

China's Media Diplomacy In The South China Sea Disputes

Case Studies Of The Scarborough Shoal Stand-off And The Oil Rig Crisis

Le Thi My Danh ^{1*} Mark G. Rolls ²

¹ FPT University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

² University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

*Corresponding author. Email: tmdl1@students.waikato.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

The Scarborough Shoal stand-off and the oil rig crisis hold symbolic value to the Chinese. During the crises, China's sovereignty claims over the South China Sea have been recounted several times. As the way that the Chinese government has mobilized media tools to cover the crises and to shape its national image of their rival(s) via its narratives turned the territorial controversies into nationalist demonstrations, and deteriorated the bilateral relations, the demand to understand how the crises and media diplomacy could impact on the bilateral relations and the peace in the region has increased. Media diplomacy occurs when a government sends its diplomatic messages to its target audiences through speeches, press conferences, visits, or even leaks. To succeed, a government needs to have the ability to predict how different stakeholders will consume its message and how its target audiences are likely to respond. The paper uses the theoretical framework of media diplomacy to analyze media reports in China to understand how China deployed media tactics to fulfill its political goals in the crises and whether media diplomacy can be used as one of the ways to resolve the tensions.

Keywords: Media diplomacy, China, Scarborough Shoal stand-off, Oil rig crisis.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the controversies over the 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off (8 April – 5 June, 2012) and the 2014 oil rig crisis (1 May – 15 July, 2014), the most dangerous armed clashes between China and the other claimants over the South China Sea (SCS) since the 2010s, as case studies in China's use of media diplomacy. Press conferences released by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and media reports published by Xinhua and the People's Daily during the crises are collected. Then, the paper uses a method of critical discourse analysis to examine the contents of the selected media units and deployed the theoretical framework of media diplomacy to analyze media tactics of China. The paper discusses (1) how the Chinese government framed its political discourses, and deployed media tactics to support its SCS strategy to manage the crises, and (2) checks whether media diplomacy could be a new way to resolve the SCS tensions. The paper hypothesizes that China used media diplomacy to support its SCS strategy to handle the crises and protect the states' international prestige (Le 2021). The paper contributes to the media and IR studies about how a Communist state deploys media diplomacy to counter its rival states in territorial disputes.

2. MEDIA DIPLOMACY

Media diplomacy is a form of strategic communication including diplomatic meetings, media interviews of leaders and diplomats, public speeches, and media publications designed to reach target audiences so that they can achieve their political goals (Gilboa 2002; Ebo 1997; Cohen 2012, 1986; Riley 2014; Chhabra 2020). Riley and Hollihan (2012, 59-77) emphasize that stakeholders will consume messages from a government's media narratives differently "because they will be relying upon their own unique histories, cultural memories, social knowledge, notions of what constitutes good reasons, and normative rules for argumentative praxis." Hence, governments are required to have the ability to predict not only how their messages will be consumed and interpreted, but also how their partners and target audiences are likely to respond.

In territorial conflicts, claimant states can use media diplomacy to spread their territorial claims over disputed areas, defend, strengthen their arguments and policy, gain the support of the domestic and international audience for their policy and criticize rival(s)' aggressive actions and arguments (Riley 2014; Chubb 2016). In turn, the public in the country with the hostile government will put pressure on its government to change its hostile policy. A government is then able to balance or counter the propaganda of its rivals. Moreover, a government can mobilize support from a global audience, especially from powerful countries which may have an impact on the disputes. More important, a government can use media diplomacy to manage nationalism, which is a key factor in territorial disputes, then, transform popular sentiments into protest voices to put pressure on its rival(s). When both sides are in a diplomatic deadlock, the media function as a signaling channel (Gilboa 2001). When both sides agree to negotiations, media events can be used to build confidence and facilitate negotiations and mobilize public support for an agreement.

According to Cheng (2012), China, at the beginning of each crisis, releases its official statements to establish its position and principles for possible resolutions. Prior to a meeting for negotiation, the principles for negotiation are not only discussed between the parties to set out the parameters for the discussion to come, but also published on the media to set the standards for minimally acceptable solutions that cope with the Chinese government's commitments to its domestic audience. The author also stated that China may shut down unofficial information channels if the state seeks control over information flows and dominance over the media airwaves to continuously frame and shape the agenda of the debate. In order to convince its rivals to de-escalate or accept conditions for negotiations that favor China the state shows its commitment to its bilateral relationship with the rivals, implying that the crises are not seriously attached to the relationship (Cheng 2012; Halper). Other scholars examine China's media propaganda and external propaganda, such as Huang and Wang (2020), while others, like Wang (2018) and Chubb (2016), studies the role of the media in the SCS disputes. However, they did not examine how the media were mobilized to support China's overall strategy in the SCS, which is called a salami-slicing strategy. The strategy aims to slowly and progressively control more and more pieces of islands, reefs and waters in the SCS by stirring up a series of relatively small aggressions and provocations in contested areas to make it politically hard for its rivals to use forceful resistance (Bak 2019). After such small and individual struggles, a Chinese presence and de facto Chinese rights in those contested areas are gradually constructed. Precedents and, over time, norms have been collectively established in the region (Haddick 2012; Vuving 2014; Dutta 2017). The strategy includes three steps: (1) subtly change the status quo, (2) alter the facts in its favor and (3) raise its claim over the newly established status quo. In the following parts, the paper finds, first, the common media narratives in China. It then, analyzes how China deployed media diplomacy to support the salami-slicing strategy in the two stand-offs. Lastly, it checks whether media diplomacy could be used as a new way to solve the SCS tensions.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 What were the common media narratives in China?

During the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, 55 remarks¹ issued by the MFA and 1001 news reports published by Xinhua and the People’s Daily were collected and examined to find some of China’s most important media themes during the crisis (see Table 1 and Table 2). These themes generated China’s common stories over the incident: the Huangyan Island/the Scarborough Shoal was an inherent territory of China; and the Philippines’ claims over the shoal were groundless. Moreover, that the Philippine warships’ harassment of Chinese fishing vessels and infringement on China’s sovereignty had caused the incident. By deploying bilateral diplomatic means, China convinced the Philippines to withdraw its vessels, protected its sovereignty over the island, and ended the crisis peacefully (Weimin 2012a, 2012c, 2012b).

Table 1. Results of MFA remarks during the Scarborough Shoal stand-off.

No	Contents	Total
1	Discussing the Scarborough Shoal incident	49
2	Discussing China's sovereignty claims over the region	32
3	Reminding of the friendship and calling for diplomatic negotiations	32
4	Discussing China's diplomatic actions	26
5	Criticising the Philippines' actions in the Shoal	26
6	Citing the government's commitments to protecting sovereignty	22
7	Call for respecting China's sovereignty and protecting peace and stability of the region	22
8	Refusing the Philippines' accusations that threatened China's image	16
9	Reporting developments at sea	16
10	Rejecting the Philippines' sovereignty claims over the shoal	14
11	Calling for third party states to stay neutral	12
12	Rejecting Philippines' legal method and the UNCLOS	7
13	Discussing anti-China protests in the Philippines and around the world	4

Source: Data collected by the authors.

Table 2. Results of Xinhua and People’s Daily articles during the Scarborough Shoal stand-off.

No	Contents	Total (1001)
1	Reporting the government's commitment to defend sovereignty by diplomatic means	429
2	Reporting the Chinese government's diplomatic and media activities	420
3	Reiterating China's sovereignty over the Shoal and confirming the traditional fishing area in the waters	382
4	Criticizing the PHLs' overall aggressive and contradictory SCS policy	362
5	Reporting the Chinese side's call for the PHL negotiations and to honour their commitments; calls for considering friendship and peace of the region	316
6	Discussing the legitimacy of China's fishing and government vessels	264
7	Quoting and rejecting the PHL's statements and diplomatic activities	251
8	Criticising the PHLs' internationalising the tensions	247
9	Describing the PHLs' activities with negative words	237
10	Calling for third party states to stay neutral	216
11	Criticising the PHLs' stirring up nationalist and patriotic sentiments against China	214
12	Calling for supporting the CPC's SCS policy;	193
13	Reporting nationalist and patriotic discourses in China	175
14	Reporting the PHLs' de-escalating initiatives	169
15	Discussing historical and legal evidence of China's sovereignty claims	164
16	Rebutting the theory of the “China threat,” describing China as a peace-loving country	141
17	Updating developments at sea	132
18	Portraying China as a victim of the US and the SCS claimant states	130

Source: Data collected by the authors.

Meanwhile, there were only 28 remarks released by the MFA and 513 news reports published by the two media channels which mentioned the oil rig incident. Importantly, the MFA published one position paper and submitted two documents to the United Nations to express the state’s stance and policy over the issue. The media reports generated the most popular themes in China (see Table 3 and Table 4) and shaped the Chinese government’s own media narratives over the issue.² First, China

stated that the operation of the oil rig was conducted by a Chinese company, within China's territorial waters, and the Chinese government deployed its vessels to protect the rig from Vietnam's illegal and aggressive disruption. Chinese forces used the utmost restraint, but the Vietnamese side continued intervening with the Chinese vessels at sea. The Chinese government accused the Vietnamese side of creating and spreading negative narratives on China's action, stirring up the anti-China protests, threatening China's image and damaging the peace and stability of the region.

Table 3. Results of MFA remarks during the oil rig crisis.

No	Contents	Total
1	Discussing the oil rig incident	28
2	Discussing other SCS issues	24
3	Asserting China's sovereignty over the SCS	19
4	Affirming the legitimacy of China's actions	17
5	Discussing the anti-China protests	10

Source: Data collected by the authors.

Table 4. Results of Xinhua and People's Daily articles during the oil rig crisis.

No	Contents	Total 513
1	Discussing the CPC's commitments on the SCS issues	282
2	Asserting China's sovereignty over the islands and waters in the SCS	240
3	Discussing the oil rig incident	222
4	Portraying China as a peaceful country	218
5	Affirming that China's action was legal	208
6	Criticising VN's actions by negative words	201
7	Emphasising benefits from cooperating with China in other fields	174
8	Calling for Vietnam to stop disturbing	165
9	Analysing VN's SCS strategies	157
10	Discussing the anti-China riots in Vietnam	127
11	Discussing negative consequences from the riots	124
12	Countering third-party actors' criticisms over China's actions	121
13	Discussing the US Pivot strategies	115
14	Reporting diplomatic efforts with Vietnam to solve the incident	114
15	Portraying China as a victim	93
16	Reporting developments at sea	72
17	Citing nationalist rhetoric	46

Source: Data collected by the authors.

3.2 What were the effects of media diplomacy?

3.2.1 Supporting China's salami-slicing strategy

3.2.1.1 Deploying media diplomacy while changing the status quo at sea

Evidence shows that as Chinese forces were managing to change the status quo at sea at the onset of the crises, the Chinese government tried to raise its narratives over the Scarborough Shoal stand-off as soon as possible, but kept a low profile over the oil rig crisis for its political goals. When both the Chinese and Philippine forces were struggling to control the Scarborough Shoal and the Philippine government focused on bilateral meetings to manage tensions at the onset, China took every opportunity to accuse the Philippines as a trigger of the stand-off and fortify its sovereignty claims over the shoal. After informing about the incident via the website of the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines on the night of April 10, the MFA confirmed it for the first time at the press conference the next day (Weimin 2012a; "Some Basic Facts on China's sovereignty over Huangyan Island" 2012). At a glance, the crisis began with a fast-moving event initiated by the Philippines with its deployment of a warship to inspect Chinese fishing vessels in the Scarborough Shoal. However, the Chinese side was not in a defensive situation (Anne Barrowclough 2012). The Chinese fishing boats at the Shoal had been upgraded with an emergency distress call system that could instantaneously request help from

the Hainan base. Moreover, there were at least two Chinese fishing boats which were squad leaders of the Tanmen Maritime Militia (Chubb 2016). Right after arriving at the shoal and providing Chinese fishing vessels with physical protection, the Chinese force claimed sovereignty over the waters of the shoal (Green et al. 2017). These claims were reposted in the media creating a perception amongst the audience that the incident was not about the status of Chinese fishermen and their fishing operations within the shoal's waters, but the sovereignty of the shoal itself, a very sensitive issue for the Chinese. Additionally, the Chinese government described the government force's successful escorting of the Chinese fishing vessels out of the disputed zone as an achievement. Moreover, China constantly confirmed that by using peaceful methods, it had convinced Manila to withdraw all the vessels, ended the tension and defended the nation's sovereignty (Weimin 2012g). It is argued that by speaking out as soon as possible, creating narratives and setting the agenda, China's media strategy "camouflaged" its behaviors in the SCS as a defender and cast the burden of starting the incident on the Philippines while it managed to change the status quo of the control of the shoal.

Differently, at the onset of the oil rig crisis, when both sides were struggling at sea, and Vietnam promptly internationalized the issue, China kept a low profile over the crisis. The MFA discussed the incident only twice on May 6 and 10, and the media released its first article until May 6 (Houlijun 2014). Strategically, by setting down the oil rig in Vietnam's claimed waters, China was "creating facts on the ground" in the SCS from the viewpoint of the international audience (Yamaguchi 2016) and was trying to turn an "undisputed area" into a "disputed one" from the Vietnamese perspective ("Vietnamese Deputy FM condemns China in East Sea on CNN" 2014). On the surface, it could be considered that the Chinese government kept a low profile over the incident to continue the state's main stance that the deployment of the rig was one of the normal activities of the CNOOC, there was no demand to further explain motivations behind the move. From the media diplomacy perspective, Vietnam's internationalization strategy and reaction from external stakeholders to some extent might cause surprise for China. Therefore, as Cheng (2012) argued, China's controlling information was to select frames and to re-shape the next debates. Additionally, the tactic of keeping a low profile at the onset of the crisis might be a part of the strategy to degrade enemies' decision-making processes through which China could expose adversaries to political dilemmas that would make Vietnam more cautious in deciding its reactions (Jackson 2015).

3.2.1.2 Deploying media diplomacy to alter the facts in its favor

The media were used to create and convey narratives on developments at sea in a way that benefited China.³ In the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, the results show that China tactically changed its tone in rebutting the Philippines' accusations for its own political goals.⁴ Before prevailing and controlling the situation at sea, China restrained its counter-arguments toward the Philippines' accusations on the media to support its bilateral diplomatic activities with the state.⁵ For instance, the MFA rejected the Philippines' claim that China's Yuzheng-310 vessel "bullied" Philippine vessels and called the narrative a "fabrication" on April 28 (Weimin 2012i). However, after issuing the fishing bans, the Philippines withdrew its vessels but China permitted its fishing boats to continue operating at the shoal and warned away foreign ones, tactically increasing the number of Chinese vessels and proving an opportunity for China to control the shoal (Xulingui 2012). As the situation at sea changed in its favor, China reacted tougher towards the Philippines' complaints. For instance, on May 23, when Philippine media made accusations that China's total maritime presence was about 97 vessels, the MFA frankly admitted that with the increase in the number of vessels at the shoal China "took stronger administrative measures" to counter "the Philippines' recent provocative moves" (Lei 2012).

A similar tactic was deployed in the oil rig crisis.⁶ For instance, when confrontations at sea were at a peak, the Vietnamese side reported that China sent six warships, helicopters, early warning planes and reconnaissance planes and fighter jets to the rig area (Lye Liang Fook 2018). China's media denied the accusation, stating only civil vessels and government ships were sent to the scene to protect the rig (Jackson 2015; Lei 2014a). The mixed presence of both civilian and law enforcement Chinese ships might open the operational environment to Beijing's advantage at sea and protect its image as a

peaceful and righteous actor while clouding the judgment of Vietnam and other stakeholders and complicating their decision-making procedures.

3.2.1.3. Creating media narratives to strengthen the newly established status quo

During the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, the MFA used media diplomacy to create its narrative of the sovereignty claims and to prove the righteousness of these claims via only 32 remarks.⁷ This tactic was aimed at slowly raising the audiences' awareness and shaping their perception over China's SCS claims, but not triggering strong protests from the other claimants. First, the CPC based its sovereignty claims on the so-called historical claim: "China is (an) explorer, developer and administrator of the island for a long time ago" (Liulu 2012). China's media outlets focused on proving that China has a long-term effective control over the shoal by name-giving and mapping it; then, making the public believe that this was an important proof for a state to claim sovereignty over a territory by quoting scholars' arguments and studies. For instance, they reposted that "the Chinese government officially announced the name of Huangyan Island (Scarborough Shoal) respectively in 1935, 1947 and 1983 and all the official maps published by Chinese governments in different historical periods marked Huangyan Island as Chinese territory" (Liulu 2012). Secondly, the MFA rejected the Philippines' title over the shoal.⁸ The media quoted experts' explanations in detail on how historic international treaties set things Philippine territory excluded the shoal from its territorial limits. Then, they cited Philippine maps, legal documents and official papers that indicated the shoal is outside the country's territory such as the 1935 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, and the 1981 and 1984 Philippine maps (Zhao Jiemin 2012). Importantly, the MFA and the media interpreted the Philippines' claim as one based on the allegation that the shoal is within its exclusive economic zone (Weimin 2012f). China then framed its counter-argument that the Philippines' claim has impaired China's territorial claim" because "the UNCLOS allows coastal states to claim a 200 nm EEZ, but coastal states have no rights to undermine other countries' inherent territorial sovereignty based on that" (Weimin 2012f, 2012e, 2012d). China argued that: "As a basic principle clearly stated by the UNCLOS, a country must have sovereignty over the land before it claims sovereignty over the adjacent sea waters. The Philippines claimed sovereignty over the waters before making a claim for the land, which was obviously wrong" (Zhao Jiemin 2012). It is argued that China intentionally neglected to solve the differences in the sovereignty claims between the two sides, focused only on its claims and interpreted the Philippines' claims in its ways.

Meanwhile, during the oil rig crisis, when China decided to speak out, its media narratives included the selected legal norms and systems in its favors to build and strengthen the legitimacy of China's SCS claims and actions while rejecting Vietnam's sovereignty claims over it.⁹ The Chinese media channels reinforced the state's official position that the rig was in waters within "China's contiguous zone", and "these waters will never become Vietnam's EEZ and continental shelf no matter which principle is applied" ("HYSY 981 Drilling Rig: Vietnam's Provocation and China's Position" 2014). It is argued that both the government and the media in China tactically obfuscated the dispute, advancing the idea that the location of the rig was closer to the Paracel Islands than to the Vietnamese coastline (Thayer 2014).

3.2.1.4. Deploying media diplomacy to de-escalate the crises

After noting that there was no Philippine vessel in the shoal, China claimed victory over the crisis. First, on June 5, to reject the DFA's statement that the two governments agreed to remove vessels from the shoal, the MFA confirmed, "the government vessels have been deployed on guard in waters off the Huangyan Island" (Weimin 2012h; Xinyang 2012). The next day, the MFA announced that China had successfully ended the incident and protected its sovereignty over the shoal (Weimin 2012g). Additionally, China's media channels reiterated that Chinese vessels would maintain China's jurisdiction and sovereignty rights over the shoal ("Philippines to "remaining withdrawal" to save face China: deployment according to needs" 2012).

Although withdrawing the oil rig one month earlier, the MFA was continuously featured in many news articles in Chinese about a message that "China's HYSY 981 drilling rig had completed

successfully its tasks in the waters off the Xisha Islands” (Lei 2014b). This was to cater to the public’s demand for information over the early withdrawal, mobilizing public support for the CPC’s policy and rejecting criticism by the opposition and extremist nationalists.

3.2.2 Protecting China’s international prestige

China’s primary goals are not only to protect the so-called national territory in the SCS but also to develop its international status (Yi 2017). Hence, it is argued that the greatest challenge for China was how to establish a *de facto* control over the Scarborough shoal, achieve the short term purposes in the oil rig development and continue legitimating China’s claims over the SCS while not causing a negative impact to its image as a peaceful power.

In order to protect China’s peaceful image during the crises, the results show that China deployed media diplomacy to run narratives of China’s promise of following peaceful paths to solve the crisis, and calls on the rival states to respond in the same way. Additionally, the media became a key tool to convey China’s preconditions for negotiations for the rivals. China requested the Philippines for withdrawing Philippine ships from the shoal, accepting China’s control over it by not sending Philippine vessels back to the scene, not pursuing legal methods, and not seeking third-party actors’ help. Meanwhile, Beijing tactically asked Hanoi to stop its harassment of the oil rig; withdraw its sovereignty claims over the Paracels; not pursue a legal case and not involve third parties against China (Thayer 2017).

Anti-China movements in the Philippines and Vietnam during the crises put challenges on China’s international prestige. To handle political pressure, China kept a low profile over the protests via its state official channels and only discussed the issue on the media. In the media, China accused Manila and Hanoi of wrongly blaming Beijing and called the states for putting more effort to manage such nationalist movements (Xiang and Yu 2013).

“China threat theory” during the crises posed a challenge to China’s peace image. In order to reverse the theory, Beijing tactically run a dual message: peaceful state but ready to war to protect national interests (Raditio 2018). To balance the two images, China created narratives describing China as a victim of external powers linking with Vietnam and the Philippines in the crises. The logic was that because other stakeholders provocatively threatened China’s interests, China was forced to take action. Meanwhile, nationalist and rhetorical narratives were mainly published in Chinese editions to manage nationalist and patriotic sentiments to convince the domestic audience to believe in the righteousness of the state’s policy and the party’s commitment to defend national sovereignty and to make China great again (Pham 2017; Yamaguchi 2016).

3.3. Can the media be a way to resolve the crises?

It is apparent that China utilized media diplomacy in the de-escalation stage of the crises. For instance, it kept a low profile over the crises to distract the public at the last stage. However, the most popular theme of Chinese media coverage was the CPC’s efforts and commitment to protecting national sovereignty. Hence, China’s principle could be understood as: China committed to peaceful bilateral negotiations to solve the incident but did not hesitate to use a harder method to defend its sovereignty and interests in the SCS.

After the crises, China has controlled over the Shoal and maintained its sovereignty claims over the SCS. Therefore, although there is no serious clash between the SCS claimant states, the overlapping claims between them remains. It is argued that the demands for the claimant states to make more efforts to handle the SCS disputes have increased since the perception gaps among the countries have been widened. The paper suggests therefore that media diplomacy assisted the settling of disputes in the short term but did not resolve issues for the long term. Furthermore, media diplomacy appears to have exacerbated sentiments of national identity and suspicions about rival claims in the SCS.

4. CONCLUSION

The paper successfully tests how the theoretical framework of media diplomacy functions in territorial disputes and partly discovers how China used media diplomacy differently to support its salami-slicing strategy to handle the crises and protect the state's national image. However, China's repeatedly using dual messages made the other claimant states react strongly, adding more challenges to China's strategy and complicating the crises. Moreover, foreign states criticized China's ambiguity in the SCS as one of the causes of the tensions, challenging the universal appeal of Xi's "Chinese Dream". China should think about the role of non-governmental organizations, such as individuals, the private sectors and civil society, in generating its international influence and prestige. Publishing their critical and uncontrolled reactions can compensate for China's assertive policies (Nye 2012, 2015).

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Le, Thi My Danh is a Ph.D Candidate in the Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Waikato, New Zealand and currently, a lecture at FPT University, Vietnam. Her research focuses on global media and communication, International relations, and crises. She would like to thank Dr. Mark G. Rolls for assistance and the reviewers for comments. Constructive feedback from Dr. Mark Rolls on her Doctoral dissertation helped develop ideas for this paper. A previous version of the paper was presented and discussed at ICAS Conference 12 in August 2021.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am most thankful for the FPT University that has provided support for the project.

REFERENCES

- Anne Barrowclough, Southeast Asia Editor. 2012. "China and the Philippines in stand-off in South China Sea." *thetimes.co.uk*, 11 April, 2012, Asia.
- Bak, Fabian. 2019. "South China Sea: Creeping Expansionism as a Success Story? | GRI." *Global Risk Insights*. <https://globalriskinsights.com/2019/03/south-china-sea-creeping-expansionism/>.
- Cheng, Dean. 2012. "Winning without fighting: Chinese legal warfare." *Backgrounder* (2692).
- Chhabra, RADHIKA. 2020. "Twitter Diplomacy: A Brief Analysis." *Observer Research Foundation* https://www.orfonline.org/research/twitter-diplomacy-a-brief-analysis-60462/#_ftnref1.
- Chubb, Andrew. 2016. "Chinese popular nationalism and PRC policy in the South China Sea." Doctoral Thesis.
- Cohen, Yoel. 1986. *Media diplomacy*. Frank Cass.
- . 2012. *Media diplomacy: The foreign office in the mass communications age*. Routledge.
- Dutta, Prabhask K. 2017. "What is China's salami slicing tactic that Army chief Bipin Rawat talked about?" *India Today*, 2017-09-07, 2017. Accessed 15 May 2019. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/doklam-china-salami-slicing-army-chief-general-bipin-rawat-1039864-2017-09-07>.
- Ebo, Bosah. 1997. "Media diplomacy and foreign policy: Toward a theoretical framework." *News media and foreign relations: A multifaceted perspective*: 43-57.
- Gilboa, Eytan. 2001. "Diplomacy in the media age: Three models of uses and effects." *Diplomacy and statecraft* 12 (2): 1-28.
- . 2002. "Global communication and foreign policy." *Journal of Communication* 52 (4): 731-748.

- Green, M., K. Hicks, Z. Cooper, J. Schaus, and J. Douglas. 2017. *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence*. Center for Strategic & International Studies.
- Haddick, Robert. 2012. "Salami Slicing in the South China Sea." *Foreign Policy* 3: 2012. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/08/03/salami-slicing-in-the-south-china-sea/>.
- Halper, Stefan. *China: The Three Warfares* (Cambridge, UK, University of Cambridge, May 2013).
- Houlijun. 2014. "China urges against Vietnamese interference in territorial water exploration." *Xinhua News Agency*, 8 May, 2014.
- Huang, Zhao Alexandre, and Rui Wang. 2020. "Panda engagement'in China's digital public diplomacy." *Asian Journal of Communication* 30 (2): 118-140.
- "HYSY 981 Drilling Rig: Vietnam's Provocation and China's Position." 2014. *People's Daily Online*, June 09, 2014, 2014. Accessed 10 May 2019. <http://en.people.cn/n/2014/0609/c90883-8738324.html>.
- Jackson, Laura. 2015. "Revisions of Reality: The Three Warfares-China's New Way of War." *Beyond Propaganda. Information at War: From China's Three Warfares to NATO's Narratives* 1: 5-15.
- Le, Thi My Danh. 2021. "Media diplomacy in the South China Sea disputes: Vietnam, China and the Philippines 2012 – 2016." The University of Waikato. <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/14708>.
- Lei, Hong, May 23, 2012, 2012, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on May 23, 2012," <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgtrt/eng/fyrthhz/lxjzdh/t935032.htm>.
- , May 20, 2014, 2014a, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on May 20, 2014," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1157859.shtml.
- , 2014/07/16, 2014b, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Remarks on the Completion of the Operation in Waters to the South of China's Zhongjian Island," <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgvienna/eng/fyrth/t1174949.htm>.
- Liulu. 2012. "China Focus: Solid evidence supports China's sovereignty claim over Huangyan Island (1)." *Xinhua News Agency*, 11 May, 2012.
- Lye Liang Fook, Ha Hoang Hop. 2018. "Vietnam's Responses to China's Maritime Assertiveness in the South China Sea." *ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute* (2018 No. 50). https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2018_50@50.pdf.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2012. "China and soft power." *South African Journal of International Affairs* 19 (2): 151-155.
- . 2015. "The limits of Chinese soft power." *Project Syndicate* 10.
- Pham, Tuan N. 2017. "THE CHINESE DREAM AND BEIJING'S GRAND STRATEGY." *Center for International Maritime Security*. <http://cimsec.org/the-chinese-dream-and-beijings-grand-strategy/35066>.
- "Philippines to "remaining withdrawal" to save face China: deployment according to needs." 2012. *People's Daily*, June 06, 2012 08:38, 2012. Accessed 23/10/2019. <http://world.people.com.cn/GB/18087636.html>.
- Raditio, Klaus Heinrich. 2018. *Understanding China's Behaviour in the South China Sea: A Defensive Realist Perspective*. Springer.
- Riley, Patricia. 2014. "Media Diplomacy: Public Diplomacy in a New Global Media Environment." In *The Dispute Over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands*, 231-244. Springer.

- Riley, Patricia, and Thomas A Hollihan. 2012. "Strategic communication: How governments frame arguments in the media." *Exploring argumentative contexts* 4: 59.
- "Some Basic Facts on China's sovereignty over Huangyan Island," 2012/04/13, 2012, <http://ph.china-embassy.org/eng/sgdt/t922594.htm>.
- Thayer, Carl. 2014. "China's Information Warfare Campaign and the South China Sea: Bring It On!" *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/chinas-information-warfare-campaign-and-the-south-china-sea-bring-it-on/>.
- . 2017. "Vietnam, China and the Oil Rig Crisis: Who Blinked?" *The Diplomat*. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/08/vietnam-china-and-the-oil-rig-crisis-who-blinked/>.
- "Vietnamese Deputy FM condemns China in East Sea on CNN." 2014. *Vietnam News Summary*, 30 May, 2014, diplomatic relations.
- Vuving, Alexander. 2014. "China's Grand-Strategy Challenge: Creating Its Own Islands in the South China Sea." *The National Interest* 8: 12.
- Wang, Yaping. 2018. "The Dog that Barks: Understanding Propaganda Campaigns on Territorial Disputes."
- Weimin, Liu, April 11, 2012, 2012a, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on April 11, 2012," <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgtrt/eng/fyrthhz/lxjzzdh/t923058.htm>.
- , April 12, 2012, 2012b, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on April 12, 2012," <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgtrt/eng/fyrthhz/lxjzzdh/t923843.htm>.
- , April 13, 2012, 2012c, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on April 13, 2012," <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgtrt/eng/fyrthhz/lxjzzdh/t924266.htm>.
- , April 18, 2012, 2012d, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on April 18, 2012," <http://www.chinaembassy.org.nz/eng/zt/mfasr/t925289.htm>.
- , April 24, 2012, 2012e, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on April 24, 2012," <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgtrt/eng/fyrthhz/lxjzzdh/t926966.htm>.
- , April 26, 2012, 2012f, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on April 26, 2012," <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgtrt/eng/fyrthhz/lxjzzdh/t928343.htm>.
- , June 6, 2012, 2012g, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on June 6, 2012," <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgtrt/eng/fyrthhz/lxjzzdh/t939678.htm>.
- , 2012/06/06, 2012h, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Remarks on the Current Situation over the Huangyan Island," <http://www.chinaembassy.org.nz/eng/zt/mfasr/t939682.htm>.
- , 2012/04/28, 2012i, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Remarks on the So-called Incident of China's Fishery Administration Vessel "Bullying" Philippine Vessels," <http://www.chinaembassy.org.nz/eng/zt/mfasr/t928750.htm>.
- Xiang, Li, and Hong Yu. 2013. "Commentary: Time for Philippines to stop unilateral moves on South China Sea dispute." *People's Daily Online*, August 13, 2013, 2013. <http://en.people.cn/90883/8362814.html>.
- Xinyang, Cao. 2012. "Chinese ships remain deployed near Huangyan Island: FM spokesman." *Xinhua News Agency*, 6 June, 2012.

- Xulingui, Liangganghua. 2012. "1st LD-Writethru-China Focus: China to impose South China Sea fishing ban." *Xinhua News Agency*, 15 May, 2012.
- Yamaguchi, Shinji. 2016. "Strategies of China's Maritime Actors in the South China Sea. A Coordinated Plan under the Leadership of Xi Jinping?" *China Perspectives* 2016 (2016/3): 23-31.
- Yi, Wang, 2017/12/10, 2017, "Speech by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Opening of Symposium on International Developments and China's Diplomacy in 2017," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1518130.shtml.
- Zhao Jiemin, Michaela del Callar. 2012. "Chinese fishing boats leave Huangyan Island." *Xinhua News Agency*, 14 April, 2012.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ 8 of them issued by the Chinese Embassy in Manila
- ² Some of the media report, both in Chinese and English might no longer be accessible online, but we have copies of the articles. The contents in Table 1,2,3 and 4 are based on our reading, coding, and analysing of the selected media units published by China's MFA and the media channels during the crises.
- ³ See No 1 and 9 of Table 1 and No 17 of Table 2
- ⁴ See No 3, 4,5, of Table 1 and No 2, 4, 5, 7,8 of Table 2
- ⁵ See No 3 of Table 1
- ⁶ See No 1 of Table 3 and No 3 of Table 4
- ⁷ See No 2 of Table 1 and No 3 and No 15 of Table 2
- ⁸ See No 10 of Table 1 and No 7 of Table 2
- ⁹ See No 3 and 4 of Table 3 and No 2 of Table 4