

productive in parts, neglected in general. Seeking to “unravel” the diversity of the region is one of the authors’ aims (p. 191).

It is an enjoyable book, partly because of their enthusiasm and engagement. Pleasure is marred, however, not only by their historiographical errors, but even more by the many errors of spelling and grammar that they or the copy-editor or the proof-reader should have corrected. “Mittshappij” for Maatschappij (p. 110); “Mollucas” for Moluccas (pp. 1, 107); “Richardo” for Rachado (p. 177); “Whickham” for Wickham (p. 74). In the above I have, I think, used “mitigated” correctly; they use it for “militated” (p. 127). And I fear they specialize in misrelated phrases. “Increasingly by-passed by the India-China trade, the high hopes Francis Light had placed in the island settlement had evaporated by the 1820s” (p. 103) is one example; others are on pages 131 and 145. In reading this book, the errors may distress the scholar (and set a bad example).

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***China and the South Sea Dialogues.* By Lee Lai To.** Westport and London: Praeger, 1999. 168pp.

Stretching 1,800 miles from Sumatra to Taiwan, the South China Sea is larger than the Mediterranean and contains five zones of potential conflict, of which the most contentious dispute is over the Spratly Islands (referred to as Nansha by the Chinese, and the Truong Sa islands by the Vietnamese). The islands, which are located in the southeastern portion of the South China Sea, are disputed by China, Taiwan, and four ASEAN states: Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei.

This work by Lee Lai To presents a detailed and balanced analysis of the territorial and maritime disputes involving the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the South China Sea, including the Spratlys. However, it is not a detailed historical analysis of the competing claims over the disputed territories. Instead, Lee’s study explores China’s diplomatic strategy in bilateral and multilateral negotiations on the South China Sea. Indeed, the analysis and consideration of both the formal and, more significantly, the *informal* dimensions to this diplomacy is a clear strength of the study.

The core of the book focuses on the tension between the PRC's preference for bilateral discussions and the increasing preference for multilateral fora by the other disputants. Nonetheless, rather than presenting an insurmountable barrier to dialogue, Lee charts the growing willingness of the PRC to engage with such fora as part of Beijing's wider goal of increasing its influence both in regional and international affairs while avoiding the internationalization of such dialogues. He maintains that in order to reap the benefits of its economic modernization programme, China requires a period of peace and stability at home and in the region. Consequently, at least for the time being, China will benefit from the pursuit of a friendly and independent foreign policy towards neighbouring states in Southeast Asia. Indeed, in Chapter 2, Lee notes that the visit of Li Peng to three ASEAN states during 1990-91 marked an important departure for China in its process of diplomatic normalization, since in the past it had been the practice for foreign leaders to court Beijing. The departure from this, he asserts, is evidence of a more outgoing and constructive diplomacy by the PRC.

Beijing's engagement with ASEAN, Lee contends, is, in part, motivated by a desire to solve the problems China has with its neighbours without involving the United States. Equally, the rapid (re)emergence of China in the Asia-Pacific region necessitates that the claimants in Southeast Asia discard many of their prior assumptions towards the PRC in favour of a new and more constructive approach. Consequently, the book also examines Sino-ASEAN relations in general and explores how this creates both opportunities and constraints on China's conduct in the South China Sea dialogues.

On the part of ASEAN, Lee argues that the organization's engagement with Beijing stems from several factors. The first is the growing strategic importance of China in the post-Cold War world following the demise of the Soviet Union and the reduction of the military presence of the United States in the region after its withdrawal from Subic Bay and Clark Airfield in the Philippines in 1992. The second is the fact that China is involved in nearly all of the major security issues in the Asia-Pacific region, including the tensions on the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan Strait, as well as the South China Sea. The final factor is the growing economic and commercial importance of the PRC. Consequently, the ASEAN states have been compelled to give priority to engagement with the PRC, both in bilateral meetings and in regional multilateral fora. However, while China has taken part in all the multilateral dialogues on security hosted by ASEAN, it has not made any concessions about its claims, nor has it changed its preference for bilateral discussions with other claimant states in the South China Sea.

China steadfastly continues to reject any internationalization of the disputes.

Despite this, China has undertaken several confidence-building measures, making it known that it would safeguard the security of the sea-lanes and that it is prepared to talk about security issues related to the stability of the area. In addition, it has also declared that it will follow international law, and, in particular, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, to help avoid further difficulty. Furthermore, Beijing has shown a willingness to shelve the disputes, allowing discussions on non-sensitive issues on an informal basis with ASEAN. In other words, the PRC has adopted a position that ensures that the disputes do not prevent the growth of diplomatic, commercial, and other ties with the ASEAN states. As Lee makes clear, while China has been consistent in stating that its claims over the South China Sea are “indisputable”, Beijing is still willing to talk about the conflicts with the parties involved.

Lee’s in-depth analysis of China’s diplomatic strategy in bilateral and multilateral negotiations over the South China Sea disputes is based on both documentary research and the personal experiences of the author at conferences and meetings on this issue. A clear and thorough assessment, this work is arguably the most detailed and comprehensive study on the issue published to date and, as such, it is likely to become the standard work on the diplomatic aspects of the South China Sea disputes.

Perhaps the only criticism is that the work focuses almost exclusively on a unitary actor model of the states involved. Consequently, there is little consideration of the competing interests within the domestic politics of China and the ASEAN states, of the local, regional and transnational commercial actors vying for influence and access to the resources of the region (although Lee does note the significance of resources in the dispute). Apart from this, Lee’s analysis is a valuable contribution to an understanding of both the formal and informal diplomacy of the PRC, and should be an indispensable work for scholars and policy-makers involved in security issues in the Asia-Pacific region.

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