

Media Representation of States Involved in the South China Sea Dispute: International News in Context

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Abstract

The media has discursively represented China, the Philippines, and the United States as states involved in territorial disputes in the South China Sea. These discursive representations ultimately pervade the media and public spheres. This study aimed to unravel these media representations by employing Halliday's transitivity analysis and van Djik's notion of ideological squares in analyzing news articles of the dispute from leading international news media. The analyses uncovered that China, the Philippines, and the United States are depicted to be actively involved in the dispute. The articles depict China's assertive and aggressive measures in the disputed waters and against the United States. China is likewise portrayed to be favoring efforts to forward diplomatic resolutions in the region. The United States is depicted as aggressive towards China while maintaining a projection of power and intimidation in the region as the security guarantor. The Philippines, moreover, is portrayed to advance its claims in the context of forwarding aggressive policies, diplomatic protest, and negotiations and proposals for diplomatic resolutions, all while balancing relations with the US and China. These discursive representations demonstrate how the media has construed and constructed for the public the states involved in the territorial dispute.

Keywords: south China sea dispute, media representation, international news, transitivity, ideological squares

1. Introduction

In the first quarter of 2013, the Philippines called the attention of the media as it instigated a case against China at the Hague. The case concerned the territorial dispute of the two states in the South China Sea (SCS). Among all the nations with territorial disputes with China, only the Philippines brought its case to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In 2016, the United Nations Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), an arbitral tribunal, ruled against China, citing that China has no historic claim in the relevant waters. While the South China Sea territorial dispute has been going on for decades, it is only recently that the issue has taken a worldwide media interest (Freeman, 2017). The international news media have now been effectively constructing discursive representations of the states involved in the territorial dispute. Such media representations permeate the news and public spheres, influencing the ideation of the public on the issue and the states involved.

Several studies have explored how the media has represented and framed the states involved in the dispute. In one, Freeman (2017) found that Asean newspapers afford large media coverage on the issue. The same study found that Singapore's newspaper covered the dispute most, although it has no claims in the territorial dispute. Interestingly, it was further found that Jakarta Post used neutral or positive language when mentioning the US and the ASEAN in the context of the dispute, while China was portrayed with more negative associations. Conversely, Fong and Koon (2019) found that China was ascribed with neutral valence in the media coverage framing of the South China Sea dispute by the news media in their study. Kreuzer (2016), on the other hand, examined the differences in media coverage in the Philippines and Malaysia. They found that Malaysia toned down the South China Sea dispute in the articles by withholding information. Conversely, the Philippine media gave much publicity to the aggressive actions of China in the disputed waters.

As observed, the media representations of the dispute reflect many differing views of the involved states and media organizations. The same is true with studies that explored the political aspects of these differing views not only in the media but also in the parlance of international relations. Baviera (2014) affirms that the SCS dispute is perceived differently by China, the Philippines, and the community of mainstream media. From the perspective of the Philippines, pursuing Sino policies is an act of asserting sovereignty. From the perspective of China and the

international community, the Sino policies reflect the Philippines that instigates strife against China (Woods, 2016). Adding ambivalence to the territorial dispute is the Philippines' measure to keep China as its major trading investor and partner while depending the maintenance of regional security order on the US (Zhao, 2013).

Woods (2016) further argued that the measures of the Philippines in raising the territorial dispute to UNCLOS did not make the country's claim stronger than China's even after the country won the arbitration. The Philippines is perceived to have affronted its unilateral, bilateral, and unspoken agreements with China. Further, according to Zhao (2012), there exists an outright concern and anxiety about the looming regional instability induced by China's rise to power and measure in the disputed waters. The regional anxiety was heightened given that in 2015, China built several artificial islands in the disputed waters that are being built as harbors and airports for whatever purpose (Kreuzer, 2016). Amid all of the implications of the aforementioned studies, it is undeniable that there are economic, political, and socio-cultural implications of the many discourses constructed around the South China Sea territorial dispute (Woods, 2016; Yost, 2013; Zhao, 2013).

Newsworthy events, especially ones involving international disputes, blow up internationally. News articles side specific narratives over others, selectively include and exclude information, and ultimately construct representations of the actors involved in these events. Fowler (2013) argued that events, which in this context is the territorial dispute, represented in news articles are not communicated naturally as their structure is not natural. In these discursive structures, the media and press set the world agenda, perpetuate representations, and shape public opinion. The media's reach is broad, and it cuts national borders. This entails that whatever representations of the states they intend to carry across in their platforms, the large readership will consume and, to an extent, be influenced by such. News articles about the long-standing South China Sea dispute are pervaded with ideological representations, constructing the representation of the issue itself and of China, the Philippines, the United States, and the rest of the states involved.

In the context of the abovementioned media representation of the states involved in the South China Sea territorial dispute, this study mainly uncovered the representations of China, the Philippines, and the United States in the international news articles. This purpose is operationally carried out in two levels of analyses heavily informed by Halliday's (1994) transitivity analysis and van Dijk's (1998) notion of ideological squares. First, the study attempted to analyze the transitivity system of the clauses in the news articles to examine how the states are represented as participants, what process types they perform, and in what context or circumstance they perform these processes. Second, the study explored the positive self-presentations and the negative other-presentations of the states in the articles considering each sovereign state as "we" and "they" or the in-group and out-group. Ultimately, by uncovering the media representations of the states, the study effectively elucidates what ideations of China, the Philippines, and the US in the context of the dispute the media perpetuates to its readership and the public.

2. Method

The method falls under critical discourse studies. Critical discourse studies is constituted by an interdisciplinary, problem-oriented approach in the operationalization of its critique. Therefore, the concern of CDS is the analysis, understanding, and explanation of social phenomena by which complexity demands a multi-methodical approach, not merely on the linguistic features per se (Wodak, 2012; van Dijk, 2013). The inquiry of the current study is problem-oriented and interdisciplinary, given that the foci are on the territorial dispute and the media representations, which demand multi-methodical frameworks for analysis. Hence, the critique used Halliday's (1994) transitivity analysis of the ideation metafunction of the Systemic Functional Linguistics and van Dijk's (1998) notion of ideological squares as the central theoretical and methodological frameworks for analyzing the media representations of the states in the news articles.

2.1 Transitivity Analysis

The transitivity analysis was used in that the study analyzed how the dispute and the involved actors were construed in the news articles. According to Halliday (1994), "transitivity is a fundamental property of language that enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them." These goings-ons are arranged in the semantic system of the language and realized through the grammar of the clause, specifically the transitivity. Hence, the analyzed clauses represent the states and *process types* which identify how the action is performed, by whom, and on what. The process types, the participants, and the circumstance were identified and analyzed through the transitivity analysis. The process types describe the doings or state of affairs in the clause, exemplified by the process verbs. The participants are elements that denote who or what is involved in the process. The circumstance contributes additional or optional information regarding the process. The sovereign states were classified as a certain type of participant, the process type they perform, and the

circumstance with which they perform the processes. After classification, the analysis of the patterns was made, thereupon describing the experiential resources expressed in the news articles by the transitivity system. Hence, portraying the states in terms of their involvement in the dispute.

2.2 Ideological Representation

The semantic macro strategies Van Dijk (1998) developed for ideological squares were used in the analysis of the ideological representation of the states in the news articles. The manifestation of the group relations category of the ideology schema is one of the main strategies of ideological discourse control. This explains the way in which texts represent in-group and out-group relations, prototypically represented by the ideological pronouns *Us* and *Them*. The analysis is based on the *Positive Self-Presentations* and the *Negative Other-Presentations* of the states in the text. Each sovereign state was considered as *self* and *other* or *us* and *them*. In the analysis, the sovereign states, therefore, are polarized – *We are Good*, and *They are Bad*, and the “ideological square” functions to polarize in-groups and out-groups in order to present the “*We*” group in a favorable light and the “*They*” group unfavorably. The ideologies were revealed after considering each sovereign state as “we” and “they” or in-group and out-group. Specifically, the analysis revolves around how each sovereign state was portrayed in *Positive Self-Presentation* (which is constituted by the emphasis on their good properties or actions and mitigation of their bad properties or actions) and *Negative Other-Presentation* (which is constituted by the emphasis on their bad properties and actions; and mitigation of their good properties and actions).

2.3 Data Description

This study utilized two most recent news articles about the South China Sea Dispute from the top five international news media websites in terms of awareness and online engagement of readers (Globalwebindex, 2019). The news articles are specifically from the Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC News), Consumer News and Business Channel (CNBC), National Broadcasting Company (NBC News), and The New York Times (NYT). The texts were selected based on the criteria that (a) they must be news articles as opposed to other articles such as op-eds or features, (b) they must be produced by the largest international news media in terms of awareness and online engagement, and (c) they must be about the South China Sea dispute mentioning the three states involved in the inquiry of the study. Only two of the most recent news articles about the South China Sea dispute from each of the news websites were selected based on the principle of recency during the conduct of the study, which was timeframed from May 2018 to September 2019.

Table 1. Corpus of the study

Article No.	News Media	No. of Words	Date published
Article 1	BBC	373	June 2, 2018
Article 2	BBC	252	July 3, 2019
Article 3	CNBC	211	August 30, 2019
Article 4	CNBC	737	August 28, 2019
Article 5	CNN	646	September 13, 2019
Article 6	CNN	488	September 13, 2019
Article 7	NBC	652	July 2, 2019
Article 8	NBC	296	May 28, 2018
Article 9	NYT	827	September 16, 2019
Article 10	NYT	608	September 11, 2019

3. Results

3.1 Transitivity Analysis in the Representation of the States

The transitivity analysis in the representation of the states reveals the process types, the participants, and the circumstances in the clauses. Here, the analysis was focused on the states as a certain type of participant in the clause, the process type that they perform or act, and the circumstance with which the states actuate these processes. Only material, verbal, mental, and relational processes are present in the text among the six process types in the transitivity system. Material processes are concerned with representing actions and events (Bartley, 2018; Halliday, 1994). Verbal processes constitute verbal action (Bartley, 2018; Eggins, 2004) and, thus, refer to all instances of saying and, more broadly, “any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning” (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Mental process type is described as processes that express one's consciousness or as processes of sensing (Halliday, 1994). Relational processes, lastly, are less concerned with inner and outer experience and instead serve to establish a relationship between two entities (Halliday, 1994).

3.1.1 Transitivity in the Representation of China

Presented in Table 2 are the process types ascribed to China as a participant in the theme, and the circumstance wherein these processes are performed. The description of the data is subsequently presented.

Table 2. Transitivity in the Representation of China

Process type	Participant-Theme	Process verbs	Participant-Rheme	Circumstance
Material	China / Beijing (<i>actor</i>)	attacks, is intimidating, deploy/ed, backed, had landed, was destabilizing, launched, had been building, claim/s/ed, tests, has attempted, has been conducting, carried out, firing off, installed, project, is pitted, are moving, establish, has sought, and sign	US, neighbors, troops, and weapons, claim, military hardware, including anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missiles and electronic jammers, bombers, the region, missiles, military installations, historic rights, tensions, power, smaller neighbors, foreign forces, an accord	with military deployment, in/across the South China Sea, on its territory, with island-building and patrols, for the first time, woody island, in the disputed waters, on an artificial island, into the sea, in the disputed region, into islands that could serve as forward bases
Verbal	China / Beijing (<i>sayer</i>)	warned, accuses, rejected, called, said, had announced, confirmed	other ships, US Navy, verdict, US warships	for five days, (verbiage: not to enter a designated area in SCS, of provocation and interference in regional matters)
Mental	China / Beijing (<i>senser</i>)	has branded, claim, anger, have disagreed, reacted angrily, agreed,	US, the "nine-dash line", US freedom of navigation, Philippine EEZ, territory, sovereignty, presence of US, nonaggression pact	in the highly contested sea, over the Paracel Islands, over several issues regarding the South China Sea,
Relational	China / Beijing (<i>carrier</i>)	had, has been, holds, is	rights, warning, legal bases, outposts, indisputable sovereignty, mellowing	China, in the sea missile tests, with 27 outposts, over SCS and adjacent waters

As shown in Table 2, the process type generally ascribed to China is material process or actions. This portrays China's active involvement in the South China Sea dispute. Also, based on the process verbs shown in the table, China is represented to be aggressive and assertive in its involvement and action in the disputed waters. Nonetheless, other than China's participant role as an actor in these process types, the goals, and receivers of these actions, such as *the US, troops and weapons, military hardware, anti-ship missiles, bombers, tensions, foreign forces*, etc., also suggest the same representation as to the process verbs.

China also performs verbal processes in the clauses. Here, as shown in the table, the targets in the verbal processes depict China as verbally targeting anything that goes against its territorial claim, which is the US. The mental process is also ascribed to China as a senser in the clauses. This portrays China's sentiment and conviction on its territorial claim. The relational process is the least process type performed by China as a carrier. In this case, the relationship between China and the attribute it is ascribed to is revealed. While the verbs express relation, the entity attributed to the participant in this process type holds more information than the process type itself. The attributes describe the possession and quality ascribed to China. Unsurprisingly, the general circumstance wherein these process types are performed by China as a participant are location (both time and place) and accompaniment as comitative. These revolve around the circumstances such as *the South China Sea, on its territory, with island-building and patrols, for the first time, woody island, on an artificial island, into the sea, etc.* Hence, the process types performed by China as a participant are indeed narrowed to the South China Sea dispute and its circumstances.

In general, the participant role mostly ascribed to China is an actor in the material process aside from being a sayer in verbal, senser in mental, and carrier in relational. The process types and the participant roles reinforce one another to construct a representation of China as an aggressive and assertive actor in its involvement in the dispute, collocating mostly negative representation in its portrayal, such as intimidation, militarization, destabilization, etc. These linguistic features of transitivity constitute the representation of China in the textual dimension of the discourse.

3.1.2 Transitivity in the Representation of the United States

Presented in table 3 are the process types performed by the United States as a participant in the theme and the circumstance wherein these processes are performed.

Table 3. Transitivity in the Representation of United States of America

Process type	Participant-Theme	Process verbs	Participant-Rheme	Circumstance
Material	United States of America (actor)	would continue, challenges, sailed, trespassed, has been practicing, conducts, adds, undermined, damaged, protested	relationship, Chinese claims, warship, requirements, China's declaration, 'navigational hegemony', powerful missiles, trust, Peace, security, and good order, unlawful restrictions	with China, routinely, in the South China Sea, Friday, regularly, in their ongoing trade battle, in relevant waters
Verbal	United States of America (sayer)	accuses, has accused, describing, reported, expressed, accused, comments	Beijing, China, Beijing's actions, the launches, and concern, China is intimidating.	in the South China Sea, long, Pentagon officials, about the overlapping sovereignty claims to the Spratlys
Mental	United States of America (senser)	criticizes, has been critical, has disagreed	Chinese missile launches, China's militarization	in South China Sea, over several issues regarding the South China Sea

As presented in Table 3, the process type generally ascribed to the United States is a material process. This depicts the US as actively involved in the South China Sea dispute. The US as an actor of these material processes is depicted to have forceful involvement and action in the disputed waters. However, the goals of these process types represent a different side of aggression by the US compared to that of China. While the participants as goals in the process type in China focused mainly on militarization, the USA focused on China and its actions. Hence, the aggression of the US is towards China and its allegations and actions, as shown in the table.

The US, as a participant of the processes, also performs verbal processes in the clauses. In this case, the USA, as a sayer, acts verbally on a target which in this case is China, as shown in the table. Evidently, this depicts the US verbally targeting China and its actions in the disputed waters. The US also performs mental processes in the clauses of the news articles. These process verbs portray the USA's sentiment and conviction on its stance against China in its actions towards the South China Sea dispute. Moreover, similar to the circumstances of the process types and participant roles of China, the US's processes are also generally contextualized in the disputed territory, as presented in the table. Hence, the process types performed by the United States as a participant are indeed narrowed to the South China Sea dispute and its circumstances.

In general, the participant role mostly ascribed to the United States is an actor in the material process aside from being a sayer in verbal and senser in mental. The process types and the participant roles of the US reinforce one another to represent the country as being critical of China and its actions in the relevant waters. As an actor in these process types, the US is depicted to challenge the aggression of China with its aggression. The process verbs and participants collocate mostly on the US's challenge and opposition to China's claims and actions.

3.1.3 Transitivity in the Representation of the Philippines

Presented in Table 4 are the process types performed by the Philippines as a participant in the theme and the circumstance wherein these processes are performed.

Table 4. Transitivity in the Representation of the Philippines

Process type	Participant-Theme	Process verbs	Participant-Rheme	Circumstance
Material	Philippines (actor)	make, drilled, has taken, filed, talk, are moving, holds	claims, oil, strong line, diplomatic protest, military drills, the decision of the court of arbitration	in SCS, in the past, with China, over the presence of hundreds of Chinese vessels, Oil and Gas, with a delicate proposal to look into joint offshore oil and gas exploration
Relational	Philippines (carrier)	Have been, has grown, was, have	warming, critical, ready, locked	with China, increasingly, the president's Beijing-friendly stance, in the long-simmering disputes

As shown in Table 4, the process type generally ascribed to the Philippines is material processes, which is similar to China and the US but is considerably few. It is important to note, however, that the representation of the active involvement of the Philippines is not as much as that of China and the US, as evidenced by the process verbs in the table. This portrays the efforts of the Philippines to act upon its claim in the territorial dispute. More so, the goals of these process types did not mention the other sovereign states involved, only the relevant waters. The participants as goals in the process type in China and the United States focused mainly on militarization and challenging of claims; the Philippines, on the other hand, focused on its claims and its actions. Compared to the other two sovereign states, even when the Philippines has claims in the South China Sea, its representation is not as widely portrayed as that of China and even the United States, which has no claims on the territory. The Philippines also performs relational processes in the clauses. While these verbs express relation, the entity attributed to the participant holds more information than the process type itself. In this case, the attributes are *warming*, *critical*, *ready*, and *locked*. These attributes exclusively describe the Philippines within the circumstance of its relation to China and the dispute.

In general, the Philippines as an actor is mostly ascribed to the material process aside from being a carrier in the relational process. It is considerably observable in the analysis that the Philippines is less represented compared to the other states. While it has claims in the relevant waters, the claims are not represented strongly as that of China. The material processes do not project the Philippines to be aggressive nor intimidating in its actions, only that it acts upon its claims.

3.2 Ideological Representations of the States

It was revealed in the analysis that China, the Philippines, and the United States have positive self-presentation and negative other presentations in the news articles. Positive self-presentations construct the ideological representations that emphasize the good and mitigate the bad actions and properties of the states to highlight the positive self-presentation. Here, the states were depicted emphasizing their good and mitigating their bad. The negative other-presentation, on the other hand, constructs the ideological representations that emphasize the bad and mitigate the good actions and properties of the sovereign states to highlight the negative other-presentation. China, the United States of America, and the Philippines have been portrayed with an emphasis on their bad and mitigation of their good.

3.2.1 Positive Self-Presentation of China

China's positive self-presentation is only in terms of its rights to the disputed territories and its engagement in discussions for agreements and negotiations. Presenting as having rights to claim the disputed waters and, in fact, owning the territory, China's aggression is given to be justified.

- (1) China had the right to deploy troops and weapons "on its own territory". (BBC 1)

China's militarization, power display, and intimidation become perceivably necessary in fighting for its claims. More so, China's aggression and intimidation are depicted as a result of the provocation from the other involved states. It is also notable that China's engagement in forming agreements to resolve the disputes contradicts its portrayal of counter-aggression. Nonetheless, the ceasing of tension with the US, the joint exploration with the Philippines, and the agreement and nonaggression pact with ASEAN depict China in a favorable light.

- (2) China and the Philippines are moving forward with a delicate proposal... (NYT 1)
- (3) China and Malaysia agreed to establish a consultation mechanism to discuss and resolve their differences... (NYT 1)
- (4) China and the 10-nation ASEAN bloc have been negotiating the nonaggression pact (NYT 2)

Evidently, these statements present China to be doing away with an aggressive approach to dealing with the dispute. More notably is China's role in agreeing to the ASEAN nonaggression pact for the region. All of which indeed emphasize the good while mitigating the bad action and properties of the state.

3.2.2 Positive Self-Presentation of the United States of America

The US's positive self-presentation revolves around its leaning toward politically situated moral high ground and concern for the looming belligerence in the disputed waters. This presentation has rendered the US as adhering to and upholding a universally recognized standard of justice or goodness. In its efforts to continually build constructive relations with China amidst the tensions, the US is presented to contribute to achieving a peaceful resolution.

- (5) The US would "continue to pursue a constructive, results-oriented relationship with China" with "cooperation whenever possible". (BBC 1)

- (6) The United States expressed concern — about the overlapping sovereignty claims to the Spratlys. (NBC 1)
- (7) The United States protested the unlawful restrictions imposed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam," she said in a statement. (NYT 1)

Additionally, this portrayal justifies the US's critical stance toward China's unlawful restrictions and claims in the South China Sea. In the light of the ASEAN member states, the US is presented to express concern in the overlapping sovereignty claims constructs a positive self-presentation for the nation.

3.2.3 Positive Self-Presentation of the Philippines.

The Philippines' claim is presented as rightful in its effort to bring to the international tribunal the case it had on the South China Sea Dispute. The Philippines, as the self, depicts its efforts to protect what it claims to be its territory even amidst the conflicting interests it has with both the US and China.

- (8) The Philippines, in the past, has taken a strong line on China's behavior in the area, even taking China to the international tribunal. (CNN 1)
- (9) China and the Philippines are moving forward with a delicate proposal... (NYT 1)

More so, even after bringing its case to the international tribunal, the efforts of the Philippines to consider regional proposals for peace and order are also depicted. In fact, the same presentation is shared with China as the two countries agreed to explore the disputed islands jointly. Here, nothing much for the Philippines is presented in this part of the discourse.

In general, the positive self-presentations of the sovereign states reveal the sovereign states' efforts to cooperate in finding resolutions and crafting agreements and pacts in the territorial dispute. Among all the sovereign states, however, the USA, which claims none of the territories in the relevant waters, is exclusively presented to have the political high ground and will to provide constructive relations among nations in the disputed waters. China and the Philippines were brought to the light of positive self-presentation in their rightful claims of the territory and their engagements in crafting agreements and pacts.

3.2.4 Negative Other-Presentation of China

China's negative other-presentation is focused on its claim over the disputed waters without basis, its territorial greed, and its opposition to the Hague's ruling. In the texts, China as the 'other' is stripped from its rights to claim many islands in the South China Sea. This leaves China no basis for its claim of sovereignty over the disputed waters.

- (10) China has no legal basis to claim historic rights to the bulk of the South China Sea. (CNN 1)
- (11) China has attempted to claim more ...than it is entitled under international law. (CNN 2)
- (12) An international tribunal in The Hague ruled in July 2016 that the area is an exclusive economic zone of the Philippines, but China rejected that verdict. (CNBC 2)

As in the statements, the territorial greed ascribed to China as the 'other' is heightened in relation to the previous presentation. The insistence of China that it has a rightful claim over a bulk of islands in the relevant waters even after the international rulings say otherwise supports this representation. This represents China's disregard for the international laws and the ruling of the PCA. Such power and conviction negate the international community and the court that represents it.

3.2.5 Negative Other-Presentation of the United States

The US's negative other-presentation is centered on its navigation hegemony, thereby worsening the region's already damaged peace and order. This has been characterized in the news articles as the US's interference and provocation of the dispute and China in particular.

- (13) The US routinely angers Beijing with "freedom of navigation" missions. (BBC 2)
- (14) The US warship "trespassed into waters off China's Xisha Islands without permission of the Chinese government." (CNN 2)
- (15) The US damaged peace, security, and good order in relevant waters." (NBC 2)

As in the statements, the navigation hegemony depicts a negative presentation of the US as it suggests abuse of its freedom of navigation missions. The USA has been an ally to many nations of the ASEAN region whose claims are in opposition to China's. Here, the US's involvement in the territorial dispute is heavily protested and contested by China that which places the US in a negative light.

3.2.6 Negative Other-Presentation of the Philippines

The Philippines's negative other-presentation is centered on its internal disagreement and it being influenced by China and the USA. The efforts of the Philippine government seem to have no effect on the Filipino public as the country has been divided in its take on its sovereign claim of its territories in the South China Sea.

(16) The Philippine public has grown increasingly critical of the president's Beijing-friendly stance. (CNBC 2)

(17) Manila has been in an awkward dance between Beijing and Washington for years over the South China Sea (CNN 1).

The statements indicate that the Filipino public has grown critical of its government's decisions. This might have been due to the dominance that the USA and China have been projecting in the entire discourse on the dispute. The subjugation of the Philippines definitely depicts the country nearly as incapacitated and influenced by the demands of the two nations ascribing negative other-presentation to the Philippines.

4. Discussion

In analyzing the transitivity and the positive and negative self and other presentations, the study uncovered the representations of China, the Philippines, and the United States in the news articles. The study's findings thereby elucidate the ideations of the involved states around the dispute that the media perpetuates to its readership and the public. Here, these representations are further discussed in relation to the discourse on the dispute and its relevant literature.

China has essentially been a key player in the dispute for decades. The analysis found that the news articles depict China's aggressive involvement and action in the disputed waters by collocating mostly negative representation, such as intimidation, militarization, destabilization, etc. These representations of China are consistent with Zhao (2012) and Kreuzer's (2016) assertion that there exists an outright concern and anxiety about the looming regional instability induced by China's rise to power and measure in the disputed waters. These measure of militarization, power display, and intimidation is causing regional destabilization. Furthermore, the analysis found that China is positively represented as having rightful claims to the disputed waters while negatively represented as being assertive and aggressive in its actions and mechanisms. Yost (2013) reflects this representation in his observation that the reputation regarding power is favoring China. The country has shown that it is not intimidated nor afraid to challenge the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations. Yost added that not only does China have a far superior military prowess and consistent improvements and exploration in the area it claims, but it also has demonstrated willingness to use these resources to impose and assert its claims in the region. It is also worth mentioning that in the analysis, it was found that China targets anything that goes against its territorial claim, specifically the US and other involved states. It is important to note that this representation reflects the efforts of China to ensure that it possesses the hegemonic power in the regions of East Asia, effectively removing the US and establishing its sphere of influence (Cotillon, 2017; Golan & Lukito, 2015).

Similar to the representation of China, the United States is depicted to be active in its involvement in the disputed waters. However, it is notable that the representation of the aggression of the US is more nuanced compared to China. While China's aggression focused mainly on militarization and intimidation, the US's aggression is targeted at China and its actions. The news articles have indeed represented the US as one challenging China by projecting power and intimidation and interfering with South China Sea dispute. The analysis of the ideological representation reveals that the US is taking the moral high ground by ensuring regional justice. Regilme (2018) found that the patterns of foreign policy behavior and identity politics of Southeast Asian nations are telling of their long-term aspiration to maintain the role of the US as the primary security guarantor in their waters. This explains the role of the US in the region and the apparent representation of its concern and involvement in the articles. It should be noted, more so, that the evident representation of the aggression of the US and China is because the Sino-American relations, as portrayed, appear to be unmoored, with competitive elements outweighing shared great-power interests in the disputed waters (Cronin, 2015).

The Philippines, similar to China and the US, is also actively involved in the South China Sea dispute. However, it is important to note that the involvement is not in the context of militarization and intimidation on the Philippines's end but in the context of diplomatic protest and negotiations and proposals for diplomatic resolutions. It should be noted that in 2010, the Philippines' policies on the dispute became more aggressive. The country made efforts to counter Chinese aggression than accommodate its demands. Nonetheless, it is revealed in the analysis that the Philippines is influenced by the US and China and that while it asserts its claim, it is represented to be subjugated by the two states. This is true in the observation of Yost (2013), citing that Manila has attempted to strengthen its security relationship

with the United States over the years, while Zhao (2013) noted that the Philippines has strategized to have China as its major trading partner and investor. This ambivalence in part of the Philippines is represented in the articles as an internal conflict in that the government and the public are divided in their take on the country's decisions and actions on its territorial claim over the waters.

For decades, China, the Philippines, and the United States have been key players in the South China Sea territorial dispute. The media has now extensively covered the developments of the states' claims, and in such coverage, the representations around the dispute and the actors involved are discursively constructed and represented. How the states are represented in the news articles consumed by the readership greatly sets the agenda for the public and thereby influences public opinion. Although the study uncovered the representations of the states and situated such representations in the existing discourse, the questions on how these representations actually influence the socio-cultural framing, the public opinion, and the policy-making bodies in the region warrant further exploration and answers.

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