions tried to mobilise nationalist sentiments as an attempt to criticise the Chinese government for being too *weak* in defending the national interest. They wanted the Chinese government to react more strongly against what they called encroachments upon the territory of the motherland. At Fudan University, students surfing the Internet picked up this critique. They used Fudan University's homepage to communicate appeals to the government and to announce demonstrations on campus. When this was discovered by the administration on Fudan, it closed the main server for several weeks. This episode illustrates the anxiety among Chinese authorities that territorial conflicts should get too much attention in the Chinese public sphere. There is a fear that what in the beginning might be a pro-China movement could in turn develop into an anti-communist movement.

As my analysis revealed, the military newspaper was more nationalist than the civilian ones. This is not particularly surprising, since the military is more often influenced by nationalist ideas than other segments of society. However, it could also be that the army was using nationalism for its own purposes. That is, that it sees an interest in boosting nationalist sentiments in the population in order to get higher budgets. Austin (1995: 314) argues that there was considerable disagreement in the leadership in the *Dianoyutay-case* on what course China should follow. Some of the members in the Standing Committee of the Politburo, who by commentators were believed to oppose the leadership of Jiang Zemin, apparently leaned towards military action. The ones who pressed for a more assertive policy opposed Jiang Zemin's call for a ban on demonstrations. Hence, they wanted to *capitalise* on public opinion to pressure the leadership towards a more aggressive policy. This may also have been the case in the Spratly conflict. However, this argument is weakened by the fact that *Jiefang Junbao* has only on rare occasions printed articles on the Spratly dispute.

In sum, the *journals* express a *conciliatory* form of nationalism when writing about the Spratly conflict. Furthermore, the relative absence of South China Sea articles in the public media indicates that the conflict is not strongly embedded in an official nationalism campaign in China.

2. Conclusions

Two main conclusions may be drawn from this thesis. First, the *Nansha* discourse indicates that China's Spratly policy is only to a limited extent influenced by aggressive nationalism. In sum, the journals express an assertive and affirmative, but not aggressive nationalism and the *public discourse* of the newspapers only on certain, rare occasions takes form of aggressive nationalism. Second, the Chinese regime will not negotiate China's sovereignty claim to the *Nanshas*. The domestic political costs of doing so could simply be too great.

The first conclusion is based on two assumptions. *First*, that the journals I have examined serves as *interpretative prisms* for Chinese policy makers. It should be

noted, however, that it is difficult to establish the *degree* to which scholarly writings reflect and influence official thinking. A systematic analysis comparing official views and scholarly analysis is certainly called for, but this has not been within the scope of this thesis. However, given what we know about the regime it is not likely that there is a *radical* difference between scholarly and official analyses. *Second*, I assume that there is a *feedback process* between official rhetoric, public opinion and policy formulation. The language used in the public media on certain occasions reveals an aggressive nationalism. However, such articles appear too rarely to be characterised as part of an official nationalism discourse. Hence, it is not likely that the feedback mechanism is influencing the formulation of China's South China Sea policy to any extent. There is, however, a possibility that if the legitimacy of the regime declines, the regime, or segments in the regime, may be tempted to radicalise the *rhetoric* in the domestic media, and hence the regime could become *trapped* by its own nationalist rhetoric. If this happens, official nationalism would to a much greater extent influence China's Spratly policy, and may even push the navy into action.

Allan S. Whiting (1995) argues that only *aggressive* nationalism may influence the foreign policy output. Hence, based on the conclusion in this thesis, China is not likely to act in ways that should cause war in the South China Sea in the near future. This indicates that China's hard/soft policy in the Spratly conflict is not a delaying tactic employed by the regime while it is waiting for the opportunity to launch a strike in the South China Sea. Rather, this policy could be an expression of a disagreement in the leadership on what course China should follow.

What seems clear, however, is that the PRC leaders will not surrender the Chinese claim to sovereignty over the disputed territories. The historical-symbolic content of the South China Sea conflict in the minds of the elite and in the public sphere indicate, however, that it may be occasions where the policy makers in China find it difficult to uphold a pragmatic South China Sea policy while at the same time maintaining their legitimacy as power-holders. The analysis revealed that the claim to sovereignty is not grounded in a *rational*

calculation of needs to secure China's access to deposits of oil and gas. Rather, it is grounded in emotions and ideology. The idea that China's sovereignty to the islands is indisputable seems to be grounded in the Chinese national identity, such as it has developed in the 20th century. The idea is shared by Chinese both in the PRC and in Hong Kong, on Taiwan and probably by most ethnically conscious Chinese overseas. The Spratlys are considered an inseparable part of the motherland, and occupation of the islands by others is interpreted as an encroachments on Chinese territory. All the articles, both in the newspapers and in the journals, repeatedly underline the necessity of defending China's sovereignty. Hence, in sum, the analysis explains why China has been so careful not to discuss the sovereignty issue in bilateral and multilateral talks. It also reveals that although the conflict is not tightly knit to the question of legitimacy today, there is a potential that it could be used as a means to boost popularity if the legitimacy of the regime is further reduced. This would especially be the case if military *hard-liners* gain weight in the foreign policy making process.

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APPENDIX 1

The articles

A. Journals:

GUOFANG

Title: Defence

Published: Military Defence Institute, Beijing

1993 No. 2

"A look to the sea of China"

(Zhong guo hai fang cong lan)

1994 No. 4

"Our Second homeland"

(Women de di er guo tu)

1995 No. 2

"Nansha questions"

(Nansha wenti)

1995 No. 2

"China's main security problems"

(Leng zhan hou wo guo de guo ji. An quan huan Jing Yu Zhu ya de an quan wenti)

1995 No. 7

"The argument that China pose a threath in Nansha should be stopped"

(Zhong guo zai nan hai zhi zao wei xie "de lun ciao ke yi xiu yi")

1996 No. 10

"Ocean. Ocean opinion. The great wall of the ocean"

(Hai yang. Hai yang guan. Hai shang chang cheng)

WAI JIAO XUE YUAN XUE BAO

Title: Foreign Studies Journal

Published: Foreign Affairs College, Beijing

1988 No.2

"The Chinese sovereignty of Xisha and Nansha prevents foreign countries from invading"

(Zhongguo dui Xi she qun dao he Nansha qun dao de zhu quan bu rong wai guo qin fao)

1994 No.4

"The evolution of the relationship between China and the countries in Southeast Asia after the second world war"

(Zhou hou zhong guo yu dong nan ya guo jia guangxi de yen bian he fa zhan)

YA TAO ZI LIAO

Title: Asia Data

Published: Asian Pacific Ocean Research Institute, CASS, Beijing

1994 No.38

"Vietnam speed up expansion in the South China Sea"

(Yue nam jia jin xiang Zhong guo Nanhai kuo zhang)

1994 No.39

"Taiwans economic relations influence on Nansha"

(Taiwan jing mao guanxi de fa zhan dui nansha shi de jing xiang)

1994 No.42

"To solve Nansha problem, economic exploitation should be stressed"

(Jiejue nansha wenti yinggai qiangdiao jingji kaifa)

1994 No.43

"Vietnam expand in the South China Sea"

(Yuenan zai nan Zhong guo hai kuozhan)

JIN DAI SHI YAN JIU

Title: Modern History Study

Published: Institute of Modern History, CASS, Beijing

1997 No. 3

"Introduction to the Chinese government and Chinese people maintenance of the Nansha territory"

DANG DAI HAI JUN (SHUI BING)

Title: Modern Navy

Published: The Publisher of "Dang Dai Hai Jun", Beijing

1992 No. 4

"The water sentiment of the Nansha soldiers"

(Nansha shui bing shui zhi qing)

1992 No. 4

"Sovereignty tablet put up"

(Zhong ma an she zhu guan bei tou fang)

1992 No.5

"For the sake of the sovereignty to Nansha"

(Wei le zhu quan chuang Nansha)

1994 No.9

"Many stories from Nansha"

(Nansha gu shi duo)

1995 No. 3 "Nansha - in which family"

(Nansha- dang shu shui jia?)

1995 No. 7

"Strong navy."

(Hai shang jin lu)

1996 No.13

"Fish big fish at Nansha"

(Nansha ciao da yu)

1997 No.4

"Nansha sentiments"

(Nansha qing)

XIAN DAI GUOJI GUANXI

Title: Contemporary International Relations

Published: Institute of Contemporary Foreign Relations, Beijing

1991 No.3

"The development of China-Southeast Asian relationship"

(Zhongguo yu dong nan ya tai guanxi de fa zhan)

1994 No.5

"Security idea, structure and strategy in Asia"

(Ya Tai di qu an quan guan, an quan jie guo an quan zhan lue)

GUOJI GUANXI XUE YUAN XUE BAO

Title: International Relation Journal

Published: Institute of International Relations, Beijing

1995 No.2

"The effect of the "China Threat" to our surrounding environment and relevant measures"

(Zhong Guo Wei Xie lun dui wo guo zhou bian huan jing de jing xiang ji you guan dui di)

YA TAI YAN JIU

Title: Asia-Pacific Studies (Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies)

Published: Institute of Asia Pacific Studies and Society of Asia Pacific Studies, Beijing

1994 (February)

(No title)

ZHONG GUO JING JI SHI BAO

Title: China Economy Study

Published: Development Research Center of the State Council, Beijing

1996 (09.08)

"Security"

(Anquan)

DANG DAI YA TAI

(YA TAI YAN JIU)

Title: Contemporary Asia

Published: China Institute of Social Science, Beijing

1992 No.5

"The Vietnamese intention towards the regions security"

(Vietnam dui di qu an quan zheng ce de yu yi tu tiao zheng)

1994 No.2

(No title)

GUOJI ZHAN WANG

Title: World Outlook

Published: Shanghai Institute of International relations, Shanghai

1988 No.7

"The unstable origin of the Nansha Island conflict"

(Nansha qun dao feng yun tan yuan)

1992 No.5

"Peace is the necessary way to seek reasonable solution"

(He ping shi moqiu heli jie jue de biyou zilu)

GUOJI GUANCHA

Title: International Survey

Published: Foreign Language Institute, Shanghai

1994 No.6

"The relationship between China and ASEAN after the cold war characteristics, questions and future"

(Hou leng zhan shi qi zhong guo yu dong many guanxi - tedian, wenti yu qian jing)

YA TAI LUN TAN

Title: Asia Pacific Forum

Published: Institute of Social Science, Shanghai

1996 No.3

"Contemporary Nansha sovereignty debate"

(Nansha zhu guan zheng yi xian zhuang)

DONG NAN YA YAN JIU

Title: South East Asian Studies

Published: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Yunnan

1988 No.4

"The origin and future of Nansha dispute"

(Nansha zheng duan de you lai qi zhang wan")

1991 No.2

"The overseas Chinese perception of historic data"

(Hue qiao chuan shuo yu liao kao zheng)

1991 No.2

"The comeback of Southeast Asian oil industry"

(Dong nan ya shi you gong ya dong shan zai qi)

1991 No 3

"South Sea Natural geography research"

(Nanhai zi ran di li suo yen)

1991 No.4

"The exploitation of Nansha oil and gas resource in the neighborhood countries"

(Zhou bian guo jia ru he lue duo wo nansha you qi zi yuan)

1993 No.4

"The influence of the Nansha dispute on Thailand"

(Nansha qun dao zheng dun ji qi dui tai guo de ying xiang)

1993 No.6

"Philippine – China"

(Zhong guo-Fei yu pin)

1994 No.1

"The internationalization trend of the Nansha dispute"

(Nansha wenti guoji hue qi shi)

1995 No.4

«The Nansha factor"

(Nansha yinshu)

1995 No.6

"The changing relationship between China and ASEAN"

(Bian hue zhong de zhong guo dong mang guanxi)

1995 No.12

"Chinese and Asian Security"

(Zhong Guo yu Ding mang an quan)

1996 No.1

"After the 08.05 1995 elections in Philippines - the effect on foreign policy"

(Wo ba xuan ju hou fei yu pin zhuyao dui wai guanxi)

1996 No.2

"The waves go up and down in the new year"

(Bo lan qi tu you yi nian)

1996 No. 3

"South East Asia's practice on the Law of the Sea"

(Dong Nan Ya di qu de hai yen shi jian)

1996 No. 6

"Characteristics and trends of security operations in China"

(Dong Nan Ya Di Qu An quan quan he zuo tedian ji zou xiang)

NAN YANG WENTI YAN JIU

Title: Southeast Asian Affairs

Published: East Asia Institute, Fujian Province

1991(July)

"The current situation about ownership to Nansha, and the measures China should take"
(Nan hai zhu quan gui shu wen ti xian zhuang yu wo guo ying cai qu de dui ce).

1991 (October)

"The struggle of the Chinese government exercising and protecting its sovereignty to islands in the South China from 1912-1949"
(1912-1949 nian zhong guo zheng fu xing shi he wei hu nan hai zhu dao zhu quan de dou zheng)

1992 (January)

"Historic evidence"
(Lishi Zhengju)

1996 No.2

"Evidence that our people have developed Xisha and Nansha"
(Wo guo renmin kaifa jing ying xi, nansha qun dao de zhengju)

GUOJI WENTI

Title: International problems

Published: Yunnan Institute of International Studies, Yunnan

1992 No. 1

"The trend of Nansha struggle"
(Tan nansha dou cheng fa zhan qu xiang)

1993 No. 1

"The changes of Southeast Asian Military situation and strategy"

(Dong nan ya di qu an jun shi xing shi he fang wu zhan de bian hua)

1993 No.2

"After the normalization of the China Vietnam relationship: past and future"

(Zheng chang hua zi hou de zhong nan guanxi: hui gu yu qian zhan)

DONG NAN YA ZONG HENG

Title:

Published:

1995 (February)

(No title)

1996 (March)

"Philippines situation and security"

(Feilixin jushi yu anquan)

1996 (January)

"Traits of ASEAN characteristics"

(Yatai jinghe zhuzi de tedian)

1996

"ASEAN and security Cooperation"

(Yatai jinghe zhuzi yu anquan hezuo)

1996 (March)

"China and ASEAN"

(Zhongguo yu Yatai jinghe zhuzi)

SHI JIE JINGJI YAN JIU

Title: World Economy Study

Published: Editorial Office of "Shi Jie Jingji Yan Jiu", Shanghai,

1994 (17.06)

"Post cold war Sino - SEA relations"

(Hou leng zhan shi zhong huo yu dong meng guan xi de te dian wen ti yu qian jing)

YIN DU ZHI NA

Title: Indo China

Published: Nanning, Guangxi province

1988 No. 2

"What Vietnam names Changsha is not China's nansha)

(Yue nam suo shuo de changsha kai? fei zhong guo de nansha qun dao)

1989 No.3

"The future of the relationship between China and ASEAN after the resolution of the Cambodian conflict"

(Jian pu zhai wenti jie jue hou Zhong guo yu Dong Mang guojia guangxi zhan wan")

GUOWAI SHE HUI KE XUE QING KUANG

Title: ?

Published: ?

1996 (February)

"Sovereign dispute of Nansha»

(Nansha qun dao de zhu quan fen zheng yu fa zhan qu shi guo wai she hui ke xue qing kuang).

YA TAI DI QU GUOJI GUANXI GAI LUN

Title: Survey of Asian and International relationship

Published: ?

1992 (May)

"Nansha oil contract"

(Nansha shiyou hetong)

B. Book

China's naval history from 1840-1949

(Chapter 6 " The territorial dispute of Nansha)

C. Newspapers

RENMIN RIBAO

Title: Peoples Daily

Published: Propaganda Departement of the Central Committee, Beijing

1988:

4. January, 30. January, 2. February, 23. February, 28. April, 30. April, 13. May, 25. May, 4. June, 4. July.

1991:

28. March.

1994:

11. November, 23. November.

1995:

12. February, 28. March, 14. March, 12. May, 17. May, 7. July ,17. July, 31. July.

1996:

24. July 1996.

1997:

03. August, 23. July.

JIEFANG JUNBAO

Title: Liberation Army Daily

Published:Peoples Liberation Army (PLA), Beijing

1988:

4. January, 23. February, 5. March, 15. March, 17. March, 25. March , 7. April, 21.
April, 25. April, 4. May, 23. May, 5. August, 18. October, 25. October, 25.
November, 2. December, 28. December.

1989:

14. March, 11. April, 14. July, 7. May, 4. August, 4. September, 15. November. 23.
December.

1990:

2. July, 14. September, 16. December, 28. December.

1991:

11. October, 16. October.

1997:

29. January, 4. July, 4. October.