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# Dispute in the South China Sea: The Roles of the Thai Government

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## Abstract

The South China Sea is a strategic location in the region. With an area of approximately 3.5 million square kilometers is surrounded by many mainlands and islands and is an important shipping route that has been connecting the Pacific and Indian oceans since ancient times.

The purpose of academic articles is to study the dispute in the South China Sea and its impact on Thailand by studying the condition. Problems in the South China Sea include disputes over obtaining information that affect the Thai government's role. Therefore, it is important both in the economy and in the strategic field. The surrounding countries are trying to claim possession and resolve disputes in the South China Sea, including: 1) claiming ownership in the South China Sea 2) Benefits of national management of areas, especially natural ownership resources 3) Security Strategy in the South China Sea For Thailand's role in the South China Sea dispute, it should show the most neutral attitude and support peaceful resolution to create regional security based on national interests in area management, especially natural resources. It is critical to work together. Part of the strategic issue is that security should be used as an important strategic point to benefit Thailand the most. Without taking part in one side and finding useful opportunities for Thailand to maximize national interests.

**Keywords:** dispute, South China Sea, roles of the Thai government

## 1. Introduction

The South China Sea is a strategic location for the region. With an area of approximately 3.5 million square kilometers Surrounded by many mainland and islands and has been an important shipping route connecting the Pacific and Indian oceans since ancient times. (Robert Kaplan, 2014) It is also estimated that the southern seas of the South China Sea have enormous marine resources, resulting in the South China Sea having political geographic importance, stableness and economy as follows

1) geopolitics The South China Sea is an important strategic point in balancing the power of various superpowers, especially between the United States and China. Countries with sovereignty over the South China Sea will be able to control trade routes, navigation and expand military influence in the South China Sea problem zone. Not directly related to Thailand but affecting the South China Sea Waters

2) South China Sea Security is the passage of one of the three major shipping routes in the world through the South China Sea

3) Economic South China Sea is one of the world's most important fishery sources and is also expected to be a natural resource. By the US National Energy Information Agency (US Energy Information Administration: EIA) The South China Sea is a fishery resource. And important biodiversity, including coral reefs Which is an important spawning of marine organisms Conflicts and disputes in The South China Sea has occurred between China and 5 nations, namely Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam and Brunei Darussalam for the first time in the late Christian decade. (Brunei Dalussalam) The dispute arose in 1980 between China and Vietnam, with Chinese warships sinking. 3 Vietnamese ships near the coral island In the year 1988, this incident killed 70 Vietnamese sailors, and it is the most

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contentious point for the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands. There are many nations represented, including both Chinese and five national members. assert rights and authority Sovereignty over the said islands which has enormous natural resources, oil, and natural gas under the sea. In addition, the South China Sea is an important shipping route in the world. If any country can control the said shipping route, it will have a huge advantage in the strategy and security of the region (Sirom Phaksuwan 2017, Page 63), which is therefore important both in the economy and in the strategy. The surrounding countries are trying to claim possession and resolve disputes in the South China Sea, including: 1) claiming ownership in the South China Sea 2) National interests in area management, especially natural resources 3) Security strategy in the South China Sea This academic article has been studied to know the source of the problems and the importance of disputes in the South China Sea in order to continue to make proposals for resolving conflicts and disputes in the South China Sea.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Realism**

The realist concept sees "state" as the main indicator of international relations. which is based on the actual phenomenon An important principle of realism is power and security, with the state trying to increase and balance power in order to secure and stop potential aggression. The state is not based on morality. And ethics and justice depend on the equality of power. States with equal powers will treat each other equally, but states with different powers will treat each other differently. Thomas Sides, a Greek historian and political philosopher, wrote about the history of this open war. (The History of the Peloponnesian War) is about the war between the Spartan state and the state of Athens during the period from 500 to 411 BC.

In the end, the war broke out because Athens, a powerful state in the region at the time, saw the growing Athens powder as a threat to Sparta's security. (Thucydides, 1972, p.23)

### **2.2 National benefit concept (National Interest)**

Mr. Hans J. Morgenthau defines national interests as follows: The one state operates any policy with the objective of protecting sovereignty. Political system, economy, religion, language, ethnicity, from other national invasions. States may implement a cooperative policy, compete in a balance or partner By helping each other to achieve the aim that the state will implement foreign policy on the foundation of national interests, and each state will do everything to protect its interests, which is Determining the actions of the state that gives the state power And the power that will allow to control other states by factors that give other states power over other states, including geographic factors Natural resources Industrial performance Military forces National characteristics Morale of national strength Government ability (Theodore A Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, 1978, p.78)

Joseph Franket sees that national interests have 3 levels. (Charivat Santaputra, 1985, p.68.) As follows

- 1) Desire level (aspirational level)
- 2) Operating Level (Operational level)
- 3) Explanatory and political level

## **3. Conflict in the South China Sea**

### **3.1 Claiming ownership in the South China Sea**

1. Claiming the ownership of the country in the South China Sea

1.1 China is a country that claims about 80 percent of the South China Sea area. Including ownership of all islands in the South China Sea as well By citing historical evidence from the dotted line map Or the U (U-Shape line ) line map, as well as claiming to be "Unbeatable sovereignty. "(indisputable sovereignty) With historical evidence from the

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Eastern Han Dynasty ( c.Prof. 23-220) that the Chinese have known the islands that have been muddled. Including China, the first country to rule the Spratly Islands in an entity, will look like in the Yuan Dynasty. ( C.Prof. 1279-1368) In addition, a map of the Chinese official of the Qing Dynasty written in the year C.Prof. 1724, 1755, 1810 and 1817 all indicate that 1767, this archipelago belongs to China ( Civil Rights, 2011 )

1.2 Taiwan. The reason Taiwan uses ownership claims is the same set of data as China. But after the Kuomintang party lost the war to the Communist Party And asylum came to establish a firm presence in the island of Taiwan While China is still experiencing political problems within Taiwan, claiming ownership of the Spratly Islands By occupying the is land. The largest is called Taiping Island, which has fresh water sources and airport construction

1.3 The Philippines has cited international law for closeness based on the continental shelf. Which can claim the ground 200 nautical miles from the continental shelf, which the Philippines has claimed ownership over the Sokroskarborough rock line With a distance of approximately 100 nautical miles from Philippians

1.4 Vietnam argued for Chinese ownership that before the 1940s China had never occupied or claimed ownership over the Spratly and Parasail Islands before. With historical documents claiming that the territory of both islands has been under the rule of Vietnam since the 17 th century

1.5 Malaysia and Brunei, both countries, have cited UNCLOS 1984, which states that new born countries can claim 200 nautical miles from the coast as a specific economic zone (EEZ ) of that country, causing both Malaysia and Brunei to claim ownership over some parts of the Spratly Islands, but Malaysia Claiming some filthy stone ownership, but Brunine, but only ownership over marine areas (BBC, 2013)

2. The issue of the legitimacy of the claim of ownership, however, countries in the South China Sea

2.1 Issues of claim legitimacy and sovereignty in nine dotted areas under sea law despite the fact that the time limit for Chinese claims will occur in the year 1449, before the 4 Sea Law principles in the year, Prof. 1958 (Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council (APRC), 2016), including before the Sea Law Act of the year C. Prof.1982 Such claims may be cited if they comply with international law principles. (International Customary Law) Incidentally, the claim of sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea under the nine-point dash seems to have no significant implications. Clearly, there was stability at the start. However, over time, China has never shown a value that will reduce the level of demand or a manner to show the exercise of rights in accordance with current sea law. Therefore, causing ambiguity and arguments based on two sea laws, such as claims and sovereignty in the territorial sea, Principles Claiming sovereignty Specific economic zones claims by the continental shelf

2.2 Issues of the legitimacy of historical territorial claims in accordance with the judgment of the World Court (Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council (APRC), 2016). Ambiguous historical territorial claims seem to match the needs of China the most

### **3.2 National interests in area management, especially natural ownership resources**

Every government has a policy hilly to protect the interests of the country or the national interests in a way that can survive the country. Stable and completely opaque, wealth under balanced world order as well as being able to maintain honor and dignity in the world lynx, as well as to promote the ideology that is social patterns of citizens for the advancement of the country's front paragraphs. (Evans, Graham and Newnham, Jefirey, 1998, pp. 344-346) But the operation of the roadmap to preserve the results The national yolks that appeared in the international political arena during the 20th and early 21st centuries were the implementation of the strategic partnership (Strategic Partnership).To national security and national interests more complex and beyond the capabilities of any country, By covering

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various fields such as fishery cooperation Sustainable fishery management Joint research in science Environmental protection Research Marine animal research Joint venture to protect the environment Joint management of freedom of navigation and flying through airspace Providing assistance Humane and disaster Air safety And tourism cooperation, etc

Disputes in the South China Sea are complex, unconcluded, with only negotiations. The countries involved must have political commitment. (political will) To overlook claims and cooperate for the benefit. Public In the high-level seminar “Functional Cooperation: A Move for Peace and Prosperity in the South China Sea ”on July 12.Prof. 2016 at Vientiane The meeting agreed that functional cooperation is a mechanism that can build trust, reduce tension. And create familiarity between the parties before discussing the claim. In addition, functional cooperation is within the framework of the UNCLOS and the chapters 6 of the DOC, therefore not contrary to the COC negotiations in the South China Sea. ( Morphology, 2017)

Prof.Special Dr. Surakiat Sathai, President of AsianPeace and Reconciliation Council (APRC) Former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister explained in the above meeting that functional cooperation means cooperation for joint development in any field that Each party is ready to agree on andCan be a mechanism to lead cooperation and peace in the South China Sea ( Morphology, 2017)

U.S

1) aspirational level of national interest, being the only superpower in the world and in the region

2) operational level of national interest Stability and stability in the South China Sea and protect the economic interests of the United States by confirming freedom of navigation and flying through airspace in the South China Sea

The interests of the United States are stability and stability in the South China Sea and freedom of navigation and flying through airspace. Therefore, the United States is expected to accept cooperation, develop areas in a functional cooperation that will reduce tensions in the South China Sea and create an atmosphere that will lead to Peaceful dispute resolution ( Morphis, 2017 )

In practice it is expected that China is ready to listen to proposals for cooperation to develop areas in a functional cooperation in a bilateral form with countries that claim overlapping rights with China because of the functional cooperation. It is acknowledged that China has the right to the disputed area along the 9th dash by Ms. Lada Bhumasat.Director of the East Asian Division 3 ( Responsible for China ) Department of East Asia Ministry of Foreign Affairs Noted that it must distinguish identify) issues that can actually be collaborated and have a political commitment to push for greater cooperation, if China has a leading roleIn determining the cooperative branch instead of ASEAN, there may be no balance in benefits. ( Morphology, 2017 )

#### **4. ASEAN**

1) aspirational level of national interest occupies the area in the South China Sea as claimed

2) operational level of national interest Stability and stability in the South China Sea with a balance between superpowers

In practice, ASEAN Member States must allow China and be ready to adjust their positions to avoid confrontation and maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea. Representatives of ASEAN Member States participating in the Advanced Seminar “Functional Cooperation: A Move for Peace and Prosperity in the South China Sea ” on July 12.Prof. 2016 in Vientiane agreed that functional cooperation is a practical way in practice. (genuine and plainible pathway) that will lead to peace and security in the South China Sea.

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(Morphorat, 2017)

Thailand should support cooperation in the development of functional cooperation, which will benefit all parties. Thailand may offer examples of the Joint Development Area (DA ) Thailand-Malaysia as an example of joint exploration and drilling of oil and gas in the southern part of the Gulf of Thailand that has not yet established a boundary which has an effect almost 40 years

In addition, Prof. Dr. Krieng Sikkitchai, Thai Ambassador to the Russian Federation which has been elected to the position of judge of the International Sea Law Court, suggests that Thailand may study the case of the Antarctica Treaty (Antarctic Treaty) to help support the achievement of the cooperation goal. functional cooperation Thailand should push the proposal with China and ASEAN Member Countries in both official ASEAN meeting and Campaign Support Outside the meeting When member countries agree to support the proposal, China should propose to consider the ASEAN-China meeting framework and propose the issue. Functional cooperation Is one of the topics of the COC to further study and discuss the branch of cooperation (Apirat, 2017)

### **5. Security strategy in the South China Sea Marine security**

The navy is the main unit to protect the interests of the maritime nation, both in normal conditions and in conflict. Therefore, there are important and challenging missions to maintain maritime security as a guarantee of the benefits. The benefits of the national maritime And the economic progress of the country due to scope of responsibility of the sailors That must operate in a vast national maritime territory on both the Gulf of Thailand And the Andaman Sea side The length of the coast is over 2,815 kilometers and covers a maritime area of approximately 314,000 square kilometers. And also includes areas outside the maritime boundary of Thailand in protection of Thai marine activities in almost every region of the world (Navy, 2022)

In addition, the navy must develop and increase the capacity of sufficient weapons to guarantee the safety of maritime operations that will bring national interests to the maritime in both the maritime territories of Thailand. And areas in which Thailand participates As well as having sufficient potential to be able to protect suppresses of conflicts in maritime areas that also affect the atmosphere of the use of the sea in Thailand. (Navy, 2022)

#### **4.20 year national strategy**

So that Thailand can upgrade development to achieve the vision "Thailand is stable, sustainable congestion is a developed country. With the development of sufficient economic philosophy" And the above national development goals It is therefore necessary to establish a long-term national development strategy that will make Thailand stable in independence and sovereignty. (National Strategy.Prof. 2018 – 2580, 2018)

The development of the country during the period of the strategy, Sati will focus on balancing the development of economic, social and environmental security. With the participation of all sectors in the form of "state championships" Consisting of 6 strategies, including national security strategy National strategy for creating competitiveness Za strategy for development and capacity building, human resources National strategy for creating opportunities and social equality Satan strategy for creating quality growth Life that is friendly to things Siege and strategy of balance and development of management systems government management In relation to the national security strategy as follows: ( National Strategy.Prof. 2018 – 2580, 2018 )

1) Maintaining peace within the country to strengthen peace and order with the nation, home, city, providing the main institution with stability as a sustainable center of mind. People are well-being, safe in both life and property. Society is strong, harmonious and generous, ready to Will solve national problems

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2) Prevention and resolution of security-related problems to solve existing problems quickly and quickly. And prevent new problems from occurring, which will result in management and development of the country in all areas, continuing and smoothly. The philosophy of an economy is sufficient, which is the key to achieving sustainable development goals

3) Developing national potential to face threats that affect national security

4) Integrating security cooperation with ASEAN and internationally Including government organizations and non-governmental organizations

5) Developing a holistic security management mechanism for important mechanisms to work more efficiently Can truly promote and support national administration and development, concrete, good governance principles And strict and effective law enforcement Can eliminate corruption And seriously misconduct Rest assured that the agency is responsible for both primary and secondary, as well as dealing with all current and future threats

## 6. Conclusion

Summary of the Thai government role

The best situation analysis (best case scenario) To the worst situation (worst case scenario) that may occur, it is found that Thailand will not lose any benefit if Thailand actively implements the policy (active role) under the ASEAN framework and pushes the attitude to the point. That will not affect good relations with China. That is to say, Thailand should reduce its role. (passive role) At the point of eating China. Thailand will benefit from the success of the bridge and the proponents of the solution to the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability, prosperity and development. Sustainable In addition, Thai people are proud that Thailand has played a role in reducing tensions in the South China Sea and creating an atmosphere conducive to the conclusion of the COC as a framework for managing disputes in the South China Sea. In formulating policies for the South China Sea Thailand must accept the steps of China's superpower and may have to convince ASEAN member countries to assess the situation as a matter of fact. Thailand may resolve disputes arising from claims of overlapping rights peacefully. Which is in line with the realist concept (Realism)

The policies of the countries involved in the South China Sea are determined by national interests. Therefore, in order to resolve disputes in the South China Sea, each country must adjust its views and have a political commitment to find mutual benefits in resolving the South China Sea. Each country should adjust the view (perception) to be as real as possible (reality) So it is best to assess the situation in the past. China used to adjust its attitude by adjusting 11 dashes to 9 dashes to support the reality situation that is conducive to Chinese national interests at that time. Therefore, if China is ready to adjust the level of National benefits (perception of national interest) will also help resolve disputes in the South China Sea, which is in line with the national interest concept. (National Interest) Thailand will not lose any benefit if Thailand actively implements the policy. (active role) within the ASEAN framework and pushes the attitude to the point of not affecting good relations with China. That is to say, Thailand should reduce its role. (passive role) At the point of affecting relations with China Thailand should take advantage of being an unqualified and friendly country with a country that claims to be a bridge builder and a problem solver within. Under the framework of international law and practice Solving peaceful means and promoting the South China Sea as a sea of peace, prosperity, stability and sustainable development (Sea of Peace, Prosperity, Stability and sustainable Development) by proposing to add the word “prosperity”

(prosperity) Because prosperity in the South China Sea is a common goal of all parties and will help support economic development. Of the region For the role of Thailand in the

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dispute, the South China Sea should show the most neutral attitude and support peaceful resolution to create regional security based on national interests in area management, especially natural resources, is important. As for security strategy issues, it should be used as an important strategic point to benefit Thailand the most. Without parting with one side and finding useful opportunities for Thailand to protect the most national interests.

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