

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE: A COMPARISON
BETWEEN THE APPROACHES OF PRESIDENTS AQUINO
III AND DUTERTE OF THE PHILIPPINES

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FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
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KUALA LUMPUR

2019

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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
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THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE: A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE APPROACHES OF PRESIDENTS AQUINO III AND DUTERTE OF THE PHILIPPINES

ABSTRACT

Disputes among several claimants over the South China Sea are often illustrated as a controversial issue that affects Southeast Asian region's stability. The change in the presidency of the Philippines has influenced the foreign policy approaches taken by the Philippines in their relations with China. The objective of this research is to investigate the South China Sea dispute between China and the Philippines especially under Aquino III (2010-2016) and Duterte (2016-present) by examining their different approaches in the dispute. As proven from this study, it is remarkable that Aquino III's approach in managing the South China Sea dispute was aggressive and he had made more attempts to counter China's aggression than to contain China. In contrast, during the Duterte's Presidency, his approach to manage the South China Sea with China has been significantly different than his predecessor and has caused relations between the Philippines and China to dramatically improve. These different approaches taken by both Aquino III and Duterte hence, have played an important role in shaping their foreign policy with China. This research covers the period between the years 2010 to 2018, and the neo-classical realism theory is used as a framework to understand and explain the different approaches adopted by Aquino III and Duterte in managing the South China Sea dispute.

Keywords: South China Sea dispute, foreign policy approach, Aquino III, Duterte, Philippines

KONFLIK LAUT CHINA SELATAN: PERBANDINGAN PENDEKATAN POLISI LUAR FILIPINA DI BAWAH PENTADBIRAN PRESIDEN AQUINO III DAN DUTERTE

ABSTRAK

Konflik Laut China Selatan merupakan isu maritim yang berlaku di antara beberapa negara berkepentingan di Asia Tenggara khususnya Filipina dan China. Filipina mengalami perubahan kerajaan apabila Duterte menjadi Presiden Filipina pada tahun 2016 menggantikan Aquino III. Berikutan hubungan yang kian renggang di antara China dan Filipina, kedua-dua Presiden Filipina mempunyai pendekatan yang tersendiri untuk menghadapi ancaman isu Laut China Selatan dengan negara China. Kedua-dua Presiden Filipina ini dipilih ekoran daripada perbezaan yang ketara dalam melaksanakan polisi mereka dalam menangani isu Laut China Selatan ini. Perbezaan ini nyata khususnya dari segi pentadbiran Presiden Aquino III yang bersifat agresif dan tegas manakala Presiden Duterte yang mempunyai pendirian yang lebih diplomatik terhadap negara China. Teori Neo-Klasikal Realis dipilih di dalam kajian ini bagi merungkai perbandingan corak pentadbiran di antara Aquino III dan Duterte terhadap peertikaian Laut China Selatan.

Kata Kunci: Laut China Selatan, pendekatan polisi luar, Aquino III, Duterte, Filipina

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

For examples:

APA	:	American Psychological Association
AFP	:	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ASEAN	:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
APEC	:	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic
CBM	:	Confidence Building Measures
CIA	:	Central Intelligence Agency
DOE	:	Department of Energy
EEZ	:	Exclusive Economic Zone
EDCA	:	Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreements
ICJ	:	International Court of Justice
ISIS	:	Institute of Strategic and International Studies
KIG	:	Kalayaan Island Groups
MDT	:	Mutual Defense Treaty
NEAC	:	National Energy Administration of China
PDF	:	Philippines Democratic Party
PCA	:	Permanent Court of Arbitration
SCS	:	South China Sea
UNCLOS	:	United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea
US	:	The United States
UKM	:	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Among the controversial issues in the Southeast Asian region are the South China Sea disputes which involve a few nations in the region such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia - all have respectively claimed their own maritime territorial rights in the South China Sea. The South China Sea is considered as one of the potential areas of regional conflict (Coulter, 1996). This is due to the richness of South China Sea area with natural resources, such as oil, natural gas and fish, where all the parties involved have their own interests to assert their claims to the area. (Maljak & Miranda, 2017). Despite the natural resources and the importance of the sea line, the real reason of contests is the location of the South China Sea itself. This sea is strategically located, and it is surrounded by nearby countries such as China, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines in the Pacific Ocean. In addition, the uniqueness of the South China Sea as a semi-closed area which is strategically surrounded by China in the north, the Philippines in the east, Vietnam in the west, East Malaysia and Brunei in the southeast, and Indonesia in the southwest makes the dispute a persistent and irresolvable issue in the region (Coulter, 1996).

There are several reasons why the South China Sea remains important for the mentioned countries. Due to its *natural resources, strategic location for shipping routes, navigation area, and fishing ground*, the South China Sea can benefit them abundantly, especially those who can get ownership of the ocean. For instance, the abundance of natural resources such as oil and gas, and fish supply offers a continuous living for people to earn their livelihood. Furthermore, the significance of navigation area provides a great advantage to a nation to conduct its surveillance for national security. For example, the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and Sea Lines of Trade (SLOT) enable the country to conduct international trade and energy supply and help boost regional and global

economic growth. Due to these advantages for the mentioned countries, the disputes remain ongoing and contested particularly between the Philippines and China. Subsequently, the disputes have caused many countries in Southeast Asia such as, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam to assert their rights over the South China Sea since the 1970s. However, China's claim is the broadest and the vaguest of all.

According to Simon (2012), China claims the entire sea by using its *Nine-Dash Line* map's justifications and asserted to get the full ownership, control and access over the marine resources. Under the *Nine-Dash Line map*, it is subjected to China's maritime territorial claims, and based on this line, it claims the access over the entire South China Sea. This *Nine-Dash Line* covers mostly the province of Hainan and to some extent the south and east coast of the country. According to China's historical claims, the country had already established its first claim by drawing a map to assert its ownership over the sea in 1947. Until now, China is still pursuing its military activities in the South China Sea by increasing its naval operation therein (Global Conflict Tracker Report, 2018).

In recent disputes over the South China Sea, the Philippines is also amongst the stakeholders wanting to claim this maritime territorial rights in the South China Sea. Its first claim started in 1950 through the implementation of laws regarding the archipelagic baselines and the geographic scopes of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

As the dispute continued between the Philippines and China over the South China Sea, the Philippines' government actively protested the action of China and other stakeholders especially during Aquino III's tenure. During his presidency, Aquino III started to enhance the security of the country in order to safeguard and protect the Philippines' maritime territory in the South China Sea from China.

Nonetheless, amongst Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines is one of the most recent of the few countries which have had several run-ins with China over debated waters in the South China Sea (Zhao, 2012). Based on the report from HARMUN Chair (2017),

when Aquino III became the president of the Philippines, he even stressed the need to claim the Philippines' right to protect its maritime sovereignty. He claimed that China's *nine-dash line* map is irrelevant, and against the international law. Furthermore, Aquino III perceived China as a major threat which caused the tension between China and the Philippines (Cook, 2016).

One significant approach taken by the Philippines under Aquino III was to integrate international laws to mitigate the dispute with China. The South China Sea case was forwarded to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) to handle the Philippines dissatisfaction with China's aggressive claims in the region (ISEAS, 2016). The Philippines under Aquino III's administration challenged China's claims on its maritime borders which they claimed to be overlapping with the Philippines' territory (Korteweg, 2016). It was during Aquino III's presidency when the Philippines' vocalized this issue internationally due to China's aggression in the South China Sea and first involved an international tribunal to settle the dispute between the two countries (Heydarian, 2016).

While Aquino III had a strict and vocal personality in this dispute, the newly elected president of the Philippines, Duterte, in contrast, was anticipated to reverse the foreign policy with China. Duterte can be described as a pragmatic leader as he adjusted his foreign policy approach in dealing with China by taking a soft stance without escalating more tensions between China and the Philippines (Heydarian, 2016).

Duterte sparked controversy by engaging with China to resolve the South China Sea dispute in a diplomatic way instead of treating it as a threat (Westmyer, 2016). Duterte has sought a close bilateral relationship with China for the sake of involving the Philippines to promote joint development and economy in the disputed area (Baviera, 2016).

1.2 The South China Sea Dispute between the Philippines and China

The Philippines is an island nation located in fast-developing Southeast Asia. The country has experienced rapid economic growth in the last decade and has transitioned from an agricultural economy to informal services (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017). The Philippines territory in the South China Sea or referred to as the *West Philippine Sea* by the Philippines offers the opportunity and benefits to enhance economic development for the Philippines due to its abundance of resources such as oil, gas, fish, minerals and the shipping routes (Rustandi, 2016). Notably, South China Sea has accounted about 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 11 billion barrels of oil (Rustandi, 2016). However, besides the usage of these natural resources as an advantage to provide economic opportunity, it has also led to potential territorial conflicts in the region (Rosario, 2017; Rustandi, 2017).

The South China Sea has been contested by China since 1942 when the People's Republic of China published its own *nine-dash line* map which caused overlaps between China and the Philippines' territorial claims. Since then, relations between China and the Philippines have deteriorated (Zao, 2012). It was during Aquino III's tenure when the standoff between China and the Philippines' naval forces led to the climax of the tension between both countries in the South China Sea dispute (Heydarian, 2017).

Duterte came into power as the President of the Philippines in 2016 and he promised to chart a new course for the Philippines to be independent from the United States (Heydarian 2012; Galang 2017; Romero 2017; Merez 2017). Due to his trust issues with the United States, Duterte chose to get closer with China (Viray, 2017; Heydarian, 2017, p.220). His early administration in the Philippines showed that Duterte had set aside the decision of the Permanent Arbitration Court to the case brought up by Aquino III, and at the same time he ended the previous practice of conducting joint military exercises with the US in the Philippines.

Simultaneously, Duterte openly accommodated Chinese demands in the name of pragmatism (Rabena, 2016). This behavior defied expectations, as it was commonly believed that the new government would expand the balancing effort should the Philippines win the arbitration case (Burgess, 2016; Heydarian, 2017).

In May 2018, Duterte even went as far as to state that Xi Jinping assured him that China will protect the Philippines from external threats and made it clear that he believed the US's martial capabilities to be inferior to those of China or Russia's. Due to Duterte's stance, China moved its naval forces and civilian vessels and claimed another Philippine island within the same month (Viray, 2018).

1.2.1 The Role of the United States in the South China Sea Dispute

During the Cold War, United States' troops stationed their base in the Philippines in order to deter Chinese's contestation in the South China Sea territories. However, when the Cold War ended, the presence of the United States in the Philippines increased negative perception among the countries in the region. Therefore, in 1991 the Philippine Senate allowed the Military Base Agreement to expire (Chambers, 2012).

The position of the South China Sea as potential access point to East and South Asia and the colonial legacy, has made the Philippines an important element of the United States' Asian strategy. It can be argued that the Philippines is an element in the containment of China as potential rival hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2018). Freedom of navigation has emerged as a core American interest in the area (Rustandi, 2016).

The Philippines has, and is still, operating within a strategic orbit of the United States. (Heydarian, 2026). They are formal allies and series of agreements and treaties exist between them. The US-Philippines Military Assistance Pact (1947), the Military Bases Agreement (1947), and the Mutual Defence Treaty (1951) meant to ensure that the United

States would stand as *de facto* guarantor for the Philippines, particularly in the event of an aggressive war against the Philippines (Heydarian, 2016).

The long history between the Philippines and the United States is still playing an important role and is affecting the relationship and collaboration between the two countries today. The memories of American colonization and oppression have left the Philippines with an ambiguous relationship with the United States. The Philippines hold a strong nationalistic feeling and is on a quest for self-determination pushing itself away from the United States especially under Duterte's administration. However, the Philippines still needs the United States to provide security and military support. It is essential for it to keep up good relations to maintain the much-needed military support. The United States is in a sense the ideal patron as it has no direct territorial interests in the Philippines anymore, but still has a strong incentive to maintain Philippines' territorial integrity in the face of Chinese claims.

Even before World War II, the United States had a strong presence in Asia. Today the United States still has the upper hand and the capacity to balance China with its defence budget of USD587.8 billion compared to China's USD161.7 billion. China has 2,955 aircrafts, 4,788 armoured fighting vehicles, and 1 aircraft carrier. Compared to the US, China is still falling behind. The US controls 13,762 military aircrafts, 41,062 armoured fighting vehicles, and 19 aircraft carriers.

The Philippines intends to increase its military budget from 1 percent of its GDP to around 2.4-2.5 percent. The Philippines Defence Secretary, Delfin Lorenzana acknowledges that the Philippines still has weak capability in terms of military defence (Parameswaran 2017). Undeniably, the Philippines' military capacity is much lower than the strength of the United States. Therefore, it becomes clear why it is dependent on the United States for security and military support.

The Philippines' defence budget is 3 billion USD, its total number of aircraft is 149, it has 778 armoured fighting vehicles, and no aircraft carrier (GFP 2017; Brinkløv 2017). In terms of martial strength, the Philippines can be labelled a small power relative to China and the United States. Despite the Philippines' strategic proximity and dependence upon the United States, it reached out to China in the 1970s when China began to normalize its relations with the United States (Heydarian 2016).

In 2016, China became the Philippines' largest trading partner worth USD21.937 billion and 15.5 percent of the country's total trade. The export receipt from China was USD6.373 billion, while payment for import commodities was valued at USD15.565 billion, resulting in a USD9.192 billion trade deficit. Compared to China, the United States is the Philippines' third largest trading partner. It accounts for 11.6 percent or USD16.427 billion in trade (Brinkløv, 2017; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017; Cahiles-Magkilat, 2018).

At the same time, the country enjoys a large influx of remittances from overseas Filipino workers, primarily in the United States (Rowley, 2018). Tourists coming from China also brought economic growth, and China committed itself to big investments in the Philippines and promised infrastructure improvements (Baviera 2013).

Comparing the Philippines' trade relations with China and the United States, the Philippines is dependent upon both countries in securing economic growth and development. However, only the economic relation with China is problematic because of the territorial conflict about South China Sea which invites political sanction (Baviera, 2013).

1.3 Problem Statement

In the middle of 2013, the Philippines documented a body of evidence in opposition to China's assertion to get ownership-access in the South China Sea by bringing the case to the International Court (Varral, 2016). A report conducted by The Lowy Institute

(2017) stated that the Philippines' military power is weak among its Asia Pacific neighbors; if compared with China, the Philippines remains the weakest. Aquino III was aware of this disadvantage of Philippines' military power, therefore, he sought support from the international tribunal in handling the South China Sea dispute against China. In this manner, he felt that the tribunal ruling would help the Philippines to at least mitigate the dispute with China (Rosenfield, 2016).

The Permanent Court of Arbitration finally came out with the decision of the case, favoring the Philippines over China. Throughout this case, the PCA stated that China's claims to the South China Sea and its assertive action had caused insecurity in the Philippines' maritime territory as it was a matter that defied the global law (Baviera, 2016). Nevertheless, Duterte, the new President of the Philippines, posed a challenge in resolving the South China Sea dispute as he refused to utilize the winning case in the tribunal which was in favor of Philippines against China. He avoided taking a strict approach towards China even though the Philippines won the case at The Hague, and sought closer bilateral relations with China (Joseph, 2016).

Undeniably, the political scene in the Philippines has changed especially since Duterte became the President in May 2016. He renewed the Philippines' foreign policy approach by alienating the United States and sought a bilateral relationship with China. Therefore, it becomes clear that his approach is different and contradictory to Aquino III's (Cook, 2016). Since there is little information regarding the shift in approaches taken by Duterte, this qualitative research aims to compare approaches taken by Aquino III and Duterte's administrations, particularly in relation to their foreign policies implementation over the South China Sea dispute between China and the Philippines.

This research examines the different approaches by Aquino III and Duterte in managing the South China Sea disputes. The importance of this study is to acknowledge that the different approaches by both Presidents, Aquino III and Duterte have affected the

foreign policies that were shaped by them in the South China Sea dispute. In addition, it is also important to examine their *different* foreign policies towards China in relation to the dispute. For instance, Aquino III's approach was more threatening to China as he resorted to the help of an international tribunal and the United States. Meanwhile, Duterte takes a slightly pragmatic approach by building a friendly relationship and accommodating China instead of showing aggressive moves.

Aquino III used the South China Sea dispute to get help from the Permanent Court Arbitration in 2016, and the result of the case successfully favored the Philippines over China. This great success, after waiting for three years, showed that the Philippines, as the first country in Southeast Asia, could win and legitimize its maritime territorial rights against the super power of the region. However, this suddenly changed when in 2016 Duterte became the President of the Philippines. He ignored the tribunal's award in the South China Sea dispute, and he refused to utilize the award to manage the issue with China.

The critical condition in the South China Sea dispute between the Philippines and China is that both Aquino III and Duterte have clearly taken very different approaches that influenced the foreign policies of the country. Due to different foreign policies under both the presidencies, the future of the South China Sea dispute remains questionable. Therefore, this research is important to distinguish and compare different approaches taken by Aquino III and Duterte in managing the South China Sea dispute with China. As this study covers Aquino III's administration until Duterte's presidency (present), the research will be focusing on the time period starting from 2013 where Aquino III decided to involve the PCA in the South China dispute to the time of Duterte becoming the President of the Philippines (present). Therefore, it is useful to briefly examine the case of South China Sea by investigating the approach and the foreign policy establishment

used by both Aquino III and Duterte, during their presidencies in the Philippines towards the South China Sea issue.

1.4 Research Objectives

- i. To examine the significance of the South China Sea to the Philippines and China.
- ii. To examine the approaches of Aquino III and Duterte in managing the South China Sea dispute.
- iii. To compare the internal and external elements which influenced the approaches of Aquino III and Duterte within the framework of the neo-classical realism theory.

1.5 Research Questions

This research will be accomplished by fulfilling the following research questions:

- i. Why is the South China Sea significant to the Philippines and China?
- ii. How did Aquino III and Duterte manage the South China Sea dispute?
- iii. What were the internal and external factors influencing Aquino III and Duterte's approaches in managing the SCS dispute based on the neo-classical realism theoretical framework?

1.6 Significance of the Research

This research would briefly give an understanding of the recent development of South China issues between the Philippines and China. As a result of the Arbitral Tribunal which was filed by the former Aquino III over the South China Sea in 2013, the tribunal provided its findings in 2016. These findings were largely favorable for the Philippines. This result stated that China's claims in the South China Sea were invalid, and it supported the Philippines for its submission towards the case.

Despite Aquino III's approach of filing a case to the tribunal proved to be successful in the South China Sea for the Philippines, the new Duterte has his own way to conduct the foreign policy with China. Duterte changed the strict approach under Aquino III to a more accommodating approach for China, during his administration.

Hence, it is important to particularly examine the case after The Hague decision in 2016. There is also the need to study where and the extent of the changes in the approaches of the former Aquino III to the current Duterte, and how they affect the Philippines foreign policies in managing the dispute. There is a lack of research on the development in the South China Sea disputes with respect to the approaches taken by both presidents of the Philippines. Therefore, this research seeks to compare their different approaches in handling the South China Sea dispute and to evaluate the Philippines' foreign policies that were shaped according to the approaches taken by the former Aquino III (2013-2016) and Duterte (2016-present).

1.7 Theoretical Framework

For this research, neo-classical realism is used to understand the different approaches taken by Aquino III and Duterte. There are obvious differences in their foreign policies, such as their individual foreign bilateral relations with the United States and China. This theory emphasizes on the importance of the degree of the domestic variables which I will explain in the next chapters, which play an important role in examining approaches of Aquino III and Duterte in their foreign policy implementation regarding the South China Sea.

This theory is integrated into the internal and local factors which come in many forms such as perceptions, leadership role, personality, elites' committee within a nation or even domestic groups. The perception and personality variables are particularly imperative in this study, as it shows that different views or opinions might influence a leader to take a certain approach or foreign policy (Baylis & Smith, 2001). For example, Taliaferro (2009) implies that the domestic factors which comprise the perception of a leader towards relative power would influence his or her decision-making in the foreign policy within a country. Therefore, these domestic factors which stem from the neo-classical realism

theory will be later employed in this research as my variables to explain the making of the Philippines' foreign policy under different leaderships, and Aquino III and Duterte's attitudes towards the South China Sea disputes.

Another important element in the neo-classical realism is an idea. Ideas which are gathered by the leader of a country may possess or influence the making of his/her foreign policy (Kitchen, 2019). This may be explained by referring to the president's perspective that could lead to his/her engagement of what, which, how, when and where to implement his/her policy or approach towards certain issues. In the Philippines for instance, both Aquino III and Duterte have shaped their foreign policy by managing the South China Sea dispute with China by taking a strict stance and pragmatic action respectively.

Therefore, in analyzing the different approaches of Aquino III and Duterte, neo-classical realism provides a better explanation of the basis of the relationship between leadership (internal factors) and the difference of foreign policy structure by both presidents.

1.8 Research Methodology

The materials utilized in this research consist of primary and secondary data resources. The researcher examines the data throughout the sources of documents, reports, articles, letters, and interviews. In addition, this study employs a method of content analysis conducted on the resources including newspapers, documentary research, and reviewed works of scholars in various fields, including politics, international relations, economy and history that are compatible with and relevant to this topic. The researcher also conducted a few interviews in order to support data gathered from the content analysis.

The individuals who were interviewed were -

1. Ambassador of the Philippines in Kuala Lumpur: H.E Jose Charles

2. Professor Kuik Cheng Wee: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
3. Thomas Benjamin Daniel: Analyst in the Foreign Policy and Security Studies Programme of Institute of Strategic Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

According to the theory selected for this research, “Foreign policy choices are made by actual political leaders and elites, and so it is their perceptions of relative power that matter” (Rose, 1998). Therefore, interviews with members of the Philippines’ political elite such as the Ambassador of the Philippines is necessary to understand the foreign policy outcome. In addition, interviews with academic scholars have also been conducted in order to obtain specialist knowledge on the researched topic. The interviews also used semi-structured questions which the participants can ask for follow-up questions and create space for further elaboration by the interviewed person (Bryman 2012).

1.9 Chapters Outline

The entire research is divided into five chapters which contain different elements discussing the dispute of the South China Sea between the Philippines and China.

Chapter one focuses on the discussion of research topic, problem statement, research objectives, the importance of the study, literature review and research methodology. It also discusses a brief background of the topic of the research.

Chapter two highlights the South China Sea disputes by looking at the background and the main countries involved such as, the Philippines and China. The factors behind these dispute claimants will be discussed thoroughly.

Chapter three discusses the approaches that were taken by Aquino III during his Presidency in the Philippines and the policies employed by Duterte to manage the South China Sea issues and handling them with China.

Chapter four focuses on the change in approaches by Aquino III and Duterte towards China over the South China Sea issue, particularly looking at the internal and external factors which had affected the change. This chapter also emphasizes the finding of this research by examining both approaches that have been taken by Aquino III and Duterte within the neo-classical realism framework.

Chapter five is the concluding chapter which comprises the analysis of the discussed research study. In addition, the findings and suggestions for further research will be presented in this chapter and followed by bibliography and references.

1.10 Literature Review

Review of the literature suggests that several studies have been carried out to understand the dispute of South China Sea particularly about the overlapping claims between the stakeholders especially China and the Philippines (Ortuoste, 2013; Yung & McNulty, 2015; Hayton, 2014; Lye, 2018; Santamaria, 2018; Kwon, 2019; Hendler, 2018). Most of these studies have been mainly undertaken to understand their reasons to assert their claims on the South China Sea, which can be justified according to their own historical values and territorial rights in the dispute. As evident from the studies, there has been a significant change in the approaches of managing the South China Sea dispute, particularly in the Philippines' foreign policy under the different leaderships of Aquino III and Duterte (De Castro, 2016; Doctolero, 2016; Roberts, 2017; Salvador, 2018).

Based on the literature review conducted, many scholars have examined their different approaches to the South China Sea according to different theoretical frameworks and conceptual understanding such as "Bandwagoning" (Kang, 2007; Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987), "Balancing and Non-balancing" (Ripsman, Taliaferro, Lobell, 2016), "Double Asymmetric Structure" (Jeremy, 2017), and "Hedging Strategic Concept" (Kuik, 2018). However, none of these researches have discussed both Aquino III's and Duterte's

approaches in the South China Sea dispute within a neo-classical realism framework to understand their foreign policy's attitudes towards China in this unresolved dispute. Thus, this researcher finds it necessary to further analyze the domestic variables affecting Aquino III's and Duterte's approaches towards the South China Sea dispute to understand their differences in managing the dispute with China.

There are few important factors of the literature that I analyzed, and they work as the *push-factor* in conducting this research. Firstly, Duterte's changing approaches for the Philippines towards the South China Sea were motivated to pursue the economic policy as his top priority for the sake of the Philippines' future (Vinales, 2016; Bhagawati, 2017). Duterte's need for development in the Philippines motivated him to get supply of aids and investments from foreign investors such as China. Amid the rising domestic concerns such as the economic developments in terms of infrastructures for Filipinos, Duterte emphasized the need to have a good relationship with neighboring-countries like China, Russia, and Japan. This approach taken by Duterte is totally different if compared to Aquino III's during his tenure whereby during his presidency, the South China Sea dispute was the main concern.

Secondly, Duterte is known to be a pragmatic-man because he dealt with the South China Sea dispute diplomatically (Heydarian, 2017; Kuik, 2018). He appeared to use the hedging strategy to seek an insurance in terms of security and to protect national interests for the Philippines (Kuik, 2018). Hedging can be referred to as a decision of a leader when he chooses to be in a *neutral state* towards two or more major powers. This strategy is a way used by a leader to avoid any circumstances in the future. Duterte used it in managing the South China Sea disputes with China where he chose to make allies with as many countries as he could to promote a balanced relationship between the Philippines and other countries.

Henceforth, this part consists of a literature review that is derived from the main studies and themes on the South China Sea (SCS). Initially, the researcher has explored and examined the previous literatures that were written by the scholars to find the gap. Through the examination, this research proves that there is lack of studies which focus on the comparison of approaches in the Philippines with reference to Aquino III and Duterte. The researcher has mainly grouped each section into several parts that are categorized based on the research question addressed for this study: *the background of the South China Sea, the stakeholders claims in the South China Sea, Aquino III's approach towards the South China Sea, Duterte's Approach towards the South China Sea*, and finally on the neo-classical realism theory.

1.10.1 Background of the South China Sea Dispute

The South China Sea issue caused the claimants in the dispute to contest against each other which led to the overlapping maritime territory's claims which remain unsolved (Owen & Schofield, 2011). The disputants among few countries involved such as the Philippines and China could contribute to a great turmoil in the region. One reason that motivated the disputants to claim the South China Sea was its productivity of the natural resources (Wu & Zou, 2009). The South China Sea is blessed with abundance in economic benefits such as fishing ground which serves as an important resource and other benefits needed by the locals and for those who want to own the South China Sea (Alice, 2011). Among other natural resources located in the South China Sea are coral lime, pearls, bird's nests, and many more (Samuel, 1982).

Beside the richness of natural resources, the South China Sea also provides an opportunity in terms of shipping lanes and routes. Due to its strategic locations, majority of trading ships will pass through and across the South China Sea, hence for those who can get access to this route, it will become an economic opportunity for them. This

strategic pathway opens many economic opportunities as it is the sea route for all trading ships that come from the Straits of Malacca to Japan, and from Singapore to Hong Kong from where almost more than half of the trading ships pass through (Samuel, 1982; Kaplan, 2014). Hence, it is significant why the South China Sea is so valuable (De Souza, 2010).

Similarly, it also believed that the dispute exists because of the sovereign rights to natural resources in the South China (Thearith, 2009). The South China Sea contains about seven billion barrels of oil reserves and about 900 trillion cubic feet (Ccf) of natural gas. Chinese observers somehow acknowledged the South China Sea as ‘the second Persian Gulf’ (Kaplan, 2014). Therefore, it can be said that the dispute in the South China Sea is driven by the richness of natural resources, particularly oil and natural gas in the area.

Many scholars have discussed the South China Sea disputes and there are many Southeast Asian scholars who defined the disputes differently from the others (Brendan, 2015). For example, Surin Pitsuwan, known as Southeast Asia’s top diplomat, referred to the South China Sea disputes as ‘Asia’s Palestine’. His views on this dispute highlight the severity of the conflict and how it needs more global attention. Similarly, the former Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd once regarded the disputes as the maritime Balkans of the 21st century (Taylor, 2014). Due to their acknowledgements on the critical situation of the South China Sea disputes, both respectively agreed that the need to own and to take control over the natural resources in the South China Sea have led to overlapping claims among the stakeholders and further complicate the dispute. As a result, until now, there is no solution to manage the South China Sea dispute.

The South China Sea disputes concern the issues of sovereignty and nationalism that hold a deep sentimental value among the stakeholders involved in the dispute (Schofield,

2007). It is believed that the dispute is about maritime ownership and to get control of the main resources that are strategically provided within the South China Sea area (Elleman, 2017).

Even though the dispute in the South China Sea is motivated by great amount of natural resources, especially the significant amount of natural gas and oil in this area, the geopolitical pursuance also emerges as a reason why this issue remains unresolved and persistent. The disputes are matters of sovereign rights, maritime territorial rights, and ownership as well as richness of natural resources that remain to be overlapping between claimants in the South China Sea (Farvel, 2012).

The ongoing South China Sea dispute, well known for its conflict and instability, remains unsolved in the Asia Pacific region (Kivimaki, 2002). The South China Sea is a triggering area as it can lead to the use of military and dangerous settlement due to the claims among the stakeholders involved. The situation in the South China Sea is complex as it does not only involve security and political aspects, but it is also related to the environmental considerations which make this sea valuable. Some scholars believe that the disputes among the stakeholders exist due to its strategic and economic importance.

The reason of contention is not necessarily the unique features of different island groups in the area, it is also due to different dynamics that stimulate change in the stability in the region affecting the way states relate with each other. Claimant states occupy some areas which other states also claim. The dispute in the South China Sea is driven by an abundance of natural resources, particularly oil and gas as well as geopolitical considerations. Thus, the persistent competition over the maritime rights, especially claims to territorial sovereignty over islands, reefs and natural resources in the South China Sea have emerged as the '*new central theatre of conflict*' in the world.

1.10.2 The Stakeholders' Claims in the South China Sea

1.10.2.1 China and the South China Sea

China's main external policy is to be successfully developed economically and to rise globally. Its aim for the South China Sea is motivated by pursuing economic resources that can elevate China's development. Therefore, China needs to justify its actions and claims in the dispute for the sea. China's claim is generally based on its history, which involve its island during the Han Dynasty (Haberer, 2014). The *nine-dash line map* was established in 1948 and it was published in 1947 by the ruling government at that time - the Kuomintang government. Officially, China used the *nine-dash line map* as a historical evidence to legalize its claim to the entire South China Sea. China even used nine-dash line claims to the United Nations as proof that China has sovereign rights over the South China Sea (Zuo, 2012). However, at the same time, the *nine-dash line map* claimed by China has also caused overlapping claims dispute with the Philippines (Strategic Comments, 2012).

Another major piece of research worth mentioning is a study which investigate the legal relevance of China's *nine-dash line map* (Dupuy & Dupuy, 2013). The map was first introduced to the international community in a case for Chinese sovereignty over the South China Sea in 2009, with accompanying claims that the actual map was drawn in 1947 or 1948. Dupuy & Dupuy's research highlights the ambiguity of whether the map is meant to constitute juridical evidence strengthening China's sovereignty claim, or if it is simply a visualization of the said claim, thus adding no actual juridical legitimacy to it.

Gao and Jia (2013) have also investigated the claims by China to the South China Sea by referring to the *nine-dash line map* of China. According to them, historically, China has a legal right to claim the South China Sea. Both authors examine China's historical activities and prove that China has a right to claim the contested sea. Based on the Chinese

history, the South China Sea and its islands are included within the Chinese territory. This historical evidence has made China's claim to South China Sea more relevant. Their research suggests that a claimant country should balance its need by accepting the rights of other respective countries. In this case, the Philippines' rights cannot be denied by China, though it has drawn the nine-dash line. Furthermore, as introduced by the UNCLOS, all these countries should embrace new maritime zones (EEZ) to peacefully solve the dispute among disputants. Similarly, under the Xi Jinping's administration, he assertively took actions to claim China's right over the South China Sea. He claimed that China has a lawful right in the South China Sea which make it necessary for China to defend their sovereignty amongst the other disputants.

In order to understand China's foreign policies and perspective over the South China Sea issue, critical assessment of Deng Xiao-ping's *Eight Principles of International Strategic Thinking* has been one of the influential factors which contribute to China's foreign policies over the South China Sea after the Cold War (Shee, 1998). Based on this reference, there are eight important principles which have been recognized: (1) *The strategic conflicts in South China Sea in particular were the result of the superpowers' pursuit of hegemonism and power politics*, (2) *It subscribes to the principle that peaceful means constitute a better alternative than violence and armed revolution*, (3) *To practice the principle of peaceful coexistence with neighbouring states*, (4) *Independence, self-reliance, non-alignment and non-hegemonism*, (5) *China's open door policy*, (6) *"One country-two systems" approach and "joint development"*, (7) *The preservation and consolidation of socialism*, and (8) *The idea of equality and mutual respect and non-interference in other fraternal communist parties and other states' internal affairs*.

The author also found that the foreign policy adopted by China towards the discussed issue is also followed by the external environment conducive to China's economic

modernization and growth, whereby China seeks to improve good relations with neighbour states. In this sense, even though China has been establishing a peaceful and diplomatic approach towards the claimant states since the post-Cold-War, it can also be seen as a big power in the Asia Pacific region. It is also being pragmatic in terms of its policies towards the South China Sea because of its various strategies that have been aggressively used to claim its assumed historical territories in the South China Sea.

1.10.2.2 The South China Sea and the Philippines

In relation to the assertiveness of China's policies towards the South China Sea from 1995 to 1998, it has taken major approaches by establishing a greater physical presence in the South China Sea (Story, 1998). The Chinese built structures on the Mischief Reef which is situated 135 miles west of Palawan and spread within the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone claimed by the Philippines. This structure had led to the ignition of the Philippines's anger. Moreover, in January 1995, the captain of a Philippines fishing vessel reported that he and his crew were detained for several days by Chinese troops on the Mischief Reef. This showed that the relations between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea were tense.

Initially, there were two approaches taken by the government of the Philippines to solve the issues. Firstly, it used the diplomacy and negotiation approach with China. Secondly, it gathered support from the United States. However, these two approaches could not successfully solve the dispute of the South China Sea between China and the Philippines, as China refused to remove the Chinese structures from the Mischief Reef. Further, the United States did not want to risk its relations with China by involving itself in the South China Sea dispute. Therefore, the approaches taken by the Philippines, especially after the events of 1995-98, have proved that this country has greatly prioritized

the issue of South China Sea and has tried to solve it through diplomacy and negotiations with China.

In comparison to the previous President of the Philippines, Duterte has taken different policies to seek a good relationship with China by gravitating closer towards China. Renato (2016) believes that a sudden shift in the Philippines' foreign policies, especially under Duterte's administration, has changed the Philippines' perspectives on various issues concerning China. From his analysis, Renato highlights a few policies taken by the Duterte administration, such as, declaring the issue of South China Sea dispute in ASEAN Summit Meeting in Laos as an effort to curry diplomatic and economic concessions from China, distancing the Philippines from the U.S. unlike his predecessors like Aquino III, reviving equi-balancing policy with China and fostering closer security partnership with Japan to equi-balance an emergent China. The dramatic changes in policies under Duterte show that the diplomatic approach and partnership are the best ways to deal with China as a rising power in the region.

Correspondingly, Banloi (2016) argues that the newly elected President of the Philippines, Duterte, appeared to change his stance towards China, especially concerning the South China Sea. For example, the previous administration under Aquino III showed that the bilateral relations with China remained tense and Duterte's policies towards China shifted to a more serious bilateral negotiation with China. The economic factors and national interests towards China have led Duterte to change his policies on the South China Sea dispute with China (Banloi & Renato, 2016). In addition to this, both authors have also examined that there are two factors which might affect Duterte's shifting policy. First, the result of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague, which favours the Philippines over China and second, the security alliance between the Philippines and the United States under the implementation of the Enhance Defence Cooperation

Agreement (EDCA). Both the United States and China are strategic partners of the Philippines, especially in terms of security and economy. Hence, Duterte's administration will most likely pursue a hedging strategy of enhancing alliances with the US, while engaging China economically and politically at the same time.

1.10.2.3 Aquino III's Approach towards the South China Sea Dispute

Lanteigne (2016) examines the approaches taken by Aquino III, during his presidency in the Philippines. Aquino III assessed that the intervention of international law is important to manage the conflict between the Philippines and China. The author states that Aquino III had opposed China's nine-dash line claim as it affected the Philippines' maritime territory which is justified through the 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone (EEZ) given to the Philippines. In addition, the claim made by China does not have a legitimate premise and it conflicts with both countries' maritime territory. Lanteigne (2016) therefore, concludes that Aquino III had taken the best or ideal approach by exposing the issue to the global attention to manage the conflict over the dispute.

Similarly, Stock (2014) also argues that the aggressive approach adopted by China in asserting the South China Sea dispute created more tension between the Philippines and China. Several events were recorded in 2011 when Aquino III had just become the President. Two major incidents led to the submission of the case to the PCA by Aquino III. The first one was when the Chinese safeguard officer was reported to behave aggressively towards the workers of the Forum Energy while operating in the Reed Bank. And secondly, the Philippines' navy ship was blocked by the Chinese maritime inspection ship team. They stopped the Filipino navy from arresting Chinese nationals who illegally operated in the Scarborough Shoal, within the Philippines' maritime territory. These incidents had worsened relations between China and the Philippines and tensions have

built up in recent years. In his study, Stock (2014) asserts that the Philippines, under Aquino III, was prepared to escalate the tension with China.

Amador III (2013) investigates that the national security of the Philippines was important under Aquino III's administration. Due to the assertive claims by China in the South China Sea dispute, Aquino III widened his approach in mitigating the conflict by improving the relations particularly with the United States along with Japan through bilateral military cooperation. Due to the failure in negotiating a solution, it prompted the Philippines under Aquino III's administration to intensify the security cooperation with the United States through the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), (Congress of the Republic of the Philippines, 2014).

Amador III (2013) also argues that Aquino III carefully handled the South China Sea; he tried and sought to enhance its internal security capacity with both the United States and Japan with regard to serving the Philippines' future peace and prosperity. He did it especially while confronting China, since it acted aggressively towards having the same claims to the South China Sea.

During the tense period between China and the Philippines due to the South China Sea dispute, the latter filed a case with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The verdict was given in 2016 and was favourable for the Philippines (Viray 2017; Rappler, 2016). This result led China to reformulate its stance to the 'four sha' claim (Viray, 2017). China's "four sha" (Chinese for sand) claim covers sovereignty and maritime entitlements over four island groups - The Pratas Islands, Macclesfield Bank area, Paracel Islands, and Spratly Islands (Viray, 2017). Whether China has or has not abandoned its 'nine-dash-line' claim is still uncertain. However, China appears determined to expand its territorial control in the South China Sea and the Philippines and continues to construct military

installations within the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Taffer, 2014; Fravel, 2010; Cheng & Paladini, 2014; Del Rosario, 2017; Viray, 2017).

1.10.2.4 Duterte's Approach towards the South China Sea Dispute

In the Philippines, a dramatic change in foreign policy has been triggered by the domestic political upheavals, especially after the election of Duterte in May 2016. The change in foreign policies, under Duterte, is portrayed as "choosing sides" because it is a change from a pro-US (under Aquino III) to a pro-China stance. Suorsa and Thompson (2017), in their study, state that the Philippines is engaged in a foreign policy that can be characterized as omnidirectional hedging which is the diversification of states economic, diplomatic, and security relations with multiple regional stakeholders with the aim of achieving maximum strategic flexibility.

In addition, their research argues that the Philippines has diversified its national strategic relations with multiple powers in the region such as China, Japan, and Russia to help itself achieve the balance in the international system and avoid the "triple dilemma" of over-dependence, abandonment, and entrapment with the United States. In brief, Duterte's administration's foreign policy is motivated by the stance of not following his predecessor, Aquino III's approach of managing the South China Sea with a strict agenda. Duterte himself prefers a more diplomatic and pragmatic ways of dealing with China over the dispute.

The main reason for Duterte to seek favours from China was the urge to get China's assistance or aid to support the Philippines' infrastructure development. Castro (2016) argues that Duterte received aid from China to build drug-rehabilitation centres in the Philippines, railways in Mindanao and weapons for the army in the region. As an example, Duterte's main objective in his foreign policy is to move closer to China and foster bilateral relations with it, particularly in the economic and diplomatic fields.

Meanwhile, the Philippines' long security allies with the United States remains a matter of less importance for Duterte as the Philippines does not fully depend on it anymore.

During Duterte's administration, he has sought to reduce the Philippines' foreign policy inclination towards the United States to promote his "independent foreign policy". Duterte very keen to strengthen relations with Russia as he aims to develop defence and economic cooperation with Russia (Storey, 2017). Following on Storey (2017), Duterte's approach towards Russia was driven by the urge to reduce the country's dependence on the United States, secondly, to normalize relations with China and lastly, to bolster ties with "non-traditional partner" such as Japan, India and Russia (Mico, 2017). Here, Storey (2017) argues that this approach not only benefits the Philippines but Russia as well. Throughout Duterte's approach to Russia, President Vladimir Putin successfully delivered his "Asia Pivot" by having bilateral relations with the Philippines in order to reduce the country's economic exposure to the West and manage to bolster trade ties with the Philippines. At the same time, Russia marketed its arms by selling them to the Philippines easily and in that way, it forged a close strategic partnership with the Philippines.

Wan and Yang (2018) examine the relationship between the economic advancements of the "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) from China towards future bilateral relation between the Philippines and China under different presidents in the country. Both scholars argue that OBOR will create more opportunities in terms of re-strengthening the relations between China and the Philippines as it can be a medium to fulfil both countries' aspiration for economic development. However, they believe that the changes in leadership could greatly affect the relationship between China and the Philippines (Wan & Yang, 2018; Chen, 2015). Nevertheless, their findings prove that the implementation of the project between China and the Philippines over the OBOR is highly dependent on

the domestic political situation and it is particularly believed that different presidents had/have different opinions regarding the value of economic cooperation between China and the Philippines.

Similarly, one of the important factors in deciding the foreign policy approach is the domestic politics itself. The rise of a strong man like President Duterte led to the making of foreign policy in the Philippines but it seemed subjective, because he crafted the Philippines foreign policy according to his personal views (Heydarian, 2017). President Duterte prefers China as an ally rather than the United States and this showcases how his influence can affect the making of foreign policy approach with China.

Also, Quintos (2018) in his study explores the significant changes in foreign policy making under Duterte after he was elected as the new president of the Philippines. One of the obstacles faced by Duterte is the South China Sea disputes with China. According to Quintos, Duterte has been using few approaches in dealing with other countries, especially China. His approach is inclined towards the combination of pragmatism and diversification. This approach not only serves in gaining maximum benefits for both countries, but also helps in mitigating the risks caused by the South China Sea conflict.

Heydarian (2016) in his study, also finds similar results. According to him, Duterte has taken a different approach compared to his predecessor, Aquino III, and he is a more diplomatic person in comparison to Aquino III. He constructs his foreign policy by moving closer bilateral relationship with China. He argues that Duterte significantly changes the Philippines' foreign policy by engaging China in the Philippines' agenda. The study indicates that Duterte's foreign policy prioritizes the need to maintain a balanced relationship with both China and United States since it is a safe approach for the Philippines.

In addition, Galang (2017) identifies the three major elements of Duterte's independent foreign policy. First, to lessen the dependence on the United States, and simultaneously, maintaining the Philippines' historic alliance with it. Second, to improve relations with China based on economic cooperation, while exploring ways to lower the tension over the South China Sea dispute. And third, to improve relations with non-traditional partners, including Russia, Japan, and India, while striving to maintain the centrality of ASEAN.

A study by Kuik (2017) analyses that Duterte has adopted the hedging approach to protect the domestic and foreign interests in an unpredictable regional security environment between the Philippines and China, and the Philippines and the U.S. He believes that the dispute related to the South China Sea cannot be immediately resolved, but the situation can be managed to prevent incidents that may spiral into a major crisis. Hence, to achieve this, the contentious geopolitical issues must be "decoupled" from non-contentious areas such as economic cooperation and people-to-people ties.

At the same time, Thompson (2014) also argues that the Philippines is an example of *hyper-presidentialism*. This is due to the ability of the leader to control and justify his actions by asserting the separation of powers and at the same time preventing other factors in the government to interfere with his actions. The President has the legal right to adjust or shape the foreign policy implementation in the country.

Duterte is the first president to hail from Mindanao, which is the most distant part of the country from the capital. Duterte is also the first president to take office directly after holding a local government position, as mayor of Davao City (Cook 2018: 268). Duterte has been categorized as an outsider to 'imperial manila'. Subsequently, Duterte had powerful supporters in Manila, including former President Ramos. However, due to Duterte's war on drug in the Philippines, Ramos regrets the decision to support him (Reuters 2016; Ilagan & Mangahas 2016).

During the presidential election campaign, Duterte repeatedly stressed that he would continue as the mayor of the Philippines, and he did not want to be addressed as President. “He will govern the country the same way he governed Davao City” (Inquirer, 2017). It has been argued that Duterte has kept his word by embracing a very mayoral approach as the president. Duterte has been described as a ‘tough-talking’ or ‘foul-mouthed’ leader due to his many harsh remarks against political leaders or institutions criticizing him. This has been especially noticeable in Duterte’s main political goals, like the ‘War on Drugs’.

For instance, when the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union, began to openly criticize Duterte’s human rights record, he lashed back with hard words for the then US’s President, Barack Obama and openly questioned the wisdom of the UN system (Heydarian, 2017). This showed how Duterte bravely stood against the big powers in the region and defence himself by justifying his action as the President for the Philippines.

Some have argued that Duterte’s use of “gutter” language injects authority to his urgency of saving the country (Curato, 2017). A Philippines policy maker even described Duterte, “*We have all experienced a friend or classmate who is a bully maybe. Normally they are afraid of one thing – a bigger bully. That is how I see our President. He is tough internally, but when there is somebody bigger than him, he is afraid*” (Charles, 2018). This is portrayed through Duterte’s concerns about China’s emerging power as he has to shape the foreign policies according to his personal political agenda to please China (Cook 2018; Cook,2017:). Nevertheless, despite Duterte’s harsh rhetoric he remains extremely popular. For instance, in December 2017, 71 % of adults polled were satisfied with the president, and only 13 % were not. His approval ratings are strongly positive across all sub-sections of the population. Duterte is the first president to enter the office with a high level of trust and has kept it steady over the first quarter of his term (Cook,

2018). This leaves him in a position as a political leader, to push through his political agenda without any or very few obstacles.

The significant change that Duterte wanted after he became the President of the Philippines in 2016 was to pursue an independent foreign policy (Galang, 2017; Romero, 2017; and Merez, 2017). Many argue in their study that Duterte's independent foreign policy approach was motivated by the Philippines Constitution of 1987 itself, where under the Article II (Section 7) the importance of pursuing an independent foreign policy is stressed. Under this statement from articles of the constitution, the president or a leader should prioritize the interest of the country which comprises of maritime territorial integrity, sovereignty and also the right to self-determination (Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, 2017). This definition leaves room for interpretation of how it will be translated into a concrete policy. Therefore, the president can use the independent foreign policy as a tool to construct his or her own version of the foreign policy and secure the prioritisation of his or her perception of the national interests. This creates a certain amount of flexibility (Brinkløv, 2017)

Duterte's bold claim to the label of 'Independent Foreign Policy' originated with his break from the traditional United States alliance. Duterte announced that he would change directions for his foreign policy approach and not again be attached to the United States (Heydarian, 2017). Duterte also made it clear that the Philippines would seek a new alliance with China by engaging with the latter especially in terms of future bilateral economic cooperation. He also perceives China as an important player due to its emergence as a major economic power in the region which at the same time detaches the United States from the Philippines's shadows (Castro, 2017) This indicates that Duterte would change his foreign policy approach in respect to the United States, its main security ally, and China as its main extremal security threat.

1.10.3 Neo-Classical Realism Theory

Neo-classical realism is the best theory to exemplify the motivation or factors that drive a state to pursue its foreign policy. Jacek (2017) in his study argues that domestic factors play an important role in determining a state's foreign policy. This argument is also supported by Norrin (2014) and Ripsman (2012), as they stress that domestic factors such as interest groups within a country contribute to the foreign policy implementation.

Neo-classical realism stems from the theory of realism. Many influential academic scholars in the international relations field such as Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer worked together to contribute and give the best relevant explanation to understand realism in international politics. The 'neo-classical realism' as a term was initially introduced by Gideon Rose in 1998. He argued that a country's foreign policy is initially driven *by the country's internal or domestic factors such as decision-makers' perception and state structure* (Rose, 1998).

Steinsson (2017), a neo-classical realist, recognizes the role of anarchy as to how it affects today's world especially in explaining the relations between countries, however at the same time he also believes that domestic factors such as leaders' perception, ideology, cultural behavior, government, and economic system are among the main determinants of domestic contributors which influence and affect the state's decision in making a certain policy. Ripsman (2016) also argues that foreign policy is shaped by internal factors such as elite's perception which can influence the implementation of policy in the country.

Zakaria (1992) in his study also states that a nation should incorporate the internal indications that comprise of many underlying variables such as system, domestic and other key determinants. This is also supported by Schweller (2004) and Wohlforth (1993), where both agree that these domestic indicators should not be ignored while explaining

the behavior of a foreign policy approach. Additionally, it is also believed that foreign policy is the outcome of the international system, the influence of domestic factors, and the intra-relations between the international system and domestic factors (Baylis et al, 2008). Although a state's national interests and international structure play an important role in shaping its foreign policy, domestic factors also serve to act as contributors in the making of the policy approach. By using this example given by the neo-classical realist scholars, it is important in this research to argue that the domestic factors in the Philippines play an important role in shaping the Philippines foreign policy.

A nation with certain internal characteristics and behaviors to some extent influence the making of foreign policy in the country. This can be suggested through president's perception and leadership, ideas and condition which are relatively important in examining the lenses of foreign policy through neo-classical realism perspective.

As argued by Taliafero (2009), this theory reflects on how the internal or domestic variables might intertwine in the making of foreign policies and under what conditions it can cause the state leaders to pursue or adopt approaches in establishing relations with other countries. In brief, despite any influence that could contribute to the foreign policy choices, the domestic variables within a country play an important role in shaping the foreign policy.

Lobell (2016) in his study investigates neo-classical realism prior to developing a new framework for this theory. For instance, he argues that neo-classical realism is merely gathered from the involvement of policymakers such as decision-makers (leaders, statesmen) of the state who are responsible for forming a new foreign policy. In the process of understanding this discourse, he argues that nation's elements such as values, attitudes or habits are important in accessing the relations between decision making and foreign policy implementations in the country.

In addition, scholars like Firoozabadi and Ashkezari (2016) present the importance of examining internal or domestic factors to elevate the level of understanding of the foreign policy of every country. They have classified domestic factors as intervening factors in influencing the implementation of foreign policy in a country. In their study, they stress on the application of a new approach of neo-classical realism that significantly focuses on the relative power and foreign policy. This can be explained when the domestic variables are referred as internal characteristic such as, the role of elites, leadership, and statesmen, and also the interests of certain domestic groups which participate to accommodate the construction of a new foreign policy.

There are many indications of domestic variables such as decision-making by interest groups (leader, statements, government, and elites) that affect the implementation of the state's policy. These variables act to highlight the importance of domestic factors in shaping the foreign policy as it can possess a different reason to achieve national's interest. The Philippines, for instance, has been affected by the South China Sea dispute which has made its leader take careful measurements and approach since he is dealing with various stakeholders in the disputes, particularly China.

The foreign policies pursued by the Philippines towards China under both Presidents, Aquino III and Duterte have resulted and influenced the relations between the two countries, particularly with reference to the South China Sea dispute. Therefore, it is important to consider and apply the domestic factors or variables in the Philippines itself as I believe that it will affect the implementations of a state's foreign policy approach.

The neo-classical realism theory can be used to support the present study. I have argued that domestic variables or internal characteristics within a country, comprising of perception, leadership, decision-making, and personality can influence a nation in conducting certain foreign policies. According to the issue in this study, both Aquino III

and Duterte had/have different values, attitude, personalities, and perception. Hence, this study investigated their approaches in managing the South China Sea disputes, respectively based on these differences.

Neo-classical realism could be applied to the Philippines' approaches, in terms of how they are different under the administration of Aquino III and Duterte, and their foreign policies towards China, regarding the South China Sea dispute. A comparative study that focuses on both Aquino III and Duterte's presidency will enhance our understanding of the South China Sea, especially when discussing the relations between the Philippines and China.

Also, the role of domestic factors under Duterte are obviously different when compared to Aquino III's while managing the South China Sea dispute with China. Therefore, it is crucial for a researcher to distinguish these two presidential terms under Aquino III and Duterte in order to understand the complexity of their approaches towards the South China Sea dispute. I argue that internal characteristics falling under the neo-classical realism framework can be used to examine the approaches taken by Aquino III and Duterte in handling the South China Sea dispute with China.

1.11 Conclusion

The changing foreign policy approach under different leaderships is significant in the Philippines particularly in relation to China over the South China Sea dispute. Relations between China and the Philippines changed tremendously especially under the presidency of both Aquino III (2010-2016) and Duterte (2016-present). Aquino III and Duterte's administration showed that there are different approaches adopted by them in managing the South China Sea dispute with China. Hence, it is important to examine Aquino III and Duterte's foreign policies and approaches under their administrations in the Philippines. Based on my research and observation, I argue that domestic factors are the best in

explaining their different approaches with China as the leaders of the Philippines and neo-classical realism can be applied to understand and examine the situation discussed.

Due to the shaping of the Philippines' foreign policies under Aquino III and Duterte, towards the disputes, it is eventually vital to highlight the differences in their approaches, understanding, personality, perception and even actions that differentiate them from each other. Therefore, I believe that by adopting the neo-classical realism theory in this study, it is appropriate to explain their foreign policy approach under both Presidents of the Philippines, particularly to examine the factors driven or caused behind their different approaches towards the South China Sea dispute.

University of Malaysia

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND OF SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

2.1 Introduction

The South China Sea has been at the core of territorial and maritime contentions for decades (Clingendael Report, March 2016). It involves many major claimants in the region such as China, the United States, and the Philippines. Respective claimants argue that the ongoing disputes are based on their national sovereignty and rights over the South China Sea (Lanteigne, 2016). Among the claimants, China and the Philippines actively claim their stand towards the South China Sea issue. China has asserted that the South China Sea is their historical territorial right, and they have legitimized their actions throughout the 'Nine-Dash Line', whereas the Philippines have filed its claim over the South China Sea at the international tribunal to initiate arbitration against China on 22 January 2013 (Cheng, 2016).

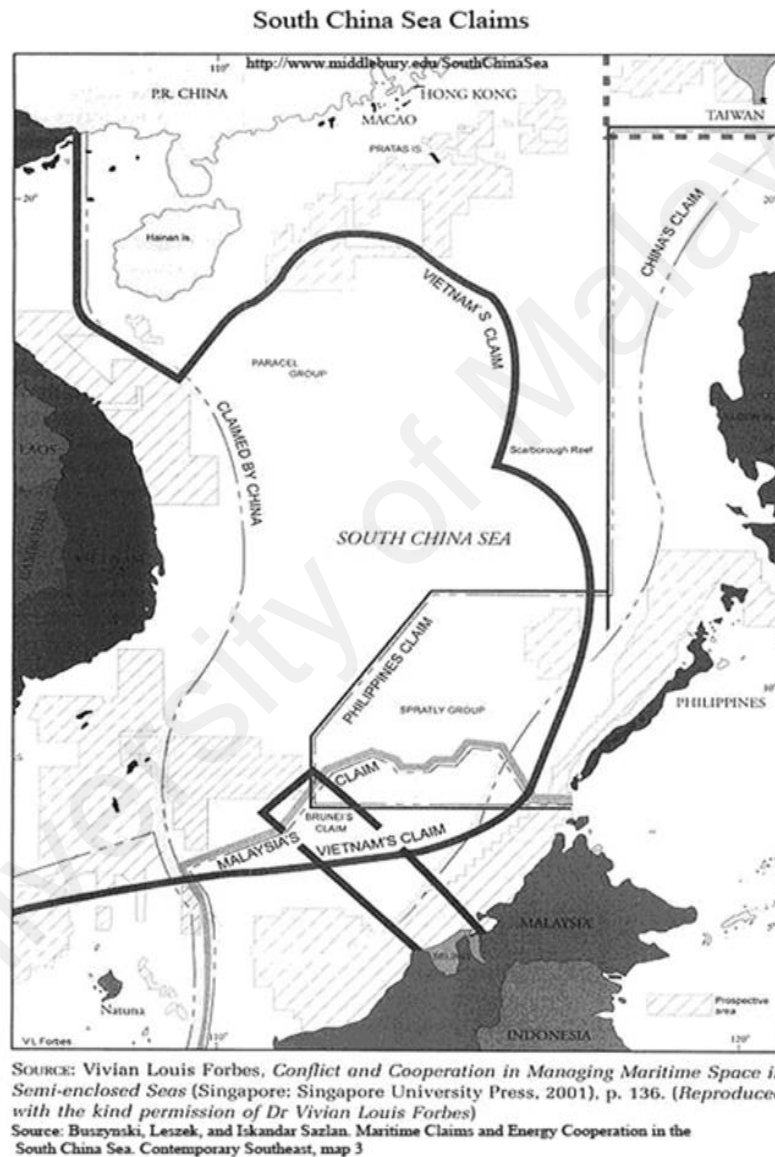


Source: Tsu-Sung, H. (Ed.). (2018). *South China Sea Disputes, The Historical, Geopolitical, and Legal Studies*. Vol. 42. USA: World Scientific Publishing.

Figure 2. 1 South China Sea Territorial Claims

Tracing back to the past, no country has ever presented their claims towards this sea or at least asserted their rights in the conflicted areas of the sea. In fact, since the end of World War II, there are no powers or stakeholders occupying a single island in the whole

South China Sea (Mirski, 2015). Recently, the regional and jurisdictional debate on the South China Sea dispute keeps on straining relations amongst China and other countries in Southeast Asia. As an example, the relations between China and the Philippines have been strained due to overlap of the regional claim and parts of the South China Sea during Aquino III's administration as the President of the Philippines.



Source: Hayton, B. (2018). The Modern Creation of China's Historic Rights' Claim in the South China Sea, *Asian Affairs*, 49(3), 370

Figure 2. 2 South China Sea Claims

2.2 Background of the South China Sea

As a semi-enclosed sea, the South China Sea hosts diversified islets and reefs as well as abundant living and non-living marine resources. It also stipulates key sea routes for maritime transportation and marine mobility. Because of its remarkable strategic location and abundant resources, the South China Sea turns into a target of contention among its bordering countries. Additionally, the South China Sea is a strategic node, not only for its active shipping pathway but also because of its essential fish stocks and potential hydrocarbon and mineral wealth.

For the most part, the South China Sea has been used by the Persians, Arabs, Indians, Chinese and other people from Southeast Asia as a sea route for trade (Anh, N, 2014). However, the idea of colonialism that emerged in the 15th century constituted an age of commerce in Southeast Asia. This led the colonizers to establish their own trading stations in the South China Sea. Respectively, they started to name the South China Sea in accordance to their specific spheres of influence such as Malaya, the northern Borneo colonies, and Hong Kong (the United Kingdom), Indo-China (France), East Indies (the Netherlands), and the Philippines (Spain) (Anh, N, 2014).

Since that, all the seafarers such as the Chinese, Filipinos, Vietnamese and Malays were well apprehensive of the benefits of their survival, and they have been fishing in the South China Sea for a long time since then. In short, securing the wealth of these natural resources will provide a considerable incentive for all littoral states to stake claims within the region. The claims by China, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan (Republic of China) over these group of islands and rocks that are located in the South China Sea have been an on-going source of tension and even conflict. This condition frustrates the peace and cohesion of the entire Asia-Pacific Region (Huang & Billo, 2015).

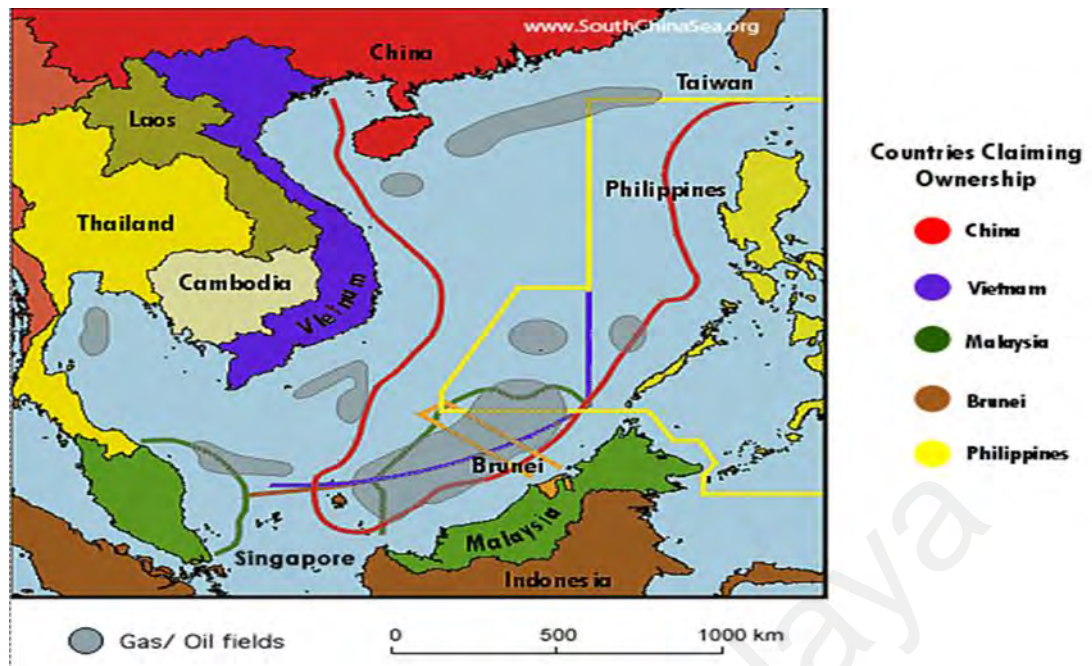


Source: Poling, G. B. (2013). *The South China Sea in Focus: Clarifying the Limits of Maritime Dispute*. New York (NY): Rowman & Littlefield.

Figure 2.3 The Map of the South China Sea

2.2.1 The Significance of Overlapping Claims of the South China Sea to Claimants

China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei are the claimants of the South China Sea. Due to its strategic location, the South China Sea area is the world's second busiest international sea lane. More than half of the world's super tanker traffic passes through the region's waters. The primary explanation for this scramble is that the South China Sea contains wealthy assets in terms of natural resources namely, oil and gas. Above all, on 19th April 2011, China's Global Times published an exceptional report that named the area as the "Second Persian Gulf" – an archive of billions of tons of raw petroleum and an excess of 20 trillion cubic meters of gaseous petrol (about 25 times of China's proven oil stores and multiple times of its gas reserves).



Source: (2018, April 10). *The Official Website of Department of Foreign Affairs of Republic of the Philippines*. Retrieved from <https://dfa.gov.ph/>

Figure 2. 4 Countries Claiming Ownership

The South China Sea not only connect the maritime route between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, but it is also a strategic route and gateway for shipping traders in East Asia. For example, most of these South China Sea's routes are used by trading ships coming from regional economic players such as China, Japan and Korea for their import purpose businesses. In addition, India also contributes in taking part in this shipping sea lane as they mainly use the South China Sea's route as a transit before connecting and continuing their business journey to other countries such as China, Japan, Korea and the United States. Undeniably, due to the variety of benefits and advantages offered by the South China Sea in terms of the abundance of natural resources such as fishing activities, and the strategic locations for shipping routes, the South China Sea has been contested by different stakeholders claiming their respective territory within the South China Sea. Opportunities in economic benefits, and the geopolitical importance are among the driven factors that motivate claimants to claim the South China Sea islands and the resources as theirs.

Nevertheless, one example of a country who is also part of the South China dispute is Indonesia. Indonesia never wanted to claim any islands in the South China Sea, but they wanted to assert their maritime rights in accordance to Indonesia's interests. In the case of the South China Sea dispute, the Philippines remain the most vocal towards this issue especially during the Aquino III's administration. Vietnam is another country who also actively asserts their claims in the South China Sea in accordance with Vietnam's rights over its EEZ within 200 nautical miles off its coast. The reason why Vietnam asserts their claim in the South China Sea is to protect their sovereign maritime islands which are known as Hoang Sa (Paracel Islands) and Truong Sa (Spratlys). In addition, Vietnam also has interest in gaining the rights to natural resources in the South China Sea in accordance with their 200 miles in dispute, where they can collect customs duty, and perhaps protect their waters from pirates, smuggling and other illegal activities within their own territorial maritime rights. These are the factors on which Vietnam assert their claims in the South China Sea.

Nevertheless, the significance of overlapping territorial disputes between the claimants is also driven by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Treaty of which all the countries bordering the South China Sea have signed and ratified. Most nations in Southeast Asia such as the Philippines, and even China accept the UNCLOS as the main reference and the guideline in maritime disputes. In general, UNCLOS is an agreement that binds the parties involved in this organization to legally accept the official framework under UNCLOS, which mainly concerns on the maritime dispute issues particularly for overlapping claims of the South China Sea.

UNCLOS has introduced the *Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)* which refers to the exclusive economic rights for a nation to hold for their sovereignty in their maritime territory. However, this claim is only valid for resources rights within their EEZ but not

as a full sovereignty. Therefore, due to this complication, some states are still contending each other and are involved with overlapping claims, particularly between the Philippines and China. This is unfortunately making the South China Sea dispute complicated among the competing maritime claims made by the bordering states in the South China Sea.

In addition, the reason why this dispute is still ongoing between the Philippines and China is due to a two-fold claim that significantly overlaps between these two countries. China's claim is over almost the entire South China Sea, which at the same time overlaps with the claims made by the Philippines over their rights in the EEZ which has worsened the dispute. As a result, this has not only weakened the relations between the Philippines and China, but also creates tension in their foreign policies towards each other.

2.3 Factors for the South China Sea Dispute between China and the Philippines

2.3.1 Economic Factors

According to Kaplan (2011), the discussions over the South China Sea are diverse for three reasons: Firstly, the claimant countries involved in the dispute. Secondly, the significance of the sea routes. Lastly, the rival power in the Southeast Asia region between China and the United States. Concerning this statement, Kaplan argues that economic factors are the main reason why the South China Sea dispute is still not resolved. It is estimated that the South China Sea may contain one-hundred and five billion barrels of hydrocarbon holds. While, according to the World Bank, the South China Sea contains oil reserves that can amount to almost seven billion barrels and at the same time, expectedly has about 900 trillion cubic feet of petroleum gas. Wherefore, most of the countries that are strategically located between the South China Sea such as China, and the Philippines view these resources as an opportunity to enhance their economic capability (Beina, 2014).

Considering the economic advantages within the South China Sea, China was motivated by the abundance of energy sources in the South China Sea and has begun to aggressively assert the claim in the disputed sea. Sigfrido Burgos Caceres, as an international consultant and well-known author in the South China Sea dispute, has supported China's claim. He likewise illustrates that the developing pressure in the South China Sea is first driven by the interest in vitality assets. Similarly, it was also indicated by the National Energy Administration of China (NEAC), that the abundance of natural resources and access to the South China Sea can be used to meet China's economic demands (Zietek, 2016).

Due to the Philippines' acknowledgment on the rich resources in the South China Sea, they also began to claim portions of the South China Sea as early as the 1970s when they found that the South China Sea may contain vast supplies of oil and gas. Therefore, in line with the 1982 UNCLOS, the Philippine's claim, particularly in accordance with the maritime laws, has been legalized by the UNCLOS's agreement for maritime territory.

The South China Sea dispute is not only focused on the oil and gas resources, but it is also motivated by the abundance of fishing opportunities. The amount of fish in the South China Sea can reach an estimated 3 million square kilometers and this has made the dispute more complicated as these fishing advantages can improve the living for those who get full access to this area. The South China Sea is home to about 3,365 species of marine life, and in 2012, it was expected that it would increase and be worth about USD21.8 billion. In fact, some scholars like Greer (2016) also believe that the South China Sea has the world's richest natural resources and contain many marine resources which make up about 12% of the global fish population in the world.

Nevertheless, the importance of fish is not only needed for certain countries, but it is a global marine demand. Due to its richness in terms of nutrients and health, the demands

for fishing ground is increasing. In brief, fish from these waters give about 25% of the protein required for the 500 million individuals of the encompassing littoral states (Snyder, Glosserman, & Cossa, 2001).

Therefore, the growing demand for fisheries and fishing production for economic purposes is crucial, especially for China and the Philippines. Also, safeguarding the access and control of maritime space in the South China Sea serves the objective of human security and economic development. Nevertheless, as the economic demands increase, the South China Sea dispute poses a serious problem amid various claimants.

2.3.2 Domestic Factors

Following the contentious claims by all the claimants of the South China Sea, most of them are expected to have pursued a pattern of renaming, asserting, mapping, occupying islets, affirming each other's statements or actions, and arresting fishermen (Ortuoste, 2013). These activities or approaches are commonly taken by each country to legitimize their own allegation over the disputed sea. China and the Philippines are important case studies to show how the domestic aspects have been adding force for the cause of the weakening relationships between the Philippines and China.

2.3.2.1 The Philippines' Claim

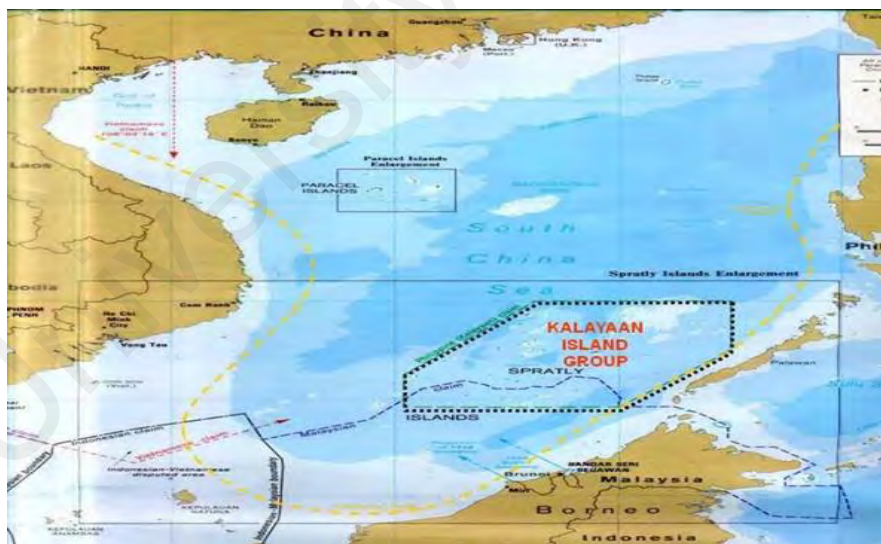
The Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) refers to the small portion of the Spratly Islands asserted by the Philippines. Kalayaan is in the area of Palawan which only has a single town called, Barangay Pag-Asa. This area is used by both the military and civilians. In 1956, Tomas Cloma discovered the islands and it was known as "Freedomland". This was the first claim over the KIG for the Philippines. However, it was also stated that the official claim of the Philippines maritime territory also began during Ferdinand Marcos' tenure as the President of the Philippines as he proclaimed the annexation of the archipelago under the administration of Palawan province.

One of the critical regions in the South China Sea dispute is the Spratly Islands where it incorporates numerous common assets that have been broadly claimed by the Philippines, China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Brunei. The Philippines perceives the Kalayaan islands in the Spratly as critical to them because of certain reasons, especially the natural resources such as hydrocarbons. The Philippines asserts about fifty islands that are situated 230 nautical miles west of Palawan Island, and are known to Filipinos as the Kalayaan. The claims made by the Philippines originated when Tomas Cloma discovered unoccupied islands in the South China Sea located nearby the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) in 1950.

Since then, the Philippines have considered they own these islands and have disseminated several laws and rules on the archipelagic baselines and the geographic scope of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Ortuoste,2013). The KIG also has established the administration system of the Palawan province. To justify its claims, the Philippines submitted the geographical coordinates for KIG to the United Nations whereby according to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Spratly Islands lie within the Philippines' 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (Andrea, 2016).

In addition, the Scarborough Shoal of Filipinos area has also been a source of disagreement between the Philippines and China since 1997, because it is rich with fish, guano, turtles, sea cucumbers, and other living marine resources. In April 2012, there was a serious standoff when a Filipino warship confronted eight Chinese fishing vessels that were harvesting marine resources in the Shoal (Glaser, 2017). The standoff between them sparked protests from both countries. Furthermore, China and the Philippines were insisting that the other was at fault and pressing the other to dismiss its ships from the shoal (Ortigas, 2018).

Besides that, the main basis of the Philippines' claims in the South China Sea is motivated by their dissatisfaction over China's claim in the dispute. The Philippines opposed China for three main factors which are regarding China's claims on the South China Sea, based on the map containing their nine-dash line as invalid, to seek a proper measurement of the Philippines' waters maritime rights which constituted under the UNCLOS Convention and thirdly to seek declarations from China that they violated the rule of Maritime law by interfering into the Philippines' maritime territory area which comes under the Convention by building constructions and fishing activities that could harm the Philippines' maritime sovereignty. The Philippines believe that they should oppose China's claims as they are incompatible with the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Pemmaraju, 2016). Simply, China's claims are against the rule of law.



Source: Rosen, M. E. (2014, August 18). *Philippine Claims in the South China Sea: A Legal Analysis*. Retrieved from https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008435.pdf

Figure 2. 5 Kalayaan Island

2.3.2.2 International Arbitration: The Philippines

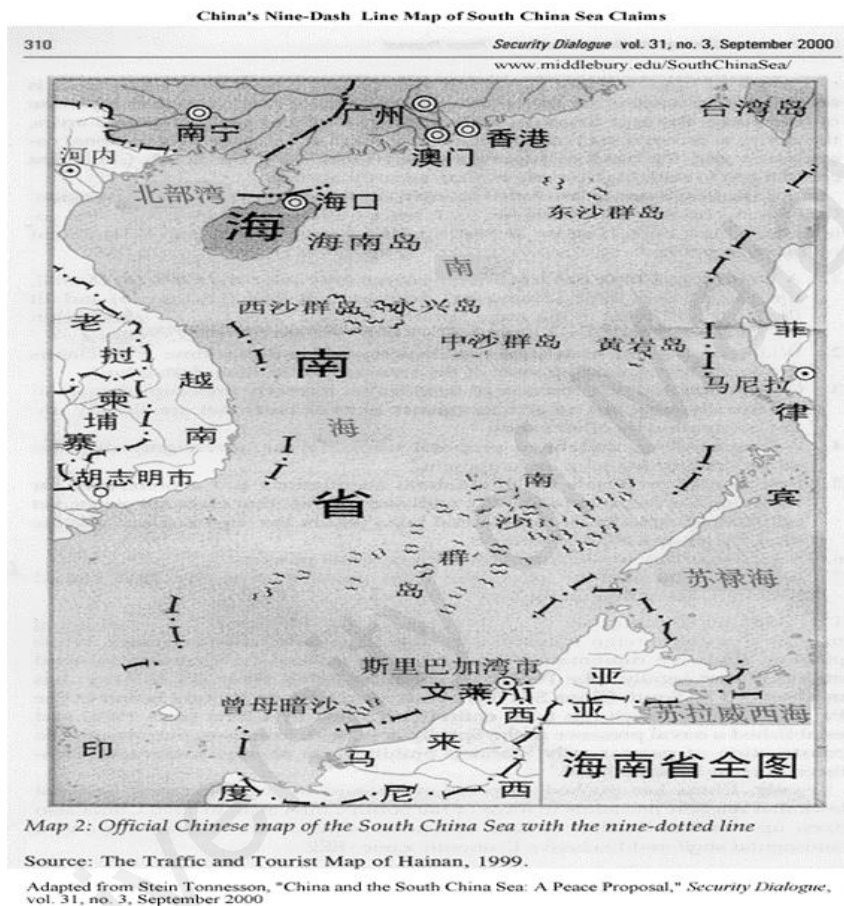
The Philippines brought the South China Sea dispute against China to the Arbitral Tribunal of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2013. This main arguments included maritime rights, entitlements and zones in the South China Sea, as well as the protection of marine life and the environment of the region. This case was supported under the provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which entitles a country to assert their claims based on international maritime laws. The 'Nine-Dash Line' of China's official map of the region claimed that China holds the ownership of the entire sea, and China also claims it as their own historical rights.

The verdict over the South China Sea dispute had been finally released on July 12, 2016, by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in favor of the Philippine's. The tribunal stated that China's claim over the Nine-dash Line did not have any legal basis as it covers almost all parts of the South China Sea, and this include the illegal military activities that were held nearby the areas belonging to the Philippine's territorial and maritime claims (Council of Councils Report, 2016).

2.3.2.3 China's Claim

The KIG claim is much like the Chinese nine-dash line claim which China uses to justify its right to feature the water space (Rosen, 2014). Beijing's intention to exert greater control over the South China Sea appears undiminished. China is viewed as a great power potential, combined with its latent expansionist ambitions and increasingly assertive foreign policy stance towards the South China Sea. This has begun to trigger major conflict between the Philippines over the contested waters of the South China Sea. The Nine-Dash Line, also called the U-shaped line, is used by China to justify its claim of full sovereignty over the entire South China Sea. It is often referred to as China's strategy to consolidate control over the disputed islands. The mapping began with the

establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, followed by the subsequent government to maintain the validity of the map. The assertive action towards protecting their own part of the South China Sea was caused by a need for resources and space to allocate 1.3 billion of their population. China will use all the available means and strategies to achieve this.



Source: Ikeshima, T. (2013). China's Dashed Line in the South China Sea: Legal Limits and Future Prospects'. *Waseda Global Forum*, 10. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/144455129.pdf>

Figure 2. 6 Official Chinese Map of the South China Sea with the Nine-Dash Line

China bases its claims by referring to its possession dated 2,000 years ago. Major discoveries and occupation by Chinese people, has shown that this area once belonged to them. In addition, China exhibits its claims by providing reference maps from the Han Dynasty which purportedly shows the South China Sea as its territory, and the historical

artefacts found on the islands indicate the presence of Chinese fishermen (Storey, 1999) in these territories.

China has taken several significant moves to lay its claims in the South China Sea. This can be seen as a policy of "creeping assertiveness" where China is establishing a greater physical presence in the South China Sea. Evidence includes laying down certain territorial markers, wherever possible, as well as seizing unoccupied reefs and constructing structures on them.

In another perspective, China's claim in the South China Sea is also based on their growing naval power (internal factor) and the growing presence of their strategic rivals around the South China Sea (external factors) (Kwon, 2019). Both factors contribute to the role of China's focus in the South China Sea dispute which has caused tensions between nations, particularly between China and the Philippines. The internal factors, referring to the increase of China's naval power, showcase China's credibility in terms of their powerful and advanced naval influence which can exert its impact over vast disputed waters in the South China Sea. Previously, China did not possess a strong naval power which could be used to deal with the dispute. As their naval power grew in terms of improvements to the naval logistics capabilities (Cliff, 2015; Cole, 2010), China decided to implement assertive actions in handling the South China Sea dispute especially with the Philippines by improving the naval build-ups and modernizing process (Kwon, 2019).

In addition, external factors such as the growing insecurities from strategic rivals such as the U.S. and India has also motivated China to be more aggressive in the South China Sea dispute. China perceived that its sovereignty in the dispute was threatened by the presence of certain power around those areas which most likely caused them to take military actions in the disputed waters (Johnson, 2013; Pham, 2011; Swaine & Fravel, 2011). This was also supported by many scholars where they believed that both the U.S.

and India's presence around the South China Sea is to establish and initiate closer ties with other disputants such as the Philippines and Vietnam, to ultimately hamper the relations between China and the Philippines (Scobell & Harold, 2013; Swaine, 2010).

2.4 Conclusion

The South China Sea is rich with natural resources such as hydrocarbon and fishing ground that can benefit the many nations surrounding it. Claimants like the Philippines and China believe it is vital for them to struggle over the disputed sea and stand with their own country rights for the sake of getting full sovereignty over the South China Sea. Each claimant is trying to justify their own actions to protect their own interest by providing historical claims, territorial rights, and even seek international help to cope with the tensions. Hence, his research is conducted to understand the dispute of the South China Sea between China and the Philippines by examining Aquino III and Duterte's approach in managing it.

CHAPTER 3: AQUINO III'S AND DUTERTE'S APPROACHES IN MANAGING THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

3.1 Introduction

When Aquino III became the President of the Philippines in 2010, the tension in the South China Sea dispute suddenly escalated and weakened the relation between China and the Philippines (Castro, 2016). During his presidency, Aquino III adopted many approaches to manage the dispute with China and employed a very strict policy by not accommodating China, but instead challenged China's Nine-Dash-Line historical claims to the disputed areas. One major successful contribution to the country by Aquino III was bringing the South China Sea case to the international tribunal at The Hague (Griffiths & Chicu Luu, 2017). The South China Sea case submission at The Hague called for the invalidity of China's claim to the disputed sea as it was against international law. Therefore, in early 2010, the Philippines under Aquino III began to change its policy approach towards China especially regarding the South China Sea disputes and became more involved with the United States to strengthen its bilateral relations with the latter.

3.2 Aquino III's and the South China Sea Foreign Policy with China

There are many factors which explain the foreign policy behavior, however, the need to integrate the domestic factors in shaping the foreign policy remain important. The domestic factors such as the *political system*, *cultural dynamics*, and *leadership* are the most important when investigating foreign policy implementation (Fearon, 1998).

However, while analyzing the foreign policy adopted by Aquino III during his Presidency, the *decision-making* and *leadership perception* factors are considered as important aspects in shaping his foreign policy. This approach is in line with the neo-classical realism perspective which claims that domestic variables are suitable for understanding attitudes and determine foreign policy. This can be observed in the

Philippines under the Aquino III's presidency particularly towards the South China Sea dispute with China.

3.3 The relevance of bringing China to the Permanent Court of Arbitration

The Philippines under Aquino III's administration brought the South China Sea case to an international tribunal solely to protect its national rights, interests, and territorial claims. It is relevant to use international law to manage the conflict between the disputants. However, there are few limitations to solve this case. Firstly, China's ignorance in abiding by the arbitrary result and secondly, the power of the international law is limited to mitigate the dispute in a legal approach, which was not followed by China in the South China Sea dispute. The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Philippines to Malaysia, H.E. Charles C. Jose stated that the relevance of bringing the South China Sea case to the international tribunal during Aquino III's Presidency should be taken as it is a much-required action to protect the Philippines' in terms of security and national sovereignty (Interview, C. Jose, 2018).

According to the Ambassador, due to tensions between China and the Philippines under Aquino III's administration, there was a decline in the export of Philippines' bananas to China (ABS-CBN News, 2016). Chinese nationals were also banned from entering the Philippines which worsened the tourism sector in the country. At that time, tourism and the economic sector in the Philippines dropped causing a severe impact on the development of the Philippines. However, these are among other consequences which the Philippines had to face due to its standoff in the South China Sea over Scarborough Shoal with China during Aquino III's presidency.

3.4 Aquino III's Approach in Managing the South China Sea Dispute

The approaches taken by Aquino III can be understood through his foreign policies that were different from his predecessor's. His strong stance and vocal approach on the

South China Sea made him make a brave statement as he was able to face China's assertion in the dispute. Relations between China and the Philippines deteriorated particularly from 2010-2011 over the issue of the Reed Bank and Scarborough Reef. The problems between China and the Philippines worsened especially in 2011 when two Chinese patrol boats tried to intimidate the Filipinos who operated under Philippines license in Reed Bank (Recto Bank) just off the coast of Palawan province.

Following that event, and several subsequent events that continuously occurred between China and the Philippines, Aquino III drew a sharp rhetoric that remarked his stance to safeguard the Philippines' national maritime territorial rights in the South China Sea and he promised to protect what belonged to the Philippines in reference to the Reed Bank and Scarborough Reef in the South China Sea.

Aquino III's boldness in managing the dispute with China became more aggressive as his policies for China changed with the purpose of making more efforts to counter Chinese aggression than to accommodate it (Kristofer, 2013). During his administration, Aquino III actively engaged with the society in the Philippines to promote the need to safeguard the Philippines' rights in the South China Sea dispute with China. He stressed the need to manage the dispute even though the Philippines received various threats and assertive actions from China (Baviera, 2012 & Stock 2014).

Therefore, to understand the approaches taken by Aquino III in managing the South China Sea, this research draws few main points with regards to Aquino III's foreign policies and his approaches which can be noted as: *adopting a balancing or a challenging policy on China's expansive maritime claim in the South China Sea, bolstering closer Philippines-U.S. security relations, and pursuing the AFP modernization programme, and diplomatic-legal strategy.*

3.4.1 Adopting a Strong Policy on China

3.4.1.1 Event of March 2, 2011

China is known for its aggressive approaches in handling issues related to the South China Sea. It progressively claimed the entire South by drawing its official maritime line called, the *Nine-Dash Line map* and began to interfere in Vietnam's system and the Philippines' oil exploration by intimidating and disturbing its activities (Thayer, 2011). One important event that became the flashpoint between the Philippines and China was the event that took place on 2nd March 2011.

In the past, the Philippines' Department of Energy (DOE) had conducted works on the oil exploration activities in the Reed Bank, however, on 2nd March 2011, two Chinese patrols approached them and asked them to dismiss the project. It caused an uproar among the Filipinos as it was considered harassment to the Philippines because the Chinese patrols had interfered with the Philippines' maritime sovereignty. This issue became the starting point for the Philippines to adopt a strict policy approach towards China and it was during Aquino III's presidency when this incident occurred.

To further investigate this incident, the Philippines filed a protest with the Chinese embassy in Manila and asked for an explanation for their attitude towards the Filipinos, following that incident. The Philippines believed that this harassment had violated the 2001 Declaration of the Conduct of Parties on the South China Sea (Thayer, 2011). However, the Chinese representatives responded to the Philippines claiming that the action of the interference of two Chinese patrols in the Reed Sea was in accordance with China's law and it was to have a regular check of patrolling, scientific research and survey in the water (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of China, 2011).

Other than that, the Scarborough incident in 2012 also contributed in deteriorating relations between the Philippines and China. The Philippines' Navy surveillance

authority discovered and spotted unlawful activities carried out by the Chinese near the Scarborough Shoal. As the authorities conducted the inspection in the area, they found out about these unlawful activities. The Chinese had illegally collected marine life such as corals, clams and live sharks and put them inside their boat which caused the anger of the Philippines' authority (The Diplomat News, 2012).

After the incident, China did not stop putting pressure on the Philippines and even initiated economic pressure on the latter due to pest problems found in their banana exports to China. This worsened relations between China and the Philippines (Interview, Daniel, 2018). The pressure faced by the Philippines became the starting point for Aquino III to bring the South China Sea dispute to international arbitrary tribunal (Ortuoste, 2013).

3.4.2 Pursuing the AFP Modernization Programme and Increasing Military Spending

Another approach that Aquino III adopted during his administration was to strengthen the Philippines' military forces. Due to China's encroachment in the South China Sea, Aquino III's awareness of Chinese threats heightened and decided to improve the Philippines' capability on external and maritime security (Greitens, 2016). According to Wu (2016), the Philippines received various sources for military use from many countries such as Israel, Australia, Germany, and the United States. These sources included helicopters, weapons, navigation radars, and aircrafts. In addition, the military programmes under Aquino III's were more successful as compared to the previous president's projects in the Philippines. For example, Aquino III managed to complete about 68 military modernization projects in the country (GMA News, June 29, 2016).

In terms of military expenditure, Aquino III had spent about USD\$387 million to improve the Philippines' armed forces on internal security and defense capability. He did

not only spend money for military purpose, but he also came out with a new future *military plan* which was called the Defense Planning Guidance (2013-2018) in October 2011. This project aimed to restructure the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and to improve the efficiency of the forces to safeguard the Philippines' maritime sovereignty (Castro, 2010). In addition, Aquino III's approach in managing the South China Sea also covered a new programme called "*Capability Upgrade Program*" which functioned to produce new contracts and plans to purchase helicopters, aircrafts, missile systems and submarines in the Philippines.

The United States has helped the Philippines significantly in the security development in the country. For Aquino III, cooperating with the United States was an important approach under his administration because this bilateral relation helped the Philippines in boosting stronger forces for the army in the country. For example, in 2011 the Philippines and the United States conducted new joint efforts development framework for both countries' future bilateral and multilateral relations on security and maritime co-operation (Castro, 2012). Among other measures were agreements between the Philippines and the United States which promoted information sharing, security support facilities, and military training by the United States to the AFP in the Philippines.

Aquino III's approach in facilitating his commitment to the South China Sea dispute led him to make sure that the military expenditure for the Philippines also increased. Aquino III believed that this allocation for military expenditure was important in protecting the nation's sovereignty. In 2015, he proposed an increase in the Philippines' military expenditure to about 75 billion pesos for a five-year plan. This budget was needed to spread awareness of the nation's maritime security in the South China Sea where it could be used to protect the nation's territorial jurisdiction and to monitor activities particularly in the disputed waters (Florencio, 2015).

It was during Aquino III's administration when the relation between China and the Philippines became weaker and caused Aquino III to take different approaches to deal with the South China Sea dispute. One approach was to bring the South China dispute to the international tribunal. Due to the escalating tension between the Philippines and China, Aquino III became the most vocal rival against China in the dispute in the South China Sea (Turscanyi, 2016).

As the submission of the South China Sea case proceeded to The Hague by Aquino III, China refused to participate and stated its rejection that it will not accept the matter or get involved in it (BBC, 2016). However, the South China Sea dispute in the international court was a legal case against China as it involved a country's sovereignty and a proactive solution was required.

Experts involved in this legal case between China and the Philippines included Judge Thomas A. Mensah of Ghana as the President, Judge Jean-Piere Cot (France), Judge Stanislaw Pawlak (Poland), Professor Alfred Soons of the Netherlands, and Judge Rudigrt Wolfrum of Germany. The case came under Annex VII (UNCLOS). There were about 15 claims brought against China in the case of the South China Sea where it urged for China to comply with the UNCLOS's agreement lawfully. Some of these claims revolved around the invalidity of China's Nine-Dash Line and also the Philippines's rights in the maritime territory according to the EEZ outlined by the UNCLOS.

The decision taken by the Philippines to file a case to The Hague received full support from the previous President of the United States, Barrack Obama as he claimed that both countries would work together to build Philippines' defense capabilities and to work with other nations to promote regional stability (Roberts, 2016).

3.4.3 The Philippines-United States Security Relations

The United States has been a traditional ally to the Philippines in the region of Southeast Asia. Their bilateral relation mainly involved security protection which allowed the Philippines to get protection under the United States' umbrella. This protection not only secured the position of the Philippines in the region but the United States' presence in the country also helped the Philippines in absorbing and surviving any aggression or threat from China especially regarding the South China Sea (Ortuoste, 2013).

The Philippines and the United States signed the Mutual Defence Treaty or the Manila Pact in 1954 to justify the presence of the United States in the Philippines (Clingendael, 2016). This treaty was implemented to acknowledge the protection of each other's sovereignty if there were an armed attack in their country. This statement comes under Article IV (Manila Pact) to state the United States and the Philippines' commitment securing their relations.

The Philippines is a country with very limited capability in terms of military strength, therefore the armed forces of the Philippines could eventually benefit from this mutual agreement with the United States. This agreement was approved and settled by the United States and the Philippines for the United States to defend Philippines' sovereignty and territorial integrity especially regarding the South China Sea disputes. The United States' *Pivot to Asia* policy under Barrack Obama was one of the important agendas that flourished the relations between the Philippines and the United States.

Due to this close relation between both countries, Aquino III took the opportunity to utilize the protection from the United States to safeguard the Philippines' interests in promoting security and defense for the country. Besides the bilateral agreement signed between the Philippines and the United States, both countries also agreed to participate

in the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). This agreement is believed to have strengthened their bilateral relations in this region. In addition, the Philippines also benefited from this agreement where the United States provided many advantages to the Philippines such as aircrafts, military assistance, and training for the AFP (Baviera, 2014).

The agreement not only opened a wide opportunity for the Philippines to modernize its defense through aid given by the United States, but also helped it in safeguarding its national maritime territory in the South China Sea. During Aquino III's presidency, he took the advantage of having a good relation with the United States by engaging with it on a closer level instead of practicing it with China. Aquino III's approach in managing the South China Sea dispute with China is clearly seen as 'pro-United States' because he managed to get the United States' protection and military aids that could be useful to the Philippines to handle the issue with China concerning the South China Sea dispute.

3.4.4 National Legislation and Regulation

Another approach taken by Aquino III was to name the Philippines' territorial maritime in the South China Sea as the *West Philippine Sea*. It was conducted to claim the Philippines' right in the disputed water according to the new official mapping instructed by Aquino III (Republic of the Philippines, 2012). This approach was taken under his orders to ease the procedure of the South China Sea claims in the region. (Wu, 2013). The West Philippine Sea included the waters around Luzon Sea, Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) and Scarborough Shoal (Bajo de Masinloc). This approach by naming the West Philippine Sea helped to ease the Philippines to justify which maritime area in the South China Sea needs to be claimed under the rightful path in order to avoid overlapping claims with other countries such as China. The impact of his approach in renaming the South China Sea had caused all governmental agencies to use the new name in all communications, messages and public documents, both domestically and internationally.

3.5 Duterte and His Approach towards the South China Sea Dispute

While leading a nation, not all leaders continue to employ the same foreign policy as their predecessors' because it changes according to the political agenda of the new president. In the Philippines' case, the lack of continuity in Philippines' foreign policy is due to its relations with China in general, and especially in the South China Sea dispute (Santamaria, 2018). In this research, it is argued that the Philippines' foreign policy approach is largely driven by the president's personality. The changes in the implementation of the foreign policy in the South China Sea disputes particularly under Duterte can be clearly observed.

Duterte was elected President of the Philippines in 2016 and replaced Aquino III's government. Duterte brought significant changes to the Philippines' government especially with regard to the South China Sea dispute (Arase, 2017). Many scholars discoursed that Duterte will take a different approach in managing the South China Sea - different from Aquino III's approaches in many ways.

The new administration of the Philippines under Duterte adopted an approach which was radically different from Aquino III's (Tomotaka, 2017). His approach focused on strengthening the bilateral relations with China and Russia and to build a distance with the United States which was considered a close ally to the Philippines' during Aquino III's time.

The Philippines under Duterte befriended China by confronting it in a less contentious manner to avoid more tension in the South China Sea dispute. Few scholars expected that Duterte caused some confusion about his approach in handling the South China Sea dispute in terms of his implementation of foreign policy approach in the disputed sea (Cook, 2016). However, Renato states that Duterte will approach China due to the

economic privileges that could be given to the Philippines under his presidency (Renato, 2016).

3.5.1 Duterte's Early Administration (2016-2018)

The verdict of the arbitration case of the South China Sea dispute between the Philippines and China was finally announced in 2016. This happened after Duterte became the president of the country after Aquino III. It became the basis for an immediate and consequential test for Duterte. It was his decision to make whether he would accept the result which favored the Philippines in the South China Sea dispute with China or would dismiss the result to seek alliance with China and to show willingness to appease Beijing's aggressive stance towards the disputed waters.

During the elections prior to becoming the President of the Philippines, Duterte's priority was to focus on the internal and domestic issues. At that time, under his administration, the South China Sea foreign policy approach remained unclear.

Some commenters argue that Duterte's foreign policy approaches on engaging with China are for the sake of economic assistance for the Philippines (The Diplomat News, 2016). During the interview with the ambassador of the Philippines in Kuala Lumpur, H.E. Charles Jose (2018), he implied that Duterte adopted a nonconfrontational approach towards the South China Sea with China in exchange for billions of dollars' worth of economic deals. (Interview, C. Jose, 2018). This served as an opportunity for the Philippines not only in terms of the South China Sea issue but also offered stability and unity to it as a regional stakeholder in the Southeast Asia region to cope with China's growing demands and needs about the disputed water (Prashanth, 2016).

Positively, Duterte's foreign policy towards China provides many opportunities for the Philippines in terms of economic development, sovereignty and rights. This can be

observed through the major changes in the country as the interceptions of the Philippines' supply vessels and fishermen have ceased, and the relation between the Philippines and China has improved overall (Aaron, 2018). This was also supported by Professor Kuik during his interview as he expressed that Duterte's pragmatic action in making the Philippines' foreign policy at least has resumed the fisheries activities and Duterte has done it very rationally (Interview, Kuik, 2018)

Other than that, the bilateral talks and getting close to China are among Duterte's main policy approaches. This includes campaigns about reopening direct talk with China, joint resource development of contested water, and even Chinese investment in the Philippines' infrastructure. (Krejsa, 2016).

3.5.2 Duterte and His Approach in Managing the South China Sea Dispute

3.5.2.1 Managing the South China Sea Dispute

Before Duterte become the President of the Philippines, he served as the former Davao City mayor and actively took part in a political party called, Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Lakasng Bayan (PDF-Laban) also known as Philippine Democratic Party-of the People (Batalla & Vincent, 2016). He was the first Philippines' president to be elected from Mindanao and the first one who did not have an elite family background.

Based on his background, Duterte is known to have a local/provincial personality and this has led him to become more concerned about domestic issues such as drug dealings and economic developments for infrastructures in the Philippines (Cook & Salazar, 2016). During Duterte's administration, domestic problems such as drug-related crimes, corruption, and development are among his top priorities while ruling the country (Desker, 2016).

Even though Duterte focuses on domestic issues, yet he is still attentive towards the South China Sea matters which need to be carefully mitigated. Duterte believes that bilateral relationship with China needs to be improved first, as long as both countries adhere to the rules and respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Therefore, in order to understand the approaches adopted by Duterte in handling the South China Sea dispute, this research has noted that there was a sudden change in foreign policies towards China over the dispute from the approaches of the previous President, Aquino III's. In the following section, the approaches by Duterte in settling the South China Sea dispute will be explained to understand the changes. The key points to note are:

- i) *Bilateral relations with China,*
- ii) *Closer diplomatic and security cooperation with China as compared to the United States,*
- iii) *Cooperation with other countries: Russia and Japan.*

3.5.2.2 Bilateral Relations with China

President Rodrigo Duterte viewed a good relation with China as an opportunity whereby successful reconciliation with China would provide advantageous conditions for the Philippines to help push forward conflict management efforts in the South China Sea. According to the news reported by the ABS-CBN News (2016) in the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte tried to avoid tensions with China especially regarding the South China Sea dispute which could lead to war between the two countries. Hence, by using the bilateral negotiations approach, the South China Sea dispute could be managed in a peaceful manner. In 2018, Duterte issued a statement in which he stated that he believed that the Philippines' army was still too weak and fragile to compete with China's

defense. This promoted an insecure atmosphere in the Philippines especially in terms of the dispute of South China Sea. At that time, Duterte was confident that only China had the power to help the Philippines. Hence, the only option left for the Philippines was to start having diplomatic ties with China and to try renewing its relation with the latter.

Duterte took a different approach towards handling the South China Sea dispute which was to have a good relationship with China. He declared that the government would have bilateral talks with China over the South China Sea dispute. Relations between the Philippines and China has taken a positive turn compared to Aquino III's aggressive approach. Duterte chose not to bring any more tension to the South China Sea dispute even though the outcome in The Hague in 2016 was largely in favor of the Philippines. The main reason for this approach was to renew political and economic ties with China.

As the bilateral talks mark a distinct break from Aquino III's confrontational policy, it has also stepped up the relations between China and the Philippines in many areas ranging from economic to social-cultural matters. Since China has always been opposed to the multilateralization or internationalization of the South China Sea issues, these bilateral relations between the Philippines and China have become an alternative approach for Duterte to manage the South China Sea dispute with China.

During a visit to Beijing in October 2016, Duterte met the President of China, Xi Jinping and signed 13 bilateral cooperation documents between the two countries (Khoury, 2017). In exchange, Duterte received China's support in infrastructure development for drug-centers, construction of railways, and Chinese-made weapons for the Philippines' army (Renato, 2016). Duterte also welcomed China to diplomatic bilateral talks among the Philippines and China by downplaying the South China Sea dispute in order to not worsen the case between them (Baviera, 2016).

Due to Duterte's appealing approach towards China, the Philippines received various aids and loans from China for the Philippines' development in infrastructure projects (Wong, 2017). In addition, the successful discussion and negotiation between China and the Philippines under Duterte changed the situation between them. For example, the Filipino fishermen who got affected by the South China Sea disputes were finally given permission to conduct their fishing and marine activities within the disputed sea (Kwik, 2018). Due to the improvement in the Philippines and China's relations under Duterte, he requested China to fund the Philippines to build railways in Mindanao as well as sought permission to have legal work permits for working Filipinos in China, and cessation of China's interference towards the Filipinos who conduct fishing activities in the South China Sea (Hendler, 2018; Arase, 2017). Duterte's requests were accepted when China agreed to give aid to the Philippines and helped in boosting the Philippines' economy by granting it 13.5 billion USD.

In addition, China also offered the Philippines about 23 million USD to rebuild and restructure the construction in Marawi City (Gao, 2017). In addition, an agreement between the Export-Import Bank of China and the Philippines was signed to finance several projects such as the Kaliwa Dam-New Centennial Water Source and the Chico River Pump Irrigation Facility.

The Philippines' relations with China remain important in securing the sovereign rights over the South China Sea. As far as the South China Sea dispute is concerned, Duterte does not seem to pursue an aggressive approach like Aquino III who fought China using the international tribunal. Instead, Duterte chooses to downplay the dispute to achieve his goal in accelerating the Philippines' economic interests. Although Duterte is aware of China's interests in the South China Sea, he still seeks China's help as he believes

that China can provide the Philippines with good investments in terms of economic opportunities and financial assistance.

As China is able to provide the Philippines with major funds in terms of financial aid and development, China also grabs this opportunity to leverage its interests in the South China Sea dispute agenda between the two countries. This could also be an advantage for China to strengthen ties with the Philippines since both countries' relations were strained in 2012 due to the South China Sea issue. By pursuing this bilateral negotiation, both China and the Philippines can be clear about their differing views over the South China Sea claims and improvement in bilateral talks can be used as a solution to manage the dispute between them.

3.5.2.3 Duterte-Xi Visits

Rodrigo Duterte's initial response towards the South China Sea disputes can be observed through his decision to have the special officers from the Philippines, Fidel Ramos (former Philippines' president) and Rafael Alunan III (former state secretary) to arrange and execute a diplomatic bilateral meeting with Chinese diplomats. The meeting was fruitful in reassuring good terms between China and the Philippines as they discussed matters on joint-cooperation such as fishing, ecology preservation, transnational operations against illegal drug and other future joint-undertakings (Almase, 2017).

This meeting is believed to be a neutral leverage between the two countries as they both agreed to have a mutual agreement on confidence-building measures (CBM) and would not let the South China Sea issue affect their bilateral relations. This approach taken by Duterte has become the first move to create a better understanding between the two countries and to foster good diplomatic relations with China - especially to have a good beginning to manage the South China Sea dispute.

In October 2016, President Rodrigo Duterte visited Beijing to initiate a good understanding between the two countries and to renew relations between them. The clash between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea dispute escalated to a high point especially after the decision of The Hague's ruling. This visit by Rodrigo Duterte to China was to seek bilateral negotiations and dialogues, and at the same time to agree on a few cooperations on trade deals such as to improve each other's bilateral relations on tourism, cultural, anti-drug and maritime territorial affairs.

Additionally, on 12 October 2017, a meeting was held in conjunction with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders where President Xi Jinping of China met Duterte and both agreed on improving their bilateral relations (Xinhua, 2017). Both Presidents agreed on having good terms in their bilateral relations to enhance political mutual trust, to deepen their cooperation, and to bring more benefits to both countries. China also supported the Philippines by helping with poverty reduction efforts and continued to support the Philippines' government's efforts in safeguarding national security.

3.5.2.4 The Philippines-United States

One of the most important security relationships between the US and an Asian country is that of the US with the Philippines. Based on the history of these two countries, the Philippines has relied on the US for its security and it is deep rooted in the history of the Philippines because it was a former colony of the US. For example, the signed agreement between the US and the Philippines on the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) in August 1951 became the cornerstone for both countries. This agreement stressed the importance of mutual commitment to safeguard, protect and mitigate any international disputes peacefully. Besides that, both countries agreed to have each other's back if any

of the two countries was facing threats and they promised to consult each other, especially regarding territorial integrity and security.

Duterte's war on drugs strategy has received both acclamations and criticisms from various sectors in the Philippines and abroad. Duterte believes that the nationwide spread of drugs and drug addiction among Filipinos would hamper the progress of the development in the Philippines. Duterte launched an anti-drug war in the country, which resulted in over 2500 deaths during a five-month period, and marked a turning point for souring relations between the Philippine and the United States (Geçer & Mahinay, 2018). It was criticized as a humanitarian issue by the United States and affected the relationship between the two countries particularly under Obama's administration.

The huge number of deaths associated with Duterte's campaign against drugs received a lot of condemnation and judgment from local agencies such as Commission on Human Rights, international agencies and organization and the United Nations' rapporteur on human rights including the European Union which expressed its dissatisfaction at Duterte's war on drugs campaign. This was also supported by the President of the United States, Barack Obama who discussed the importance of human rights and talked against Duterte's War on Drug in the Philippines.

Obama expressed his concern about the killings of so many Filipinos due to Duterte's war on drug in the Philippines because it abused human rights. This has sparked Duterte's anger and it became one of the reasons why he started improving the country's relationship with China and alienating the United States.

At the beginning of Duterte's administration, he made several unflattering statements about senior US officials, including President Obama, and asserted that the Philippines will pursue a more independent foreign policy. One of his early approaches as the

President was to condemn the United States' presence by insulting and questioning the United States' involvement with the Philippines and he also threatened to stop any cooperation with the US that was practiced by Aquino III under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreements (Arase, 2017).

Furthermore, Duterte believed that the U.S. has a prominent interest in the Philippines because of the island nations' location. In countering China's expansionist claims and aggression, the United States might think that the location of the Philippines' would be the right place to base American warships, aircrafts, marines, sailing and flying operations from the archipelago. However, the relation between the United States and the Philippines worsened as Duterte threatened the United States with the discontinuance of any strategic partnership, which involved the banning of the United States' naval ships in the Philippines to conduct any military navigations. He also threatened to end bilateral military exercises that had been ongoing since Aquino III's administration.

Relations between the Philippines and the United States grew even worse when Duterte visited China in 2018 where he publicly announced that the Philippines would end its ties with the United States in military and economic cooperations (CNN World News, 2018).

One reason why Duterte distanced the Philippines from the United States is due to his past experiences with the latter when he was the mayor of Davao City before he became the president in June 2016. Duterte's anti-America policy was motivated by a few events and grievances over the United States' policy towards the Philippines. Duterte once claimed that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) aided in the escape of an American, Micheal Meiring, after he accidentally triggered an explosive device in his hotel room in Davao City, however, the United States refused to help. Afterwards, Duterte was reportedly denied a visa to visit the United States (Prashanth, 2016). In reference to this

evidence, Duterte also viewed the United States as ineffective because it failed to protect the Philippines' rights and sovereignty. This happened when the United States could not stop China from building its artificial islands that undermined the Philippines' position in the South China Sea.

These incidents not only changed Duterte's perception of the United States, but it also made him change the foreign policy approaches for the United States in terms of less dependency on the US and expansion of good relationships with other countries.

Since Donald Trump became the President of the United States in 2017, relations between both leaders has gradually changed because both Duterte and Trump aspire to repair the 'bad relations' between the Philippines and the United States. Both wish to resolve the issues caused by Obama's criticism on Duterte's war on drugs (Thompson, 2017).

During Duterte's early administration, he was very committed to pursuing separation approach from the United States due to some issues such as Obama's comments on the drug war in the Philippines, unreliable support from the United States, and Duterte's past experiences dealing with it. However, it also showed that distancing the Philippines would not guarantee or ensure the sovereignty of the Philippines, therefore, Duterte took a pragmatic approach by accommodating China, the United States, Russia, and Japan at the same time to receive collective and greater benefits from these countries (Batalla & Vincent, 2016).

3.5.2.5 Cooperation with other countries: Russia and Japan

In late September 2017, President Duterte announced that he would forge "new alliances" with China and Russia to cushion the fallout from the possible withdrawal of the US from the Philippines in 2017 (Cbacungan, 2016). Duterte not only limited his

cooperation with China and the United States but also took this as an opportunity to engage with another countries such as Russia and Japan.

Duterte's approach can be understood as "to have been the friend to all, but subservient to none" (Trishia, ABS-CBN News, 2016). Under this policy, the Philippines practiced pursuing a good relationship by maintaining diplomacy with many countries and by engaging with them in every field including economy, politics, and society. This engagement is important for the Philippines especially under Duterte's administration to keep a good relationship with other countries to pursue the Philippines' national interests.

Unlike Aquino III, who relied on the United States and ASEAN to consolidate Philippines' foreign policy, Duterte's approaches were inclined towards distancing itself from the United States, and forming good relations with China, Russia and Japan. The Philippines under Duterte's administration has also pursued enhanced security cooperation with other partners in the region, including Australia, South Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, ranging from cooperation on training and exercises to purchasing military hardware from these countries (Sheena, 2016).

After Duterte's visit to Japan on 26 October 2016, both Japan and the Philippines respectively recognized the need to have good bilateral relations between the two countries. Duterte and Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, held a productive Summit Meeting in a friendly, forward-looking and constructive atmosphere, with a view to further promote the "Strategic Partnership" between Japan and the Philippines as two maritime countries bound by shared basic values.

Other than that, during Duterte's visit to Japan, he also signed a loan agreement of about 21 billion yens (USD\$200 million) which helped the Philippines in strengthening maritime law enforcement capabilities (Hernandez, 2017). In addition, Japan had

provided two large patrol boats to the Philippines and would fund the government for development assistance of about 5 billion yens to the Philippines to support local agricultural development (Kyodo, 2016).

This relation between them will not only help the Philippines but at the same time can benefit Japan in the future. Significantly, the strategic partnership between the Philippines and Japan can be considered a shared interest where it provides mutual diplomatic advantages to both countries. This strategic partnership has helped both Japan and the Philippines in enjoying more flexibility in terms of accommodating the parties' respective foreign policies and both countries can focus on specific goals in the partnership such as capacity-building (Galang, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2017). By and large, Duterte has sustained his predecessor's forging of strong relations with Japan.

The relationship between Russia and the Philippines has never been a significant defense partnership due to the Philippines' decades of alliance with the United States (Prashanth, 2017). Nevertheless, this relation has been a spotlight for Duterte to diversify his country's ties with other countries like Russia. Apparently, both the Philippines and Russia are looking for collaboration where, Russia for its part, has been looking to boost the security aspect of its relations with several Southeast Asian states, meanwhile, the Philippines under Duterte's administration seeks to boost the country's outreach with Russia to advance its defense ties.

Russia and the Philippines signed a military cooperation agreement in 2017 and the Philippines' President, Duterte personally oversaw the transfer of about 5,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles donated by Russia to the Philippines (RT News, 2018). Duterte also seeks to explore future deals of military expenditure for buying Russian armored cars, patrol boats, submarines, and helicopters.

As a manifestation of Duterte's pursuance of independent foreign policy, it is crucial for him to seek, expand and forge relations with a diversity of partners such as Russia and Japan (Republic of the Philippines, 2018). The Philippines' national interest and domestic agenda remain essential for Duterte's foreign policy and it should manifest the government's resolve in engaging and cooperating with other countries in matters of mutual interest in terms of economic growth and security build-up.

3.5.3 Duterte's Personality in Shaping the Foreign Policy Approach with China

The current administration's foreign policy plays the most important role in shaping the country's South China Sea policies. The change in foreign policy under Duterte is obvious as it is related to his own personal views and opinions about the country's relation with China. Duterte wants to maximize his country's economic and trade benefits by reestablishing good relations with China, and at the same time to de-escalate the South China Sea dispute. Hence, it is important to examine this changing foreign policy approach under Duterte's administration which is related to his personal motivation and approach towards China.

China has been increasing its demands in the South China Sea by sending its military to the disputed area to gain control and improve its maritime policies towards the South China Sea. This action has appeared to threaten the sovereignty of other nations' maritime territory especially the Philippines' and therefore it is required of Duterte to take strategic actions to handle the South China Sea dispute with China.

On the other hand, Duterte's rapprochement with China is driven by his desire to get China's help in the Philippines' development assistance. His policy on engaging China in the Philippines' economy is due to his lack of confidence in the United States aids in safeguarding the Philippines' sovereignty, as well as American criticism of his war on drugs (Interview, Daniel, 2018). He also believes that the Philippines is safer by appeasing

China. It is to avoid war between the two countries particularly over the South China Sea dispute (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017). Additionally, Duterte loves peace and reconciliation and therefore he refuses to take any aggressive approach in handling China as it will only lead to military conflict and it will derail Philippines' economic growth (Baviera, 2018).

Other personal factors have also led Duterte to adopt a more personal and pragmatic approach towards the South China Sea dispute with China. Duterte is seen as a hands-on problem solver who demonstrates political will and does not fear change (Murphy, 2017). He is a brave leader who never fears adopting changes. His new foreign policy for the Philippines in terms of its dispute with China is an example of this.

3.5.3.1 Duterte as a Statesman and his Foreign Policy

One of the domestic variables in the Philippines that influenced the change in foreign policy by Duterte was Duterte himself. As a leader, a President, and a statesman for the Philippines, his domestic approach has gradually affected the construct of the foreign policy under his administration. According to Zakaria (1998), the statesman or a leader plays an important role through his perception and understanding. It is crucial and should be prioritized while forming a foreign policy where Duterte is responsible to decide to take any action or policies in his country. Heydarian (2017) also argues that in developing countries like the Philippines, the foreign policy is less institutionalized, more personalistic, and largely reactive to the behavior of great powers.

In *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968), Samuel Huntington presciently warns about the prospects of autocratic takeover precisely in contemporary Philippines. Due to the conditions in the Philippines where there is rising income inequality, intensified mobilization on the part of masses and where the middle class is getting aspirational, Duterte has grabbed this opportunity to practice what he believes in and uses the power

to his advantage (Surveys by Pulse Asia and Social Weather Stations in the third and fourth quarter of 2016). Taylor and Frantz (2016) describe this process by stating that the Philippines under President Duterte will experience this change.

In many ways, Duterte is best described as a strongman populist, who combines the authoritarian style of governance and limited respect for democratic checks and balances them with "caudillo" style populism which is appealing to both right-wing yearnings for rule of law and left-wing demand for social justice (Heydarian, 2017). For example, Duterte has brought many changes in the Philippines such as by implementing the "War on Drugs" programme, and also improved the Filipino's living by providing economic opportunity.

Duterte has openly criticized America for decades and has always been an unabashed critic of American military presence in Mindanao (Wall Street Journal, 2016). Therefore, at the early stage of his administration in the Philippines, he clearly sought to distance the country by being less dependent on the United States while taking more diplomatic ways with China. In this context, Duterte intends to create an appeasement approach towards China to avoid conflict as he was skeptical of the United States' willingness to help the Philippines if any armed conflict over the South China Sea might occur in the future. In addition, the Philippines had no choice but to appease China which act as a big power in the region and this helped in mitigating the South China Sea dispute between the two countries (Kuik, Interview, 2018).

3.6 Conclusion

The decision to bring the South China Sea dispute to The Hague became remarkably significant and was considered a success for Aquino III's administration. There are many major events that have contributed to manage the South China Sea problems by dealing with China. One major turning point during Aquino III's presidency was that the power

of law could be justified to protect the nation's sovereign rights and Aquino III's achievement in managing the dispute became a role model for other countries or stakeholders involved in the disputes. They could use his example to protect their claims over their maritime territorial rights in the South China Sea.

However, Duterte has drastically changed his foreign policies in handling the South China Sea dispute. To successfully pursue his ambitions, Duterte has made sure that bilateral relations with China are negotiated in a diplomatic way without rising any difficulties that might hamper relations between them. In addition to that, Duterte also wants to detach the Philippines from the US by putting an end to their alliance. He has worked towards strengthening ties with Russia and Japan. Any approaches taken by Duterte are believed to solve and lessen the issues of the South China Sea with China and these approaches are made diplomatically to avoid further negative circumstances that might affect the government of the Philippines.

CHAPTER 4: COMPARISON BETWEEN THE APPROACHES OF AQUINO III AND DUTERTE IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

4.1 Introduction

The comparison of the approaches made by Aquino III and Duterte can be understood by explaining the internal and external factors that contributed in shaping their foreign policies approach in the South China Sea dispute. Both the internal and external factors represent the nature of the different personalities possessed by the two leaders Aquino III and Duterte. Meanwhile, the external factors can also influence, in a way, how these two leaders reacted to new threats in their surrounding particularly while managing the South China Sea dispute.

4.2 Internal Factors

Respectively, both leaders have a different perception about the subject particularly on how they perceived China. Accordingly, Aquino III and Duterte have different personalities and they contradict each other in terms of how they see China - whether as a threat or as an ally. These unlike perceptions led Aquino III and Duterte to take certain actions and policies according to their understanding or perception in order to manage the South China Sea dispute.

4.2.1 Aquino III's Internal Factors

Internally, Aquino III perceived China as a threat particularly in the dispute of South China Sea between China and the Philippines. According to Daniel (2018), Aquino III was known as a man of principle, brave, and aggressive. During Aquino III's tenure as the President of the Philippines, he brought the South China Sea dispute to Arbitration to ask the tribunal to mitigate the dispute between them according to international law and/or the 1982 UNCLOS. In this context, the role of Aquino III as the President of the Philippines at the time led to the decision of taking China to the international tribunal and

was characterized by his domestic approach, personality and decision-making that simultaneously influenced the way he managed the South China Sea dispute with China.

Nevertheless, this is an example that shows that the neo-classical realism perspective is applicable in understanding Aquino III's foreign policy approach. Following Kitchen's (2010) study, he argued that this neo-classical realism is embedded from the domestic influence which can be referred to as the centralization of power within a state or leadership that can influence decision-making. The ideas and opinions from these concerned people are relevant and important to shape foreign policy implementation. For example, Aquino III as the President of the Philippines, during his administration, perceived China as a threat and by any means sought to implement his foreign policy according to his point of view in which China was considered an opposition party against the South China Sea dispute between the Philippines and China (Castro, 2016)

Aquino III's foreign policy formulation for the country showcased that he perceived China differently and treated it as a threat, especially regarding the South China Sea dispute. He took numerous actions in order to get the support of the United States to manage the South China Sea dispute with China. This domestic approach can be seen through his personality and decision-making by prioritizing his country's rights in the disputed sea and successfully gaining legal success afterwards. As the International Crisis Group noted, Aquino III was regarded as a strong man who knows how to manage his country when a threat presented during this strained relationship with China over the South China Sea. Simply put, Aquino III's approach in handling the disputed sea was more assertive and vocal to safeguard the Philippine's territorial rights.

During Aquino III's administration, he sought the United States to help him manage the dispute in terms of strengthening military cooperation and particularly joint exercises between the United States and the Filipino troops (Abinales, 2013). Similarly, as reported by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (2011), Aquino III sought to acquire advanced weapon systems from the United States to begin modernizing and rearming the Armed Forces of the Philippines. This occurred because Aquino III's efforts to ease the tensions with China over the South China Sea dispute had been ignored by China. Therefore, as he had no other alternatives, Aquino III then had to upgrade the military defense and capabilities by closely cooperating with the United States (Castro, 2012). Consequently, Aquino III also decided to counter China in the dispute through internationalization of the conflict and forging closer ties with the United States and Australia, as well as Japan (Kreuzer, 2018). Aquino III's perception of China as a threat had been the core reason of the way he dealt with China which also affected the approach or policy taken by the Philippines in managing the South China Sea disputes with China.

Similarly, as supported by Castro (2014), he argued that a state's decision to balance or bandwagon against an emergent power not only lies on their national capabilities, size or location, but it is also influenced by the results of elections and the leader's individual ability to manipulate local circumstances to achieve disproportionate relations with the big powers. Similarly, as neo-classical realism stresses on the importance of domestic politics, Aquino III made a choice to become allies with the United States rather than China. This showed that his opinion in shaping the foreign policy towards China by seeking a closer bilateral relationship with the United States was one of his strategies against China in the South China Sea dispute.

4.2.2 Duterte's Internal Factors

In contrast, Duterte wanted his personality to be different from that of his predecessor especially regarding the foreign policy approach and the strategy to manage the South China Sea dispute. His administration's current foreign policy orientation plays the most important role in shaping the Philippine's approach regarding the South China Sea. The changing of the foreign policy approach under Duterte is significant as it was motivated and driven by his own personality such as his personal views and opinions, and perspective towards the South China Sea dispute with China.

Under his administration, Duterte's foreign policy approach is determined by his personality which contributes to the way that he deals with China. He is described as a controversial and divisive figure (Santamaria, 2018). Duterte similarly also has an instinctively independent leadership style, a hands-on problem solver, reputedly concerned for the Filipinos' welfare and has beliefs in working for peace and reconciliation (Baviera, 2018).

The relation between Duterte's personality and the implementation of foreign policy in the Philippines is important as it proves that there is a change in the approaches adopted by Aquino III and Duterte due to their personal characteristics. There are many reasons behinds this change and Duterte's personality is among the influential factors of why now the Philippines' relationship with China is stronger under his presidency whereas the Philippines under Aquino III was so aggressive towards China.

Duterte perceives China as a successful nation with a strong military capability which could affect the situation in the contested sea. He takes this as an example to not take an approach that might further elevate the tension between the two countries as this will ruin their future economic relations. Duterte is aware of China's aggression in the South China Sea and tries to take a softer stance in handling the tensed relations between the

Philippines and China to get mutual understanding and cooperation to avoid conflict between them.

In the case of Duterte, his foreign policy in the South China Sea dispute with China was approached similarly to neo-classical realism in managing their tension as it was influenced by his domestic counterparts such as leadership and his perception towards the disputes happening in the Philippines. Neo-classical was employed to understand certain actions taken by a leader in the making of foreign policy by integrating the domestic needs particularly to justify the Philippines' demands in the disputed water with China. Duterte legitimizes his power to take control of the issue by satisfying China in order to protect the Philippines' from China's threat.

In addition, Duterte's foreign policy concerning China is also motivated by his perception about the United States which involves the anti-American sentiments. Meanwhile, Aquino III on the other side, legitimized his right as a President to protect the Philippines' rights in the South China Sea disagreement by taking the case with China to the international tribunal as he perceived China as an enemy and the United States as an ally. Nevertheless, during Duterte's administration, he was anti United States, particularly under Obama's presidency. Obama condemned Duterte's war on drugs in the Philippines as it is a human rights violation and he should instead handle the issue carefully (Santos, 2017). Due to the criticism, Duterte showed his anger and released a statement against Obama and in turn caused the Philippines'-United States relations to deteriorate. However, according to Daniel (Interview, 2018), relations between the United States and the Philippines resumed normally when Trump became the President and both leaders started to discuss future cooperation between the two countries.

Likewise, the different personalities between Aquino III and Duterte can be seen throughout their approaches concerning external relationships with other countries such

as the United States, Russia and Japan. For example, during Aquino III's administration, he was devoted to have a closer relationship with the United States to search for military assistance as well as the need to protect the Philippine's interests in the South China Sea. Due to Aquino III's closer relations with the United States, his stance as a pro-U.S., somehow changed his foreign policy approach in the Philippines which was particularly shaped by his perception towards the significance of diplomatically engaged relations with the United States.

4.3 External Factors

External factors such as threats from China, support from another country such as the United States, and assistance from China are among important determinants of why they can influence the shaping of foreign policy approaches under both leaders, Aquino III and Duterte. These external factors are not only different at the time, but it also caused different approaches under these two leaderships.

4.3.1 Aquino III's External Factors

During Aquino III's presidency, he experienced the growing presence of China's strategic claims around the South China Sea (Kwon, 2019). China's continuous build-ups and construction of naval structures that surrounded the South China Sea eventually caused the Philippines' maritime sovereignty to be affected. Aquino III believed that China interfered with the Philippines's maritime territory through naval construction and fishing activities that could have harmed the marine environment.

In addition, China's claim over the South China Sea is something that Aquino III could not resist and ignore. This is due to China's claims regarding the rights and obligations to the waters, seabed, and maritime features of the South China Sea on the basis of historic rights and as depicted in the map containing the *Nine-Dash Line* which are deemed invalid by the Philippines because they were inconsistent with UNCLOS (Pemmaraju, 2016).

The extensive claims and military approach used by China eventually threatened the Philippines' security and sovereignty in their territorial maritime zone. Therefore, instead of being ignorant about the issue, Aquino III put forward his approach and then changed his policy towards China regarding the South China dispute.

At the same time, the willingness of the United States to assist the Philippines against China in the South China Sea offered Aquino III an opportunity to deal with China's aggressiveness in the dispute. At the same time, as Aquino III sought to disassociate himself from the previous Arroyo administration's policy of equibalancing China and the United States, this also showcased that his direction for foreign policy approach in the Philippines had transitioned according to his personal opinions and perspective towards the importance of the Philippines' interest. Therefore, since 2011, Aquino's III foreign policy had been shaped by his domestic approach that comprises of challenging China's claim in the South China Sea, redirected the AFP's focus from domestic security to territorial defense, and promoted closer security relations between the United States and the Philippines.

4.3.2 Duterte's External Factors

In contrast to the Philippines' under Duterte's tenure, China's assistance in order to help the Philippines under Duterte is among the main important external factors of why his approaches is different if compared to Aquino III. The Filipinos welfare, especially among the poor, is Duterte's top priority in terms of his internal approach to guarantee the Filipinos' welfare. Hence, any approach taken by Duterte in managing the foreign policy with China is always to make sure the Filipinos receives better future under his tenure.

One of Duterte's major concerns is to bring the Philippines to a new level of economic development that is needed to transform the Philippines' economy. However, this could not be done without taking into consideration aid from other countries. As supported by

Lopez (2017), Duterte's sought to get close to China in order to get support in terms of economic cooperation as this diplomatic approach with China will benefit the Philippines' future developments.

For this need, Duterte sees China as a great power that can help the development of the Philippine's. After taking office in July 2016, Duterte visited China and their discussion brought fruitful results. For example, the relations between China and Philippine's stand on a new starting point, where both countries agreed to work together to ensure the development of bilateral relations on the right track. Consequently, due to Duterte's soft approach with China, the Philippines' development in the country was funded by China as they are willing to offer assistance to the Philippines in terms of helping Duterte achieve his promise to the Filipinos to reduce poverty in the country. Besides, China will continue to support the Philippines under Duterte's administration.

As Duterte perceives China as the regional economic player especially within the Southeast Asian countries, Duterte believes that China could support him if he is willing to approach China pragmatically and diplomatically. Until present, the Philippines has received and has been rewarded with many economic opportunities and infrastructure developments such as the renewal of roads, railways, bridges, ports and airports. In addition, as relations between China and the Philippines under Duterte resumes positively, China in return has allowed Filipino fishermen to return to the Scarborough Shoal and back to their normal life by fishing around the area (Baviera, 2017).

Even though it is obvious that China has managed to help Duterte and the Philippines economically, at the same time Duterte also needs to ensure that his diplomatic relations with the United States remain intact as the Philippines needs the United States for security purposes to aid protect the Philippines' territory.

4.4 Comparison between Approaches of Aquino III and Duterte in the South China Sea Dispute

Since Duterte became the President of the Philippines, there is a reorientation that took place especially when we look at his foreign policy behavior. One of the factors that led to this changing is the role of domestic influence such as personality and decision-making in the Philippines. This change has certainly affected the approach concerning foreign policies in this country. Furthermore, this is also caused by different political and security landscapes of the administration that shaped the degree of variations towards the approaches or actions taken by the President to manage the South China Sea disputes with China. Hence, by using the neo-classical realism theory, the domestic factors which are at the core of neo-classical assumptions are applied in my research as they are relevant and they distinguish the differences between the approaches of Aquino III and Duterte in shaping their foreign policy towards the South China Sea dispute with China.

Even though the neo-classical realism emphasizes on the domestic variables stemming from the systemic, domestic, and other influencing factors, this study focuses to exemplify the foreign policy determinants by only using *domestic influences*. The importance of identifying the internal factors within a leader shows how it can influence or affecting them in shaping their foreign policy approach when interacting with various countries in the world.

The main objective of this study is to examine the different approaches taken by Aquino III and Duterte in handling the South China Sea dispute with China. This research analyzes the information based on the content analysis that has been done and the data that is also supported by the interviews conducted by the researcher. According to the content data analysis, the researcher found that the sentiment or perception about whether the pro-United States or the anti-United States and pro-China and anti-China are among

the indications that examined the different approaches taken by both Aquino III and Duterte in their foreign policies implementation in the South China Sea with China.

The first main difference in the approaches taken by Aquino III and Duterte towards the South China Sea disputes with China is their sentiment of whether they stand for the pro-United States or the anti-United States.

In addition, the most important approach that shaped Aquino's III foreign policy was the use of a diplomatic-legal strategy to challenge China in the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA). The Philippines' government under Aquino's III administration filed the South China Sea case with China in January 2013 where it was considered as the first brave step taken by the nation to manage the dispute. To some extent, Aquino's III administration reached a point where a negotiated settlement with China was most unlikely. Hence, the only way to at least manage it was by bringing the dispute to an international tribunal (Hendler, 2018).

Based on this data, the researcher supports the information from the interview with Jose (2018), as he indicated that during Aquino III's Presidency, Aquino III tried to engage with China through bilateral relations, but it was China who refused to discuss the South China Sea issue. He describes Aquino III as a firm and principled man, who always protected "what is ours" (referring to the Philippines' maritime territorial rights in the South China Sea). At the same time, Jose also stresses on the personality of Aquino III as he always believed in the rule of law (international law) and wanted to have a peaceful engagement), which led Aquino III to seek help from the international tribunal. Similarly, following on interview with Kuik (2018), he also believes that Aquino III's strong stance towards the United States was motivated from the Philippines being a close ally to the United States and due to Obama's rebalancing policy in the Philippines which made

Aquino III to continuously deliver his foreign policies which depended on the United States.

Additionally, the perception of anti and pro-China is also among the main findings for this research. Undeniably, both leaders, Aquino III and Duterte have different views on China and their perception of it has led them to take different approaches respectively. In brief, Aquino III was anti-China, meanwhile, Duterte is pro-China.

During Aquino III's presidency in the Philippines, he was attached closer to the United States and his perception of China diminished as the Philippines were asked to accept China's sovereignty especially in relation to the dispute. At the same time, their bilateral relations were only dominated by maritime disputes which worsened the situation between China and the Philippines (Wong, 2017). Aquino III perceived that action as oppressive and he refused to acknowledge China's sovereignty particularly under the South China Sea dispute (Interview, Jose, 2018). Meanwhile, Duterte from the beginning of his presidency has always stated that the Philippines' will focus on bilateral relations with China instead of the United States. Duterte viewed China as a source of opportunities which can benefit the Philippines with new infrastructures for the country's development.

His inclination to mend the political ties between the Philippines and China is motivated to improve the economic relations between both countries. Duterte believes that China could assist and help him to achieve his promise to the Filipino people to improve the condition in the Philippines' (infrastructures, tourism, employment) if he successfully engages with China (China, 2016). At the same time, Duterte also believes that the Philippines could not solve the dispute, hence *managing* the South China Sea dispute is the best way to avoid war and conflict between the Philippines and China (Interview, Kuik, 2018). Throughout this argument, it is obvious that Duterte's foreign policy approach towards China in the South China Sea dispute was particularly driven by

the need to strengthen the relations with aid donors such as China, wherein from them Duterte received funds of about USD\$26 billion (Interview, Daniel, 2018) in return for his pro-China policy.

In addition, this research also finds that the big power dynamic which is the pro or anti-United States and pro or anti-China and the developmental needs such as in the economy and in building infrastructure are the main factors affecting the change in foreign policy from Aquino III to Duterte.

China's emergence as a great power has witnessed the changes in foreign policy under Duterte's administration. Since the big power is uncertain, the Philippine cannot not fully depend on the United States to solve the South China Sea dispute anymore and needs to widen their ties with other countries such as China, South Korea, and Japan to manage the conflict. At the same time, Duterte feels that the Philippines also could not depend to the United States anymore as he doubted their commitment to his country especially in relation to the South China Sea dispute (Thompson, 2016). In addition, his change in the approach is also influenced by the action of the western countries, especially the United States under Obama's administration, who condemned Duterte's anti-drug campaign which had tensed relations between the two countries. Hedging towards China and away from the United States during the beginning of Duterte's administration indicates that this changing of foreign policy is due to the uncertainty of the big power structure.

Likewise, one of Duterte's priorities in foreign policy is to develop the Philippines domestically. For Duterte, Chinese investment in the Philippines is creating many opportunities not only for the country but also for the Filipinos. Therefore, he welcomes any kinds of assistance that China could offer to him in terms of funds and investment.

4.5 Conclusion

The explanation behind the differences in the two administrations of Aquino III and Duterte was driven by the complex condition of internal and domestic influences that contributed to the decision-making which then affected their policy approach respectively. This can be understood by assessing both Aquino III and Duterte approaches in managing the South China Sea dispute with China by the help of the theory of neo-classical realism. As mentioned earlier in the previous chapter, the neo-classical realism contends that the internal characteristics of states may intervene the implementation of foreign policy taken by the state leaders to shape a state's foreign policy. Therefore, by going through these internal and external factors by both presidency in the Philippines in managing the dispute, this study can determine and measure the extent to which the Philippines contribute to the existing problem in the South China Sea. Significantly, neoclassical realism can explain how the Philippines' perception and assessment of threats and opportunities under Aquino III and Duterte with China in the South China Sea dispute towards their formation of foreign strategies at a given time and circumstances.

In conclusion, it is important to examine the dynamics of domestic factors such as the personality of the leader as it provides much more explanation to understand why certain policies are undertaken by the President within a country. This personality factors not only help to manage or mitigate any conflict especially the South China Sea disputes between the Philippines and China, but their level of commitment and domestic variables that influenced their approaches can be investigated to avoid any further escalation of the dispute in the future.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter is to analyze the research finding according to the main data gathered from the content analysis and data from interviews conducted. Most of the analysis is in accordance with the research objectives stated in Chapter One, concluded here as different personalities between Aquino III and Duterte provides significant changes and contradict in terms of their approaches towards the South China Sea dispute with China.

This research examined the domestic factors which had influenced the approaches of Aquino III's and Duterte which are guided by the neoclassical realism theoretical framework. It focused on the importance of a leader's personality which can lead to the making of foreign policy in the Philippines in particular with regard to the South China Sea dispute between China and the Philippines.

The researcher had applied the neo-classical realism theory to examine the different approaches taken by both Aquino III and Duterte and examined the extent to which domestic influence such as personality, decision-making and perception had moulded their approaches in the South China Sea dispute with China. This is to prove that domestic factors play a significant role in understanding the situation in the South China Sea dispute. By putting the Philippines' internal characteristics into consideration (as explained by the theory of neo-classical realism) when addressing the research problem of this study, a better understanding of the phenomenon under study is achieved.

Given the various claims over the South China Sea and the challenging security concern between the claimant countries such as the Philippines, it seems unlikely that the conflict can be resolved with finality. However, managing these conflicts diplomatically will be the best hope for them to do not degenerate into violence. The Philippines realized that this conflict could not be ignored as this issue will continue to appear and exist in the

future, therefore, consideration and mitigating on the South China Sea dispute especially in the hands of the Philippines' presidency is the utmost needed policy to deal properly with China. With the concern of China being a great power and their active movement and actions in the disputed sea, it is important for the Philippines to ensure the right approach is to be taken carefully.

Both presidents Aquino III and Duterte are aware of their sovereign rights in the South China Sea, however, each of them had handled it in different ways. For this research, it can justify that the way these two presidents mitigated the issue was by challenging - which is in reference to Aquino's III presidency, and by avoiding to offend China - which refers to Duterte's presidency. It is clear that the South China Sea will be a major conflict in Southeast Asia and mitigating the issue will be important as a non-violent solution is viewed to be in everyone's best interest.

This research has shown that both presidents Aquino III and Duterte have adopted different approaches which stem from the domestic factors that have influenced their decisions. It is highlighted that a comparison of the two presidential terms is necessary in order to understand the factors that influence a leader to choose a foreign policy when ruling over a government.

The South China Sea dispute should be managed diplomatically in order to avoid conflict and war among claimants. The reason why this dispute has remained unsolved is due to the disagreement between stakeholders especially China as they refused to settle it peacefully. Therefore, the only way to manage this dispute is to satisfy both parties, the Philippines and China, in accordance with international law that can accommodate both claims respectively in the dispute. The role of an international treaty such as UNCLOS should be prioritized in any maritime conflict as it will be difficult to manage it without a peaceful agreement and order. China should consider accepting the services of

international tribunals particularly in the matter of the South China Sea dispute as it will be the best approach to manage it among the stakeholders.

For the Philippines, it is significant that both Aquino III and Duterte had different approaches to manage the dispute. Positively, different leaderships in the Philippines showed the distinct success in managing the South China Sea dispute with China. Firstly, the Philippines won the South China Sea case against China in 2016 under Aquino III's administration, and now under Duterte, the Philippines has recovered relations with China and became a close ally as economic partners in the region. Due to this changing leadership, the South China Sea dispute with China has been managed differently and it is proven that this change has affected the current circumstances in the dispute and shows that leadership and personalities of leaders can eventually lead to significantly different decision making approaches.

Hence, in view of the Philippines and China's relations, the South China Sea dispute shows that different leaderships can either shape or change a foreign policy approach. Nevertheless, the need to examine Aquino III and Duterte's distinctive approach is important in this research in order to understand why these changes happened. Finally, both President Aquino III and Duterte are subjected to domestic concerns at the time of their tenure that shaped their foreign policy approaches. Ultimately, this signaled that neo-classical realism is applicable to both situations during their presidencies in the Philippines.

It is evident that a leader does not react similarly to the same objective and interest. Both Aquino III and Duterte shaped their foreign policies approach based on their internal characteristics such as their personality and perspective of the South China Sea dispute. The dispute eventually influenced the Philippines' foreign policy approach while its domestic factors (leaders) intervened and shaped their different approaches towards the

dispute with China. Therefore, when looking for possible means that can help manage or eradicate the conflict between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, it is important to always consider the influence level of different domestic dynamics of the parties involved in the implementation of these means. Any domestic dynamic regardless of its size or influence can alter the balance of peace and stability in the international system, especially in the South China Sea dispute.

In summary, most of the Southeast Asian countries especially the Philippines feel the urge to manage the South China Sea dispute carefully. Due to many factors such as the economic benefits in the South China Sea, overlapping claims between claimants, and competition towards the stakeholders involved, all of the parties need to discuss the dispute thoroughly and find a peaceful solution to end the complexity of relations particularly the disagreement that caused tensed relations. Undoubtedly, in the case of the Philippines, it is shown that Aquino III and Duterte have different approaches to managing the dispute with China, but in the end, they both struggled to ensure that the Philippines' national interests are guaranteed for the development of the country. Meanwhile, relations between China and the Philippines will continue to face challenges, as the political issues will never stop permanently, and both countries should manage to at least resolve the South China Sea debate to satisfy in accordance to the interests of both sides in order to avoid any conflict between the two nations in the future. As for the Philippines, the changing leadership from Aquino III to Duterte has shown positive development in relations between China and the Philippines whereby there has been minimum conflict in the dispute, and more economic partnerships as well as many opportunities for the future has been realized.

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