

***Ocean Governance and Conflict in the East and South China Sea: Negotiating Natural Resources, Institutions and Power.* By Christian Schultheiss. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024. Hardcover: 382pp.**

Why do some claimant states in disputes over the East and South China Seas succeed in reaching agreements on natural resources or conflict management while others do not? In this meticulously researched work spanning over three decades of negotiations, Christian Schultheiss offers an answer that is both simple and profound: cooperation hinges on confidence that cooperation will not inadvertently strengthen a rival claimant's bargaining power. This concern is not exclusive to smaller claimants but extends to larger powers as well.

Schultheiss structures his book into six chapters that progressively build to this thesis. Chapter Two establishes the conceptual groundwork, introducing various types of agreements under consideration, from fisheries pacts and joint development arrangements for offshore oil and gas to maritime law enforcement cooperation, codes of conduct and mechanisms for incident prevention and crisis communication. He then analyses how such agreements influence power dynamics between disputing claimant countries. This chapter also considers alternative variables that shape negotiations, including nationalism, domestic politics, legal entitlements and international arbitration.

The book's empirical core spans the next three chapters. In Chapter Three, Schultheiss examines the negotiations over marine natural resources in the South China Sea, covering talks between China and the Philippines, China and Vietnam, the Philippines and Taiwan, and Brunei and Malaysia. To assess whether China's involvement is a defining factor, this chapter also includes two case studies that exclude Beijing. Chapter Four shifts the focus to the East China Sea, where Schultheiss analyses bilateral and trilateral negotiations involving China, Japan and Taiwan. Again, he includes a case—this time between Japan and Taiwan—that does not involve China, offering further comparative insights. Chapter Five turns to conflict management efforts in both maritime regions. It tracks three decades of negotiations on a Code of Conduct

over the South China Sea, as well as China and Japan's attempts to establish procedures for crisis management, including an air and sea communication mechanism and a code for unplanned encounters.

The book's conclusion highlights how claimant states manage to govern marine natural resources collectively, even amid ongoing territorial disputes and great power rivalries. It pinpoints the key commitments still missing that could advance ocean governance in the East and South China Seas. Finally, it broadens the discussion by exploring the wider implications of these findings for great power competition and cooperation beyond Asia's maritime disputes.

The book's greatest strength lies in its comprehensive and theoretically grounded analysis of how claimant states attempt to design institutions governing marine natural resources and conflict behaviour. Schultheiss demonstrates a clear grasp of the complex interplay between legal frameworks, power dynamics and diplomatic manoeuvring. His comparative approach is particularly valuable, as it allows readers to identify patterns across different bilateral and multilateral negotiations. By incorporating cases that exclude China, he prevents the oversimplification that would come from reducing these disputes solely to Beijing's actions. The historical depth of Schultheiss's study is also impressive. Spanning three decades of negotiations, he provides readers with a longitudinal perspective on how these maritime disputes have evolved over time, offering crucial historical context for understanding the current situation and future possibilities.

Despite these strengths, there is slight room for improvement. The introduction raises too many questions, potentially overwhelmingly some readers. A more structured presentation—framing the supplementary questions as illustrative observations following the main research question (pp. 17–18) and integrating additional questions from later sections (p. 26 and p. 42) as sub-questions—would have improved clarity. Moreover, the formatting could be improved. Each chapter's sub-heading starts from “1”, rather than following the clearer hierarchical format in which Chapter Two's sub-sections, for instance, would be labelled “2.1”, “2.2”, etc.

Despite these minor drawbacks, Schultheiss makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on ocean governance in the

East and South China Seas. By focusing on the conditions under which states reach agreements, he provides valuable insights for policymakers and diplomats. The comprehensive analysis, theoretical framework and empirical richness also make this book useful reading for scholars of Asian security, maritime law and international negotiations.

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