

***Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea: Navigating Rough Waters.* Edited by Jing Huang and Andrew Billo. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Hardcover: 212pp.**

Publishing a book on hot-button issues such as the South China Sea dispute is challenging for two main reasons. First, there has been so much published on this subject. With hundreds of books and journal articles, and thousands of online analyses and commentaries every year, the chance for a book on South China Sea to be visible and have a significant impact is quite low. Second, important developments in the South China Sea occur on a regular basis, which means that books on the subject tend to become outdated fairly quickly.

Published in early 2015, it may still be too early to predetermine whether *Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea: Navigating Rough Waters*, edited by Jing Huang and Andrew Billo, will establish itself as an authoritative source of reference on this issue. But for now at least, the book reveals itself to be a serious project which covers a wide range of issues related to this protracted maritime dispute.

The book is divided into five sections with nine chapters. The first chapter by Nguyen Thi Lan Anh provides a useful overview of the South China Sea dispute and why it is so complex. The next two chapters examine the legal dimensions of the dispute. Specifically, Zhang Xinjun provides a case for “setting aside disputes and pursuing joint development” (pp. 39–53). Zhang’s analysis closely reflects the official positions of the Chinese government regarding the issue of joint development, as well as its opposition to the Philippines’ arbitration case against China at the Permanent Court of Arbitration. The chapter, while providing a good reference point for China’s official stance on the dispute, offers predictable arguments and little new insight into the issue. To the contrary, the chapter by Robert Beckman provides a comprehensive and useful technical analysis of the *Philippines v. China* case and its implications — not only for the two countries concerned, but also for the other claimant states as well as the entire region.

The next two chapters examine the role of ASEAN in managing the dispute. While Walter Lohman provides a good historical account of ASEAN’s engagement in the management of the disputes, Yee Kuang Heng looks into the challenges confronting the Association, especially the difficulties in reaching a common ASEAN position. This

is followed by two chapters on national perspectives. Specifically, Angelo A. Jimenez looks into the Philippines' handling of the dispute *vis-à-vis* China and discusses the challenges to establishing a rules-based regime for dispute management. Meanwhile, Hui-Yi Katherine Tseng provides an interesting analysis of Taiwan's policies *vis-à-vis* the disputes.

The final section offers an assessment of possible solutions and future prospects of the dispute. In a largely policy-oriented chapter, Patrick Cronin proposes a number of solutions, especially for the United States. Cronin suggests that Washington should promote the role of international law such as the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; reinforce regional institutions; strengthen the military capabilities of allies and partners; and improve cooperation with China to reverse the prevalent perception in both countries of a zero-sum game in bilateral relations. Meanwhile, in evaluating existing approaches towards resolving the dispute, Yang Fang's chapter argues that a comprehensive and durable solution to the dispute is unlikely to be found in the foreseeable future, and therefore, the claimants should focus on ways to better manage it.

All in all, the book offers a timely and useful analysis of different aspects and issues related to the South China Sea dispute. Some chapters, such as those by Nguyen Thi Lan Anh and Robert Beckman, are particularly useful for a wider audience, whether for the experts or the laymen, researchers as well as students. However, there are some shortcomings that are worth raising.

Like most edited volumes based on conference papers, the coherence of the book structure, while adroitly handled by the editors, is still undermined to some extent due to the limited number of chapters. For example, the section on the legal aspects of the problem contains only Chinese perspectives, apart from Beckman's background analysis of the dispute. If there had been a chapter analysing legal issues from the perspective of other countries, especially the Philippines, it would have been a valuable addition and which would have made the legal section more balanced. Similarly, the section on "regional perspectives" is not truly "regional", as only perspectives from the Philippines and Taiwan are presented.

Furthermore, there are a number of errors in the book. For example, in her chapter, Katherine Tseng wrote that "in 1989, a clash erupted between China and Vietnam, leading to Chinese occupation over the entire Paracel Island group, despite the attempt

of a unified Vietnam to retake the islands in the aftermath” (p. 130). The naval clash between Vietnam and China in the Spratlys (Johnson Reef South) actually happened in March 1988, not 1989. Moreover, the event was related to China’s occupation of a number of features in the Spratlys, not the Paracels. China took over the entire Paracels in January 1974, when it invaded the eastern part of the archipelago then held by South Vietnam.

Since 2014, China has been building seven massive artificial islands in the Spratlys, and by September 2015, two major runways had been almost completed on Fiery Cross Reef and Subi Reef, with a third expected to be built on Mischief Reef. China’s artificial islands have drastically changed the *status quo* in the Spratlys, in both strategic and legal terms, and have extremely important implications for the South China Sea dispute. For example, not only claimant states but also the United States and Japan have reacted strongly to China’s actions and stressed the threats that the islands pose to regional order and security. Their policy towards the South China Sea dispute as well as China may undergo significant shifts as a result. Of course, such developments were not covered in the book as they emerged only after the authors finished their papers in March 2013. But again, they highlight the challenge mentioned earlier that books on the South China Sea dispute tend to become outdated quickly.

Nevertheless, this edited book volume offers a good read with several chapters useful and relevant for students interested in the South China Sea problem for years to come, despite fast-changing developments.

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