

## THE EMERGENCE OF CHINA AS A GLOBAL POWER AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTES: A PEACEFUL RISE OR A THREAT TO INTERNATIONAL ORDER?

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### **Abstract**

*In this paper, the narrative of the emergence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a global power began with Chairman Mao Zedong's failed attempt to transform China into a modernised and industrialised State. By 1978, the pragmatic leader, Deng Xiaoping, came into power and reformed China's closed economy. Ever since then, China for more than three decades has been experiencing an unprecedented economic growth rate of 9-10%. This 'economic miracle' has not only made the Chinese State an economic powerhouse recently but also a country that is fast becoming a military power under the incumbent President, Xi Jinping. The South China Sea (SCS) is an approximately 3.5 square kilometres sea in the western region of the Pacific Ocean. This geostrategic sea's waterways, geographical features and natural resources have for more than three decades been subjected to the overlapping sovereignty and jurisdiction claims of the heavyweight, China and the diminutive littoral States – Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei that surround the South China Sea. This paper therefore takes first and foremost, a critical look at the emergence of China as a global power and lastly whether it would be a peaceful rise or pose a threat to international order in the context of the South China Sea Disputes. The historical and analytical approaches were used to carry out this study as well as the qualitative method of data collection.*

**Keywords:** South China Sea (SCS), Rising Power, International Order, Assertiveness, Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power.

## Introduction

Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century began, the most remarkable event on the international scene to have caught the attention of scholars in the academia as well as States policy-makers, is the rise of the People's Republic of China as a global power. In the late 50s, the leader of communist China, Mao Zedong, was bent on transforming China from an agrarian to an industrialised economy. With his "Great Leap Forward" campaign that began in 1958, all China's individual household farms were collectivised into large communes in the rural areas (Morrison, 2015). "He encouraged average citizens to produce steel in backyard factories, embarked on massive capital construction projects, and increased the mass mobilization of peasant groups, supposedly to improve grain production and increase harvests, but also to boost the Communist Party's control over the populace" (Kurlantzick, 2007, p.13). But no sooner had Chairman Mao's "Great Leap Forward" campaign started than it began to fail and eventually came to an end in 1962. The campaign shattered administrative routines, wasted vast resources, undermined work incentives, and triggered a man-made famine that cost the lives of 30 million people (Rawski, 2011).

Following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the mantle of leadership fell on the reformist, Deng Xiaoping, who upon assuming power in 1978, saw to the reform of China's closed economy with his "Open Door Policy" which transformed China from a centrally planned economy to an open market economy. The 1978 economic reform, which commenced fully the following year, brought about the establishment of four Special Economic Zone (SEZ) along the coastal area of China which attracted Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), boosted exports and, the importation of high technology products into the country. As a result, China became a significant trading country and also a major international actor in world politics (Godwin, 2004; Morrison, 2013; cited in Shambaugh, 2013).

Ever since Deng Xiaoping economic reform opened up China's command economy to the wider world, China has sustained an average annual economic growth of about 10 percent for thirty years, the fastest in the world and indeed unprecedented in the history of economic development the world over (Wang, 2009). The CCP led government, having brought about and sustained the economic growth and development of China, has for over 30 years been enjoying legitimacy from its citizenry as well as a stable political system. In 2010, China overtook Japan as the second largest economy in the world (Lai, 2012). Though, China has already overtaken America on the basis of the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) yardstick since 2014, it has been predicted by some economic experts that China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would surpass that of the United States to become the largest economy in the world by 2025-2030.

The 'economic miracle' to have taken place in China made possible the modernisation of its obsolete military force – the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Presently, China's defense spending is above \$150 billion (the second largest in the world after that of the United States put

at about \$500-600 billion every year), which is earmarked annually for the enhancement of the PLA capability to project power on land, in the air and sea. China as a nuclear power has a stockpile of nuclear warheads. The People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) can boast of a good number of stealth drones and fighter jets just as the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) can equally do the same with its numerous combat warships and nuclear powered submarines. In April, 2017, PLAN launched its first home made aircraft carrier which is China's second after the refitted Soviet Union aircraft carrier 'Liaoning' that was purchased from Ukraine (Ogunnoiki, 2017). Furthermore, China, military wise, has been able to fashion out an Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) defense strategy that would deny the naval force of powerful countries such as the United States and its allies from reaching mainland China from the 'near seas' (i.e the East China Sea, the Yellow Sea and the South China Sea) or what some Chinese military strategists call the 'First Island Chain', should there be a counter intervention move against it.

China no doubt, is a rising economic and military power on the international scene. It has over the years proven to be a responsible State actor as it complies with international norms and regimes to an extent. Of them all, China's adherence to the principle of 'non interference' in the domestic affairs of other States as spelt out in article 2(7) of the United Nations Charter (1945) is highly commendable. Her immense contribution to the U.N budget and peacekeeping operations the world over is also worth mentioning. However, China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea has made Western countries raise eye brows and accordingly take necessary steps to checkmate her (Ogunnoiki, 2017). Having done the introduction of this research work, the body of this paper has been compartmentalised into the following headings – conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, the measurement of China's national power, the three dimension of China's comprehensive national power: hard, soft and smart power, the emergence of China as a global power and the South China Sea disputes: a peaceful rise or a threat to international order?, and lastly, conclusion.

## **1. Conceptual Clarification**

There are three salient concepts that capture the whole essence of this study. An understanding of each and every one of them is essential for an in-depth study of the emergence of China as a global power and the South China Sea disputes: a peaceful rise or a threat to international order?

### **i) Rising Power**

According to Hart and Jones (2010), there is no commonly accepted definition of what an emerging or rising power is, let alone consistent indicators of what a rising State looks like (cited in Miller, 2016). Nevertheless, a rising power is a State that is fast wielding economic and military power regionally or globally.

## ii) Assertiveness

Generally speaking, assertiveness means to confidently claim one's rights which could be done forcefully. But to Fravel, assertiveness "implies new and unilateral actions to change the status quo in a dispute or relationship" (Fravel, 2012, p.41).

## iii) International Order

"Order refers to the settled arrangements—rules, institutions, alliances, relationships, and patterns of authority—that guide the interaction of states" (Ikenberry, 2015, p.5). The international order therefore is the settled arrangements – territorial boundaries, institutions and sundry in the post-World War II era.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Today, the focus of the world is on Asia and the rising prominence of countries therein. China, being an emerging global power from the region, has recently triggered a widespread concern whether its augmenting power would pose a threat to the established post-World War II international order as safeguarded by the United States for more than seven decades now (Huiyun, 2009; Yaqing, 2010; Goswami, 2013). At this juncture, this study needs to be critically analysed which would be done within the framework of a theory.

Of the several mainstream theories that we have in the discipline 'International Relations', the theory that specifically touches on how States power can pose a security threat to international order and accordingly, the response of 'status quo' States to counteract such a threat, is none other than 'Neorealism'.

Neorealism or structural realism as some scholars would preferably call it, is an offshoot of classical realism which sprang up during the Cold War. The chief proponent of this theory remains Kenneth N. Waltz. In his book: *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Waltz made up for the loose ends in classical realists thinking (Ogunnoiki, 2017). "Waltz agreed with classical realists that states are the primary actors in the international system, and that they seek power. However, Waltz broke with earlier realists on why states seek power. Instead of human nature, Waltz identified the international structure as the origin for why states seek power. Anarchy and the distribution of power within the international system determine state behaviour. Anarchy forces states with military capabilities (i.e. all of them) to fear each other, and, as a result, build up their respective power capabilities to achieve an adequate level of security. System-wide, this logic leads to a balance of power dynamic, whereby states either build-up their own power capabilities (internal balancing) or forge alliances with other states (external balancing) to balance the power of a rival state" (Pearson, 2015, p.3).

According to Stephen Walt (2002), there are two strands of structural realism - i) offensive realism and ii) defensive realism. Each of these types of structural realism seek to answer the salient question, why do States seek power? (Ogunnoiki, 2017).

### **i) Offensive Realism**

Offensive Realism or Revisionism as one out of the two kinds of structural realism, was developed by John Mearsheimer. Offensive realists are of the view that in order for States to assure their survival in the self-help international system, they have to accumulate as much power as possible (Heffron, 2015).

Mearsheimer (2014, pp.79-80) came up with five assumptions on why States would do all it takes to maximise power at the detriment of other States in the international system. “The first assumption is that great powers are the principal actors in global politics and operate in a system of anarchy. The second assumption is that all states have offensive military capabilities, albeit some greater than others, and this can change over time. Assumption number three is that states can never be sure of the intentions of other states. A state may appear to be a status quo state, but in reality may be a revisionist state. Furthermore, whilst it is difficult to detect a state’s present intentions, it is near impossible to predict its intentions in the future. The fourth assumption is that survival is the ultimate goal of all states. The final assumption is that states are rational actors and make calculated decisions” (cited in Heffron, 2015, p.5). Going by the aforementioned assumptions, offensive realists are of the opinion that States would do all it takes to maximise their power for their survival. They are opportunists that “look for opportunities to shift the balance of power in their favour” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p.80).

In Asia, China, being the most populous country in the region and indeed the entire world, has been flexing her muscle as a rising global power in laying sovereignty claims to most of the South China Sea geographical features which Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines equally have legitimate claims over them (Ogunnoiki, 2017). Although some scholars as Roy (2013a, p.3) have pointed out that China would not attempt to alter forcefully the status quo as she benefits immensely in terms of international trade from the existing international order, offensive realists going by China’s recent actions in South China Sea think otherwise (Ogunnoiki, 2017).

### **ii) Defensive Realism**

Defensive realism as the second strand of structural realism, was developed by Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt. To Waltz, “the first concern of states is not to maximise power but to maintain their positions in the system” (Waltz, 1979, p.126). Why Waltz holds such a view is because, if a single State becomes too powerful, neighbouring States would perceive it as a direct threat to their survival. Thus, the weaker States would be forced to increase their own capabilities as well as form coalitions to balance against it (Heffron, 2015).

“Defensive realists show optimism unlike offensive realists’ pessimism. The former is optimistic about cooperation among ‘Status Quo’ states because such states have no designs to dominate each other. However, cooperation is not possible among ‘Revisionist States’ because they have avariciousness to dominate the strategic environment for themselves. In other words, revisionist states enter into competition for dominance” (Amir and Zafar, 2013, p.404). Succinctly, defensive realists believe that States tend to balance the power of emerging world powers rather than maximise theirs (Waltz, 1979).

Of late, the United States, its allies and partners have taken precautionary measures against China should it threaten the rule based international order. That it may be able to prevent China from revising the status quo in South East Asia (SEA), the U.S has been deploying its armed forces on a rotational basis to its base in Japan and Guam, and those it has access rights to in the Philippines and Australia.

### 3. The Measurement of China’s National Power

Many international relations scholars and analysts alike are of the view that China is an emerging global power. Considering its unprecedented economic growth and the modernisation of its military that ensued, one cannot but agree with them that China indeed is a rising world power. Having said this, there is the need to measure China’s national power. To successfully do this, Ray S. Cline’s formula for measuring a State’s perceived power will be used which is written as  $Pp = (C+M+E) \times (S+W)$  were: **Pp** – Perceived power; **C**– Critical Mass; **M** – Military Strength; **E** – Economic Strength; **S** – Strategic Purpose; **W** – Will to pursue National Strategy (Cline, 1975).

#### i) Critical Mass

In terms of landmass, China is ranked the third largest country in the world. The second largest country remains Canada and then, the Russian Federation as the largest country in the world. It shares a border up North with the Russian Federation and Mongolia. To the North-Western region are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan. By the South-Western region is the largest democracy in the world, India, as well as Nepal, and Pakistan. To the South-Eastern region, the neighbouring States of Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Bhutan and lastly, to the North-Eastern region are North and South Korea in the Yellow Sea. The People’s Republic of China is the most populous country in the world with a population of 1.3 billion people i.e. one fifth of the estimated 7 billion persons living around the globe. Despite being the most populous country in the world, China is faced with the problem of an aging population as its next door neighbour, Japan, which may become a problem in China’s power projection in the nearest future. In 2015, the CCP led government of China put an end to the 36-years-old ‘One Child policy’, which took effect in 2016, with the hope that they would be able address the aging population problem on the long-run (Ogunnoiki, 2017).

## **ii) Economic Strength**

The economic power that China wields presently would not have been what it is today if Mao Zedong had not made an attempt at transforming China into a modernised and industrialised country. Though his ‘Great Leap Forward’ campaign of 1958 failed woefully in 1962, the 1978 economic reform of Deng Xiaoping which began fully in 1979 was a huge success. With his ‘Open Door policy’ which opened up China’s economy to the world, Deng Xiaoping saw to the creation of four Special Economic Zone (SEZ), which not only attracted Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) into the country, but also set the ball rolling for China’s economic “take off” till this very day.

China for more than thirty years has been experiencing a booming economy which has made quite a number of analysts to see China as one of the greatest economic success stories in modern times owing to its rapid and sustained economic growth rate that can be attributed to its large-scale capital investment (financed by large domestic savings and foreign investment) and rapid productivity growth (Morrison, 2013; Roy, 2013a; Morrison, 2015).

From the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, China’s economy grew at a rate of approximately 10 percent a year. But from the late 1990s until 2005 its economy grew at 8 percent to 9 percent annually (Layne, 2008). With such an impressive economic growth rate, China overtook Japan as the second largest economy in the world in the year 2010 and has been predicted to overtake the United States (which currently is the largest economy in the world), by 2025-2030. China foreign exchange reserves as at December, 2011, was \$3.18 trillion. In January, 2018, it was \$3.14 trillion, the largest foreign exchange reserves in the world.

Despite this recent development, most of China’s media houses still see China as a developing country as its GDP per capita is only one tenth of Japan’s thereby making China’s claim to be the second biggest economy in the world only fine on paper and not in reality (Zhang, 2012). Though about 400 million people or so have been added to the middle class in China (Rosecrance, 2006), the distribution of China’s wealth still remains uneven. Based on the Gini coefficient, the gap between the rich and poor in China is 0.45 or even 0.47 (Zhang, 2012). This income gap in the second largest economy in the world has made some scholars to place a question mark on the rise of China as an economic power.

## **iii) Military Strength**

With a large population and a prosperous economy to go with it, China has been able to manage the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) with over 2.3 million personnel, the largest in the world (Möckli, 2007). In the 1990s, the modernisation of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) entered a new phase under President Jiang Zemin to the end of increasing the PLA’s capabilities. Many

years down the line, China is still in pursuit of a professional and fully equipped military that can project power both on land, in the air and sea. Presently, China has in its arsenal, nuclear warheads. It has also a number of stealth fighter jets and drones and just two operational aircraft carriers at the moment.

Going by the military expenditure of China, China is the second largest defense spender in the world. Unlike the number one defense spender, the United States, with a defense spending that is between \$500-600 billion every year, that of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is above \$150 billion annually. China's humongous defense spending over the years has triggered a 'security dilemma' in South East Asia (SEA). According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2016 report, the mounting tension between China and the other claimant States over the disputed South China Sea, resulted in a substantial growth in the military expenditures of the following countries in 2015 – Indonesia (16 percent), the Philippines (25 percent) and Vietnam (7.6 percent) (cited in Gady, 2016).

#### **iv) Strategic Purpose**

China has had one major strategic purpose since the late 70s. This strategic purpose is none other than the economic development of China (Ogunnoiki, 2017). As Julian Madsen (2006) rightly pointed out, the most obvious motivation behind the PRC's new engagement strategy is the need to secure vital energy resources required to sustain China's dynamic economic growth amidst the increasingly unstable international energy market. Having ceased to be a net oil exporter in the early 1990s, China currently imports approximately 60 percent of its oil from the Middle East (cited in Zambelis and Gentry, 2008). In the past few years, China has been able to reach oil and gas exploration contracts with Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela and Cuba, just as it has also concluded oil contracts and pipeline deals with Central Asian States – Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (Isenberg, 2008).

Still on China's strategic purpose, President, Xi Jinping has a dream for his country which he hopes to attain before bowing out of office. His "China Dream" first and foremost is to make the communist State "moderately well-off" by 2021 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would be celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and lastly, to make China a "rich and powerful" country by 2049 when the People's Republic of China (PRC) would be marking its centenary anniversary as a communist State on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October of the said year (Rudd, 2015). To make this dream a reality, President Xi Jinping rejuvenated the ancient Silk Road with his One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative in 2013.

#### **v) Will to Pursue National Strategy**

China's booming economy is a resource thirsty economy. As the largest importer of "black gold" (i.e crude oil), securing an unfettered energy supply has left the government of China with no

other option but to have the alacrity to pursue its national strategy. Over the years, China has been conducting economic diplomacy through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which among other things would lead to the laying of pipelines that would run from the oil rich member States of SCO to China. Knowing fully well that her energy needs through this avenue is not sufficient, China, having garnered scientific data on the untapped hydrocarbons and minerals at the seabed of the South China Sea, has become more assertive over the Spratly group of Islands (Ogunnoiki, 2017).

#### **4. The Three Dimension of China's Comprehensive National Power: Hard, Soft and Smart Power**

Power generally speaking, is the ability to shape the behaviour of others either through the threat/use of force, inducement or attraction. In time past and in recent years, several scholars have extensively written on the phenomenon 'power' – Bertrand Russell, Max Weber, Robert Dahl, Peter Bacharach and Morton Baratz, Michel Foucault, Steven Lukes, Peter Blau, Anthony Giddens, Joseph Nye etc. However, to thoroughly examine the '3D' of China's comprehensive national power (CNP) (*zonghe guoli*), the writings of Joseph S. Nye Jr. (1990), precisely his typology of power would be used – i) hard power ii) soft power and iii) smart power.

##### **4.1 China's Hard Power**

According to Joseph S. Nye Jr. (1990), a country's hard power is made up of two things – its economic and military strength (cited in Beukel, 2010, p.7). Hard power is the ability of a State to get other States to behave in a way that would bring about a desired outcome through inducements or payments 'carrots' or through the threat or use of force 'sticks' (Nye and Jisi, 2009). As it involves tangible resources (weapons, capital), hard power as a kind of power can be measured. However, it is very expensive to use as it requires a lot of the aforementioned resources.

China as an economic powerhouse has proven itself to be a responsible emerging power regionally and globally. During the Asian financial crisis (1997-1998) which was caused by the floating of Thailand's currency 'Baht', the United States as the world hegemon failed to respond appropriately to the crisis. The Chinese State, being an opportunist, swung into action in order to stabilise the affected economies. Among the necessary actions it took in that regard was its resolve not to devalue its currency *Renminbi* (RMB) despite being pressured to do so. Thus, China's action earned it the plaudits and gratitude of Asian countries.

Still in Asia, precisely South East Asia, China has been the engine propelling the economic growth and development of the States therein. For some years now, China has been a major source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as well as a market for the goods exported by South East Asian countries. In 2004, the Early Harvest Programme was launched which allowed the

member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to export their agricultural produce to the Chinese market at a low tariff rate. Taking a step further, China entered a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with ASEAN called the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) which was established in 2010. Hence, South East Asian countries economic wise, see their relations with China as an opportunity (Li and Worm, 2011; Hussain, 2013).

In 2013, China's President, Xi Jinping, unveiled the 'One belt, One Road' (OBOR) initiative. Being a modern version of the ancient Silk Road that was a strategic trade route linking China to the Arab world and Europe, the OBOR initiative with six economic corridors (one of which is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC]), would in the nearest future bring about the infrastructural connectivity between China, South East Asia, South-South Asia, North East Africa and Southern Europe (Jinchen, 2016). Also an initiative of the Chinese government is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which is to fund infrastructural development in the Asia-Pacific region. Established in 2015 with an authorised capital of \$100 billion, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany surprisingly joined the AIIB despite the United States objection.

The Asian continent has not been the only region in the world to have felt and is still feeling the economic clout of China. Currently, China is Africa's largest trade partner, having taking over from the United States in 2009. On the African continent, it has been funding the construction of roads, railways, hydroelectric power dams, presidential palaces, seaports, airports, hospitals, stadiums etc. In 2012, China's President Hu Jintao promised to loan Africa \$20 billion, an amount almost triple the investment of the U.S for improving some African countries electricity generation under the Obama administration. Same year, China to the tune \$200 million built and gifted to Africa the new African Union (A.U) headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At the 2015 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Johannesburg, South Africa, China's incumbent President, Xi Jinping, in the spirit of the 'win-win' cooperation and development of China and African countries, pledged a whopping sum of \$60 billion for development projects in Africa. In South America, China's presence can be seen in the oilfields of Ecuador and Venezuela. In Nicaragua, a Chinese business mogul and billionaire in person of Mr. Wang Jing is funding the construction of a much bigger canal to the tune of \$50 billion compared to the American built Panama Canal which when completed would ease the traffic of goods from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean. In January 2015, President Xi Jinping in the maiden China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) forum that took place in Beijing, pledged \$500 billion in trade and \$250 billion of direct investment for the Latin American and Caribbean region (LAC) (Yu, 2015; Dollar, 2017; Ogunnoiki, 2017).

Globally, China has been able to provide Third World countries with a substitute to the unfavourable Bretton Woods financial organisations – the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In 2006, China joined three emerging economies to formalise the founding of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) in a meeting of their foreign ministers that were

present at the United Nations General Assembly. As a group of four countries, BRIC held its maiden summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009. By the year 2010, the acronym changed to BRICS after South Africa was admitted. Put together, the five emerging economies account for 43% of the world population, 30% of world GDP and 17% of world trade (BRICS, 2016). BRICS, since it was formed, has been able to achieve a few things. The milestone achievement of this bloc till date is the New Development Bank (NDB) which was established in 2014. With an initial authorised capital of \$100 billion and an initial subscribed capital of \$50 billion, the bank as the years roll by, would be financing development projects in BRICS and other developing countries.

To have accompanied China's growing economic strength over the years is the development of its military power (Elder and Ayson, 2012). Since the modernisation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) began in the 1990s, China has been enhancing the PLA's capabilities. It provides regularly, technical and professional trainings for its over 2.3 military personnel in combating threats to the Chinese polity, especially those that are modern in nature e.g. cyber hacking. As one of the few nuclear powers in the world, China has a stockpile of warheads that can be launched with Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). Its People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) has for some years now been improving the stealth J-20 fighter jets that would enable China project aerial power within and outside its sovereign airspace. Today, the PLAAF has several fighter jets and stealth drones.

The Chinese government has also of late taken a keen interest in the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). It aims at making PLAN a blue-water navy which would make China a sea power (Xiaoyan, 2014). Not only will this greatly help China with her sovereignty claims in the disputed South China Sea but also in combating piracy in and around the Malacca Strait and the Horn of Africa where it has its first overseas military base in Djibouti which was launched on August 01, 2017. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has over 60 submarines of which its nuclear submarines are capable of launching a Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM). It also has an aircraft carrier, "Liaoning", which is a refitted aircraft carrier of the defunct U.S.S.R that was purchased from Ukraine in 1998 and launched in 2012. In addition to this, it recently launched its first home made aircraft carrier in April, 2017 (Ogunnoiki, 2017).

Having examined China's hard power in the above paragraphs, it can be said that China has used more of its 'carrots' than 'sticks' regionally and globally. China has over the years been successful at using its economic power to get developing countries to cast votes in its favour in international organisations such as the United Nations (U.N) as well as to sever diplomatic ties with the *de facto* State, Taiwan. Still on the Taiwan issue, China conducted military exercises and missile tests near Taiwan in July-August 1995 and in March 1996. Responding appropriately to the threat China posed to Taiwan, the United States deployed two aircraft carriers to the waters near the Taiwan Strait (Wu, 2007; Frost, Przystup and Saunders, 2008).

## 4.2 China's Soft Power

Mao Zedong has widely been quoted to have said in 1938 that, “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun”. While his assertion was true decades ago, it is no longer so in our modern world where a country's attractiveness (soft power) has become the better means to get a desired outcome than through coercion and inducement (hard power).

In many published literatures, it is written for our information that the concept ‘soft power’ was coined by the distinguished service professor of Harvard University, Joseph S. Nye Jr. Much as this is true, the soft power idea is not entirely that of Professor Joseph S. Nye Jr. As a concept, its origin can be traced to the works of Hans J. Morgenthau, Klaus Knorr and Ray S. Cline (Gill and Huang, 2006). Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion or payments (Nye, 2004). Put in another way, it is the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes (Nye, 2011). This ability of a State to get others to want the outcomes that it wants by shaping their preference is what is known as soft power (cited in Nye and Jisi 2009).

It has been said not once, not twice that, soft power cannot be measured like hard power owing to the fact that it makes use of intangible resources e.g culture. But contrary to this view, it can be measured quantitatively through opinion polls. Soft power as the second kind of power according to Joseph Nye, is not so expensive unlike hard power that requires so much of a State's material resources.

Soft power according to Joshua Kurlantzick, is in degrees. It is “high” when targeted at elites and “low” when directed at the broader public (Kurlantzick, 2006; 2007). For a State to be said to wield soft power, it must derive such power from its culture, political ideology and diplomacy (Gill and Huang, 2006). Similarly, Nye (2006) believes that the sources of a country's soft power are i) *culture* – having a rich cultural heritage that is being admired by other countries ii) *political value* – practices the political values it wants other countries to emulate, and lastly, iii) *foreign policy* – having a foreign policy considered by other States as legitimate.

Since Joseph S. Nye Jr. coined the concept ‘soft power’ in his book: *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990), several literatures on soft power have been written and published by Chinese intellectuals. The first Chinese to do this was Wang Huning in his journal article *Culture as National Soft Power: Soft Power* (1993). Some years after this, China's political elites have taken a keen interest in projecting China's soft power around the world. From the early 2000s, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been enhancing its soft power especially after President Hu Jintao on October 15, 2007, made mention of it in his address at the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party where he stated the need for China to invest more in its soft power resources. The following year, China seized the opportunity at the opening

and closing ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics to display its rich culture, having played host to athletes from around the world. In 2010, it also took advantage of the Shanghai Expo that drew thousands of visitors (Nye, 2012) as it also did in the 2015 Miss World beauty pageant which it hosted. These, however, are not all the means China has used to make itself attractive to its global audience. China through its cuisines and the sponsorship of over 2,000 celebration of the Chinese New Year in 140 countries is fast getting countries of the world accustomed to the Chinese culture (Du, 2017).

Presently, the sway that China has around the world through its soft power would be looked into in seven different ways. The first is by China's promotion of its language worldwide. Mandarin is one out of the six diplomatic languages in the United Nations. As a rising power, with an expanding business presence in the extractive, manufacturing and service delivery sectors in most countries, if not all around the world, China from the administration of President Hu Jintao has been promoting its mandarin language through the non-profit organisation called Confucius Institute (CI). Named after the Chinese philosopher, Confucius (551–479 BC), Confucius Institutes can be sighted in various higher institutions of learning in different countries. Confucius Institutes are jointly operated by Chinese universities and foreign partner universities/organisations (Pan and Lo, 2015). Overseeing the worldwide operation and funding of the Institutes is the Office of Chinese Language Council International, known for short as 'Hanban'. The primary goal of the Confucius Institutes is to enhance the understanding of the Chinese language and culture, to strengthen educational and cultural exchange and cooperation between China and other countries, to deepen friendly relationship and lastly, to help in the construction of a harmonious world (cited in Munk-Petersen, 2013).

Following the founding of the first Confucius Institute in November, 2004, at Seoul, South Korea, several other CIs have been established across the continents of the world – Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America and Oceania. In the United States, there are 68 Confucius Institutes which statistically is more than 20% of all such programs the Chinese government sponsors around the world (Aldrich, Lu and Kang, 2014). In Africa, there were 25 Confucius Institutes across the continent at the close of the year 2010 (Makoni, 2010). Just to mention a few, they can be spotted at the University of Lagos and Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria, University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University in Kenya, and Rhodes University and University of Cape Town in South Africa. Presently, there are over 500 Confucius Institutes in 140 countries and 1,000 Confucius classrooms in schools (Nye, 2018b). By 2020, the total number of Confucius Institutes is expected to have increased to 1,000 according to the Chinese Ministry of Education (Huang, 2013).

Confucius Institutes, despite the success it has recorded in teaching the mandarin language and culture of the People's Republic of China (PRC), have not been spared of criticism. In some quarters, there are those that believe that there is a political agenda behind the expanding

network of Confucius Institutes globally. Just like the British Council, the Goethe Institut and the Maison Française, they believe the founding of Confucius Institutes in host countries are there to promote the benign image of China as well as to promote its version of the Chinese culture and language against that of Taiwan (Gill and Huang, 2006). Precisely in the West, Confucius Institutes have also been criticised for their lack of ‘academic freedom’ on what China sees as sensitive issues –Taiwan’s independence, the Buddhist leader of Tibet, Dalai Lama, the spiritual movement of Falun Gong and the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang (Sayama, 2016). In 2013, McMaster University in Canada closed the Confucius Institute over the discrimination against the practitioners of Falun Gong in the hiring process of the institute’s instructors. In 2014, it was the turn of the University of Chicago in the United States after 100 professors signed a petition (Peterson, 2017) owing to the limited academic control of the University over the CI which was not “consistent with the intellectual principles and values of the university” (Liu, 2015). Other Universities to have shut down the Confucius Institute on their campus are Pennsylvania State University in the United States and Stockholm University in Sweden.

The second way China has utilised its soft power has been through its education sector. Students from several countries, especially those from Africa, have benefited immensely from the scholarship programme of the Chinese government. Having secured a scholarship, they are to spend two years learning the mandarin language before proceeding to study courses in technology, medicine, engineering etc. Besides those on scholarship, there are a number of self-financed Asian students—from Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, and elsewhere who preferably apply to study a course at the undergraduate and postgraduate level in China’s higher institutions of learning (Hunter, 2009). As at 2006, there were over 140,000 foreign students studying in mainland China (compared to about 560,000 in the United States) (cited in Wuthnow, 2008, p.13). By 2008, it was reported that China’s universities would enroll over 120,000 foreign students, as compared to some 8,000, twenty years ago (Kurlantzick, 2006).

The third way China is being admired by other countries has been through its martial art. China for some decades now has been fascinating the world with its ancient martial art called *Kung Fu* or *Wu Shu*. Created around A.D. 520 in the Shaolin Temple in Henan, China, by a Buddhist monk, kung fu was a way of exercising the body in order to strengthen the health, fitness, and concentration of the monks. Many years after, it was refined, modified, and expanded, not only for exercises, health and fitness, but also for self-defense and combat (cited in Tsang *et al.*, 2008). Today, China through the martial art of kung fu, has been able to captivate its global audience in fictional films and animations through its ambassadors one of which is the famous martial art actor, Jackie Chan. Though the fictional film *The Great Wall* (2016), a U.S-China co-production, did not do so well in the global box office, it showcased China’s cultural heritage to the world.

Fourthly, China has also been exercising its soft power through public diplomacy. In order to enhance its image globally, Beijing's has been expanding China's media outreach. In July, 2010, the Xinhua News Agency, a state-owned and operated news network, launched CNC World, China's first 24-hour English-language global news channel. The Xinhua News Agency however, is not the only station that broadcast 24 hours a day in English. The China Radio International also does so round the clock (Huang, 2013). To have also been made an international broadcasting network by the Chinese government is the China Central Television (CCTV) (Kurlantzick, 2006). This TV station (renamed China Global Television Network) broadcast in different languages – English, Russian, French Spanish, Arabic etc. Beijing, between 2009 and 2010, invested \$8.9 billion on external publicity work, including 24-hour cable news channels (Nye, 2012). This humongous spending by the Chinese government on the internationalisation of China's media houses is not only for the purpose of making known China's perspective on global issues but also to counter the propaganda and hostile views being spread by West about China (Meng, 2012; Huang, 2013).

Fifthly, China has been able to project its soft power through the ideology – Confucianism. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949, the PRC took to the Marxian ideology under Chairman Mao. Hence, China practiced a centrally planned economy up until Deng Xiaoping came on board who opened up China's closed economy to the wider world. Having abandoned the command economy for a market economy, China seized to be a perfect example of a country with a socialist ideology. Nevertheless, the Chinese State has not been without a guiding ideology. Some years back, the government of China reintroduced the ideology – Confucianism which Mao Zedong saw as a feudal idea and thus suppressed it during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). China today sees itself as a Confucian society that has taken after the tenets of Confucianism – benevolence, peace, harmony and morals. In 2005, the President of China, Hu Jintao in line with Confucianism, came up with the phrase 'harmonious world' as one of China's foreign policy pursuit. Ever since then, China has been generous enough to fund development projects in Third World countries around the world.

Sixthly, China is fast becoming appealing to Third World Countries through its development model called the 'Chinese model' or the 'Beijing Consensus' (as Joshua Cooper Ramo coined in a research report published in 2004). China for more than 30 years has recorded an unprecedented economic growth rate of which the economic model behind the wealth it now enjoys and the economic development that ensued is being considered by developing countries (Zhao, 2010). Unlike the capitalist West that do give the conditions of trade liberalisation and the democratisation of the political domain of a country, China believes economic growth and development is possible when a country is politically stable under a strong authoritarian government plus a market economy (Cho and Jeong, 2008; Nye and Jisi, 2009; Nye, 2010). An example of a Third World country that is being attracted by the Chinese model of development is none other than Zimbabwe with its 'Look East' foreign policy under President Robert Mugabe.

Zimbabwe and the few other African countries to have given the Chinese Model a thought have done so because the Western capitalist model of economic growth and development otherwise known as the ‘Washington Consensus’ (as was coined by John Williamson) has done them more harm than good following the mid 1980s Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) that not only worsened the hardship in their country but led to a ballooning sovereign debt (Ogunnoiki, 2016). Succinctly, the development of the Chinese State according to Professor Zhang Weiwei has eight characteristics: (1) practice-based reasoning, (2) a strong state, (3) prioritising stability, (4) primacy of people’s livelihood, (5) gradual reform, (6) correct priorities and sequence, (7) a mixed economy and (8) opening up to the outside world (Zhang, 2012).

Last but not the least is through its foreign policy. The foreign policy of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is predicated on chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai’s Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence – i) mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; ii) mutual non-aggression; iii) mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; iv) equality and cooperation for mutual benefit and; v) peaceful co-existence (Panda, 2014). Since Mao Zedong and the first Premier of China, Zhou Enlai made these five principles part and parcel of the April 29, 1954, Panchsheel Treaty with India, the PRC’s foreign policy from Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao to the incumbent President, Xi Jinping, has been ‘keep a low profile’, ‘good neighbourliness’, ‘peaceful rise’, ‘peaceful development’ and a ‘harmonious world’. Thus, a number of Asian, African and Latin American countries now see China’s foreign policy to be legitimate as China not only seeks a stable and peaceful international environment but also the win-win outcome of its and their economic development.

So far so good, China has to a great extent been successful at ‘winning the heart and minds’ of developing countries in Africa and Latin America with its soft power. But the same cannot be said of those in the developed world because, China falls short of the Western ideals of rule of law, human rights and democracy. Also worthy of mentioning is the success China has recorded in dispelling the ‘China threat’ perception and misunderstanding about China around the world with its soft power. However, there are scholars who are of the opinion that China is not there yet when it comes to projecting soft power globally. Their recommendation therefore is that China should look into its limited use of civil societies as an agent of persuading and attracting other countries with its culture, political values, ideology, foreign policy and diplomacy like the United States does the world over. This they can do by relaxing the political control over civil societies (Nye, 2012; Kang, 2017; Nye, 2018a).

### **4.3 China’s Smart Power**

Since the remarkable economic reform by the pragmatic leader, Deng Xiaoping, transformed the People’s Republic of China at the close of the 70s, China’s hard power in recent years has become a source of concern for some countries. Pessimistic realists in the West, particularly those in the United States, are of the view that China’s growing hard power poses a threat to the

international order. To assuage the fear of neighbouring countries in South East Asia and countries the world over, China, few years into the new millennium, began to project her peace loving image globally. However, neither China's hard nor soft power have satisfactorily gotten China the outcomes it desire. Thus, China, like some advanced countries in the West, has combined its hard and soft power or what Joseph Nye calls "Smart Power".

Joseph S. Nye Jr. defines smart power as the ability to combine hard and soft power resources into effective strategies (Nye, 2011:22 cited in Munk-Petersen, 2013). To be smart about fusing soft and hard power means that, the government of a State needs to know first and foremost the strengths and limitations of both powers. They must for example be fully aware of what their army is capable of achieving and not achieving, the negative and positive impact of their broadcast abroad etc. What is left to be known after this is how and when to combine their soft and hard power resources to achieve their foreign policy goals and objectives (Wilson, 2008).

Of late, China has been smart about the combination of its hard and soft power to the end of actualising its goals in South East Asia. With its 'charm offensive' approach and 'good neighbour' foreign policy, China in the past few years has become attractive to its neighbours in the sub-region. On November 04, 2002, China signed ASEAN's Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) that enjoins the signatories to resolve their disputes by peaceful means. This however has not prevented it from utilising its military might against any of the claimant littoral States that confronts it in the South China Sea as was seen in the Scarborough Shoal naval skirmish between China and the Philippines in the year 2012.

## **5. The Emergence of China as a Global Power and the South China Sea Disputes: A Peaceful Rise or a Threat to the International Order?**

The phrase 'the rise China' or 'China's rise' is one that has frequently been used in published articles and texts on international relations (Paus, Prime and Western, 2009). Used for the very first time in the West in the early 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it became a popular phrase following the writings of Nicholas Kristof Banker and William Overholt (Zan, 2009; cited in Jerdén, 2016). Having said this, it must be emphasised at this juncture that the phrase 'the rise of China' is not totally appropriate for describing China. The reason for saying this is not farfetched. China as a civilisation is not just attaining the regional power status for the first time. For over 2,000 years, the Middle Kingdom was technically and economically the major power in East Asia from the Han to the early Qing Dynasty (Yining, 1999 cited in Yan, 2001, p.33; Nye and Jisi, 2009). Hence, China, as a statement of fact, is a reemerging power in East Asia and an emerging global power on the international scene.

The phenomenal rise of China as a global power has been one of the widely discussed international event in the academia. Today, China is a force to reckon with owing to its

economic, military and cultural clout that is increasingly been felt around the world. But the China that is seen spreading its tentacles the world over did not initially have such ambition if one is to take into consideration the political statement of the brain child of China's 'economic miracle', Deng Xiaoping. In his speech at the floor of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, 1974, Deng Xiaoping said that:

*“China is not a superpower, nor will it ever seek to be one. If one day China should change its color and turn into a superpower, if it too should play the tyrant in the world, and everywhere subject others to its bullying, aggression and exploitation, the people of the world should . . . expose it, oppose it and work together with the Chinese people to overthrow it”* (Bergsten et al., 2008, p.1)

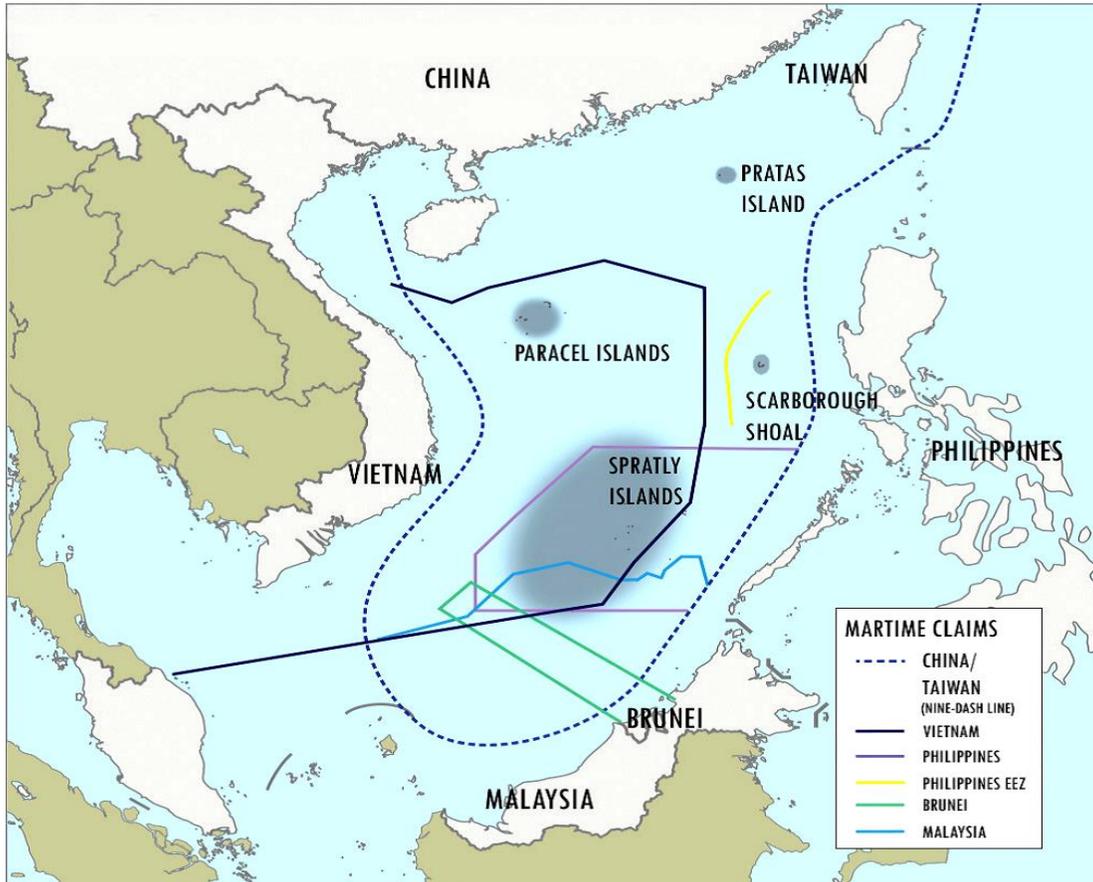
In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping foreign policy mantra was that China should 'conceal its capability, bid its time, and never take the lead' (*taoguang yanghui, juebu dangtou*). This foreign policy stance of 'keeping a low profile' until China's capabilities are fully developed was at that point in time the wisest thing to do as China was just beginning to reap the fruits of the 1978 economic reform. It would therefore have been a wrong move of China especially during the Cold War to utilise her developing power. With the passing of time, China's successive political leaders have practically abandoned Deng Xiaoping's 'keeping a low profile' for the emergence of China as a responsible world power that can play major roles on the international scene. This decision of theirs is informed by China's developing capabilities compared to the time of Deng Xiaoping. Thus in November, 2003, Zheng Bijian introduced for the first time the catching phrase 'Peaceful Rise' (*heping jueqi*) at the Boao Asia Forum. However, at the Boao Asia Forum in April, 2004, President Hu Jintao replaced it with 'Peaceful Development' (*heping fazhan*) mainly because the word 'rise' implies a relative growth in their national power which other countries would perceive as a security threat (Yan, 2006; Cho and Jeong, 2008; Liu and Tsai, 2014). Though a nuance can be seen between the 2003 'peaceful rise' and the 2004 'peaceful development' terminologies, China did not abandoned the idea of its rise as a world power (Cho and Jeong, 2008). In 2005, President Hu Jintao came up with yet another phrase, the 'harmonious world' (*hexie shijie*), in the Asia-Africa Summit at Jakarta, Indonesia (Liu and Tsai, 2014) which simply is the desire of China to make the international environment as peaceful and stable as possible for the attainment and sustenance of its and other countries economic growth and development.

Asides making the necessary changes to what it would preferably have other countries label the attainable ambition of the CCP led government, China has on its part taken concrete steps at reassuring the international community especially its neighbours in South East Asia (SEA) of its peaceful ascendance as a world power that would not in any way threaten the long standing status quo. Committing words to action, China has subjected itself to a few international regimes

and norms as well as participated in the Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) over the disputed South China Sea. This notwithstanding, there are those – the realists and the power-transition theorists, that are still not convinced by China’s rhetoric of a peaceful rise. They argue that historically, there is the tendency of an emerging power to be a troublemaker that will consequently generate tension and conflict in the international system. With the exception of the United States replacing Great Britain, relations between the world’s greatest power and the world’s greatest emerging power have always been difficult, to say the least (Friedberg, 2005; Mahbubani, 2008). Left to the offensive realist, J. Mearsheimer, the rise of China as a global power would not be peaceful. He argues that, if China continues to record an impressive economic growth over the next few decades, the United States and China are most likely to engage each other in an intense security competition with a considerable potential for war (Mearsheimer, 2004).

The South China Sea is a semi-enclosed sea in South East Asia (SEA) which appropriately is 3.5 square kilometres (Morton, 2016). Regarding its geographic features, the sea “consists of over 200 tiny islands, reefs, shoals, atolls, and sandbanks grouped into three archipelagos – the Spratlys, the Paracels and the Pratas, Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Shoal” (Zhou, 2015, p.1). The geostrategic importance of this sea cannot be overemphasised. First and foremost, the South China Sea is a strategic sea lane of communication (SLOC) for commercial vessels conveying roughly 50% of the world’s sea borne goods and energy annually from the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait. Secondly, the different surveys to have been conducted in the area have proven that the sea has untapped commercial quantity of hydrocarbons and minerals lying beneath it at the seabed and subsoil. Lastly, as a body of water, the South China Sea is rich in marine life as different species of fish can be found and caught there for human consumption. Having considered the geostrategic significance of the South China Sea (SCS), it is no longer difficult to understand why the sea is home to the world’s most perplexing territorial, jurisdiction and maritime problem that so far remains unresolved (Jiang, 2014; Sinaga, 2015; Kim, 2016).

Fig. 5.1 – Map of the Overlapping Sovereignty and Jurisdiction Claims in the South China Sea



**Source:** Bader, J., Lieberthal, K. and McDevitt, M. (2014). *Keeping the South China Sea in Perspective*

Historically, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has based its claim of inalienable and indisputable sovereignty over the contested South China Sea on discovery, occupation and governance. China claims to have discovered and accordingly exercised sovereignty over the South China Sea from the Han to the Qing dynasty. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, China, during the Yuan dynasty, drew its territorial map in 1279. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, other maps were drawn during the Ming dynasty which was used by Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433) in his voyage in the South China Sea. Prior to the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1912, China lost her hold over the South China Sea features due to the invasion, occupation and colonisation of China’s territories by imperial powers before World War II (1939-1945) – Great Britain and France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Japan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tønnesson 2002; Jensen, 2011; Cronin and Kaplan, 2012; Storey, 2012; Roy, 2013b; Zhou, 2015; Boston Global Forum, 2015; Morton, 2016, Khoury, 2017).

Following Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945, the ownership of these features was not thoroughly addressed in the San Francisco Treaty of 1951. Hence, it became open to competing claims by the littoral States that surround the South China Sea – China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Indonesia (Baviera, 2012). The first claimant State to occupy a geographical feature in the South China Sea was the Republic of China (ROC) i.e. Taiwan that has similar claims with the People's Republic of China (PRC) owing to the 1947 map which the Kuomintang (KMT) government published and the PRC held unto after the leader of the Kuomintang (KMT) government, Chiang Kai-shek, fled mainland China for Taiwan in 1949. In 1956, Taiwan occupied the Itu Aba Island, the largest island in the disputed South China Sea. Years after, other littoral claimant States (asides Brunei) have done likewise. China is in possession of seven, Vietnam occupies more than twenty, Malaysia two and the Philippines about eight (Shen, 2002).

Ever since China has been laying claim to 80-90% of the South China Sea with the unclear nine-dash line (NDL), it has at some point used military force to gain control over features in the sea that the smaller neighbouring States equally have legitimates claim over – Sino-Vietnamese naval skirmish in 1974 and 1988; and Sino-Philippines armed clash in 1995 and 2012 respectively. Aside resorting to coercive measures, China has been assertive in the South China Sea with its enacted laws – the 1992 Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone law, and the 1998 Exclusive and Economic Zone (EEZ) and Continental Shelf (CS) that are being enforced by its coastguards and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). The most recent of China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea is its reclamation of land from the sea through dredging and sand filling of the sea which started at the close of 2013.

As Zhou (2015) pointed out according to a report in the *New York Times*, China as of June, 2015, rapidly built seven artificial islands over the disputed Spratlys in the space of 18 months, accounting for over 2000 acres in size, as large as 1,500 football fields. It has built airstrips, ports, helipads and other infrastructures on these man-made islands. Although, China's island-building is widely interpreted by its neighbours and the United States as a provocative move intended to strengthen its territorial claims and potentially threaten Freedom of Navigation (FoN), Beijing insists that the construction and maintenance works are designed not to restrict free naval passage but to provide positive public services, including maritime search-and-rescue, disaster prevention, weather forecasting, and navigation security and fishery production for the greater good of the region (cited in Kim, 2016, p.39)

China, despite her creeping assertiveness in the South China Sea, has given the management and peaceful resolution of the disputes a trial through its preferred bilateral approach as against the 'internationalisation' of the disputes which Vietnam as one of the claimant States is in support of, seeing that it would involve other regional powers. China has been courting with ASEAN, exploring its multilateral fora to the end of building confidence and trust with its member States.

In November 04, 2002, China signed ASEAN's Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC). Thereafter, China acceded to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2003 which enjoins parties to the treaty to refrain from the use of force in resolving the disputes (Ogunnoiki, 2018).

The South China Sea disputes for long have been a major irritant in China's relations with Southeast Asia countries. Nevertheless, there are high hopes in some quarter that someday this irritant would be resolved once and for all or that it would be shelved in order to give room for cooperation between China and Southeast Asian countries (Banlaoi, 2003). As a matter of fact, China has offered to fund cooperative activities in the South China Sea without prejudice to any state's claims to the area (Valencia, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

This paper was solely written to ascertain whether the emergence of China as a global power would turn out to be a peaceful rise or a threat to international order. An accurate answer therefore to this research question depends on the pattern of China's behaviour in coming years. Should the People's Republic of China (PRC) continue on the path of pursuing its peaceful development strategy without attempting to revise the rule-based-order that has so far made it a wealthy country for more than three decades now, then, it can safely be said that the emergence of China as a global power would be peaceful. But if the CCP led government of China so choose in the nearest future to violate international norms and law for its own territorial gains by coercively grabbing further geographical features in the contested South China Sea, then, China has proven the offensive realists to be right all along that indeed it poses a security threat to the rule based international order.

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