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### Chinese Nationalism and the “Gray Zone”: Case Analyses of Public Opinion and PRC Maritime Policy

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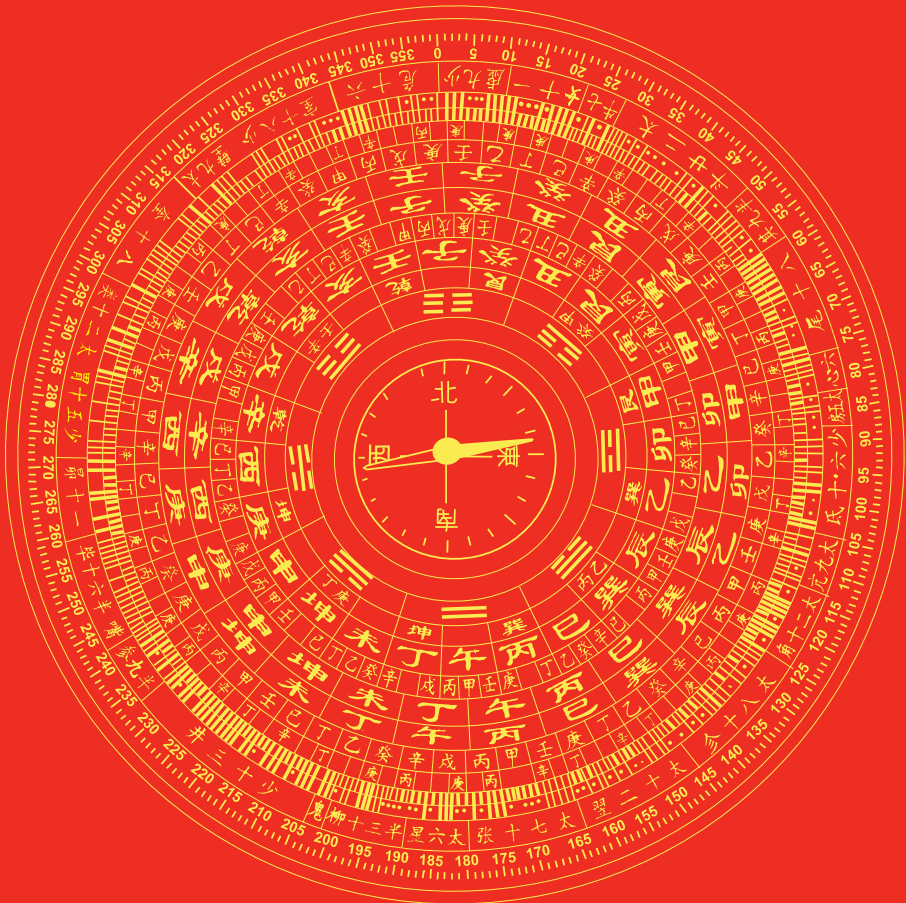
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U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
CHINA MARITIME STUDIES

Number 16

## Chinese Nationalism and the “Gray Zone” Case Analyses of Public Opinion and PRC Maritime Policy



Andrew Chubb



# Chinese Nationalism and the “Gray Zone”

Case Analyses of Public Opinion and PRC Maritime Policy

*Andrew Chubb*



CHINA MARITIME STUDIES INSTITUTE  
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The image features the Chinese characters '中海' (Zhong Hai) written in a bold, expressive cursive calligraphic style. The characters are dark black with visible brushstrokes. The character '中' is on the left, and '海' is on the right. Below the characters, three stylized fish are depicted in a circular arrangement, swimming clockwise. The fish are rendered in shades of grey and black, with simple outlines and fins. The entire composition is set against a plain white background.



## Contents

List of Figures.....	vii
Introduction: Assessing Public Opinion's Impact on PRC Foreign Policy.....	1
<b>2006–2008: Regularizing Maritime Rights Defense</b>	
<b>CASE STUDY 1</b> White Hulls and “Special Operations” .....	11
<b>2009–14: Incidents at Sea—Managing Nationalist Sentiments</b>	
<b>CASE STUDY 2</b> The <i>Impeccable</i> Incident, 2009: The United States Goes Public.....	18
<b>CASE STUDY 3</b> Sino-Indonesian Fishing Clashes, 2010–16: Public Opinion and Policy Contestation.....	23
<b>CASE STUDY 4</b> Diaoyu Fishing Clash, 2010: A Nationalist Hijacking?.....	29
<b>CASE STUDY 5</b> Reed Bank and the Sino-Vietnamese Cable Cuttings, 2011 .....	39
<b>CASE STUDY 6</b> Scarborough Shoal, 2012: Cumulative Criticism and Strategic Channeling .....	50
<b>CASE STUDY 7</b> The Diaoyu Nationalization, 2012: A Nationalist Feedback Loop?.....	58
<b>CASE STUDY 8</b> Second Thomas Shoal, 2013–14: Public Opinion Windfall.....	65
<b>CASE STUDY 9</b> The <i>HYSY 981</i> Incident, 2014: Keeping Nationalism on the Sidelines .....	71
Conclusion: Policy Implications.....	76
About the Author .....	100





## List of Figures

<b>FIGURE 1</b>	The <i>Triton 626</i> Incident .....	13
<b>FIGURE 2</b>	Baidu Search Activity for “South China Sea” (南海), January–December 2007.....	14
<b>FIGURE 3</b>	Baidu Search Activity for “South China Sea,” January–December 2008.....	15
<b>FIGURE 4</b>	Approximate Path of One Regular Rights-Defense Patrol in 2012.....	16
<b>FIGURE 5</b>	Baidu Search Activity on “South China Sea” (南海, 南海问题, and 南海争端) during <i>Impeccable</i> Incident .....	21
<b>FIGURE 6</b>	Approximate Locations of Major PRC-Indonesia Fisheries Incidents, 2010–16 .....	24
<b>FIGURE 7</b>	Approximate Location of Coercive PRC On-Water Actions in Relation to PRC Nine-Dash Line and Maximum UNCLOS-Based Claim before the 2016 Arbitration Ruling ....	25
<b>FIGURE 8</b>	Baidu Search Index for “South China Sea” (南海), April–July 2009.....	28
<b>FIGURE 9</b>	Baidu Search Index for “South China Sea” (南海), Full-Year 2009.....	28
<b>FIGURE 10</b>	Institution of “Normalized” Patrolling near Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands from September 2010 .....	31
<b>FIGURE 11</b>	Surge in Baidu Search Activity on the Term “Diaoyu Islands,” September 2010 .....	35
<b>FIGURE 12</b>	Baidu Search Index for “South China Sea” (南海, 南海问题, and 南海争端) in Early-to-Mid 2011 .....	44
<b>FIGURE 13</b>	Baidu Search Activity on “South China Sea” (南海, 南海问题, and 南海争端) through Mid-2011.....	45
<b>FIGURE 14</b>	Location of Incidents of Chinese Vessels’ Harassment of Vietnamese and Philippine Energy-Survey Ships, 2011–12.....	48
<b>FIGURE 15</b>	CCTV Coverage of Scarborough Shoal, 9 May 2012 .....	53
<b>FIGURE 16</b>	Quarterly Average Baidu Search Index Value for “South China Sea” (南海), 2006–15.....	54
<b>FIGURE 17</b>	Baidu Search Activity on “Huangyan Island” (黄岩岛) (Scarborough Shoal), April–June 2012 .....	56
<b>FIGURE 18</b>	Images of CMS Patrols within 12 nm of Diaoyu Islands, Released on 14 September 2012.....	61

<b>FIGURE 19</b>	Baidu Search Activity on “Diaoyu Islands” (钓鱼岛), May–October 2012 .....	62
<b>FIGURE 20</b>	Baidu Search Activity on 仁爱礁 (Second Thomas Reef), 2013 .....	68
<b>FIGURE 21</b>	Baidu Search Activity on 仁爱礁 (Second Thomas Reef), 2014 .....	68
<b>FIGURE 22</b>	Baidu Search Activity for “South China Sea,” 2009–15 .....	74
<b>FIGURE 23</b>	Baidu Search Activity for “Vietnam,” April–May 2014.....	74

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# Chinese Nationalism and the “Gray Zone”

## Case Analyses of Public Opinion and PRC Maritime Policy

### Introduction: Assessing Public Opinion’s Impact on PRC Foreign Policy

This volume examines the role of popular nationalism in China’s maritime conduct. Analysis of nine case studies of assertive but ostensibly nonmilitary actions by which the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has advanced its position in the South and East China Seas in recent years reveals little compelling evidence of popular sentiment driving decision-making. While some regard for public opinion demonstrably shapes Beijing’s propaganda strategies on maritime issues, and sometimes its diplomatic practices as well, the imperative for Chinese leaders to satisfy popular nationalism is at most a contributing factor to policy choices they undertake largely on the basis of other considerations of power and interest. Where surges of popular nationalism have been evident, they have tended to follow after the PRC maritime actions in question, suggesting instead that Chinese authorities channeled public opinion to support existing policy. Each case study represents a typical instance of the PRC’s increased maritime activities in the “gray zone” of coercion below the threshold of overt military confrontation. In most cases, popular nationalism was demonstrably not a significant factor behind the party-state’s assertive on-water behavior.<sup>1</sup> Of the nine cases considered, in only three did popular influence plausibly play a role: in the Sino-Indonesian fishery disputes of 2010 to 2016 (case study 3), in the Scarborough Shoal incident of 2012 (case study 6), and in the controversy over Japan’s 2012 “nationalization” of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands (case study 7).<sup>2</sup> Yet even in these more likely cases, it is still not clear that the party-state would have acted differently in the absence of popular nationalism.

Indeed, each case shows sufficient cause for Beijing’s actions in some combination of (1) China’s increasing maritime administrative capabilities, (2) increased material value of the disputed maritime possessions, (3) the changing legal regime in which China seeks to enforce its claims, (4) perceived challenges to the viability of China’s claims, and (5) a host of domestic elite political considerations besides popular nationalism. After examining the role of each of these factors in the cases, the monograph concludes with some policy recommendations.

### *Does Popular Nationalism Drive China's Assertiveness?*

Speculation about popular nationalism's influence on Chinese foreign policy can be found across academic works, government reports, think tank briefs, media commentary, and state officials' remarks. For several decades now, the PRC party-state has worked to cultivate among Chinese citizens a sentimental attachment to far-flung disputed islands, rocks, reefs, energy resources, and maritime spaces in the South and East China Seas. This conspicuous buildup of the symbolic political significance of these remote possessions is readily visible in children's textbooks; everyday news; propaganda directives; books and academic research; events; social media campaigns; and, perhaps most infamously, the nine-dash line in the South China Sea.<sup>3</sup> Given the apparent alignment among these efforts to build what Chinese propaganda strategists call 海洋意识 (maritime consciousness) and the PRC's more confrontational pursuit of its claims at sea, the speculation is hardly surprising.

The nationalism explanation has featured prominently in analyses seeking to explain supposedly suboptimal, unstrategic, or counterproductive aspects of China's behavior on its maritime littoral that have resulted in setbacks to the PRC's relations with many of its neighbors. "The most likely—and worrisome—explanation," former White House adviser Ely Ratner has argued, "is that domestic priorities drive China's foreign policies."<sup>4</sup> Thomas J. Christensen has explained a range of belligerent PRC posturing as arising from a combination of overconfidence in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and oversensitivity to nationalist criticism.<sup>5</sup> Rory M. Medcalf and Raoul Heinrichs similarly suggest "some assertive Chinese maritime behavior may be intended as a demonstration of naval capacity to Chinese audiences."<sup>6</sup>

The possibility that rising popular nationalism lies behind Beijing's assertive maritime policy carries three important real-world implications. The first concerns the prospects for outside actors to influence China's actions. Singaporean prime minister Lee Hsien Loong notes that "astonishing progress has roused strong nationalistic feelings and a desire to claim China's rightful place in the sun, after more than a century of humiliation."<sup>7</sup> If such sentiments drive China's actions at sea, as Lee suggests, any attempts at deterring them likely would prove counterproductive. By contrast, if the PRC's maritime-dispute policy reflects careful calculations of the international situation by the top leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), there may be more scope for outside actors to shape Beijing's conduct, using incentives and disincentives.

Second is the possibility that popular nationalist influence on policy could render crises or incidents at sea uncontrollable. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert O. Work noted at a 2014 gathering in Washington, DC, that "[i]n the Asia-Pacific, nationalism is fueling and exacerbating territorial disputes and maritime claims, leading to increased tensions

and greater chances of miscalculations among the countries in the region.”<sup>8</sup> Such miscalculations, in turn, could escalate into disastrous conflict as a result of domestic nationalist demands. Back in 2012, Singaporean foreign minister K. Shanmugam warned that in the South China Sea “there is a risk that decisions could be influenced or even dominated by domestic public opinion.” The risk of this occurring “should not be underestimated,” Shanmugam continued, “and the consequences if those risks come about cannot be underestimated either.”<sup>9</sup>

Third is the ability of the PRC to enlist popular nationalism as a foreign policy resource. The U.S. Defense Department’s annual report to Congress has noted that “nationalistic appeals for a more muscular PRC posture, particularly during times of crisis, effectively constrain more moderate, pragmatic elites in China’s foreign policy establishment,” but that popular nationalism also could offer the regime a negotiating resource.<sup>10</sup> A widely cited report from the International Crisis Group similarly describes nationalism as “both useful to Beijing in the South China Sea and a constraint that limits its options.”<sup>11</sup> If popular nationalism has been an instrument of China’s foreign policy, then Beijing’s management of public opinion—usually recognized as an internal matter—in fact lies within the scope of state-to-state diplomacy. If so, then China, the United States, and other regional states need to discuss the management of domestic public opinion, both informally and formally in diplomatic settings, in much greater depth.

Despite these important, real-world implications, the proposition that rising popular nationalism lies behind Beijing’s assertive conduct in maritime East Asia has not been tested systematically—a problem that relates to the near-total opacity of the CCP’s decision-making processes. This volume attempts to tackle this challenge by tracing the interactions between Chinese domestic discourse and party-state policy in nine carefully chosen cases of Beijing’s assertive activity in the South and East China Seas.

### *Defining the Key Concepts*

Before addressing the cases, we must define key terms around which this volume’s analysis revolves. The first of these is *popular nationalism*, or *nationalist public opinion*. In common usage, *nationalism* can refer to an unwieldy array of social phenomena, ranging from nonliberal trade policies or the passion of sports fans for their country’s representative team, through anticolonial resistance or racist, far-right movements, to hard-line foreign policy preferences. The voluminous scholarship on nationalism has not produced an agreed-upon definition.<sup>12</sup> This study therefore uses a working definition whose scope encompasses the phenomenon of interest: public actions or sentiments favoring more-assertive foreign policy actions.

This definition is designed to direct the focus toward those social phenomena that are both observable and capable of generating bottom-up pressure for confrontational

gray-zone actions on foreign policy issues. However, it also is broad enough to cover both nationalist mobilizations, such as street protests, boycotts, and petitions, and mediated manifestations of nationalism, such as online commentary, consumption of jingoistic media content, and opinion survey results. The word *popular* denotes that the sentiments or actions are shared among a large number of citizens, but this does not imply participation by or the agreement of a majority, or even a significant minority, of the population. The term *popular nationalism* will be used interchangeably with *nationalist public opinion*, and in distinction from *elite nationalism*.<sup>13</sup>

Popular nationalism could influence a wide variety of state decisions, policies, and actions; however, this volume is concerned solely with its implications for foreign policy, that is, 对外政策 (policy toward the outside). The Chinese construction helpfully reminds us to consider whether a given action actually is directed toward the outside world, thereby foregrounding the distinction between foreign policy and state behavior.<sup>14</sup> China's party-state comprises a sprawling complex of agencies, organizations, and informal groupings, sometimes with competing bureaucratic, financial, and political interests. It therefore is vital to consider whether a given action that a frontline agency takes accurately reflects the central party leadership's intentions. One-off actions, taken by uncoordinated frontline or substate agencies, that cease after coming to the attention of the leadership can be considered *state behavior*, but do not necessarily represent the state's *foreign policy*.<sup>15</sup> The role of nonstate actors in the disputed seas, too, must be considered carefully. Tacit or explicit state authorization of nonstate actors to take actions that clearly impinge on outside interests is a foreign policy action under the definition used here. But where official connections with nonstate actions are lacking, only the state's subsequent responses can be interpreted safely as policy. In sum, to the extent that we reasonably can conclude that central party-state decision makers were aware that a given course of action would bear on foreign governments, it will fit the definition of foreign policy.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the precise meaning of the term *gray zone* has generated debate among scholars, but it is deployed here to denote confrontational or assertive actions designed to remain below the threshold of military conflict.<sup>17</sup> Gray-zone actions are acts of coercion in physical space—that is, they exclude diplomatic moves, propaganda, and verbal representations.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Alternative Explanations for PRC Maritime Assertiveness*

Nationalist public opinion is only one of many plausible drivers of China's maritime actions, so to understand its possible impact it is necessary to assess the strength of other factors as well. The stronger these alternative explanations are, the less likely it is that popular nationalism played a decisive role in such actions. Decades of research on public



opinion and foreign policy in democracies indicate that any bottom-up public influence, such as that of popular nationalism, is limited, especially where the issue in question is remote from people’s everyday lives.<sup>19</sup> If this is true in democracies, then it is even more likely to be the case in the PRC, where the ruling party is not directly accountable to the public through regular elections. As a baseline, then, we should demand substantial evidence that policy makers were responsive to popular nationalism before we conclude that it was a viable explanation for observed actions.

We also need evidence that nationalist public opinion did not simply affirm choices toward which leaders were inclined already. It will be insufficient merely to observe that China’s actions accorded with, or won approval from, public opinion. Establishing a bottom-up nationalist effect on foreign policy requires at least some basis for believing that the decision makers’ own policy preferences were less hard-line than the public’s. Thus, the strength of alternative explanations will be crucial to our assessment of public opinion’s strength as an explanatory factor; if other common calculations of the leaders easily explain a foreign policy action, there will be little reason to think they would have acted differently if public opinion had been less nationalistic.

Alternative explanations are especially important to consider when discussing the possibility of public opinion as a constraint on the party-state’s actions. There may well be a range of courses of action that are closed off because they would be prohibitively costly to the party’s legitimacy with the public. Permitting Taiwan to declare independence is perceived widely as an example of this; others might include dropping the claims to the Spratly or Diaoyu Islands entirely, or officially renouncing the nine-dash-line map. Again, however, saying that the public has influenced the state’s policy requires establishing a basis for believing that the leadership might have acted differently, or at least that some actors with influence over policy may have wanted to take the course of action that popular nationalism precluded. In short, identifying any role for popular nationalism as a contributory factor behind policy outcomes will require careful consideration of what *else* might explain the action in question.

In explaining Chinese maritime policy, a distinction needs to be drawn between underlying long-term drivers and variables that may explain change. The underlying drivers of a state’s policy in maritime disputes include its self-defined security, economic, and political interests in the disputed possessions in question. In the case of China, these often are much greater than outside analysts appreciate. For example, while it has been common in English-language discourse on the South China Sea to find the military significance of the Spratly Islands dismissed as insignificant, Chinese party-state materials generally have posited a link between control of the islands and control of the surrounding maritime space, which most observers would agree is strategically vital. The PRC’s construction of facilities on the seven Spratly reefs it occupies, most recently with

massive land-reclamation works, deepwater ports, and large airfields, reflects Beijing's long-standing belief in the military applications of the islands.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, since the 1970s PRC estimates of potential offshore resource bounties have been orders of magnitude higher than those from sources elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>

The CCP's symbolic political stake in its maritime disputes also is not new; the discourse of righteous historical victimization has been a feature of PRC policy discussion on the South China Sea since the 1980s, or even earlier.<sup>22</sup> These large, long-standing stakes in the dispute make it necessary to consider rigorously whether a given maritime action is understood better as a continuation of the PRC's ongoing pursuit of these interests or as a policy change requiring explanation by reference to other variables.

Explaining changes in China's policy or behavior at sea will require identifying variation in the factors capable of animating it. One enabling factor for gray-zone activities is the material balance of power in the region, considering the PRC's military and economic capabilities relative to those of other actors in its region. As will be seen, the regional balance of power has been shifting steadily in China's favor across the period of China's assertiveness. If gray-zone actions are designed to advance the state's interests without triggering open conflict, then greater ability to impose military and economic costs in a conflict scenario should make the state's opponents less inclined to challenge such actions, thereby increasing the scope for them.

In many cases, however, Beijing already enjoyed a preponderance of material capabilities over its adversaries, particularly in the South China Sea, before its patterns of action changed. In such cases, the changing balance of power could have made a difference only insofar as China's calculations involved the possibility of U.S. intervention. America's preoccupation with its Middle East wars likely raised China's estimation of the threshold for U.S. intervention from 2001 onward, thus enabling a wider range and greater intensity of Chinese actions in maritime East Asia. The global financial crisis may have done the same starting from late 2008. But these changes in the balance of power were at most an enabling condition for the PRC's gray-zone policy that began in 2006–2007, rather than a trigger.

Explanations for increases in gray-zone activities can be grouped into five broad types. These explanations are by no means mutually exclusive; it is common for analysts to point to some combination of these factors when explaining changes in Chinese maritime policy.

1. Maritime administrative capability: Greater quality and quantity of PRC maritime administrative assets (including on-water law-enforcement units, logistical support, energy-exploration equipment, and surveillance and communication capabilities) enable Beijing to intensify its activities in disputed maritime spaces.

2. Material value of disputed possessions: Increases in the underlying value of the resources on China’s disputed maritime periphery increase the incentives for assertive actions to secure them.<sup>23</sup>
3. Legal regime: The progressive development of the controlling international legal regime—the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)—has hardened disputed maritime claims on all sides, spurred the development of new enforcement capabilities, and created incentives for assertive actions to advance or protect legal claims.<sup>24</sup>
4. Weakening bargaining position: Where China’s position in a dispute is weak and deteriorates further, leaders may perceive the likelihood of their resolving the dispute in China’s favor to be in danger of declining to zero, creating incentives for escalation to preserve the claim’s basic viability.<sup>25</sup>
5. Substate political competition: Decision-making and foreign policy actions often are a product of internal debate, political competition, and organizational pathologies. Assertive policies may result from political factions jockeying for authority, vested interests lobbying for favors and preferred policies, bureaucratic and party agencies seeking organizational prestige or access, agencies operating in disputed areas stretching their mandates, or individual leaders exercising their personal preferences.<sup>26</sup>

### *Three Models of Nationalism’s Role*

There is no direct, institutional mechanism by which popular sentiments could influence the foreign policy decisions of an authoritarian leadership that does not stand for popular elections. But China scholars have identified three kinds of processes through which nationalist public opinion may influence PRC foreign policy. The first involves the legitimacy concerns of the party-state. The second centers on elite contention opening the door to bottom-up influence. The third model holds that the state can make use of the Chinese public’s nationalist sentiments as a strategic resource in PRC foreign policy.

*Legitimacy Model.* The most straightforward models of domestic public opinion as a factor in Chinese foreign policy hold that leaders take confrontational actions to bolster or preserve their legitimacy with the public. A common starting point is the notion that Beijing’s abandonment of revolutionary egalitarian communism in favor of market-oriented economic reform since the 1980s has created an ideological vacuum, and thus a legitimacy deficit. Thomas Christensen puts it succinctly: “Since the CCP is no longer communist, it must be even more Chinese.”<sup>27</sup> Susan Shirk has argued that unwillingness to be criticized on nationalist grounds often prevents pragmatic Chinese policies toward Japan, including over maritime issues in the East China Sea.<sup>28</sup> Robert Ross has

characterized the PRC's maritime assertiveness as a subrational response to widespread popular demand for "traditional symbols of great power status."<sup>29</sup>

For this legitimacy model to be analytically plausible in a given case, the assertive actions in question must be publicized domestically, and the state must claim credit for its actions—if not in its official version of events, then at least via mass media coverage.<sup>30</sup> If this does not occur, then a desire to boost legitimacy or mollify popular nationalist criticism cannot have been a major factor in the decision to engage in the assertive actions in question. If the intention is to divert public attention away from domestic problems (such as deteriorating economic conditions or political scandals), such issues should be overshadowed by the assertive foreign policy actions. While no "smoking gun," such an observation would increase analytic confidence in the idea that rallying domestic support was among the state's considerations.

Alternatively, we may look for rising public attention and mobilization levels toward the issue in question. As a general rule, the higher the level of public attention on a foreign policy issue, the more likely it is to become a factor in a state's decision-making.<sup>31</sup> If we can find evidence of nationalist mobilization or unusually high public attention on the issue *prior to* the state's confrontational foreign policy actions, this will increase the likelihood that those actions were chosen with at least an eye toward appeasing or impressing public opinion. While Chinese public opinion is notoriously inaccessible and subject to political distortions, the mass rollout of the Internet era has generated new opportunities to gauge the online public's reactions to news events retrospectively. The Baidu Search Index (BSI), a database of continuous daily measurements of Internet search activity on keywords from July 2006 onward, provides insight into the timing of surges in public attention levels toward a given topic.<sup>32</sup> This can be deployed in conjunction with online news searches, which can offer an indicative sample of the stories that were circulating in China's online mediascape before, during, and after observed attention spikes.<sup>33</sup>

*Elite-Contention Model.* More-specified models of nationalism's role hold that elite contention is what opens the door to popular influence on foreign policy. In an early exposition of this idea, Joseph Fewsmith and Stanley Rosen argued that public opinion was most likely to have an impact "when joined with the concerns or interests of those higher in the system."<sup>34</sup> Substate actors or factions may seek to align themselves with nationalist opinion, either to attack their political rivals or to promote hard-line policy preferences based on ideological proclivities or narrow bureaucratic interests. Linda Jakobson reports that a nationalistic political atmosphere has contributed to Beijing's assertive behavior in the South China Sea by providing political cover for maritime-security agencies to push the boundaries of their mandates.<sup>35</sup> James Reilly has developed the implications of elite contention a step further, arguing that intrastate divisions

may reduce the state's ability to curtail spontaneous nationalist mobilizations, which in turn can influence policy. Once a “wave of mobilization” swells in society, it not only strengthens the position of hard-liners in any internal debates but also creates incentives for other decision makers to adopt tougher stances to avoid damaging criticism.<sup>36</sup>

If this type of elite-contention process involving public opinion has been present in a given case, we ought to find the hard-line actions coinciding with known periods of elevated contention in elite politics, such as the CCP's quinquennial congresses or acute political crises.<sup>37</sup> Of course, it is often difficult to know precisely when periods of leadership contention begin and end in China, so the predictions of contention-based models regarding the timing of assertive policy shifts are not very specific.<sup>38</sup> But if this basic condition is met, we can seek further evidence by studying central media coverage for inconsistencies that would hint at elite differences over the issue at hand or linkages between the issue and internal political struggles. If nationalist public opinion has become important in intraparty struggles, we even may find particular elites or their proxies explicitly justifying hard-line policy proposals as reflecting the will of the people.

Sequence is a central consideration to this analysis. If the assertive policy change follows a wave of mobilization that arises during a period of high-level tensions, this is consistent with Reilly's model of bottom-up influence on a divided elite. But if the sequence is reversed, this suggests a third possibility besides those described by the legitimacy and elite-contention models: that the state may have directed public opinion toward the issue for strategic purposes.

*Instrumental Model.* “Two-level game” approaches to international relations have drawn attention to the advantages that domestic constraints can provide to states at the international negotiating table.<sup>39</sup> One such line of research, examining the concept of “audience costs,” suggests that domestic public opinion can serve strategic purposes, even for authoritarian regimes such as the PRC.<sup>40</sup> Jessica Chen Weiss has shown, for example, that since in China antforeign protests require permission from authorities but are increasingly costly to suppress as they grow larger, their appearance or nonappearance helps to demonstrate the state's willingness either to stand firm or to de-escalate during an international crisis.<sup>41</sup> Other research suggests that, in the Internet era, China may be capable of conveying deterrent threats via nationalist public opinion without running the risks associated with permitting antforeign street protests. Even a state-guided, online-only wave of nationalist buzz, such as that seen in the aftermath of the 2016 South China Sea arbitration ruling, can sharpen outside observers' perceptions of the dangers of confronting Beijing at sea.<sup>42</sup>

If the state has instrumentalized popular nationalist sentiments as a resource in an international dispute, we should be able to make three observations. First, surges in

public attention or nationalist agitation should appear *after* the assertive policy shift in question, not *before*. This can be tested by comparing the timing of an assertive policy change with increases in popular mobilization or sentiments calling for tougher policy. Besides the Baidu Search Index and News Archive described above, other accessible indicators of popular nationalist activity include public online commentary, commercial media sensationalism, and real-world mobilizations. If such indicators show that the rise in nationalist sentiment occurred *before* the assertive shift in policy was decided on, this will render the instrumental model unlikely as an explanation for the case at hand.

Second, official comments on the issue and state media coverage should be both widespread and consistent rather than concentrated in particular sectors or agencies. If the state is seeking to channel nationalist public opinion strategically toward an issue, popular sentiments should be fueled by heightened official rhetoric and central state media coverage, rather than by sections of the media that may have been acting on behalf of substate interests. If a wave of nationalist outrage follows hardening diplomatic rhetoric and intensified coverage of the issue across key state media, we can be confident that the state's foreign policy makers and propaganda authorities were aware of such coverage and did not intervene. This will suggest, at a minimum, that the central leadership did not consider the public's expressions of patriotic sentiments inconvenient.

Third, we should observe the party-state attempting to draw foreign attention to those nationalist sentiments. If diplomatic messaging or foreign-directed propaganda content does not refer to public opinion, it is less likely that the state was attempting to use it as a foreign policy resource. It is important to note, however, that this observation also will be consistent with the bottom-up legitimacy and elite-contention models; we would expect such remarks from a state feeling genuinely besieged by domestic nationalist sentiments or from officials whose cooperative intentions had been frustrated by public opinion.

The observations outlined above will not prove decisively which of the three models applies. However, they will enable us to make informed judgments of which model fits best, on the basis of how the different pieces of evidence fit together and the nature of the state's goals at the time.<sup>43</sup>

Using this analytic framework, the remainder of this volume assesses the impact of popular nationalism in specific key cases of China's gray-zone maritime behavior. Part 1 covers early alterations in China's maritime-dispute behavior in 2006–2008, a period when public attention toward maritime disputes was generally low. Part 2 details eight contentious cases that occurred later and required that the party manage domestic nationalist sentiments. The cases traced were chosen carefully to be typical of the PRC's ostensibly nonmilitary gray-zone maritime policy that has emerged since 2006.<sup>44</sup>

After establishing the events in question as representative of the changes observed in the PRC's gray-zone maritime-dispute behavior over this period, each case study examines domestic Chinese discourse for signs that could support or disconfirm the influence of nationalist public opinion on the state's conduct, before considering the strength of other international and domestic explanations for China's actions. As we will see, there is little evidence of popular influence on the state's on-water conduct; the state's instrumental channeling of citizens' sentiments to support its foreign policy emerges as the most prominent role for popular nationalism in China's policy in maritime disputes.

## **2006–2008: Regularizing Maritime Rights Defense**

### *Case Study 1. White Hulls and “Special Operations”*

The steadily increasing presence of large patrol boats and their more frequent use for coercive purposes are fundamental components of China's gray-zone operations in the South and East China Seas. Although these patterns of behavior have received increasing attention in recent years, especially since the *Impeccable* incident of 2009 (see case study 2), they first began to intensify rapidly in 2006–2007.<sup>45</sup>

Case study 1 details three early alterations in China's maritime-dispute behavior during this period: (1) the rollout of a system of regular rights-defense patrols from mid-2006; (2) the *Triton 626* incident, involving intense Sino-Vietnamese clashes over PRC oil exploration in mid-2007; and (3) operations to interfere with Vietnam's continental shelf surveys. Together these three alterations constitute an amalgamated case study. In contrast to the other case studies examined later, the gray-zone policies covered herein emerged during a period when public attention toward maritime disputes remained relatively low, allowing Beijing to act with much less public scrutiny than it would face from 2009 onward.

### *Components of the Case Study*

*The Commencement of Regular Rights-Defense Patrols.* A new program of 定期维权巡航 (regular rights-defense patrols) commenced in July 2006 in the East China Sea. The program centers on maintaining a minimum presence of white-hulled (i.e., civilian) patrol vessels and daily surveillance flights in areas subject to PRC jurisdictional claim. In February 2007, the agency responsible for these patrols, China Marine Surveillance (CMS), under the PRC State Oceanic Administration (SOA), extended the regular patrol area into the Yellow Sea and the northern part of the South China Sea, and again nine months later to include the southern part of the South China Sea. Thus, by December 2007, the regular rights-defense patrol system covered all of “the 3 million square kilometers of waters under China's administration”—the extent of China's claimed (but, in 2006, largely unrealized) jurisdiction in the East and South China Seas.<sup>46</sup>

The rollout of the PRC's constabulary presence in disputed waters was accompanied by a new willingness to deploy these white-hulled ships for coercive purposes. In mid-2006, a fleet of small, armed, maritime law-enforcement vessels from the China Maritime Police, under the People's Armed Police, escorted a seismic survey ship from China's state-owned oil company CNPC into waters south of the Paracel Islands. Ryan Martinson has detailed how this fleet of twelve armed ships protected the survey from large numbers of Vietnamese vessels that attempted to disrupt the two-month operation.<sup>47</sup>

Subsequently, however, responsibility for protecting unilateral PRC energy surveys in disputed waters was transferred to the *unarmed* CMS fleet that also had been tasked with conducting the regular rights-defense patrols. These developments marked the arrival of China's "gray-zone" strategy, combining coercion and unilateral administration of disputed maritime spaces with active avoidance of escalation to military conflict.

*The Triton 626 Incident.* CNPC's energy-survey operations moved to an even more provocative location in 2007, precipitating serious clashes known as the *Triton 626* incident. The operation was scheduled to take place in an area referred to as the "626 Work Area," approximately forty-seven nautical miles (nm) west of Triton Island, the westernmost land feature of the Paracels, and therefore the closest to the Vietnamese coast.<sup>48</sup>

Vietnamese vessels initially turned back the Chinese survey ship and positioned themselves at this location, preventing the survey from proceeding.<sup>49</sup> In response, the SOA sent patrol boats from the CMS East Sea and South Sea regional branches to act as escorts for the survey ship. On June 29, the two cutters arrived in the area, but the Vietnamese ships refused to leave; a standoff ensued that lasted into the following day. According to a Chinese state media account, the Vietnamese ships' presence was preventing the survey ship from lowering its seismic cables, so "the Chinese maritime commander decisively issued the order to ram the other side's vessels." This ramming action was performed repeatedly until all the Vietnamese vessels were forced to leave (figure 1).<sup>50</sup>

The *Triton 626* incident was a milestone for the CMS force, and may have been the first time the newly equipped agency had gone beyond surveillance or shadowing operations to engage in a genuinely coercive enforcement action. Comments of CMS officials interviewed in a China Central Television (CCTV) documentary indicate that this was the first time the CMS South Sea Regional Fleet had been used in this way.<sup>51</sup> Another suggestion of the significance of the operation is the special awards ceremony for the "South China Sea Special Rights Defense Law Enforcement Operation," held in Beijing on 26 September 2007, to commend participants and hear reports on the incident.<sup>52</sup>



**Figure 1.** *The Triton 626 incident.* Left, approximate location of the confrontations; right, on-scene footage of deliberate ramming of Vietnamese ship, filmed from CMS ship (“Defenders of the Blue Domain”).



*Interference with Vietnamese Surveys.* A series of similar “special operations” performed by CMS followed. Targets included scientific vessels collecting geological data for Vietnam’s submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf and Vietnamese and Philippine oil and gas surveys within the nine-dash line.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Analysis of the Case Study*

The methodical rollout of the patrols and the multiregional, multiagency efforts evident in the “special operations” strongly suggest that these events manifested a policy shift decided on, or at least approved, by the party leadership at the central level. What were the causes of these early moves into the gray zone? Could they have been designed in part to divert domestic discontent, impress nationalist members of the public, or ward off internal criticism from hard-liners aligned with public opinion?

*Official Comments and State Media.* China’s official statements and state media coverage indicate that these new maritime law-enforcement activities had little or nothing to do with popular nationalism. This is evident, first, from the fact that none of the actions was well publicized. The regular rights-defense patrols were the only component of this set of new policies to have been publicized to domestic mass audiences. One brief March 2007 report from state news agency CNS mentioned the patrols, but this was about nine months after their implementation and the story was not republished widely.<sup>54</sup> It was only on 12 July 2008, that state television announced that regular rights-defense patrols were occurring in the South China Sea.<sup>55</sup> As for the on-water clashes, the *Triton 626* incident only was revealed six years later in a CCTV documentary, while the interference with Vietnamese continental shelf surveys never has been acknowledged publicly.

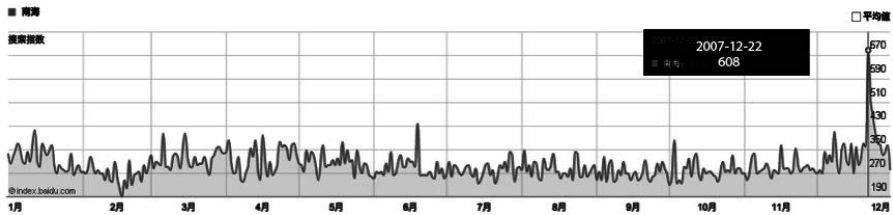
The fact that state media discussion of these new gray-zone activities and incidents did not begin until months or years afterward constitutes solid evidence that the state was not driven by a need to alleviate legitimacy issues or placate rising nationalist sentiments. The dearth of media coverage is equally inconsistent with the idea of contending

elites attempting to focus public attention on the issue to bring about policy change or attack internal rivals. If legitimacy issues were involved in the policy's causation, the state should have sought to relieve the pressure through sustained publicity of the assertive policy, either before or soon after implementation. If contending elites were attempting to use the issue, it at least should have been covered in certain sectors of the media or online.

*Public Attention and Mobilization.* The BSI shows no evidence that either the regular rights-defense patrols or the coercive on-water operations in the 2006–2008 period were preceded by any groundswell of online nationalist pique. As figure 2 indicates, there were no surges in search activity on the “South China Sea” string through 2007 until 22 December, when the raising of a Song dynasty shipwreck named *South China Sea 1* (*Nanhai 1*) just off the coast of Guangdong received major state media attention.

The July 2008 announcement about regular rights-defense patrols on CCTV prompted the only clear spike in public interest in the South China Sea issue within the online public across 2008 (figure 3).<sup>56</sup> The idea that a desire to appeal to popular nationalism was part of the motivation behind this assertive policy change arguably passes the basic test

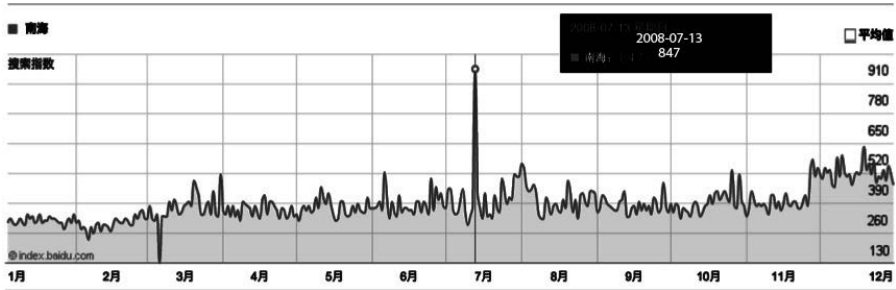
**Figure 2.** Baidu search activity for “South China Sea” (南海), January–December 2007. The black box indicates the index's highest daily value for the year, recorded on 22 December. (Baidu Search Index).



of plausibility as an explanation in this case—the public was informed of the assertive action, and the state claimed credit for it. But, as noted above, publicity did not begin until more than a year after the patrol system had been initiated. While the television segments may have been an example of nationalist posturing, public opinion was not involved in the causation of the policy itself. What is clear is that there was a spike in popular attention toward the issue *after* the central state media publicity, indicating the strong influence of the state television broadcaster in setting the online public's agenda.

*Explanations.* Surging resource values appear to have combined with declining claim strength to trigger a policy shift. Another necessary, if insufficient, condition for that shift was new administrative capacity developed in response to the UNCLOS regime. It likely is not a coincidence that the value of China's energy imports trebled between 2004 and 2006—just before the PRC's policies changed. Although the rights-defense patrols were not aimed directly at securing resources, the CNPC survey operations

**Figure 3.** Baidu search activity for “South China Sea,” January–December 2008. The black box lists the value for the peak on 13 July (Baidu Search Index).



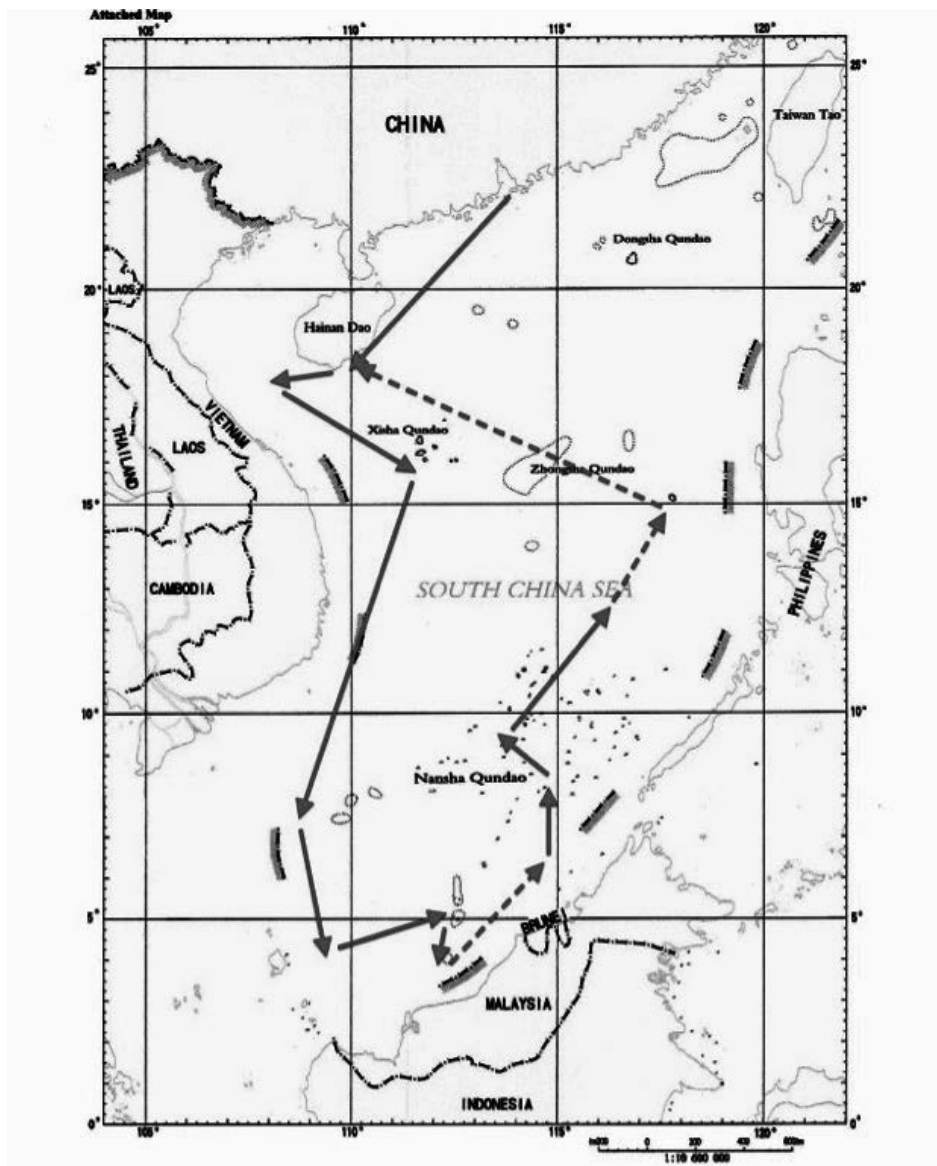
implemented with the aid of coercive escorts were. In fact, the latter are referred to in party-state materials as part of the PRC’s “offshore oil exploration strategy.”<sup>57</sup>

In the East China Sea, the higher prices appear to have spurred greater efforts toward Sino-Japanese joint development of disputed resources. But in the South China Sea, the opposite occurred, with the PRC’s position suffering a series of setbacks (including the stalling of the trilateral Joint Maritime Seismic Undertaking), engendering a sense of threat to the basic viability of China’s claim. Internal sources recommending that decision makers take action to increase China’s presence to “maintain the dispute” and to “slow down the pace of border negotiations” in some areas offer support for this idea.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, in the South China Sea the advent of the UNCLOS regime had weakened China’s jurisdictional claims greatly around the margins of the nine-dash line—precisely those areas where regular patrols were rolled out (see figure 4). This suggests that they may have been intended to compensate for legal weakness.

These moves were made possible by recent acquisitions of high-endurance patrol vessels developed specifically to enforce the PRC’s maritime-rights claims in the wake of its accession to UNCLOS. International relations theorists typically hold international law to be either irrelevant (the realist school) or a constraint on states’ confrontational behavior (the liberal school), but in this case it was a key factor behind the PRC’s assertive policy shift. Until Beijing enshrined the UNCLOS regime’s two-hundred-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) into its domestic legal system, PRC maritime law-enforcement agencies had no domestic legal basis for seeking control over vast expanses of maritime space. In fact, the agency that implemented the policy (CMS) was founded after the passage of the 1998 Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf (hereafter EEZ/CS Law). The following year, the State Council established three national-level CMS fleets and allocated 1.6 billion yuan (¥1.6 billion) to equip the new agency with thirteen large, new, long-range patrol boats and five aircraft.<sup>59</sup> The project was evidently a complex one, involving exhaustive

**Figure 4.** *Approximate path of one regular rights-defense patrol in 2012, compiled by author from route map visible in "Xunhang Nanhai" [Patrolling the South China Sea], aired on 22 July 2012, on CCTV, available at <http://tv.cctv.com/2012/12/10/VIDE1355099970602223.shtml>.*



research before procurement began, and it may have encountered some delays, as the first ship was delivered only in late 2004.<sup>60</sup> The force also needed time to develop the organizational and logistical capacities and operational experience to make effective use of its new equipment, which meant staying at sea for prolonged periods. Only once these long-planned capabilities were in place could the long-planned regular rights-defense patrol system be rolled out.<sup>61</sup>

CMS's fleet of white hulls also made the new coercive gray-zone actions possible. At least three of CMS's first six new cutters participated in the June–July 2007 “special rights-defense action” to protect the *Triton 626* drilling project. The importance of the new ships is indicated by the fact that at least one was called in from the CMS East Sea Branch, based more than two thousand kilometers away; the South Sea Branch had two new ships of its own, but these evidently were not considered sufficient. One of these units, *Haijian 51* (commissioned in November 2005), also was identified as ramming Vietnamese geological survey ships later in the year, leading some Vietnamese analysts to speculate that the ship may have been designed especially for this type of task.<sup>62</sup> Regardless of whether this is true, it is clear that the availability of these new assets enabled the operations.

Beijing could not have used its naval capabilities for these kinds of coercive operations. According to a well-placed researcher, using warships in this way would have carried an unacceptable risk of escalation to war, and in any case the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy (PLAN) does not have the relevant 职能 (functional role) within China's state system.<sup>63</sup> The PLAN's over-the-horizon deterrent presumably backstopped the operations, but CMS's particular form of white-hulled law enforcement was equally crucial (if not more so) to making them possible within the parameters of the party-state's strategic goals, which have included the avoidance of military conflict. These technical capabilities were developed, as noted above, specifically to meet the challenges and opportunities that the new international legal regime presented.

*Conclusion.* Appeasing popular nationalism was not among the CCP's motivations when it began its intensification of gray-zone activities in the South and East China Seas. The system of regular rights-defense patrols was set in motion in the late 1990s with the PRC's accession to the UNCLOS regime. The establishment of new civilian maritime law-enforcement capabilities was followed by a methodical, progressive rollout of regular patrols across China's disputed maritime littoral between 2006 and 2007. It also enabled the deployment of nonmilitary assets to neutralize opposition to Chinese activities in disputed waters without triggering military escalation. In the South China Sea, this new willingness to resort to coercion appears to have resulted from a combination of surging resource prices and new challenges to the viability of the PRC's position.

The fact that these crucial policy changes were implemented without any public fanfare disconfirms both the legitimacy and the elite-contention models of popular nationalist influence on policy. In a vivid illustration of the changes in the CCP's management of public opinion detailed in the following case studies, the *Triton 626* incident finally was revealed to the Chinese public in a state television documentary in late 2013—more than six years later—with dramatic footage from the scene and candid interviews with personnel involved. This was a strong indication of the state's newfound willingness to claim

the credit for its acts of maritime assertiveness and to enlist the public's patriotic energies in support of its foreign policy goals. Further evidence of this pattern will be seen in later case studies. However, when Beijing implemented its new policies in 2006–2008, it evidently was determined to avoid any involvement from the public.

## 2009–14: Incidents at Sea—Managing Nationalist Sentiments

### *Case Study 2. The Impeccable Incident, 2009: The United States Goes Public*

For five days in early March 2009, Chinese fishing boats and government ships repeatedly harassed USNS *Impeccable*, a high-tech survey ship conducting sonar surveillance for the U.S. Navy in the South China Sea. According to the Pentagon, *Impeccable* was around seventy-five nautical miles east of Hainan Island when the incidents took place.<sup>64</sup> The confrontations culminated on 8 March, when two Chinese fishing boats, accompanied by one PLAN surveillance vessel, one CMS patrol ship, and one Fisheries Administration cutter, maneuvered closely around the U.S. ship for several hours.<sup>65</sup> The fishing boats targeted *Impeccable's* underwater monitoring equipment, cutting back and forth across the stern of the ship, where it was trailing a sonar array, attempting to snare the array with a long pole. Eventually they forced *Impeccable* into an emergency stop, prompting the ship's crew to ready an equipment-destruction sequence.<sup>66</sup>

The American response was swift and public. On the following day, 9 March, a Defense Department statement laid out the U.S. version of events in detail, as outlined above, accusing the Chinese vessels of having “violated the requirement under international law to operate with due regard for the rights and safety of other lawful users of the ocean.”<sup>67</sup> A formal protest was filed with China's military attaché in Washington. The incident is now widely considered emblematic of the new coercive element in China's maritime policy.<sup>68</sup>

For analysts attempting to explain the *Impeccable* incident, nationalist public opinion in China has endured as one of the likely causes of the PRC's actions. Robert Ross characterizes the incident as one of a number of “blunders” that resulted from “the party's effort to appease China's nationalists.”<sup>69</sup> Thomas Christensen regarded it as typical of the belligerent behavior attributable to the CCP's sensitivity to nationalist criticism and an exaggerated sense of power in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>70</sup>

But China's official comments and state media indicate that the Chinese ships' behavior was unrelated to any desire to appear tough or assertive for domestic nationalist audiences. Instead, the *Impeccable* incident resulted from the PRC's pursuit of its long-standing and growing interest in opposing foreign military surveillance in the EEZ, in the context of the unknown intentions of a new U.S. administration that was beset by a domestic financial crisis.

*Official Comments and State Media.* The PRC’s official comments and state media coverage indicate no desire to use the incident to impress the domestic public or forestall nationalist criticism. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu addressed the issue in a regular press conference on 10 March (Beijing time), the first since the United States had made the incident public. According to the official Chinese-language transcript, Ma stated that “the U.S. claims are seriously contrary to the facts,” that they “invert black and white,” and that China had lodged a protest against the U.S. Navy’s close-in surveillance. A separate statement released the following day confirms that the party-state was more concerned about positioning itself as a victim of illegal encroachment than with impressing the domestic public with its active resistance to the American threat.<sup>71</sup>

While the U.S. side described the PRC ships’ maneuvers as “aggressive,” the official transcripts of the 10 March MFA press conference and 11 March statement on the issue contain no mention of any Chinese actions at all, despite the spokesman being asked numerous specific questions about them.<sup>72</sup> The Defense Ministry’s official response followed the same pattern, painting China as the victim of illegal U.S. encroachment, with only one brief sentence mentioning China’s “normal rights-defense activities.”<sup>73</sup> Unusually, numerous serving PLAN commanders also commented publicly on the issue. These remarks, too, focused on declaring the hypocrisy of the hegemonic United States, not China’s hard-line actions in response.<sup>74</sup> Some high-ranking PLA officers even explicitly denied that an incident had occurred at all, let alone one involving Chinese boats bravely defending the sovereignty, rights, and honor of the nation.<sup>75</sup> These responses not only made no attempt to claim credit for the Chinese vessels’ assertive conduct but actively refused it.

There was no mention of the *Impeccable* controversy on CCTV’s authoritative 7 PM news bulletin between 10 March and 30 March. Nor was there any prominent mention of the incident (or the diplomatic sparring that ensued) on the 10 PM *Wanjian Xinwen* (*Evening News*) produced by the same trusted office.<sup>76</sup> The latter ran reports on the MFA’s press conferences on six occasions between 10 March and 30 March, four of which addressed South China Sea-related issues, yet the *Impeccable* incident appears to have escaped mention.<sup>77</sup> Given the strong influence of television in setting China’s domestic news agenda, as well as the tight state control of these key news bulletins, this is a strong indication that the CCP was not attempting to draw public attention toward the issue, whip up anger over the U.S. threat, or bolster its nationalist credentials with the public via its assertive actions.

Striking differences between Chinese- and English-language state media coverage and between internal and external versions of events confirm how far domestic nationalist legitimacy was from the CCP’s calculations at this time. In the English-language *China*

*Daily* on 11 March, PLAN rear admirals Lin Yongqing and Zhang Huachun were quoted defending the actions of the Chinese ships.<sup>78</sup> However, neither of these comments affirming the Chinese boats' actions appears to have been reported in Chinese-language media.<sup>79</sup> A similarly revealing contrast exists between the Fisheries Administration's private and public versions of the incident. Publicly, the head of the agency's South Sea Regional Bureau claimed that the fishing boats' actions were "totally spontaneous" and had nothing to do with the government.<sup>80</sup> But in the *China Fisheries Yearbook*, which is not readily accessible to the public, the bureau states that it "organized Fisheries Administration vessels and fishing vessels to successfully intercept and expel [*Impeccable*] from our country's EEZ."<sup>81</sup> On each count, the party-state was loath to portray itself domestically as having confronted the United States actively. This makes it highly unlikely that the Chinese ships' coercive actions were intended to appease or impress nationalistic public opinion.

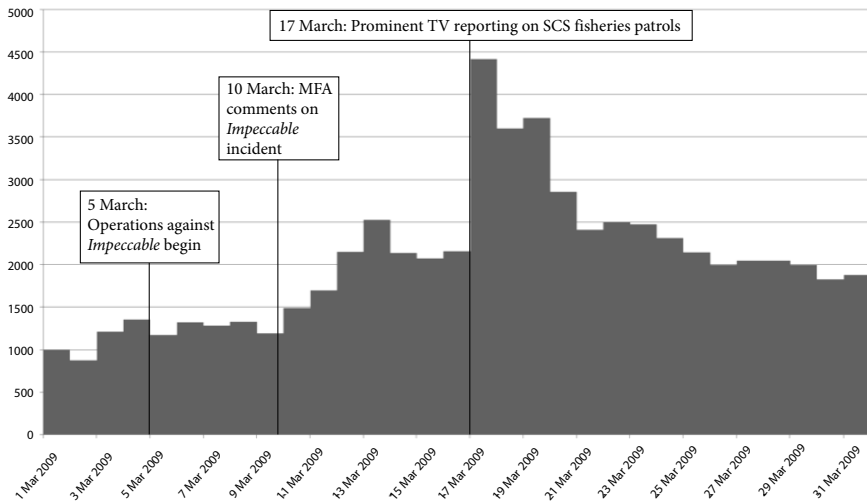
*Public Attention and Mobilization.* Rather than rising public sentiments pushing the state into action, publicity of the *Impeccable* incident itself drove public attention toward the South China Sea issue (figure 5).<sup>82</sup> The BSI rose to a peak of 4,400 on 17 March, when state media strongly publicized the dispatch of a newly commissioned paramilitary fisheries-patrol ship to the disputed areas as a response to the increasingly tense situation there, and rumors circulated of a possible evacuation of Chinese citizens from the Philippines.<sup>83</sup> These reports were not related directly to *Impeccable*, but the incident appears to have increased the public's appetite greatly for information on the topic around this time. Thus, if there was nationalist public pressure on the PRC government for assertive measures, it was probably greater after the *Impeccable* incident than before—especially given the state's official framing of China as the victim of U.S. encroachment.

The *Impeccable* incident was, of course, not merely a South China Sea incident but also a matter of Sino-American relations. As the 1999 bombing of the PRC's Belgrade embassy and the 2001 EP-3 spy plane incident showed, Sino-U.S. confrontations are likely to spark public attention and mobilization.<sup>84</sup> But the PRC showed little sign of concern with nationalist public opinion in the wake of the *Impeccable* incident. It did not serve as a constraint from winding back the on-water harassment; although there were four other cases of harassment of U.S. surveillance ships in the Yellow Sea over the following two months, none approached the intensity of the March incident.<sup>85</sup> Nor did it prevent China from engaging in public cooperation with the United States; on the contrary, the PRC proceeded with a series of high-level diplomatic and military-to-military meetings stressing Sino-American cooperation.<sup>86</sup>

From a peak above 4,400 searches, attention levels among Internet users fell away quickly, as figure 5 shows. This suggests not only that the state was unconstrained from moderating its conduct toward the United States but that its clear intent to de-escalate



**Figure 5.** Baidu search activity on “South China Sea” (南海, 南海问题, and 南海争端) during *Impeccable* incident.



probably sent a powerful moderating signal to domestic audiences.<sup>87</sup> In theory, such signals can enable a state to pursue de-escalation and more-cooperative relations moving forward.<sup>88</sup> As will be seen again in the 2011 cases (see case study 5), this is one way a state can manage the risks of domestic discontent or unwanted nationalist influence on foreign policy.

*Explanations.* The PRC’s actions, most straightforwardly, were aimed at asserting the party-state’s long-standing policy of opposing military surveillance activities in maritime areas subject to a Chinese EEZ jurisdictional claim.<sup>89</sup> The PRC previously had taken actions to advance this position, notably in the EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft incident of 2001. In 2009, Chinese personnel on the fishing boats made clear that they wanted to interfere with *Impeccable*’s underwater sonar monitoring equipment, which probably was gathering information on China’s submarine fleet. Since 2008, that fleet had included ballistic-missile submarines—important to China’s nuclear deterrent—based at Yulin Naval Base at the southeastern tip of Hainan.<sup>90</sup> As a simple act of opposition to *Impeccable*’s surveillance activities, the purpose of the Chinese vessels’ actions hardly could have been more clear. However, this underlying strategic interest cannot explain easily the timing of the altered behavior that precipitated the incident. Why did the PRC take this kind of action over the issue in early 2009, not the previous year or earlier, before the new submarine facility entered operation?

A tactical probe, triggered by uncertainty over the intentions of a new U.S. administration beset by financial crisis, offers the neatest explanation for the timing of the PRC’s actions. In all, fishing boats harassed U.S. military surveillance ships in China’s claimed

EEZs at least five times between March and May 2009.<sup>91</sup> Tellingly, no equivalent confrontations have been reported since that time. This shows that, while the operation against *Impeccable* served the long-standing geostrategic objectives noted above, it did not constitute a fundamental shift in China's policy aimed at compelling the United States to change its surveillance behavior.<sup>92</sup> This suggests that the aim more likely was to gauge the American response in the context of severe economic uncertainty in the wake of the global financial crisis of late 2008. Barack Obama's assumption of the U.S. presidency in January 2009 added a further incentive for Beijing to seek updated information about U.S. intentions on China's maritime periphery at this time, and previous PRC practice suggests that the change of administration may have been a factor.<sup>93</sup>

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates understood the incident as a PLA action taken "without the knowledge of the civilian leadership in Beijing."<sup>94</sup> This is basically compatible with the explanation advanced above, since military leaders themselves conceivably could have organized and executed such a probing action. However, there are several reasons to question Gates's interpretation. One is the involvement of at least two subministerial government agencies—CMS and the Fisheries Administration—and the requirement for coordination across the civil-military institutional divide, which would have been difficult (and risky) to conceal from the central party leadership. This coordination, and the fact that the harassment was sustained over a period of several days, eliminates the possibility of frontline units having acted on their own initiative.

Second, by the evening of 8 March, when the United States made its initial private protest, MFA officials already were prepared with sufficient information on the incident to mount a detailed rebuttal, suggesting that the foreign policy bureaucracy, or party leaders higher up in the system, were cognizant of the actions.<sup>95</sup> Fisheries officials have cited the incident as an example of "fisheries rights defense working in concert with diplomatic representations."<sup>96</sup>

Third, the fact that several more instances of harassment of U.S. surveillance ships occurred over the following three months suggests that this behavior was not strongly contrary to the central leadership's wishes.<sup>97</sup>

Collectively, these observations suggest that PLA initiatives or preferences, as distinct from those of the CCP central leadership, are unlikely to have been a factor behind the confrontation.

As with many of the incidents that have composed China's assertive shift into the maritime gray zone, the on-water agencies' actions in the *Impeccable* incident were connected intimately with the state's response to the UNCLOS regime.<sup>98</sup> The agencies found legal authority for their actions in UNCLOS-inspired domestic legal instruments, especially the 1996 *MSR Rules*, and CMS ships discovered the spy ship during one of their new

regular rights-defense patrols—a program that, as noted above, resulted from Chinese intentions and capabilities developed in direct response to UNCLOS.<sup>99</sup> The incident also demonstrated the feedback loop between new, assertive policies introduced at one time—in this case, regular patrols that increased China’s maritime domain awareness—and further assertive actions in subsequent periods. However, the equipment required for the action against *Impeccable* probably would have been available to the agencies before the addition of the new UNCLOS-inspired fleet of long-range patrol boats.<sup>100</sup> Thus, while China’s legal argument against the U.S. activities was enabled directly by the convention, the assertive on-water actions themselves probably were not.

*Conclusion.* The *Impeccable* incident resulted from the PRC’s pursuit of its long-standing stated interest in opposing foreign military surveillance in the EEZ, in the context of the unknown intentions of a new U.S. administration beset by a domestic financial crisis. China’s official comments and state media from March 2009 show that the Chinese ships’ behavior was unrelated to any desire to appear tough or assertive for domestic nationalist audiences. Equally, as we have seen, the *Impeccable* incident became public only at Washington’s initiation, and the PRC made no concerted attempt to channel the influence of public opinion instrumentally into the service of its maritime policy objectives at that point. But on 25 March, two weeks after the incident, the MFA’s departmental director general did cite rising online nationalism in China in an appeal to U.S. interlocutors to cut back American offshore surveillance activities.<sup>101</sup> This suggests that PRC diplomats now recognized popular nationalism’s instrumental potential as a 砵碼 (bargaining chip) to underpin China’s policy on this issue.<sup>102</sup>

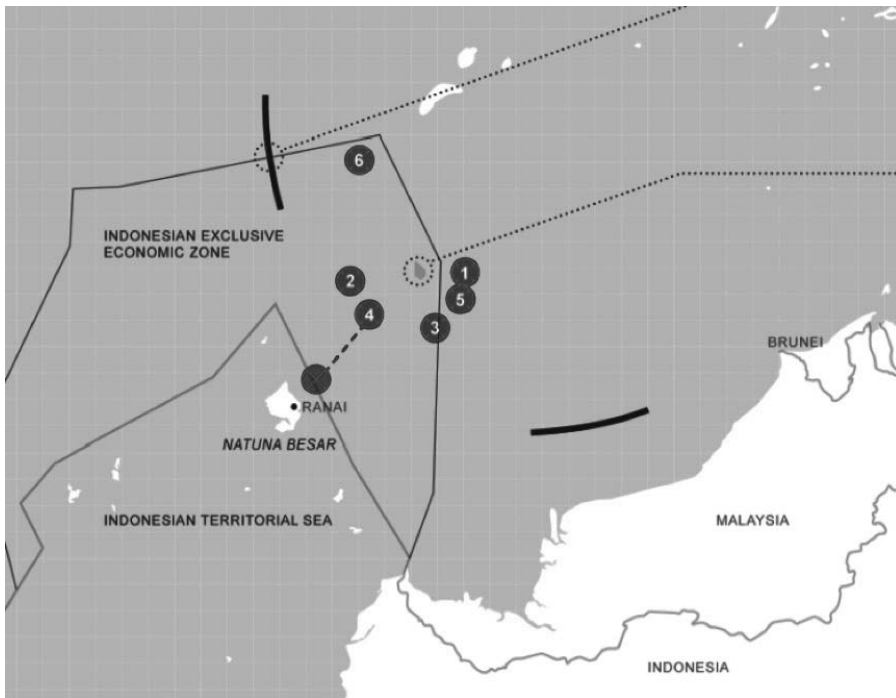
### *Case Study 3. Sino-Indonesian Fishing Clashes, 2010–16: Public Opinion and Policy Contestation*

Since 2010, at least four instances have been reported of PRC civilian law-enforcement ships coercing Indonesian naval vessels into releasing PRC fishing boats at the far southern extremity of the nine-dash-line area. In each case, Indonesian law enforcement detained the fishing boats within Indonesia’s EEZ projected from the Natuna Islands, whose status is not in dispute (figure 6). The location is significant because China has no plausible basis to claim maritime rights in that area under UNCLOS, so the coercive actions there almost certainly represent enforcement of its claim to “historic rights” within other countries’ EEZs, alluded to in the PRC’s 1998 EEZ/CS Law. The area also contains large, though only marginally commercially viable, oil and gas reserves that Indonesia is pushing to develop, perhaps for strategic reasons.<sup>103</sup>

This form of gray-zone coercion has not been aimed only at Indonesia; the PRC Fisheries Administration’s yearbook recorded “rescues” of more than a hundred PRC fishermen from the clutches of foreign authorities in the Spratly area in 2010.<sup>104</sup> However, the

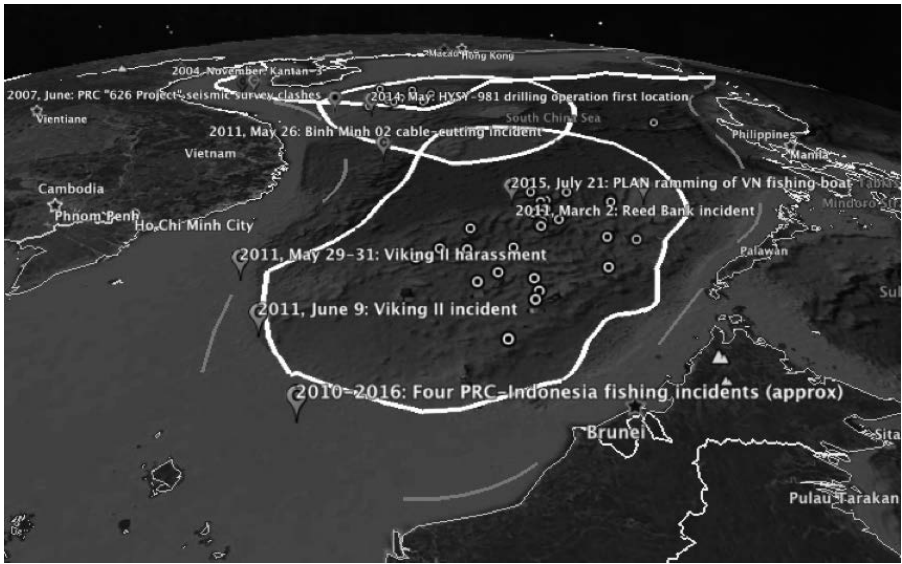
Sino-Indonesian incidents were especially significant owing to their location: just inside the nine-dash line, but outside any plausible PRC EEZ claim under UNCLOS (figure 7).<sup>105</sup> This, together with other evidence that includes fisheries charts and Chinese media accounts, indicates that in taking these actions the PRC Fisheries Administration has been acting on a new and provocatively expansive reading of the nine-dash line as a geographical border.<sup>106</sup>

**Figure 6.** *Approximate locations of major PRC-Indonesia fisheries incidents, 2010–16 (note that incidents 5 and 6 marked on this chart did not involve coercion by PRC ships). Detail from map in Connolly, Indonesia in the South China Sea, p. 4.*



Beijing's general policy of strengthening protection for its fishing boats in the disputed Spratly maritime spaces dates back at least as far as 2003, but the key changes giving rise to the PRC-Indonesia confrontations did not occur until 2009.<sup>107</sup> Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Fisheries Administration complained of a lack of resources and equipment for long-distance missions, admitting that its fleet often was unable to prevent other countries from detaining Chinese fishermen there, even when this occurred near the PRC's outposts.<sup>108</sup> New equipment, authority, and techniques arrived in 2009, when *Yuzheng 311* and *Yuzheng 302* were dispatched to the Spratlys "with

**Figure 7.** Approximate location of coercive PRC on-water actions in relation to PRC nine-dash line and maximum UNCLOS-based claim before the 2016 arbitration ruling that none of the Spratlys constitutes an “island” under UNCLOS article 121.



the approval of the national relevant departments,” not only to manage the Chinese fleet but to “exercise the state’s administrative power, and strongly proclaim sovereignty.”<sup>109</sup>

The exercise, and subsequently the enforcement, of “historic rights” in Indonesia’s Natuna EEZ began in late 2009.<sup>110</sup> In mid-2010, reports emerged of two incidents in which the armed PRC Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) cutter *Yuzheng 311* forced the Indonesian navy to release PRC trawlers it had detained.<sup>111</sup> In March 2013, an Indonesian navy captain posted a detailed account of a similar incident, in which the PRC fisheries-survey ship *Nanfeng* and the armed cutter *Yuzheng 310* had compelled him to release a Chinese fishing boat.<sup>112</sup> And in March 2016, Indonesia’s minister of marine affairs and fisheries announced that PRC cutters had compelled the release of a Chinese fishing boat by ramming it as it was being towed toward the Natuna Islands for processing.<sup>113</sup> In the absence of such reports from earlier times, it seems reasonable to infer that this series of incidents reflects an intensification in the PRC’s gray-zone maritime behavior in this area of maritime space. If so, how can this change be explained, and how likely is it that nationalist public opinion was a factor?

As shown below, domestic discourse on the matter offers indications that public opinion may have been a factor in an intrastate policy contest that resulted in the coercive measures to protect Chinese fishermen in the Indonesian EEZ. Specifically, the public’s response to a flurry of media reporting on the plight of Chinese fishermen whom

Indonesia arrested in mid-2009 may have helped hawkish party-state actors weaken restraints on confrontational on-water conduct in the area. What makes this plausible is that the MFA and party leadership had clear reasons to oppose such conduct, for it was certain to undermine Sino-Indonesian relations, antagonize the largest and most powerful state in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and harm China's international image by flouting a globally legitimate international legal regime it once had extolled as a force for "breaking maritime hegemony."<sup>114</sup>

*Official Comments and State Media.* The MFA appears to have been unprepared to respond publicly to Indonesian detentions of Chinese fishermen. The MFA made its first comments on such an incident on 25 June 2009, publicly demanding the release of seventy-five fishermen detained on eight boats in what the MFA described as "the traditional fishing grounds of the Spratly Islands." This comment was offered in response to a report that the *Huanqiu Shibao*, a tabloid subsidiary of the *People's Daily* that often defines the extremes of acceptable nationalist public discourse, published that morning. That story, in turn, was based on a translation of Indonesian media content published two days earlier; the actual incident had occurred three days further back, on 20 June.<sup>115</sup> This sequence suggests that the MFA or party leadership may not have been intending to respond publicly to this incident before the media drew attention to the issue.<sup>116</sup> If so, this was a case of the media, and by extension public opinion, impacting China's diplomatic agenda.

The *Huanqiu* translation's scoop formed part of a larger wave of reporting on the South China Sea in general, and on the plight of Chinese fishermen in particular, in certain parts of the Chinese media through the first half of 2009. Beyond the *Huanqiu* piece, detailed feature reporting came mainly from Xinhua subsidiary *International Herald Leader*, the Chinese-language website of the *China Daily*, and provincial papers such as the *Guangzhou Daily*. This assortment of relatively disparate outlets further suggests that the reports were not the result of a systematic, centrally directed campaign motivated by strategic or diversionary considerations. Most suggestively, some reports carried explicit criticisms of the MFA's lack of support for arrested fishermen, as well as extensive quoting of Fisheries Administration personnel.<sup>117</sup> These observations are consistent with particular substate elite actors attempting to enlist public opinion in support of a hawkish policy shift on this specific issue.

The party-state did not comment publicly on either the 2010 or 2013 incidents. Xinhua may have issued a brief report on the 2010 incidents, but if so this was quickly taken down, indicating that diplomatic flexibility was more of a priority for Beijing than was claiming credit for the assertive actions it already had taken.<sup>118</sup> One of the first detailed Chinese-language reports on the 2013 incident appears to have come two years later, when CNS ran a heroic account of the role of one fisheries-survey ship in the "rescue."<sup>119</sup> The PRC's only comment on the 2016 incident was the MFA spokesperson's 21 March

press conference remark that “after the relevant fishing vessel was attacked and harassed by an armed Indonesian ship, a Chinese coast guard ship went to assist and did not enter the Indonesian territorial waters.” The spokesperson immediately added that some fishermen remained under detention in Indonesia.

This presentation of these incidents is inconsistent with an attempt to bolster nationalist legitimacy via foreign policy aggression, but is quite consistent with the possibility of nationalist influence on policy via elite contention. As noted below, data on public attention and mobilization levels offer some further support for such an explanation.

*Public Attention and Mobilization.* The criticisms of the MFA in the 2009 media reports on the issue, together with the prominence of Fisheries Administration officials as sources, suggest that contending elite actors, particularly the Fisheries Administration, may have been attempting to push for a tougher handling of the issue, or for more resources for fishing-protection missions, or both. The BSI offers solid evidence that this media coverage had an effect on public opinion, in terms of both attention levels among the general public and intensity of feeling among already-activated citizens. The flurry of stories pushed the BSI to a peak above 1,100 (see figure 8). Although the public’s appetite for information on the topic did not swell to the degree seen in the wake of the *Impeccable* incident three months prior (see figure 9), the spike was still much bigger than any peak across the 2006–2008 period.

The media campaign even appears to have had a real-world mobilizing effect, with a small-scale protest reportedly held in front of the Indonesian embassy in early July—quite possibly the PRC’s first ever against a Southeast Asian country over the South China Sea issue.<sup>120</sup> Even as tensions eased in the second half of 2009, the BSI remained more than twice as high as it had been during the same period in earlier years.<sup>121</sup> This indicates that the media campaign did have an effect on public opinion. Whether this actually tipped the scales in any elite policy contests, helping to produce the change in behavior from 2010, is difficult to know with certainty, but significant evidence at least points in this direction.

*Explanations.* The incidents—at least the publicly reported ones—followed a conspicuous strengthening of China’s fisheries law-enforcement capability, with the arrival of modern, armed fisheries-enforcement vessels. New ships were involved in most or all of the incidents.

*Yuzheng 311* (now *Haijing 3411*), a refurbished naval rescue ship commissioned into the Fisheries Administration fleet in early 2009, reportedly was a protagonist in both the 2010 incidents.<sup>122</sup> Displacing 4,450 tons, it was at the time the agency’s largest vessel, conducting longer stays at sea in remote areas, as well as offering greater coercive capabilities. It was posted to the disputed area almost immediately after its commissioning.

Figure 8. Baidu Search Index for “South China Sea” (南海), April–July 2009.

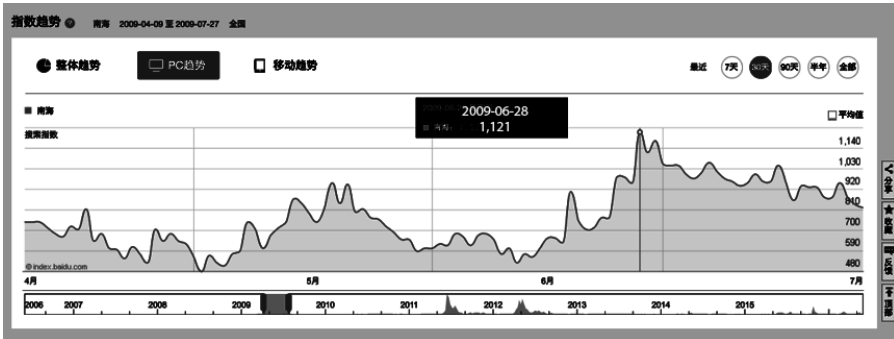
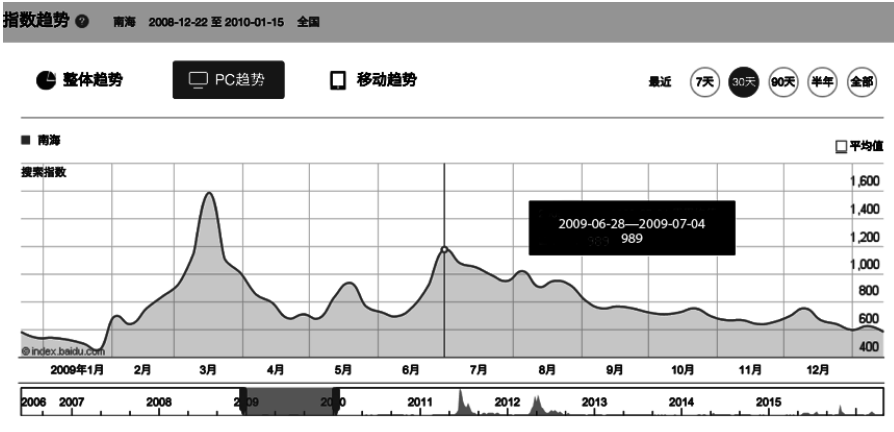


Figure 9. Baidu Search Index for “South China Sea” (南海), full-year 2009. The midyear peak associated with the Indonesian fishing incident is pinpointed with the value 989, while the larger peak to the left is that which followed the Impeccable incident.



*Yuzheng 310*, the armed unit involved in the 2013 incident, was a new ship launched in 2010, as was the *Nanfeng* fisheries resource survey ship involved in the same incident. Open-source accounts are unclear on which China Coast Guard (CCG) ship performed the ramming operation in March 2016, although it appears to have been one of the newer three-thousand-ton cutters.<sup>123</sup> Even if it was an older asset that predated the change in PRC behavior, its availability to operate in such a remote area was enabled by the fleets' other new assets.

Official sources allude to the abundant fisheries resources of the disputed areas of the South China Sea as a motivation for the central policy of encouraging fishing there. As explained in the *China Fisheries Yearbook*, in 2008 the South Sea regional branch of the FLEC “actively guided and encouraged fishing boats to venture to the Paracels, Spratlys, and Zhongsha for production, reducing pressure on near-seas resources, and exploiting external-seas resources . . . implementing the accompanying fleet production system,



solidifying confidence in Spratly production.”<sup>124</sup> This suggests that resource depletion closer to shore may have contributed to the PRC’s sponsorship of the expansion of fishing activities in the “Spratly Southwest Fishing Grounds,” under armed protection.<sup>125</sup>

There are signs that substate bureaucratic politics also may have contributed. The attachment of the nine-dash line to a 2009 letter to the United Nations was a watershed moment in the PRC’s South China Sea policy; it was the party-state’s first use of the map in a public diplomatic document, and could be read as establishing a link between the line and China’s claims to maritime resource rights.<sup>126</sup> In the context of proposals for a unified maritime law-enforcement fleet—eventually approved in 2013—this may have had the effect of encouraging PRC maritime law-enforcement agencies to operate at the margins of the nine-dash line to position themselves as defenders of China’s maritime “border.”<sup>127</sup> If this effect was in fact unwelcome to the central leadership, then this type of substate envelope pushing may be part of the explanation for the increase in coercive incidents in Indonesia’s Natuna EEZ. While the *Fisheries Yearbook* proudly laid claim to the 2013 incident, the lack of mention of the 2010 incidents offers a faint suggestion that the practice may not have been in accordance with the center’s wishes at that time.<sup>128</sup> As we saw earlier, examination of domestic discourse on the matter suggests that public opinion may have become a factor in such an intrastate policy contest.

*Conclusion.* The Indonesia fisheries controversy offers the most likely example of popular nationalism contributing to assertive on-water conduct via the processes specified by the elite-contention models of public influence on foreign policy. Specifically, the public’s response to a relatively piecemeal 2009 campaign of media reporting on the plight of Chinese fishermen arrested by Indonesia quite plausibly helped hawkish party-state actors weaken restraints on confrontational on-water conduct in the area. Crucially, the MFA and other decision makers had good reason to oppose such conduct, as it obviously would bring a new party into the dispute, antagonize ASEAN’s largest and most powerful state, and harm China’s international image by brazenly flouting an internationally legitimate legal regime that the PRC had ratified. Thus, the case of the Sino-Indonesian fishing “rescues” appears to demonstrate some of the key observable indications of public opinion becoming a factor via elite contestation.

#### *Case Study 4. Diaoyu Fishing Clash, 2010: A Nationalist Hijacking?*

On 7 September 2010, Japanese authorities boarded and seized a Chinese fishing boat near the disputed Diaoyu Islands after it twice had rammed Japan Coast Guard (JCG) ships.<sup>129</sup> On 8 September, Japanese authorities arrested the boat’s skipper, Zhan Qixiong, on suspicion of obstructing law enforcement, and on 10 September a Japanese court authorized his detention for ten days while prosecutors considered charging him.<sup>130</sup> On 19 September, the detention was extended for a further ten days, but five days later Japan

backed down, releasing Captain Zhan and declaring that he had not intended to ram the patrol vessels.<sup>131</sup>

Over the course of Captain Zhan's seventeen days in detention, China canceled high-level exchanges, postponed discussions over energy resources in the disputed area, and discouraged Chinese tourism to Japan, all while steadily intensifying its public threat language. The MFA also summoned the Japanese ambassador five times, once during the middle of the night.<sup>132</sup> There also was a widespread belief that China slowed down exports of important rare earths to Japan as part of its response.<sup>133</sup>

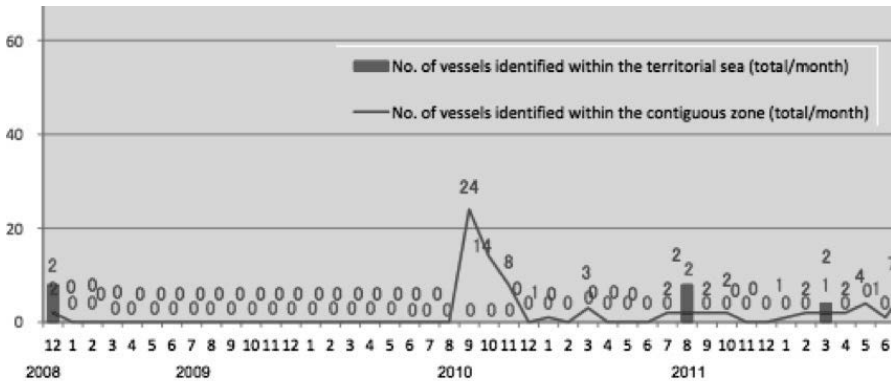
The collision occurred amid an extraordinary expedition by hundreds of PRC trawlers to fish in the area in August and September—almost certainly with state support.<sup>134</sup> On 9 September, two days after the incident, the MFA announced that Fisheries Administration patrol ships had been sent to the area.<sup>135</sup> By 17 September, China had reinforced its on-water presence further by sending both CMS and Fisheries Administration patrol ships “to strengthen law-enforcement activities in our relevant waters to safeguard China's maritime rights and interests” and had transported building materials and equipment to the disputed Chunxiao oil and gas field.<sup>136</sup> Eleven days later, on 28 September, the MFA declared that 常态化 (normalized) fisheries-protection patrols now were taking place. To achieve this, the FLEC called in patrol boats from all three regional fisheries fleets and conducted four such voyages by the end of the year 2010, “in accordance with the MFA's arrangements.”<sup>137</sup> This new pattern of patrols is apparent in JCG data on entries into the 24 nm contiguous zone around the disputed islands, as depicted in figure 10.

The case stands as a prime example of China's policy of incremental, often coercive, but deliberately nonmilitary advancement of administrative control over disputed areas of the East China Sea.

Numerous analysts have linked the PRC's assertive response to the Diaoyu crisis with nationalist public opinion. Michael Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel wrote that the PRC state “clearly overreacted, almost certainly in part due to domestic pressure.”<sup>138</sup> Zhu Zhiqin wrote that the incident showed how PRC foreign policy could be “hijacked by public opinion.”<sup>139</sup> Willy W. Lam characterized Beijing's reactions as “dubious if not irrational measures to appease nationalists.”<sup>140</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston has offered a more qualified appraisal of the relationship between domestic public opinion and China's actions during this period, arguing that Beijing sought to have Captain Zhan released by 18 September to help “control anti-Japanese demonstrations” around the key anniversary of Japan's 1931 invasion.<sup>141</sup>

But did the CCP's undoubted concern with nationalist criticism actually affect its conduct on the water? As shown below, the evidence from China's domestic discourse is consistent with both the legitimacy model and the instrumental model of popular

**Figure 10.** Institution of “normalized” patrolling near Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands from September 2010. Adapted from Japan Coast Guard chart.



nationalism’s role in foreign policy. But when we consider the strength of alternative explanations for the PRC’s on-water actions and its attempt to deter Japan from prosecuting Captain Zhan, the instrumental model emerges as the more compelling explanation.

*Official Comments and State Media.* MFA spokespersons commented on the issue on at least sixteen separate occasions over the month following the incident, addressing the issue in seven routine press conferences and releasing nine spokesperson statements. Importantly, these official comments publicly flagged an uncompromising response from the first opportunity. On the day of the incident, 7 September, the MFA announced that it had lodged a protest with the Japanese government over the detention of the fishing boat, and added that China was “demanding Japanese patrol boats not engage in so-called ‘law enforcement’ activities in waters near Diaoyu Island” and “reserves the right to make further response.” The following day, it announced that Assistant Foreign Minister Hu Zhengyue had summoned Japan’s ambassador and “demanded the Japanese side release the detained Chinese ship and crew members immediately.”<sup>142</sup> On 9 September, the MFA spokesperson also confirmed that Fisheries Administration ships had been sent to Diaoyu waters to “safeguard fishery production order as well as the safety of Chinese fishermen’s lives and property,” making clear that this was part of the government’s response to the incident.

The MFA’s comments and statements consistently highlighted both the rightfulness of the detained fishermen’s activities and the Chinese government’s strong support for them. MFA statements and press conferences announced or confirmed the raft of measures the Chinese government was taking to punish Japan for its “incorrect” actions, including sending patrol ships to the area (9 September), postponing scheduled negotiations over the East China Sea issue (11 September), canceling a National People’s

Congress (NPC) delegation's visit to Japan (14 September), sending CMS and Fisheries Administration patrol ships to the area and increasing unilateral activities in the disputed Chunxiao oil and gas field (17 September), ruling out a meeting between Premier Wen Jiabao and Japanese leaders at the United Nations, suspending bilateral exchanges at and above the ministerial level, and advising travel agencies against booking tours to Japan (21 September).

Central state media continuously emphasized the events of September 2010 as a decisive victory for China, thanks to the efforts of the Chinese government. The first CCTV 新闻联播 (*Network News*) report on the crisis, broadcast on 13 September—the day Japan released the boat and crew, but not the captain—was a succinct summary of this official media narrative: “Following stern representations from the Chinese government, today fourteen Chinese fishermen illegally detained by Japan boarded a Chinese government-chartered plane and returned safely to Fuzhou. The Chinese fishing boat illegally detained by Japan also commenced its return journey, and the Chinese government has sent Fisheries Administration ships to relevant waters to aid it.” A report from the scene of the fishermen's return at Fuzhou airport followed, with the reporter repeating that the plane was “sent by the Chinese government” and that a “joint work group” of officials from the MFA, Fisheries Administration, and Fujian Province had been on the plane with them. The only comment from any of the fishermen came from Wang Guohua, who thanked the government first for “this opportunity to return to the motherland” before expressing strong support for the government's stance.<sup>143</sup> CCTV *Network News*' report on Captain Zhan's return twelve days later followed exactly the same formula: emphasizing his safe return on a Chinese government-chartered plane, accompanied by MFA, Fisheries Administration, and Fujian officials, and showing scenes of Captain Zhan thanking the government and declaring his support for its stance.<sup>144</sup>

Besides these tales of human interest and state-led national triumph, CCTV also made sure the nation knew about the party-state's uncompromising stance on the issue and the specific measures taken to punish Japan. When Captain Zhan's detention was extended on 19 September, the 7 PM *Network News* made no mention of this setback, but reported that the incident now had “seriously damaged Sino-Japanese bilateral exchanges.” Citing an MFA source, the report stated as follows:

China has already suspended bilateral ministerial-level exchange, halted bilateral contact regarding increased flights and expanded overflight rights, and delayed the Sino-Japanese Comprehensive Meeting on Coal. The scope of Chinese citizens going to Japan for tourism has also already been seriously affected. The MFA stated that the above-mentioned situations are totally Japan's responsibility, and the Japanese side must immediately release the Chinese captain or else it must bear all the ensuing consequences.<sup>145</sup>

CCTV's 10 PM *Evening News* also covered China's activities around the Chunxiao oil and gas field, and announced the “normalization” of Fisheries Administration patrols in Diaoyu waters on 28 September.<sup>146</sup>

Significantly, in New York on 22 September, Premier Wen Jiabao explicitly threatened “necessary countermeasures” if the captain was not released. Premier Wen's public threat formed the subject of a ninety-second report that was broadcast on *Network News* on 22 September.<sup>147</sup> The high domestic publicity accorded to the government's punishment of Japan and its top leaders' personal threats of escalation was exactly the opposite of the trend observed after the *Impeccable* incident (case study 2), when China's assertive actions had escaped all but the briefest mention and reporting of tough-sounding official remarks mostly had been limited to English-language state media outlets.

When Japan relented, CCTV *Network News* immediately announced Captain Zhan's impending return, introducing the news via a journalist at the MFA press conference, who opened his question by stating the following: “According to reports, Japan had no choice but to release the Chinese captain Zhan Qixiong.”<sup>148</sup> The clear implication was that the Chinese government's strong stance had forced Japan to back down. The 10 PM *Evening News* bulletin the same night added that the Japanese cabinet secretary had pledged to “work to restore Sino-Japanese relations,” thus acceding to another of China's official demands: that Japan make the first move to mend relations.<sup>149</sup> China responded the next day with an official foreign ministry statement demanding compensation and an apology.<sup>150</sup>

On the other hand, throughout the crisis the PRC deliberately projected to international audiences an image of being under pressure from domestic public opinion. In the MFA's 9 September regular press conference, Jiang Yu declared that Japan's actions had “met strong reaction from the Chinese public.” Declaring the government to be “unswerving in its determination and resolve to maintain sovereignty and territorial integrity,” Jiang linked the public's reaction with “further escalation” if the crew were not released. Over the next two weeks, top officials all the way up to Premier Wen Jiabao repeated the core message of demanding the release of the detained captain while linking public opinion to the threat of strong countermeasures if Japan did not comply.<sup>151</sup> An obvious corollary was that further Japanese interference with the PRC's upgraded fishing and patrolling activities would carry even greater risks of escalation. Of course, a state being driven to escalate a crisis under pressure from nationalist public opinion also would seek to make its foreign interlocutors understand this. But it is also plausible that these references to public opinion were part of the PRC's attempt to convince Japan to drop its legal proceedings and accept the new patrolling activities, rather than constituting an accurate explanation for the PRC's escalatory on-water policy.

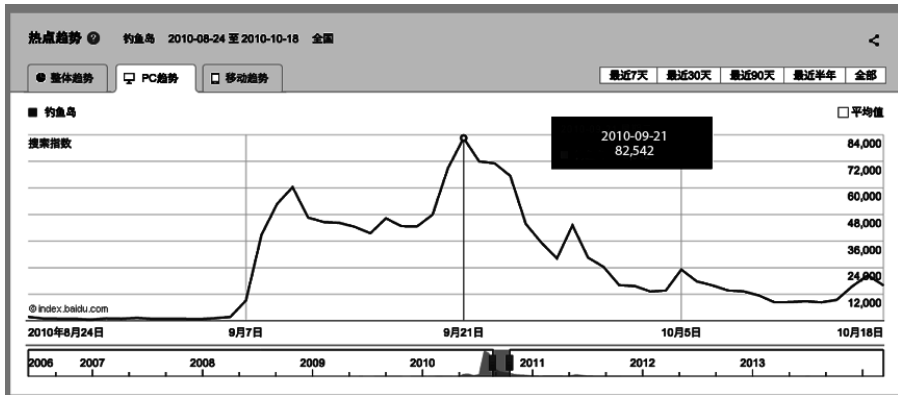
In sum, official comments and state-controlled media coverage make clear that the party-state made a concerted attempt to portray its response domestically as proactive, strong, and successful. The centralized sourcing and dissemination of a consistent party line are in keeping with the legitimacy model, which characterizes the state's assertive foreign policy actions as motivated by concern for its nationalist credentials, while ruling out the elite-contention model of nationalist influence. But the quantity and quality of official information are also consistent with a state instrumentally drawing public attention toward the issue for diplomatic advantage. Reviewing the timing of the surges in public attention levels may shed additional light on which of these two models best describes this critical gray-zone case.

*Public Attention and Mobilization.* The Diaoyu fishing boat crisis was bound to cause a stir among the members of the Chinese public. Poll results dating back to the early 1990s suggest that sections of the Chinese public long have held a keen interest in the issue of the Diaoyu Islands.<sup>152</sup> On the other hand, the long-running Sino-Japanese joint Genron/NPO opinion poll showed that, as of mid-2010, the general population's attitudes toward Japan had been growing steadily more positive each year since 2005.<sup>153</sup> Nonetheless, the Diaoyu 2010 crisis occurred at a time of year when anti-Japanese sentiments are brought forth most easily: close to 18 September, China's anniversary of the beginning of Japan's 1931 invasion. This timing ensured that the PRC public would be paying attention to the issue, a point that can be demonstrated by retracing the course of the rise in public attention using the BSI.

Public attention levels already were higher than usual when the fishing boat incident occurred.<sup>154</sup> On 7 September, the BSI rose from around 1,100 to above 9,000. The following day it jumped to 38,000, and by 10 September it was above 60,000 (see figure 11). This suggests that at this point in time interest in the topic among Internet users was orders of magnitude higher than at any previous time since measurements began in mid-2006.<sup>155</sup> Nationalist groups also mobilized small-scale anti-Japan protests in Beijing on 8 September.<sup>156</sup> Thus, when China dispatched fisheries-patrol boats on 9 September, and especially after Japan made its decision on 10 September to keep the captain in detention, Beijing was probably facing the highest level of domestic public attention in years. It would not be surprising if Beijing's subsequent dispatch of fisheries-patrol ships, the postponement of scheduled talks on joint development of oil and gas resources, and the cancelation of the NPC delegation's visit to Japan were driven by concern with keeping this surge in public sentiment under control.

The sequence of elevated public attention levels before the incident, and particularly from 8 September onward, followed by the adoption and announcement of escalatory measures on 9 September and again on 17 September, ahead of the sensitive date, circumstantially supports the proposition that the PRC state's actions were driven in

Figure 11. Surge in Baidu search activity on the term "Diaoyu Islands," September 2010.



part by the surging domestic nationalist sentiments. So too does the fact that anti-Japan street protests involving several hundred people took place in several Chinese cities on 18 September. These protests preceded a further toughening of the PRC's stance on 21 September and the eventual enactment of "normalized" fisheries patrolling on 28 September, leaving open the possibility that placating an enraged nationalist public formed part of the motivation for those escalatory actions. However, it is not clear whether the high volume of official rhetoric and hard-line countermeasures announced before 18 September placated the public's patriotic sentiments or stimulated them.

Chinese security agencies worked hard to restrict the scale and intensity of the anti-Japanese protests on 18 September, the most significant nationalist anniversary of the year.<sup>157</sup> Jessica Chen Weiss theorizes that this was intended to signal the CCP leadership's commitment to keeping relations on track.<sup>158</sup> But, as noted above, throughout the crisis the PRC's projection of the image of being under pressure from domestic public opinion to international audiences also telegraphed a threat of escalation. The evidence from China's domestic discourse in relation to the issue therefore is consistent with both the legitimacy model of nationalism as a foreign policy driver and the instrumental model of nationalism as a foreign policy resource; however, once we consider the strength of alternative explanations for the PRC's on-water actions and its attempt to deter Japan from prosecuting Captain Zhan, the instrumental model emerges stronger.

*Explanations.* China's policy in the East China Sea had been hardening for several years before the 2010 crisis erupted, especially in the gray zone of maritime law enforcement and fishing militia. The SOA introduced its system of regular rights-defense patrols in 2006 (see case study 1), PRC patrol boats entered the 12 nm territorial seas around the Diaoyu Islands for the first time in December 2008, and CMS patrolling activities in the East China Sea intensified the following year.<sup>159</sup> The PRC also had restarted unilateral

development of disputed oil and gas fields in 2009 and, according to Japanese officials, had flown helicopters dangerously close to a Japanese destroyer in April 2010.<sup>160</sup> And, as noted above, Captain Zhan's ramming of the JCG vessel occurred amid a major surge in state-sponsored fishing activities in the area; Japanese authorities observed unprecedented numbers of PRC fishing boats within the territorial seas in August and September 2010.<sup>161</sup> All this suggests that the assertive changes in PRC policy toward the Diaoyu Islands may have predated the trawler collision. If so, the surge of popular nationalism seen in the wake of the incident could not have been a cause of Beijing's assertive on-water policy shift.

Chinese government sources have referred to the institutionalization of PRC fisheries patrolling in response to the 2010 incident as a turning point, suggesting that PRC leaders may have recognized the opportunity the crisis presented to go a step further with its "countermeasures" against Japan and to use its new capabilities to change the status quo in China's favor, with the public's anti-Japanese agitation helping to ensure that Tokyo would not oppose this.<sup>162</sup> Yet positive changes in the balance of power are by no means the whole story, for China also was responding to what it perceived as a serious weakening in its claim to the islands.

There is compelling evidence that the PRC leadership perceived that criminal charges against Captain Zhan would strengthen significantly Japan's claim to the islands, with a correspondingly deleterious effect on China's own claim to the islands.<sup>163</sup> Captain Zhan had rammed two Japanese government ships, but nonetheless, because the incident occurred in Diaoyu territorial waters, a trial under domestic law would stand as a clear demonstration of Japan's territorial administration of the islands. It also, in China's view, ignored an important political aspect of the 1997 Sino-Japanese Fishery Agreement, under which the waters around the Diaoyu Islands were maintained as "free fishing zones" within which flag-state laws would apply.<sup>164</sup> Thus, China may have perceived strong incentives to seek to deter Japan from proceeding with the domestic charges. China's subsequent actions were consistent with Fravel's theory that states are more inclined to engage in escalatory behavior when faced with declines in the strength of their claims over disputed territories they do not control.<sup>165</sup> Three pieces of evidence support this explanation.

First, MFA officials repeatedly stressed the point that any "so-called judicial proceedings" against the captain of the fishing boat were illegal and invalid. When the Japanese government backed down on 24 September, MFA spokesperson Jiang responded, "I would like to reiterate that Japan's adoption of any form of so-called judicial procedures over the Chinese captain is illegal and invalid." The 25 September MFA statement—China's most formal and authoritative encapsulation of the official line on the issue—specifically highlighted this contention.<sup>166</sup> MFA spokespersons have reiterated China's



opposition to Japanese judicial proceedings in their answers about the topic in July 2011, May 2012, and February 2014. The consistent emphasis on the judicial proceedings suggests the Chinese state was less concerned about the nationalist hot-button issue of the Japanese state's detention of the captain than the more anodyne administrative matter of his processing under domestic Japanese law.

Second, before the “so-called judicial proceedings” became likely on September 10, China's handling of the incident had been fairly moderate by comparison with previous practice. The 2004 landing and detention of activists on the Diaoyu Islands are roughly analogous to the first three days of the 2010 crisis, as a case of citizen actions in the disputed area demanding a policy response from the CCP authorities. The 2004 incident lasted only from 24 March to 26 March, but China's official response over that span was harsher than in the first three days of the 2010 incident. In the earlier case, on the day the activists were detained, Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui demanded the activists' immediate release and warned that noncompliance would “arouse the powerful indignation of the Chinese people.” Underscoring this point, the next day small but angry demonstrations were permitted outside the Japanese embassy in Beijing, where protesters burned a Japanese flag.<sup>167</sup> On the first day of the 2010 incident, by contrast, Vice-Foreign Minister Song Tao merely lodged Beijing's objection to the “illegal interception of Chinese fishing boats” and apparently made no threat of escalation comparable to Zhang's six years earlier.<sup>168</sup> China in 2010 also waited until the second day before demanding the fishermen's release via Assistant Foreign Minister Hu Zhengyue, an official of lower rank than Zhang in 2004.

Third, the timing of China's subsequent escalations also signaled that the problem was with Japan's use of its domestic judicial process. Diplomatic protests were elevated from vice foreign minister to foreign minister on 10 September, when Japan decided to detain Captain Zhan pending charges. The second extension of Captain Zhan's detention, on 19 September, prompted an expression of “strong indignation and protest” from Vice-Foreign Minister Wang Guangya, as well as an MFA spokesperson statement threatening “strong countermeasures, for which Japan shall bear all the consequences” if it did not change course. This raises the possibility that the Chinese CMS and Fisheries Administration patrols at Diaoyu were intended as part of the threat-signaling effort aimed at forestalling legal proceedings against Captain Zhan.

In sum, the major explanatory factors were an existing toughening trend in PRC policy applied on the water in the East China Sea since 2006, the strength of the PRC's perception that there was an urgent need to prevent Japan from exercising its planned domestic legal processes, and the recent acquisition of new patrol boats to enable a near-constant presence in the area. Considered together, these offer a compelling explanation for the course of action China chose to take on the water. This decreases the likelihood that

domestic nationalist legitimacy concerns motivated China's on-water actions, leaving the instrumental model as the most plausible explanation of the role of popular nationalism in China's maritime policy in this case.

*Conclusion.* The party-state's words and actions make clear that its main objective during the crisis was to deter Japan from applying domestic judicial procedures against Captain Zhan, but it also took the opportunity to use its growing white-hulled capabilities to patrol the nearby waters with unprecedented intensity and reinforce its offshore energy installations in the area. The strength of various rationales for doing this calls into question the interpretation of China's response as an overreaction. China's official comments and state media coverage indicate it is possible that nationalist pressure contributed to the PRC's adoption of hard-line measures to punish Japan during the crisis, but the strength of alternative explanations leaves it unlikely to have had a material effect on China's on-water behavior during the crisis.

During the 2010 Diaoyu crisis, the CCP prominently announced the measures it was taking to punish Japan, made sure the events were portrayed as a diplomatic victory, and directed credit toward the government. However, it is doubtful that any of the assertive steps taken against Japan on the water would have been absent if not for domestic nationalist public opinion. To be sure, the measures made for good publicity material with which to burnish the government's nationalist credentials, but the PRC's words and actions during the crisis (and since then) have indicated the seriousness with which Beijing viewed the prospect of Tokyo taking domestic judicial action against Captain Zhan—a message the PRC could not state openly without further compromising its legal claim. The likely ramifications this would have had for China's claim to the islands suggest that backing down on the question of Captain Zhan was never an option; if so, then any nationalist constraint from a more moderate handling of that aspect of the issue is moot. Indeed, as we saw, whatever fears of nationalist criticism the CCP leaders may have held did not prevent them from discouraging and restricting anti-Japan protests on the most sensitive date of the year. Fear of instability evidently outweighed fear of nationalist criticism.

This explanation for China's actions also calls into question the idea that China's response was "hijacked" by public opinion or was an overreaction brought on in part by domestic pressure. Given the implications of Tokyo's "so-called judicial proceedings," the assertive actions Beijing took may well have been completely rational from the leadership's perspective. This is all the more likely when we consider the evidence of whole-of-government coordination in China's response. The carefully timed escalations of diplomatic rhetoric, the postponing of scheduled meetings, the threats of additional "countermeasures," the simultaneous stimulation and constraining of anti-Japanese nationalist protests, the tourism boycotts, and the shows of official presence in nearby

waters—all reasonably could be expected to help with the task of deterring Japan from a course of action China evidently perceived as inimical to its interests. Thus, while the party-state may have designed its policy measures with one eye on public opinion, its actions are explainable without reference to nationalism as an influence.

Not only did China’s approach succeed in convincing Japan not to proceed with charges against the captain; the PRC actually came out of the crisis with a stronger on-water presence around the islands. It had sent government patrol ships to the surrounding waters for the first time since 2008, carried out maintenance on its unilateral East China Sea energy installation, and instituted a new regime of “normalized” fisheries patrols. These tactical gains, and the subsequent repetition of this pattern in 2012, further diminish the likelihood that a nationalist-driven overreaction was a significant factor behind the PRC’s actions during the 2010 Diaoyu crisis.

#### *Case Study 5. Reed Bank and the Sino-Vietnamese Cable Cuttings, 2011*

On 2 March 2011, the energy-survey ship *MV Veritas Voyager* called for help from the Philippine Coast Guard and armed forces, reporting that CMS South Sea Fleet patrol boats *Haijian 71* and *Haijian 74* had threatened to ram it.<sup>169</sup> The incident forced the French ship to suspend the energy surveys it was conducting on behalf of the Philippine company Forum Energy in the Reed Bank. Also known in the Philippines as Recto Bank and in China as 礼乐滩 (Liyue Tan), this expanse of relatively shallow ocean located on the northeastern edge of the Spratly Islands has been estimated to contain up to 3.4 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.<sup>170</sup> According to Maj. Gen. Juancho M. Sabban of the Philippine military’s Western Command, the CMS boats “ordered [*MV Veritas Voyager*] to stop and leave the area because it’s supposedly Chinese territory.” Sabban said the survey ship had been operating approximately 250 km from the coast of Palawan.<sup>171</sup>

The Philippines responded by sending two lightly armed air force planes to the area, as well as two coast guard ships to guard the contracted vessel from further harassment while it completed the survey.<sup>172</sup> On 4 March, President Benigno S. Aquino III announced that the Department of Foreign Affairs had lodged a formal protest with the Chinese embassy.<sup>173</sup>

Over two months later, on 26 May, three CMS patrol ships confronted a PetroVietnam energy-exploration vessel, *Binh Minh 02*, around 120 nm from the coast of central Vietnam, and severed its seismic-survey cable. The company released a video of the incident in which the survey ship’s crew is heard warning the CMS ship *Haijian 84* over two-way radio: “You are acting very stupidly and dangerously, stay away from the cable.”<sup>174</sup> According to *Binh Minh 02*’s Russian skipper, the Chinese ships announced that the ship was violating Chinese sovereignty and demanded it leave the area.<sup>175</sup> The three CMS

ships then cut back and forth across the Vietnamese vessel's stern until the seismic cables it was towing were cut. In all, the confrontation lasted about three hours.

The Vietnamese government responded with a vigorous diplomatic protest, demanding compensation and accusing China of violating UNCLOS, the ASEAN-PRC Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and the consensus of the two countries' high-ranking leaders.<sup>176</sup>

A similarly intense Vietnamese protest followed on 9 June after a Chinese fishing boat ensnared the survey cable of *Viking II*, another survey ship conducting seismic research for PetroVietnam in disputed waters farther south. The Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) alleged that the incident was "totally intentional, thoroughly deliberated, and planned," with the Chinese fishing boat having been equipped with a "specialized cable slashing device." *Viking II* had been operating in a Vietnamese energy concession known as Block 136/03, located in the Vanguard Bank several hundred kilometers south of the site of the 26 May incident. The MOFA spokesperson named two boats from the PRC's South Sea regional fisheries law-enforcement fleet, *Yuzheng 311* and *Yuzheng 303*, that had been on hand to support the fishing boat, and declared that the incident had been intended to "realize" China's nine-dash-line claim.<sup>177</sup>

Since that time, observers have cited this series of incidents as examples of the "strident" approach of a PRC state trying to "play to the popular nationalist gallery" and "appease China's nationalists."<sup>178</sup> Once again, however, the CCP's presentation of the issue to its domestic public shows this to be highly unlikely, and there are much stronger explanations for the PRC's assertive actions. Nine months on from the successful campaign to pressure Japan into releasing a fishing boat captain detained in the East China Sea, this case offered the earliest strong evidence of the PRC drawing on the energy of nationalist public opinion to advance its diplomatic goals in the South China Sea.

*Official Comments.* The PRC foreign ministry addressed the Reed Bank incident only indirectly. On 8 March, in answer to a general question on "countries including Japan and the Philippines" reportedly lodging protests over maritime issues, spokesperson Jiang Yu reaffirmed China's policy of resolving disputes through peaceful negotiation and of seeking joint development, which she described as a "strategic choice." Jiang's response made no reference to the actions of the CMS ships six days earlier.<sup>179</sup> In a follow-up comment made two weeks later, seemingly in response to a state media reporter's prearranged question, Jiang declared the Philippines' exploration activities to be "illegal and invalid."<sup>180</sup> Once again, however, Jiang made no reference at all to the CMS vessels' coercive actions.

The *Binh Minh 02* incident became public on 27 May, and the MFA addressed the issue in an ad hoc statement from Jiang in response to foreign media inquiries on 28 May, a

Saturday. Neither the statement's content nor the circumstances in which it was issued suggested an attempt to gain domestic political mileage from the event. Public demand for South China Sea information is cyclically lower on weekends, so if the state's aim was to draw public attention to the event it could have made the statement on either the preceding Friday or the following Monday. The PRC's foreign and defense ministries had not responded to foreign reporters' requests for comment on Vietnam's accusations on 27 May. But with no scheduled press conference until 31 May, the statement on 28 May almost certainly was an ad hoc response to the rapidly growing international media coverage rather than an attempt to draw domestic attention toward the issue.

Far from foregrounding the strong and coercive nature of China's actions—for instance, by praising the CMS crews for upholding sovereignty or defending maritime rights—Jiang's 28 May statement referred to China's actions merely as 正常海洋执法监察活动 (normal maritime law-enforcement surveillance activities). Regarding the *Viking II* incident, the MFA declared it an accident while characterizing the Chinese fishing boat as a victim of “illegal chasing” by the Vietnamese side.<sup>181</sup> Throughout the monthlong period of heightened tensions, the MFA carefully avoided the kinds of terminology that might have implied that coercion had been used against foreign targets, such as “rights defense” (维权), “expulsion” (驱赶) or “putting a stop to” (制止) objectionable foreign activities.<sup>182</sup> China's official comments also were followed by clear reaffirmations of China's desire to resolve the disputes “peacefully through friendly consultation” and, even at the peak of the tensions in mid-June, explicitly “not resorting to force or threat of force.”<sup>183</sup> None of these responses are consistent with the proposition that China's assertive actions had been aimed at assuaging popular nationalist criticism.

Comments from more-senior officials during this period also were inconsistent with interpretations of China's assertive actions as an attempt to impress the domestic nationalist citizenry. In the wake of the *Binh Minh 02* incident, defense minister Gen. Liang Guanglie told the Shangri-La Dialogue security forum that the situation in the South China Sea was “stable” and that the channels of dialogue were running smoothly. Later that month, Vice-Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai attracted international attention by commenting that “some countries are playing with fire” and that he hoped the United States would not be burned.<sup>184</sup> However, this remark was made to a group of foreign reporters ahead of an international meeting, and may not have been intended for domestic consumption.<sup>185</sup> In fact, the following day CCTV ran a report explicitly questioning the comment's veracity, describing it as an example of the U.S. media's 演绎和发挥 (inference and conjecture) for their own unscrupulous purposes.<sup>186</sup> Cui's comment showed that, once again, CCP officials were apparently more inclined to strike a hard-line stance in front of foreign audiences than domestic ones, as in the wake of the *Impeccable* incident two years earlier (case study 2). Such external-first threat signaling is

consistent with a strategy of international deterrence, not domestic nationalist posturing. Domestically, the most heavily publicized leadership rhetoric across this period was state councilor Dai Bingguo's 26 June remarks following his meeting with Vietnamese special envoy Ho Xuan Son, which by contrast reiterated that the two countries would resolve their disputes through negotiations and would maintain peace at sea.<sup>187</sup>

In sum, Chinese leaders' domestically directed remarks made no attempt to take credit for the assertive gray-zone actions of PRC maritime law-enforcement agencies—although equally they did not suggest an attempt to channel nationalist emotion instrumentally toward the issue. However, state media coverage and online activity data offer some evidence in favor of the latter proposition.

*State Media.* Translations of foreign news reports led domestic media coverage of the Reed Bank issue. A short summary of an Agence France-Presse story on the Philippines' allegations of harassment in the Reed Bank on 3 March was reposted a handful of times on mainstream news portals, including both the commercial Sina News and the State Council-affiliated CNS, under the headline "Philippines Claims 'Harassment' by Chinese Patrol Boats, Deploys Fighter Jets to South China Sea." A more detailed translation of a *Time* magazine (U.S.) report on the incident appeared on *Huanqiu Wang* on 7 March and was republished in PRC media at least fourteen times under the rather more stirring headline "Philippines Claims Oil Exploration Ship Harassed by Chinese Patrol Boats in Spratlys and Forced to Retreat." A 9 March report from the website's Manila correspondent also was republished at least eleven times.<sup>188</sup>

The media's commercial and professional imperatives are the most likely explanation for this coverage, rather than the state, or elements within it, attempting to direct public attention toward the issue. The central authorities' most influential mass medium, CCTV, did not broadcast any reports on the Reed Bank incident in its major news bulletins, nor was the issue mentioned in the *People's Daily*.<sup>189</sup> The reaffirmation of China's stated desire to resolve the disputes peacefully was one of the most prominent stories on the South China Sea issue during this period, not promoting a narrative that the CCP was taking a hard-line stance on the matter.<sup>190</sup> The media's reliance on translations of foreign reports also indicated authorities were making little effort to control the framing of the incident in domestic online media.

The party-state made little effort to draw the public's attention toward the *Binh Minh 02* and *Viking II* incidents, whether for reasons of domestic legitimacy or diplomatic advantage. Chinese commercial media and military enthusiasts picked up on foreign media reports about the incidents, but the central party-state's most important and influential television news programs steadfastly ignored the issue.<sup>191</sup> Only on 26 June, when state councilor Dai Bingguo met with Vietnamese vice-foreign minister Ho Xuan

Son, did the key news bulletins of national broadcaster CCTV make any mention of the South China Sea. That evening, tightly scripted reports on the meeting were pushed out across commercial and state-run media platforms, stating that Dai and Son had agreed that the two countries would be “good friends, good neighbors, good comrades, good partners.”<sup>192</sup> Online and print media coverage of the *Binh Minh 02* incident was led by Xinhua’s report on the MFA spokesperson’s response. Among more than one hundred online news articles sampled from the Baidu News archive, none carried a prominent headline characterizing the incident as an 驱逐, 驱赶 (expulsion or chasing away) of the Vietnamese survey vessels.<sup>193</sup>

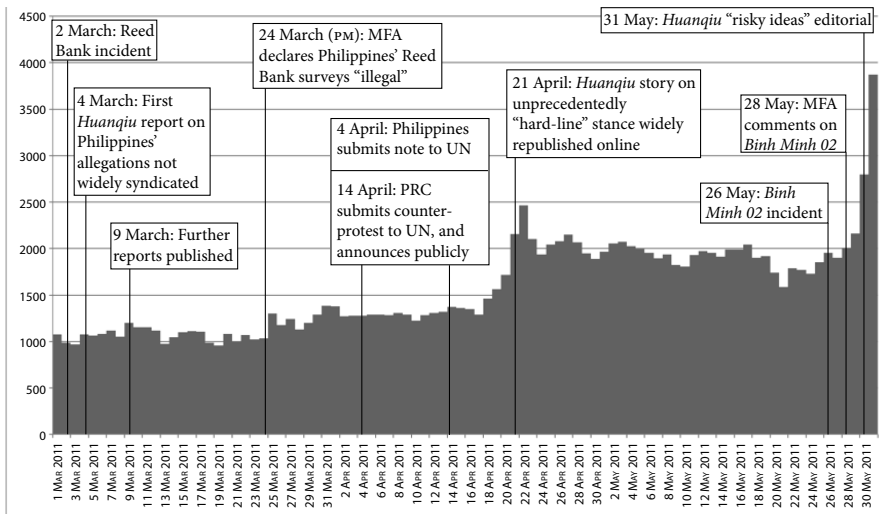
The *Huanqiu Shibao*’s editorial line lurched back and forth between confrontational and moderate rhetoric. Its editorial on 31 May carried the headline “Vietnam’s Risky Ideas in SCS Increase, China’s Restraint Has Limits” and, as shown below, appears to have increased public attention greatly on the issue.<sup>194</sup> However, another editorial, on 9 June, ostensibly reprimanding Vietnam for allowing anti-Chinese protests the previous weekend, also made clear that China would not be following suit: “Anger Is Not the Right Way to Handle the South China Sea Dispute.”<sup>195</sup> A third notable editorial, published on 21 June under the headline “Use Two Means to Prepare Response to Vietnam’s Provocations,” swung back toward confrontation: “China has to be ready for two plans: negotiate with Vietnam for a peaceful solution, or answer the provocation with political, economic, or even military counterstrikes.”<sup>196</sup>

One explanation for this inconsistency would be that competing substate interests were battling to influence the paper’s editorial line. But the inflammatory editorials appeared *after* the incidents, and therefore cannot explain China’s on-water behavior. A stronger explanation would be that central propaganda authorities were seeking to demonstrate to the Vietnamese side that the Chinese public also was becoming agitated over the issue.

*Public Attention.* The Reed Bank incident had minimal impact on the level of Chinese public demand for information on the South China Sea dispute in early 2011. As seen in case study 2, the Baidu Index for South China Sea search terms briefly rose above 4,400 following the *Impeccable* incident in 2009. The average value remained consistently above 1,400 through late 2010, but by January 2011 it had fallen back to around 1,000. It stayed there for several months, including through the period of the Reed Bank incident. As figure 12 shows, the issue began to rise on the online public’s agenda in 2011, in response not to the Reed Bank incident itself but to tougher official rhetoric and domestic media coverage in April portraying the party-state as adopting an increasingly assertive stance. This confirms that the Chinese party-state did not launch the first of this series of coercive gray-zone actions in response to rising pressure from China’s technologically empowered online population.

Interest levels were tailing off again by late May, when the first Sino-Vietnamese cable-cutting incident occurred.<sup>197</sup> But following the MFA's ad hoc comments on 28 May and wide syndication of the *Huanqiu*'s threatening "risky ideas" editorial, the issue suddenly took hold in the public's imagination. The BSI accelerated to nearly 4,000 on 31 May, around the level seen after the *Impeccable* incident, and hit a new all-time high above 6,300 on 4 June. (The impact of this editorial on existing attention levels at that time is more apparent on the smaller scale of figure 12.) Demand for South China Sea information had just started to fall back when the *Viking II* incident took place on 9 June,

**Figure 12.** Baidu Search Index for "South China Sea" (南海, 南海问题, and 南海争端) in early-to-mid 2011.

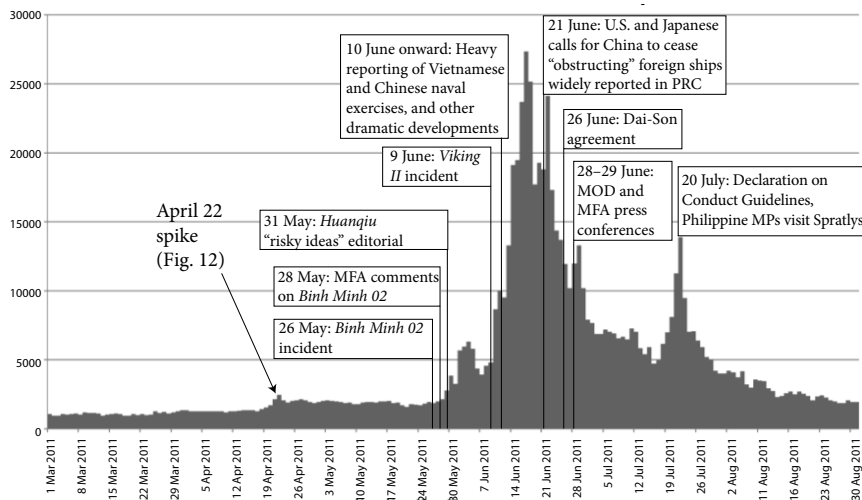


but after this an unprecedented surge made all earlier periods of heightened information demand appear as minor blips in comparison. The BSI for the South China Sea search terms hit 27,000 on 17 June and remained above 10,000 through the rest of the month—a level more than double the highest-ever single-day reading before this period of tensions began (figure 13). The South China Sea finally had taken hold in the public imagination—but this appears to have been an effect of the PRC's assertive conduct, not a cause.

The sense of an impending showdown in the South China Sea drove a massive surge in public interest levels. Heavy coverage of Vietnamese live-fire naval drills—the subject of more than 170 articles published on major commercial news portals between 10 and 15 June—suggested that war was a genuine possibility. Reports of anti-Chinese protests in Vietnam and Hanoi's announcement of new military draft guidelines appeared to confirm this trajectory. China's actions and semiofficial media matched the escalatory



**Figure 13.** Baidu search activity on “South China Sea” (南海, 南海问题, and 南海争端) through mid-2011.



trend. The Maritime Safety Administration—not normally known as an implementer of assertive policies—attracted attention by announcing that its largest patrol ship, *Haixun 31*, would shortly sail through the disputed island groups. Excitement hit a new peak after 14 June, when the PLAN publicized three military drills of its own, including amphibious island-seizing operations, with embedded correspondents projecting dramatic on-scene reporting and imagery to citizens.<sup>198</sup> Military media “hawks,” including Maj. Gen. Luo Yuan and Rear Adm. Yin Zhuo, further stoked the drama; “Luo Yuan Says China Is South China Sea Victim, Has Suffered Again and Again” was a 15 June headline on the *People’s Daily*-affiliated news portal. Prominent reports of the Philippines’ alleged “demolition” of Chinese sovereignty markers in the Spratly Islands further implied that China was being besieged from multiple directions.<sup>199</sup>

Beneath the general public’s surging interest in the issue, a wave of more-extreme nationalist mobilization swelled. This too appears to have been triggered by the sense of impending confrontation created by China’s own assertive actions, dramatic coverage of Vietnam’s responses, and the semiofficial nationalist commentariat’s sensationalization of the implications. One author who watched the progression of these events from inside the state propaganda system has observed strong links between elevated expectations for conflict and the explosion of nationalist postings on online platforms. According to Liao Lei, after the PLAN’s South Sea Fleet conducted a series of live-fire exercises around Hainan Island in mid-June, “some netizens linked this with Vietnam’s aggressive posture on the South China Sea issue, believing these exercises to be China ‘preparing for war,’ and statements related to ‘China and Vietnam cannot avoid a war’ filled online

forums.”<sup>200</sup> Once again, public attention and nationalist mobilization levels were not rising in the lead-up to the incidents in question; rather, they increased afterward in response.

The observation that the wave of popular mobilization on the South China Sea issue arose after the incidents, not before, also rules out the elite-contention model of popular nationalism as a driver of the gray-zone activities. A quantitative study of PRC censorship behavior during this period detected a decline in online comment deletions during the wave of nationalist mobilization.<sup>201</sup> Speculatively, it is possible that particular hawkish elites may have been behind this puzzling relaxation of censorship at this sensitive time. But if so their efforts were obviously unsuccessful, as the PRC was decidedly more restrained in its maritime behavior during the second half of 2011.<sup>202</sup> A more likely explanation, in line with the instrumental model of nationalism’s role in foreign policy, is that the buzz of popular nationalism online formed a useful backdrop to the diplomatic negotiations with Vietnam that were going on at the time.

*Explanations.* The MFA’s comments on this series of incidents clearly indicate that China’s coercive law-enforcement actions were designed to oppose directly the Philippines’ and Vietnam’s energy-survey activities. When asked on 8 March about the Philippines’ diplomatic protest over the Reed Bank incident, MFA spokesperson Jiang Yu did not address the issue directly, but reiterated China’s advocacy of joint development of the disputed area’s resources. She repeated this when asked about unspecified other 纠纷 (entanglements) with Vietnam. Jiang also began the MFA’s 28 May response to the *Binh Minh 02* incident by stating, “China opposes Vietnam’s oil and gas exploration activities within the waters under the jurisdiction of China.”<sup>203</sup> Likewise, in the official response to the *Viking II* incident, MFA spokesperson Hong Lei twice described Vietnamese energy explorations as “illegal.” Hong then made a point of proclaiming China’s maritime rights and interests in the specific area where the incident had taken place: “*It needs to be pointed out* that Vietnam grossly infringed China’s sovereignty as well as maritime rights and interests by exploring oil and gas illegally in the Wan’an Bank waters and chasing away Chinese fishing boats.”<sup>204</sup> Narrowing the focus to this specific energy-rich area implied that ownership of, or at least access to, these resources was a key motivation behind China’s assertive actions.

Rising commodity prices and Chinese import volumes preceded China’s assertive actions in the first half of 2011, which is consistent with the increasing material value of the disputed possessions being an explanation for policy change.<sup>205</sup> The three actions all targeted rival claimants’ attempts to develop energy resources in the disputed area in collaboration with third countries, and followed closely after Vietnam and the Philippines launched new seismic-survey projects.<sup>206</sup> By demonstrating vividly the serious risks involved in engaging in these explorations without China’s cooperation, the actions served

China's established objective of deterring foreign commercial enterprises from ongoing and future involvement in the disputed area.<sup>207</sup> This supported the long-standing objective of seeking joint development of resources in maritime areas that the PRC claimed but did not control.<sup>208</sup>

This series of confrontational actions also was related closely to the development of the UNCLOS legal regime. Most, if not all, of the PRC government law-enforcement vessels involved in the three incidents were products of the shipbuilding projects initiated in 1999 to enforce China's UNCLOS-inspired EEZ law.<sup>209</sup> Emblematically, *Haijian 84*, one of the main units involved in the *Binh Minh 02* incident, was the thirteenth and final vessel produced under this project, having been commissioned only recently, in early 2011.

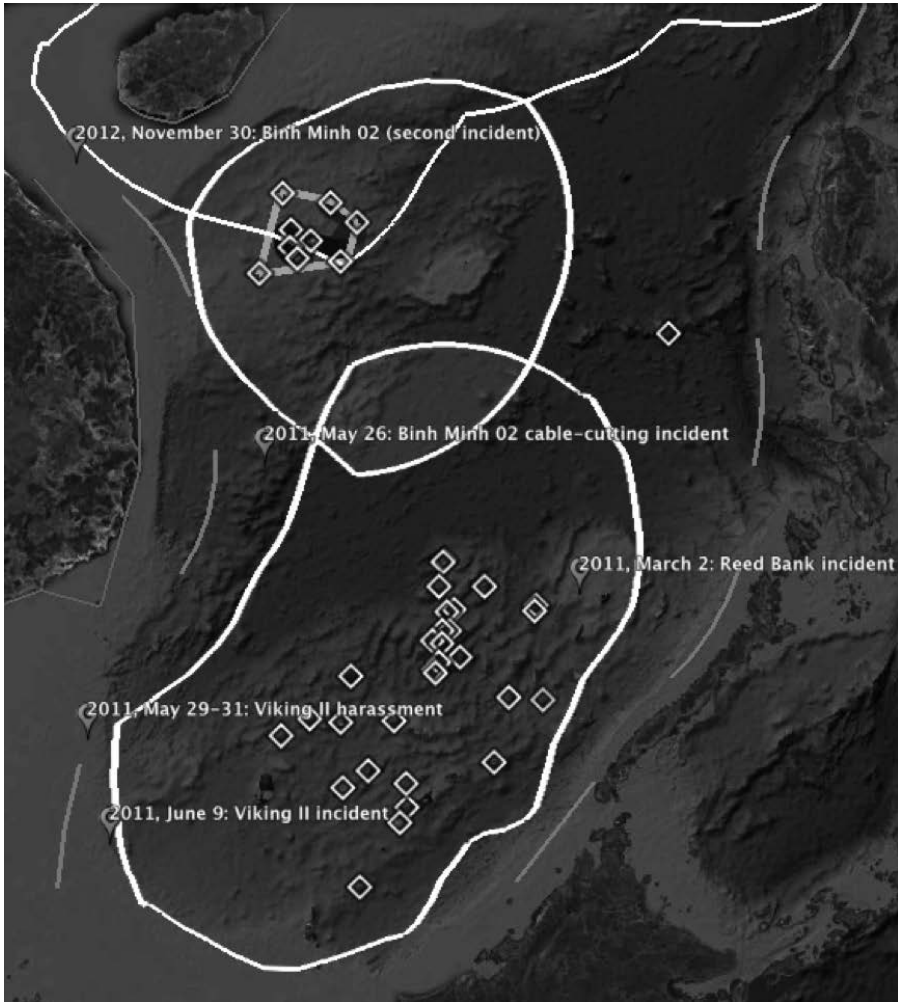
The *Binh Minh 02* and *Viking II* incidents, and a similar case of cable cutting in late 2012, all took place within the nine-dash line but beyond the area to which the PRC could hope to sustain a claim under UNCLOS as part of an EEZ generated by the Paracel or Spratly Islands (figure 14). China's actions were focused on marginal areas where the convention's emergence as the globally legitimate basis for maritime resource rights had weakened its claim greatly.<sup>210</sup> The Reed Bank incident took place within an area where the Philippines' presence already was strong relative to China's, owing to geographical proximity, previous survey activities, and third-country support. This suggests that China's increased maritime constabulary capabilities, developed to enforce its claims in the UNCLOS era, coupled with its desire to 维持争议 (maintain the dispute) in areas where its already weak claims were being subjected to new challenges, precipitated the events of 2011.<sup>211</sup>

Some Vietnamese observers have interpreted this series of incidents as a test of their country's resolve. As one official described it, “It's like someone puts one foot in your house, if you don't say anything, they will come inside.”<sup>212</sup> The fact that the incidents ceased after Vietnam's furious reaction is certainly consistent with such a reading; only one similar incident has been reported since that time, in late 2012.

The strategic probing explanation is compatible with the balance of power and the material value of disputed possessions being driving factors behind a given instance of assertiveness. Increased relative material capabilities and other positive changes in the balance of power can create an incentive for a state to engage in assertive actions, as doing so allows it to update its assessment of adversaries' resolve levels in light of the power shift. Information yielded about opponents' on-water capabilities and tactics also may facilitate future attempts to access resources.

Strategic probing, however, is distinct from weakening claim strength as an impetus for assertive actions. The former involves a state actively seeking updated information, the

**Figure 14.** Location of incidents of Chinese vessels' harassment of Vietnamese and Philippine energy-survey ships, 2011–12.



Sources: Compiled using Google Earth, incident coordinates in official materials, and Gregory B. Poling, *The South China Sea in Focus: Clarifying the Limits of Maritime Dispute* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

better to inform *future* courses of action, while in the latter the state seeks to preserve fading *present* hopes of achieving an existing objective. Although a probing interpretation cannot be discounted, there is stronger empirical support for the explanation outlined above: that the PRC's coercive acts were the responses of a more powerful China to new challenges to already weak claims to increasingly valuable resources.

Some sources have linked these incidents to the CMS and Fisheries Administration organizations’ bureaucratic interests in presenting themselves as tough defenders of the nation’s sovereign claims.<sup>213</sup> But unlike in the Sino-Indonesian fisheries clashes (case study 3), there are good reasons to doubt that this was an important factor. First, risky and confrontational coercive operations were not part of the CMS force’s range of normal responsibilities, but instead were carried out on an ad hoc basis under orders from the command headquarters on the mainland.<sup>214</sup> This means that the Reed Bank and *Binh Minh 02* actions are unlikely to have been initiatives of frontline units. At a minimum, military authorities likely would have been informed, since the PLAN is tasked with providing the security guarantee for civilian maritime law-enforcement operations.<sup>215</sup>

There was, in turn, little sign of civil-military disagreement over this aspect of policy, with commentaries in the military’s official newspaper strongly affirming the MFA’s official rhetoric emphasizing China’s peaceful intentions.<sup>216</sup> The MFA’s prompt response further suggests relatively strong coordination among agencies in Beijing, including those presumed to hold relatively “dovish” policy preferences. The fact that spokesperson Jiang Yu was able to make a swift response to the *Binh Minh 02* incident on a weekend is another suggestion of high-level coordination.

Finally, the repetitive occurrence of the incidents suggests that the actions at least did not contradict the intent of the party center, since the initial incidents gave Beijing’s decision makers an opportunity to clarify their instructions to maritime agencies if such actions were contrary to their wishes. It is possible that the *Viking II* cable cutting was indeed an accident, but if so it was one that occurred during a sustained, state-sponsored harassment operation against Vietnam’s hydrocarbon-survey operations in the Vanguard Bank.<sup>217</sup>

*Conclusion.* There were strong strategic and policy-based rationales for China’s assertive actions in the first half of 2011. Beijing wanted to deter its rivals from unilaterally exploiting the increasingly valuable resources in the area in question and to reassert its presence where its claims had been weakened—and it had the means to do so, in its new fleet of white-hulled ships.

PRC domestic discourse indicates that nationalist public opinion was not plausibly a significant contributor to China’s gray-zone actions in the first half of 2011. Official statements made no attempt to claim credit for the incidents, instead casting China as the victim and emphasizing conciliatory policies. The most influential state-controlled mass media outlet, CCTV, made no prominent reports on the incidents, indicating the state had little desire to use the assertive actions to bolster nationalist legitimacy, even after they already had occurred. And the wave of public attention that swelled during this period arose after the incidents had taken place, not before, suggesting that Beijing may

have used public opinion instrumentally in the diplomatic negotiations that followed the incidents. In sum, popular nationalism neither drove the CCP state's gray-zone coercion early in the year nor constrained it from moderating its approach and pursuing warmer ties with the Philippines and Vietnam during the second half of the year.

Nine months later, this period of moderation came to a close with the Scarborough Shoal incident, examined next. This case would reveal even stronger evidence of Chinese public opinion's role in Beijing's coercive diplomacy.

*Case Study 6. Scarborough Shoal, 2012:*

*Cumulative Criticism and Strategic Channeling*

On the morning of 10 April 2012, the Philippines' naval ship BRP *Gregorio del Pilar* (FF 15) arrived at Scarborough Shoal, an isolated atoll around 125 nm off the northern coast of Luzon, to investigate a group of Chinese fishing boats that an aerial patrol had spotted two days earlier. After anchoring outside the entrance to the shallow midocean lagoon, the warship dispatched armed soldiers on dinghies for a visit, board, search, and seizure operation against the eight fishing vessels. This turned up large quantities of endangered giant clams and corals, as shown in pictures released by the Philippines' military.<sup>218</sup>

After collecting this photographic evidence, the Philippine soldiers returned to their ship, apparently with the intention of detaining and processing the crews the following day. However, late in the afternoon two CMS patrol boats arrived and took up positions between *Gregorio del Pilar* and the fishing boats, physically preventing their arrest.<sup>219</sup>

Thus began a two-month standoff at sea that ended when the Philippines withdrew its ships ahead of a typhoon, leaving China in control of the disputed atoll.<sup>220</sup> Thereafter, Manila refrained from sending its ships back to Scarborough Shoal, while Chinese vessels maintained a constant presence. China emerged with effective control over the shoal.<sup>221</sup>

Two aspects of China's behavior during the Scarborough crisis manifested assertive change in PRC policy in the gray zone of maritime conflict beneath the threshold of war. First was the decision to intervene physically to oppose the arrest of the fishing crews, creating the standoff in April.<sup>222</sup> The second was China's imposition of administrative control over Scarborough Shoal. According to Philippine records, PRC law-enforcement ships began increasing the number of law-enforcement and fishing boats at the shoal and using coercive tactics to exclude Philippine boats from the area starting in early May.<sup>223</sup> This was accompanied by informal economic sanctions: "quarantining" shipments of Philippine bananas and suspending tourism booked through PRC state-run travel agencies, which have a near monopoly on the Chinese outbound tourism market.<sup>224</sup> The ongoing enforcement of policies established at this time has involved

subsequent coercive actions, including the use of water cannon against Philippine vessels approaching the shoal.

The standoff between the Philippines and China over Scarborough Shoal in April–May 2012 was a stern test of the CCP’s ability to maintain control of popular nationalism. In light of the highly visible wave of nationalist expression that coincided with these events, many academic commentators have argued that popular nationalism was a key cause of China’s assertiveness.<sup>225</sup> Fu Ying, a senior foreign affairs official, and Wu Shicun, a well-placed former Hainan provincial official, explain China’s actions as a response to public outrage generated by photographs of the incident.<sup>226</sup>

However, while China’s leaders surely gave consideration to the public mood, the strength of other explanations leaves the likely bottom-up impact on Beijing’s actual behavior as, at most, marginal. Moreover, tracing the domestic discourse reveals evidence that authorities deliberately channeled popular nationalist sentiments toward the issue to help deter Manila from opposing the new status quo at the shoal.

*Official Comments and State Media.* The voice of the party-state was ever present throughout the Scarborough Shoal standoff and it dominated domestic Chinese media coverage. The foreign ministry’s official transcripts show that MFA spokespersons commented on the issue in twenty-nine consecutive press conferences from 11 April to 28 May and in four separate ad hoc statements.

Spokesperson Liu Weimin addressed the situation in the MFA’s 11 April news conference, the first since the standoff began, answering a question from a state media reporter about whether China had made diplomatic representations over the Philippines’ “so-called law enforcement” at Scarborough Shoal. Liu confirmed this, and added that “China’s relevant departments have already dispatched government vessels to Huangyan Island waters, and the Chinese fisherfolk and fishing boats are safe.”

This prompted a flurry of state media reporting, led by CCTV, which covered the issue in national news bulletins on four out of eight nights between 11 and 18 April—a strong sign of the central authorities’ intention to have domestic audiences follow developments.<sup>227</sup> Three editorials in the *Huanqiu Shibao* raised the prospect of military conflict over the issue between 12 and 24 April. Thus, the party-state promptly took the credit for its assertive actions, so a nationalist legitimacy ploy is plausible as a consideration in the state’s decision-making.

After the initial series of tough statements, the tone and content of China’s official comments moderated as diplomatic negotiations proceeded. From 19 April onward, the MFA stopped explicitly demanding that the Philippines withdraw its ships, declared the situation to be “easing,” emphasized a diplomatic resolution, and focused on rebutting the Philippines’ attempts to define the standoff as an international problem.

The PLA also made its first public comments, scrupulously dispelling any hint that it might be pushing to take action of its own volition. Defense minister and Central Military Commission member Gen. Liang Guanglie stated on 24 April, “At present we have the diplomatic departments and relevant maritime departments dealing with this issue, and I believe they will do a good job.”<sup>228</sup> Ministry of Defense spokesperson Geng Yansheng repeated this sentiment during the PLA’s monthly press conference on 26 April and affirmed that the Chinese navy would “closely cooperate with departments such as Fisheries and CMS to jointly safeguard the state’s maritime rights and interests.”<sup>229</sup> PLAN deputy chief of staff Li Shihong affirmed on 30 April that the navy would act only on the basis of the Central Military Commission’s instructions.<sup>230</sup>

In short, while they informed the public of the assertive actions the state was taking, party and military officials—singing from the same sheet of music—kept their rhetoric restrained through the remainder of April.

Beijing’s diplomacy over Scarborough Shoal appeared to shift to a holding pattern ahead of the Philippines-U.S. 2+2 meeting on 30 April, which promised vital insights into Washington’s position. Still, authorities did not order the media to downplay the issue. In fact, information control appears to have been lax around this time, with central state media outlets carrying misleading reports that resulted in highly unfavorable coverage of the party-state’s policy.

For example, on 23 April central state newswires reported information supplied by the PRC embassy in Manila stating that *Yuzheng 310*—the Fisheries Administration flagship, which had arrived on the scene with major media fanfare four days earlier—had “left Huangyan Island,” along with CMS’s *Haijian 84*, leaving only one Chinese government vessel there. Embassy spokesperson Zhang Hua was quoted saying that this was a demonstration of China’s willingness to negotiate diplomatically.<sup>231</sup> This story was repudiated the following day—in fact, both ships remained within 12 nm of the shoal—but not before PRC commercial online news sites had presented it as a backing down in the face of Philippine aggression.<sup>232</sup>

The most likely explanation for this combination of misleading official information, loose state media reporting, and unchecked sensationalist impulses is that the authorities in Beijing were preoccupied with internal matters, perhaps related to the Bo Xilai scandal unfolding at the time.<sup>233</sup> After this short period of relative chaos, state media reporting tightened up from late April onward, with relatively low-key remarks from MFA and Ministry of Defense press conferences dominating mass media and online coverage for the next ten days. There also were no *Huanqiu* editorials or *People’s Daily* commentaries on the subject between 26 April and 7 May.



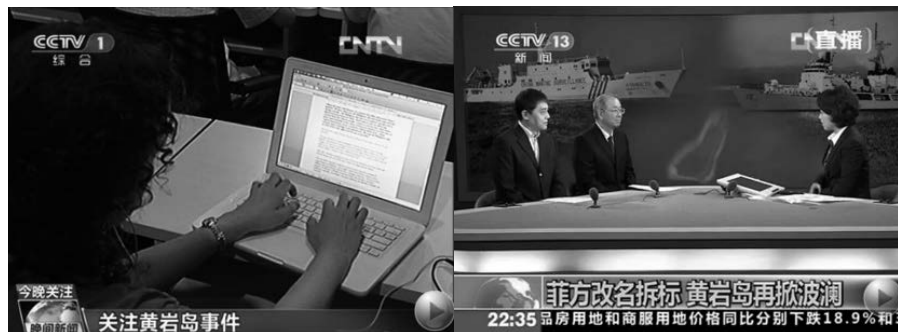
After that, however, a state-led media frenzy surged forth. On 8 May, as Philippine activist groups called for protests outside Chinese embassies around the world, the PRC’s official rhetoric hardened dramatically. The MFA posted a summary of a meeting between Vice-Foreign Minister Fu Ying and Philippine diplomats, stating that Fu had warned that “the Philippine side has obviously not realized the serious mistakes it is making.” Most ominously, the MFA account cited Fu as stating that China “has made every kind of preparation to respond to further enlargement of the situation.”<sup>234</sup> MFA spokespersons on 9 May and 10 May repeated Fu’s language of “serious mistakes,” reiterating that the Philippine government was inciting anti-China protests, and warning of “strong reactions and concerns among Chinese people at home and abroad.”

This set off a tsunami of domestic media attention. A headline in the *People’s Daily* on 9 May read, “Philippines’ Actions Can Only Reduce ‘Likelihood of Peaceful Solution.’” This was one of four Scarborough-related pieces on page 3 of the party mouthpiece. The *Huanqiu Shibao*’s editorial the same day made the same point, with characteristic bombast: “Peace Will Be a Miracle If Provocation Lasts.” CCTV’s 10 PM news bulletin, meanwhile, informed the Chinese public that the events had provoked their “intense reaction and attention” (figure 15).

This was certainly true. However, the data examined in the next section indicate that, rather than public opinion driving the gray-zone policy on the water, the party-state channeled the public’s nationalist sentiments toward the issue in support of its efforts to force the Philippines to accept the new status quo around the shoal.

*Public Attention and Mobilization.* The decision to intervene in the Philippines’ attempted arrest of the fishermen at Scarborough Shoal in April was not a response to public demand. First, demand for information on the South China Sea issue had declined significantly since mid-2011 (see figure 16).<sup>235</sup> This suggests that the level of public scrutiny on the state’s policy choices was probably *lower* than it had been in October 2011, when China had handled at least one comparable fisheries incident in the Spratly Islands

**Figure 15.** CCTV coverage of Scarborough Shoal, 9 May 2012. The voice-over accompanying the shot on the left is stating that the Philippines’ behavior “has caused an intense reaction and attention among the Chinese masses at home and abroad.” On the right, military commentators are discussing the Philippines’ “acts of violence,” suggesting China respond in kind.



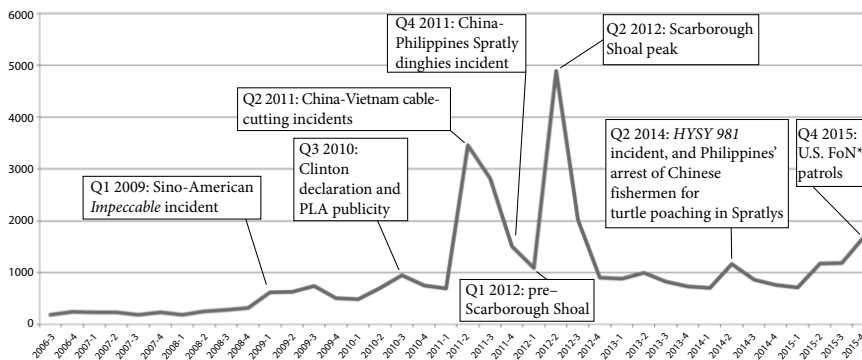
through diplomacy rather than on-water confrontation, despite heavy media reporting and online nationalist criticism.<sup>236</sup>

Second, Beijing's similarly low-key handling of the arrest of a Chinese fishing crew in the Spratlys in May 2014 and their subsequent conviction in a Philippine court on poaching charges demonstrated that nonconfrontational responses to this type of incident remained possible for Beijing despite the rise of nationalist public sentiments on the South China Sea issue. Lower leadership tensions in 2014 and the hard-line persona that Xi Jinping had cultivated by that time may have lowered the domestic costs of such an approach compared with 2012's. But it nonetheless demonstrated that the rise of Internet-enabled popular nationalism on the South China Sea issue had not been sufficient to constrain the state from handling PRC-Philippines South China Sea fishing incidents in a low-key manner. This is solid evidence against direct concern about nationalist public opinion as a motivation for Beijing to engage in the Scarborough Shoal standoff.

If public opinion did play a role in the initial phase of the standoff in April, it more likely was related to the elite political contestation going on at the time, involving the downfall of Bo Xilai and the selection of a new leadership. Alignments between intraelite political or policy groupings and the ongoing buzz of nationalist criticism could have contributed to China's decision to engage the Philippines in the standoff, in line with the elite-contention models of public opinion's influence. An SOA publicity campaign earlier in the year and the hawkish rhetoric of PLA propagandist Luo Yuan in early 2012 could be interpreted as hints of this type of policy contention.<sup>237</sup> There were also, as noted above, signs of inconsistency in the media coverage of the issue in mid-to-late April.<sup>238</sup>

The problem with such an interpretation, however, is that there is little reason to believe that *any* elite groups would have preferred a response more moderate than the one Beijing pursued. On the contrary, the MFA's rapid and detailed public response to the incident suggested either top-level coordination or a consensus on the matter. The most plausible link would be that, in the tense overall political atmosphere prevailing at the

**Figure 16.** Quarterly average Baidu Search Index value for "South China Sea" (南海), 2006–15.



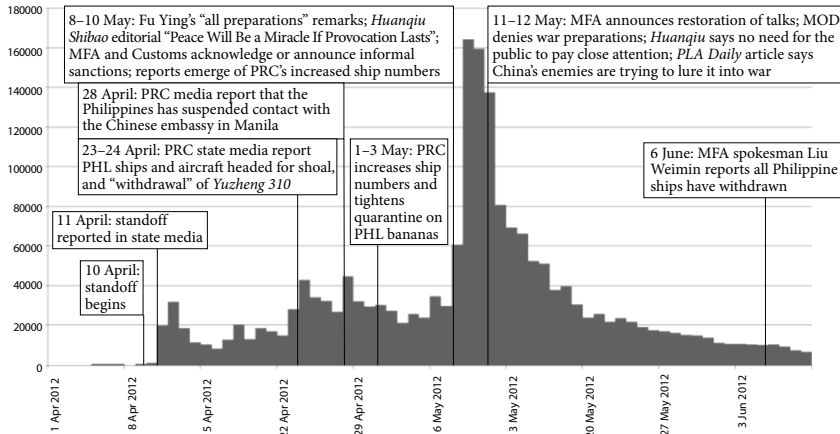
\* Freedom-of-navigation

time, sustained nationalist criticism of the CCP’s conciliatory policy toward the Philippines and Vietnam since mid-2011 had a cumulative political effect that rendered a moderate response untenable. Again, however, there are various strong rationales for Beijing’s hard-line approach (discussed in detail below), so it is far from clear that the relevant decision makers would have handled the issue differently in the absence of the political tensions and online nationalist vitriol. More importantly, during the second phase of the standoff in May, nationalist public opinion became a useful instrument with which to ratchet up the pressure on Manila.

The public response to Vice-Foreign Minister Fu Ying’s ominous 7 May comments and the associated intensification of state media coverage were many orders of magnitude larger than those pertaining to the news of the incident itself. On 9 and 10 May, as the MFA and central media repeatedly told audiences of their “intense reaction and attention,” the BSI for 黄岩岛 (Scarborough Shoal) jumped to around 160,000, *quadruple* the highest value it had reached at the height of the agitation in April (figure 17). This expansion of the attentive public brought with it a major broadening of public participation in online discourse. Scarborough Shoal became the leading topic on Sina Weibo, a social media platform with a highly generalized mass user base, on which foreign affairs issues rarely were prominent. The hashtag #ChineseWarshipsApproachPhilippinesTerritory propelled the Scarborough standoff to the top of the Weibo trending topics list—assuredly subject to close monitoring by censors—for about twenty-four hours between 9 and 10 May.<sup>239</sup> Subsequently, nationalist sentiments found expression in mass petitions, hacking attacks, consumer boycotts, and even small street protests.<sup>240</sup> The crucial detail, however, is that this all began several days *after* the PRC had begun imposing administrative control at the shoal, which means that this wave of mobilization cannot help explain the policy shift.<sup>241</sup>

During the media wave, two arms of the party-state responsible for foreign-directed communications repeatedly drew attention to the escalatory pressure from China’s citizens, suggesting that the media wave may have been intended as a warning. On 9 and 10 May, MFA spokesperson Hong Lei publicly repeated the message—verbatim, in successive press conferences—that the Philippines had “triggered strong reaction and concerns from the Chinese people.” English-language propaganda content elaborated on the theme. Xinhua ran a full article on the public’s reaction and its implications, under the headline “China Outraged by Philippines’ Provocation”; the article pointed out that “China is completely free to tackle the Huangyan Island incident in a different way.”<sup>242</sup> In its 9 May editorial, the English-language *Global Times* warned that, given the Chinese public’s hard-line policy preferences, the international community “should not be completely surprised” if the confrontation “escalates into a military clash.”

**Figure 17.** Baidu search activity on “Huangyan Island” (黄岩岛) (Scarborough Shoal), April–June 2012.



By channeling popular sentiments toward the issue, Beijing likely hoped to sharpen Manila’s perception of the risk of serious escalation should it oppose the Chinese gains on the water. Remarks from Philippine leaders both before and after the standoff do suggest that Chinese popular nationalist discourse may have contributed to Manila’s decision to accept the new status quo as a reality.<sup>243</sup> Together with the strength of the alternative rationales for China’s on-water policy shift discussed below, this leaves the instrumental model as the strongest explanation for the role of Chinese popular nationalism in the Scarborough Shoal standoff.

*Explanations.* The Scarborough standoff resulted from a confluence of circumstances, some intended, some serendipitous. First of all, PRC fisheries authorities had been “actively guiding” China’s fishing fleet to head to the atoll since at least 2008, increasing the likelihood of interaction with Philippine authorities.<sup>244</sup> The fishing boats at the shoal in April 2012, at least two of which were skippered by squad leaders from the Tanmen Maritime Militia, had traveled there with the aid of state subsidies.<sup>245</sup> Confrontation followed the Philippine military’s decision to dispatch its largest naval vessel—a refurbished U.S. Coast Guard cutter commissioned into the Philippine navy in December 2011—to investigate the Chinese fishing activities first spotted by an airborne patrol on 8 April. The next key link in the causal chain was the emergency distress call system that had been installed recently on the PRC fishing boats. This enabled the crews to alert authorities in Hainan instantaneously of the situation using the Beidou satellite navigation system that had entered service in December 2011.<sup>246</sup> The Philippine naval personnel’s decision to return to *Gregorio del Pilar* then created a narrow time window within which PRC maritime law-enforcement authorities could arrive to prevent the arrests. Finally, the ability of CMS ships *Haijian 75* and *Haijian 84* to accomplish this task was a direct

result of their being in the area on a “regular rights-defense patrol” at the time.<sup>247</sup> This program of regular patrolling, introduced in 2007, had been strengthened in the Scarborough Shoal area in 2009 and 2011.<sup>248</sup>

Beneath this array of proximate causes, increased maritime administrative capabilities were a major factor behind the change in China’s behavior. Beijing’s responses to this type of situation probably had not been tested since 2006, the last time Manila arrested Chinese fishermen there.<sup>249</sup> The PRC’s level of activity around the shoal had been increasing since around 2007. There was increased patrolling and fishing activity in 2008, 2009, and 2011; stronger public statements about the feature by MFA spokespersons; and even a newly supportive attitude toward Chinese ham-radio enthusiasts broadcasting from the feature.<sup>250</sup> Once again, new maritime constabulary capabilities developed in response to the UNCLOS regime from the 1990s onward also were necessary for the change in the PRC’s behavior to occur. The large, fast patrol boats that arrived in time to rescue the fishing crews were both recent additions to the CMS fleet.<sup>251</sup> These ships were vital to the “regular rights-defense patrol” program that resulted in their being located close enough to the scene to intervene in the incident in April. And with Sino-Japanese tensions rising in the East China Sea, far to the north, the new high-endurance maritime law-enforcement ships were surely crucial to the subsequent lockdown of Scarborough Shoal from May onward, which required their constant presence.<sup>252</sup> The crucial role of the newly operational Beidou satellite system, with its unique Short Message Service (known as SMS) text message–transmission function, showed further how improved technological capabilities augment a state’s ability to administer disputed maritime spaces. With the development of these specific capabilities, it is not surprising that CCP policy makers’ attitude toward the issue changed between 2006 and 2012.<sup>253</sup>

There is evidence to suggest the importance of three other factors in particular. Declining coastal fish stocks may have increased the value of Scarborough Shoal’s marine life, and Chinese fishing activities do appear to have increased after the PRC took control, suggesting that this may have provided part of the motivation for Beijing’s hardening position.<sup>254</sup> And the initial decision to divert the CMS ships to initiate the standoff in April could have been taken by SOA chief Liu Cigui and his colleagues as an opportunity to pursue institutional or personal political gain, although the MFA’s rapid and detailed response examined above suggests otherwise.<sup>255</sup> Finally, there is tenuous evidence suggesting that Xi Jinping may have been involved in handling China’s response to the Scarborough Shoal crisis, although the opacity of CCP decision-making makes it difficult to rule this either in or out.<sup>256</sup>

However, several of these explanations can be ruled out for the May escalation. Substate politics is unlikely to account for the lockdown of the shoal, as it involved coordination among a wide range of state agencies.<sup>257</sup> It is equally difficult to characterize the

Scarborough Shoal incident as a case of China attempting to save a rapidly weakening claim, although it is possible that the strengthening of the U.S.-Philippines alliance under President Aquino increased Beijing's sensitivity to demonstrations of Manila's control. It was not a strategic probe, as the PRC stood firm when its actions encountered resistance from the Philippines.<sup>258</sup> But the factors outlined above—especially China's burgeoning maritime administrative capabilities—appear sufficient to explain the change in the PRC's policy over Scarborough Shoal since 2006.

*Conclusion.* Before the standoff at Scarborough Shoal began, the PRC's policy for handling fisheries incidents there had not been tested since 2006. Improvement in its material capabilities since that time directly enabled China's actions. Increased economic might, technological infrastructure, and maritime law-enforcement capabilities designed to meet the UNCLOS era were important permissive factors for Beijing to opt for the observed course of gray-zone action. Furthermore, the shoal's aquatic resources had increased in value owing to declining coastal fish stocks. The decision to confront the Philippines and commence the April standoff may have involved an element of policy entrepreneurship from ambitious SOA party chief Liu Cigui (with support from the PLAN) or it may have reflected Xi Jinping's personal leadership style, but there is little reason to believe that any relevant policy players thought it should have been handled differently.

The strength of these explanations leaves very limited room for the possibility of bottom-up popular nationalist influence. Given the elevated elite tensions at the time, public opinion might have tipped the balance in favor of confrontation, but only if we assume that influential policy actors were deterred from advocating a nonconfrontational response to the situation.

A month into the standoff, China ramped up its vessel numbers at the shoal and began denying access to Philippine ships. At this point, heightened MFA rhetoric and saturation media coverage prompted a major surge in attention across Chinese society, from which flowed an outpouring of popular nationalist expression that Beijing evidently was keen for the outside world to notice. Scarborough Shoal thus introduced a new role for the PRC's networked "masses" in the South China Sea dispute: not as a driver of irrational assertiveness, but as a resource in the pursuit of the simultaneous "rights defense and stability maintenance" that expresses the PRC's gray-zone policy in maritime disputes.

#### *Case Study 7. The Diaoyu Nationalization, 2012: A Nationalist Feedback Loop?*

During the second half of 2012, tensions over the Diaoyu Islands erupted. This led to the most serious deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations since normalization in 1972.

The issue began to heat up in April 2012, when the right-wing governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, announced a plan for the municipal government to purchase three of

the disputed islands from their private owner. After simmering for several months, the crisis came to a head in August and September 2012, when Japan’s national government stepped in to purchase the islands.

Immediately after Japan went ahead with the purchase, the PRC formally promulgated territorial sea baselines around the disputed islands. Four days later, China launched a program of regular patrols in the newly declared 12 nm zone, using CMS and Fisheries Administration ships. This challenged forty years of Japanese on-water administrative control of the waters around the islands, imposing a situation of overlapping control.<sup>259</sup>

Nationalist mobilizations, uncertainty over the fate of Bo Xilai, and the looming Eighteenth CCP Congress raise the possibility that nationalist public opinion may have been a factor in China’s behavior.<sup>260</sup> Peter Hays Gries, Derek Steiger, and Tao Wang argue that the party-state was afraid to suppress the anti-Japan sentiments, because of the effect this might have had on its legitimacy, and that this contributed to its assertive actions. Weiss argues that while street protests originally were permitted to send a signal of resolve, the assertive policies on the water were aimed in part to “defuse hawkish pressures.” Reilly, on the other hand, finds that the state tolerated the wave of mobilization to release the public’s anger and build legitimacy, but also to “enhance diplomatic leverage.”<sup>261</sup> Would China have acted differently if the public had not been so angry and attentive? Or did the elevated level of public agitation itself follow the state’s hard-line stance?

Evidence suggests that Beijing deliberately focused public attention toward the issue in August in the hope of deterring Tokyo from proceeding with purchase of the islands. When this failed and the Noda administration proceeded with the purchase, it left the CCP party-state to respond to public humiliation, by a historical adversary, amid heightened public scrutiny and severe internal tensions within the party. Thus, if the state instrumentalized popular nationalism in its deterrence signaling in August, this appears to have fed back into China’s hard-line response in September. Given the high levels of public attention and agitation, at least some aspects of China’s response to the island purchase in 2012 were aimed at easing popular (and elite) nationalist pressure. These included the submission of China’s territorial sea baselines to the United Nations in New York on 14 September, cancellation of events to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations, and China’s nonattendance at a World Bank meeting in Tokyo. It is likely that Beijing’s policy makers would have preferred not to take these courses of action and would have refrained had public opinion not been so agitated.

However, the same cannot be said about the regular patrols around Diaoyu, which officials had touted as a desirable outcome several months earlier. Compelling alternative rationales exist for this key on-water component of China’s response to the Diaoyu crisis.

It also was implemented just as an even larger surge of state-led popular nationalist sentiment burst forth in September, helping avoid the possibility of Japanese opposition to the new gray-zone policy. The details of this case point to a complex series of state-society interactions in which popular nationalist expression was by turns a cause, effect, and component part of China's on-water policy shift.

*Official Comments and State Media.* On 15 August, a group of Hong Kong-based *baodiao* (protect Diaoyu) activists landed on the disputed islands. The impetus for the trip was reports of a plan by right-wing Japanese politicians to visit the islands on 19 August.<sup>262</sup> *Baodiao* voyages are prevented routinely by Hong Kong authorities or intercepted by mainland maritime law enforcement.

On this occasion, however, not only did PRC authorities refrain from blocking the activists' voyage, but central media covered the activists' progress live, sending out dramatic blow-by-blow accounts to audiences across China, including the activists' landing and their inevitable arrest by Japanese authorities.<sup>263</sup> Soon afterward, senior MFA official Vice-Foreign Minister Fu Ying publicly demanded the "immediate and unconditional release" of the activists.<sup>264</sup> Even after the activists' repatriation to Hong Kong on 17 August, the MFA maintained the harsh rhetoric, labeling their detention "a gross violation of China's territorial sovereignty."<sup>265</sup>

After Japan followed through with the island deal on 10 September, a wide array of PRC party-state organs issued a torrent of vitriolic comments. The official line was defined by a formal foreign ministry statement denouncing the purchase as another "gross violation of China's sovereignty" and demanding that Japan "should return to the track of negotiated settlement" or it would "bear all serious consequences arising therefrom." From the very beginning, externally directed comments repeatedly drew foreign attention to the rising nationalist sentiments in China. MFA spokesman Hong Lei declared in his 11 September press conference that Japan's "wrong actions" had "aroused the indignation of the Chinese people at home and abroad." English-language propaganda from Xinhua even announced, "Anger is also smoldering among the general public in China, with anti-Japanese demonstrations taking place Tuesday."<sup>266</sup>

In China's domestic media, indignant reports on the issue ran on high rotation on central state broadcast media throughout the next four days. China's most authoritative and influential TV news program, the 7 PM *Network News* bulletin, ran lengthy features on the issue every evening throughout the week. On Friday, 14 September, hours before the largest protests exploded, the Diaoyu situation was reported even ahead of the activities of party leaders.<sup>267</sup> Not only did this highly unusual occurrence imply that, contra the elite-contention model, the top leadership was involved in handling the crisis; it also



signaled to domestic audiences that an extraordinary situation existed in which normal rules—such as a prohibition on collective demonstrations—might not apply.

When CMS ships made their first foray into the 12 nm territorial waters on 14 September, state news agencies almost immediately pushed out powerful imagery from the scene (figure 18). Officials and state media also repeatedly drew attention to the government’s resolute stance and assertive 一系列反制措施 (series of countermeasures). State propaganda even claimed—quite misleadingly—that the Chinese patrol boats had 驱赶 (expelled) Japanese vessels near the islands. In fact, the “expulsion” process referred to little more than shadowing the Japanese ships at a distance, with flashing electronic signs demanding that they vacate the area, until they left of their own accord.<sup>268</sup>

Evidently, the party-state was keen to portray itself as striking a hard-line stance, but this is consistent with both the legitimacy and instrumental models. And the evidence presented below suggests that the party-state’s hard-line stance was itself a major reason why the public was so agitated.

**Figure 18.** Images of CMS patrols within 12 nm of Diaoyu Islands, released on 14 September 2012.

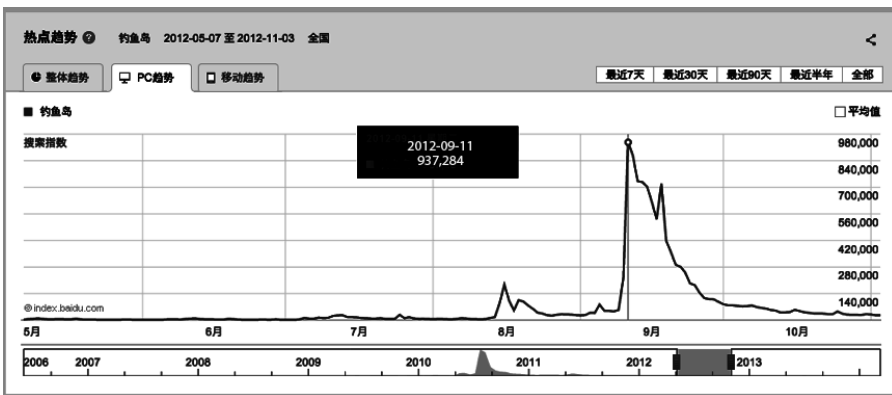


*Public Attention and Mobilization.* Anti-Japan protests were held in some forty cities on the weekend of 18–19 August. In addition to the abnormally intense and dramatic state media coverage noted above, Christopher Cairns and Allen Carlson have detected a relaxation of censorship on social media during the first peak in anti-Japan mobilization on the weekend of 18–19 August.<sup>269</sup> At that point, the PRC was seeking to persuade the Japanese government not to proceed with its planned purchase of five of the islands from a debt-stricken private owner. But if Beijing was channeling popular nationalism toward the issue to send a warning to Tokyo, it failed completely; the Noda administration proceeded with the purchase.<sup>270</sup> This left the CCP party-state to respond to public humiliation by an adversary toward whom historical grievances are especially strong, amid heightened public scrutiny and severe internal tensions in the party.

Interest in the Diaoyu Islands issue among PRC Internet users—a large and growing proportion of the population—peaked on 11 September, the same day Japan announced

its decision to execute the ownership transfer (figure 19). Consistent with the legitimacy models of nationalism as a driver of policy, this surge occurred three days before the patrols inside the Diaoyu Islands 12 nm zone began. But if the heavy publicity of the patrols confirmed that the CCP was keen to take credit for its resolute stance, this may have been a by-product of the new regular patrolling patterns rather than a motivation. As explained below, Beijing's desire to claim patriotic points for its hard-line on-water actions against Japan probably also was tempered, counterintuitively, by its concerns about social stability.

**Figure 19.** Baidu search activity on "Diaoyu Islands" (钓鱼岛), May–October 2012. The box highlights the value of the index for 11 September 2012.



The sequence of events makes clear that the violent mass protests in September did not drive the assertive on-water actions; indeed, the reverse is more likely. Over the weekend of 15–16 September—*after* the heavy state-media publicity of these assertive new measures noted above—the wave of nationalist sentiments exploded into massive and sometimes violent street rallies. Beijing authorities facilitated, surveilled, and controlled these protests by closing the road outside the Japanese embassy to traffic to create a contained protest zone with a concentrated armed police presence and hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers assisting with “stability maintenance.”<sup>271</sup> Intriguingly, by 18 September, the most sensitive date on the Chinese nationalist calendar, the Central Propaganda Department was ordering media to downplay rousing narratives of China's retaliation against Japanese provocation.<sup>272</sup> Several cases already discussed have shown evidence of assertive policies stimulating nationalist activities. The party's otherwise puzzling behavior in refusing the credit for its hard-line response suggests that CCP authorities may have been aware that further publicity of assertive on-water moves might fuel, rather than placate, the patriotic mobilizations. If so, this would decrease further the likelihood that mollifying nationalist mobilization was among the motivations for introducing the patrols.<sup>273</sup>

The Chinese government ships began their new patterns of on-water actions in the territorial seas on 14 September against a backdrop of large-scale anti-Japan demonstrations that continued until 19 September.<sup>274</sup> The associated threat of further instability and escalation loomed to help deter interference with the new policy. As geographers He Xiaojing, Liu Yungang, and Ge Qiuqing argue, Beijing used state media to “upscale” the scope of involvement in the dispute to compensate for the materially superior capabilities of Japan and its U.S. ally.<sup>275</sup> The wave of state-led popular nationalist mobilization gave Japan strong incentives not to interfere with the new PRC on-water presence, lest a spiral of escalation ensue. This time, unlike in August, the popular nationalist threat signal worked, helping the PRC to achieve its stated policy goal of “unity of rights defense and stability maintenance” in the East China Sea. There was no need for the state to hide its involvement; in fact, giving Japan (and the United States) some assurance that the state was ultimately in control was essential to ensuring a deterrent effect. The case appears to illustrate popular nationalism being channeled into a failed attempt at deterrence signaling in August, before feeding back as a bottom-up driver of assertiveness. But these same public sentiments also may have helped to secure the PRC’s new and otherwise provocative on-water patrolling patterns. This suggests how, as Zhang Shiming has surmised, nationalism simultaneously can act as a motivation and an opportunity for foreign policy actions.<sup>276</sup>

*Explanations.* As noted in case study 4, for several years before 2012 China’s approach to the Diaoyu Islands issue had been toughening, especially in the gray zone of maritime law enforcement. Japanese government statistics record PRC patrol boats entering the Diaoyu 12 nm zone for the first time in late 2008, but tellingly they had made three entries in the year leading up to the 2012 crisis.<sup>277</sup> The September 2010 Sino-Japanese confrontation over legal proceedings that Japan initiated against the captain of a Chinese fishing boat that had rammed a JCG vessel may have been part of this trend, although it is not entirely clear that China would have reacted more mildly had this occurred in the past.<sup>278</sup> While the captain’s reckless seamanship probably was not state directed, the incident occurred during intensified state-sponsored PRC fishing in the area.<sup>279</sup> China’s institution of regular patrols around the Diaoyu Islands in September 2012 was consistent with this general trend of increasing assertiveness in the East China Sea since 2006.

In fact, central media had touted the possibility of patrolling regularly around Diaoyu to break Japan’s 实际控制 (actual control) since as early as March 2012.<sup>280</sup> As noted above, Chinese patrols within 12 nm of the islands already were on the rise before the crisis—and, in fact, PRC maritime officials had flagged the desirability of conducting regular patrols within the islands’ territorial waters.<sup>281</sup> The policy shift likely would have required significant preparation time. Geographical survey data also had to be assembled to determine the precise location of the territorial sea baselines, and a wide range of state

and military resources had to be organized to form the multiregional fleet that began patrolling the area. This relatively long lead-in time should decrease our confidence that the patrols were a reaction to the demands of popular nationalism.

As in many other cases examined here, China's altered behavior would not have been possible without the specific maritime law-enforcement capabilities developed in response to the advent of the UNCLOS era in the late 1990s. In particular, the new high-endurance patrol boats initiated in 2000 to equip the CMS fleet were crucial; this is evident from the fact that even with these new ships the PRC still needed to call on all three regional fleets, plus provincial patrol vessels, to sustain its regular presence in the disputed waters from September onward.<sup>282</sup> The PRC also believed that the legal implications of the Japanese government's purchase of the islands were a potentially severe challenge to the viability of its claim.<sup>283</sup> Thus, it is likely that a sense of weakening claim strength combined with China's increasing maritime administrative capabilities developed in response to the UNCLOS era produced the change in policy that manifested itself in 2012. Fravel's theory of state behavior in territorial disputes holds that escalation is more likely when challenges to the viability of a state's claim coincide with other internal or external security threats.<sup>284</sup>

Coordination among many state agencies (from CMS and the PLA to the MFA and Ministry of Commerce) was required to implement the on-water policy shift, so substate vested interests are unlikely to have been a cause of the policy shift. In fact, there were strong signs of the top leadership's involvement.<sup>285</sup> The material value of the disputed possessions had not increased in any obvious way. As in the Scarborough Shoal case (case study 6), the assertive gray-zone policy might have reflected the preferences of either Hu Jintao or Xi Jinping, but, given the trajectory of China's maritime policy under Hu, it is far from clear the two would have differed from each other. Indeed, there is little indication of any other leaders favoring a softer response. Of course, this apparent hawkish consensus itself may have resulted from nationalist public opinion. But this public opinion and the resultant pressure to act assertively, in turn, were largely attributable to leading central state media coverage.

*Conclusion.* Given the high levels of public attention and agitation as well as elite political tensions, it is likely that at least some aspects of China's response to the island purchase in 2012, such as canceling diplomatic engagements, were aimed at answering the expectations of nationalist public opinion. Beijing's policy makers likely would have preferred not to take the courses of action they did, such as the canceling of diplomatic engagements and negotiations, and would have refrained had public opinion been less agitated. But the same cannot be said about the regular patrols around Diaoyu, for which alternative rationales were strong, and which officials even had touted several months

prior as a desirable outcome. Therefore, even in this most likely case, it is unlikely that nationalist public opinion influenced China’s on-water conduct significantly.

But even if no direct bottom-up causal links existed between public opinion and the new PRC patterns of patrolling around the Diaoyu Islands, the Chinese public’s displays of nationalist sentiments may have helped secure this gray-zone policy initiative by deterring possible opposition from the Japan Coast Guard. Considering the PRC’s official comments, saturation coverage in the state media, otherwise curious absences of censorship, and externally directed comments alluding to nationalist sentiments, it appears that the party-state decided that the public’s anger over the Diaoyu issue was best treated as a diplomatic resource. Beijing’s apparent attempt in August to leverage popular nationalism to send a warning to Tokyo not to purchase the islands failed entirely. As noted, this left the CCP party-state to respond to public humiliation by an adversary toward whom historical grievances are especially strong, amid heightened public scrutiny and severe internal tensions in the party. But in September, when the party-state hit back with its new program of patrols, the massive accompanying outpouring of popular nationalism created good reasons for Japan—and perhaps its allies and partners—to respond cautiously, thereby helping China secure a new status quo in the East China Sea’s most contentious waters.

*Case Study 8. Second Thomas Shoal, 2013–14: Public Opinion Windfall*

Another China-Philippines standoff—of lower intensity, but more prolonged, than the one at Scarborough Shoal—began in May 2013 at 仁爱礁 (Second Thomas Shoal).

This submerged atoll in the Spratly group has no legal territorial status, but has been the subject of contention between the two countries since 1999, when the Philippines grounded the BRP *Sierra Madre*, an aging navy ship, on the reef. Manila claimed at the time that this was accidental, but *Sierra Madre* has been home to a small detachment of marines ever since, despite the rapid disintegration of the rusting hulk.

Second Thomas Shoal (sometimes referred to simply as Second Thomas) sits just over the horizon from the PRC’s outpost at Mischief Reef, but the PRC is not known to have threatened the Philippine presence there until early May 2013, when CCG ships suddenly began lingering continuously nearby in plain sight. Over the following eighteen months, these ships intercepted and harassed several Philippine supply missions, manifesting a new willingness on the PRC’s behalf to use coercive tactics to put pressure on the Philippine presence at the shoal.<sup>286</sup> How should we explain this new gray-zone policy?

*Official Comments and State Media.* From the earliest stages of the Second Thomas episode, the official comments by the Chinese government clearly acknowledged that its patrolling actions were assertive; official spokespersons also repeatedly described them

as “irreproachable.”<sup>287</sup> In the second altercation, around nine months later, China directly initiated publicity of its actions, with the MFA announcing on 10 March 2014, that the CCG had succeeded in warding off two intruding Philippine supply ships loaded with construction materials.<sup>288</sup> The possibility of a legitimacy-based motivation for the policy shift therefore passes the first test of plausibility: the public was informed and the state took credit. But further examination of the official comments, online media coverage, and the public’s attention levels undercuts this idea.

First, it was commercial media, rather than central state organs, that promoted the narrative that China had acted assertively, especially during the all-important initial phase when the issue first became public, around 10 May 2013. The MFA confirmed that Chinese ships had taken “normal routine law enforcement” actions at Second Thomas Shoal, but the idea that these actions were anything out of the ordinary emerged mainly in the commercial media treatment of the issue. The public first heard about the events at Second Thomas Shoal in a 10 May 2013, Xinhua translation of Philippine media reports. Commercial online news providers jumped at the chance to sensationalize, suggesting PLA action; “Chinese Destroyers Enter SCS Second Thomas Shoal Waters, PHL Military Sends 3 Ships to Monitor” was the most popular headline on China’s commercial news portals. In stark contrast, Xinhua’s own headline had made no suggestion of any PRC action at all: “PHL Reports Claim PHL Navy Dispatches 3 Warships to Ren’ai Reef in Spratlys.”<sup>289</sup> The fact that it was left to commercial media to infer an assertive shift in this way reduces the likelihood that a desire to impress public opinion motivated the state’s actions.

Second, numerous official statements actively downplayed the assertiveness of the Chinese ships’ conduct; at one point, the MFA even provided information on the Philippines’ success in resupplying its outpost. In its 30 May press conference, for example, the Defense Ministry’s spokesman Geng Yansheng emphatically denied that China was cutting off food and water to the Philippines’ outpost. In June, PRC spokespersons from both the diplomatic and military corps also repeatedly fielded questions about Philippine defense secretary Voltaire Gazmin’s remarks that China had allowed a resupply and rotation mission to pass through to the Philippine outpost. Asked on 24 June about this apparent Philippine logistical success, the MFA spokesperson declared that China never would accept the 非法侵占 (illegal occupation) of Chinese territory, including Second Thomas Shoal, but added that the Philippines’ crumbling outpost on that “indisputable” Chinese sovereign territory actually did not constitute such an occupation. This intricate mental gymnastics routine seems unlikely to have been designed with indignant patriots in mind. If China had instituted an assertive new policy in part to impress public opinion, it would make very little sense to walk back from that policy publicly just a couple of weeks later. The public treatment of the Philippines’ eventual success in resupplying

and reinforcing its outpost at Second Thomas Shoal, then, is further evidence against the idea that the initial blockade was aimed at domestic public opinion in China. If it had been, we would expect the PRC to have either downplayed the issue or attempted to counter the narrative of Philippine success.

Third, the lack of mention by central party media also should reduce confidence in a legitimacy motivation lying behind the PRC's gray-zone actions at Second Thomas Shoal, as well as the instrumental model in which the state uses public opinion as a diplomatic resource. If concern about popular pressure or international strategic advantage motivated the state, we would expect to find some sign of an attempt to make sure this narrative reached domestic or international audiences. Contrary to the expectations of the legitimacy model, the key central state TV news programs do not appear to have mentioned Second Thomas Shoal until 30 May, and when they finally did the emphasis was on the Philippines' “serious violation of China's territorial sovereignty” and featured no information at all regarding the Chinese ships' actions in response.<sup>290</sup> Contrary to the instrumental model, the PRC's foreign-directed comments on the matter made no reference to public pressure. This constitutes strong evidence against the idea that nationalist public opinion was a significant driver of, or instrumental component in, Beijing's actions.

*Public Attention.* The PRC's actions at Second Thomas Shoal were not preceded by any groundswell of public or media attention toward this area of policy. Few of China's citizens even would have known about the Philippine ship grounded on the reef; the name 仁爱礁 barely had a mention in China's online media until the Chinese ships made their move in May 2013.<sup>291</sup> More generally, attention levels toward the South China Sea had fallen back significantly since the heightened interest over the Sino-Vietnamese tensions in 2011 and the Scarborough Shoal standoff in 2012 (see figure 16 in case study 6). Internet search activity for “South China Sea” was the lowest it had been for two years. This offers little support for the idea that popular nationalist pressure contributed to the policy shift.

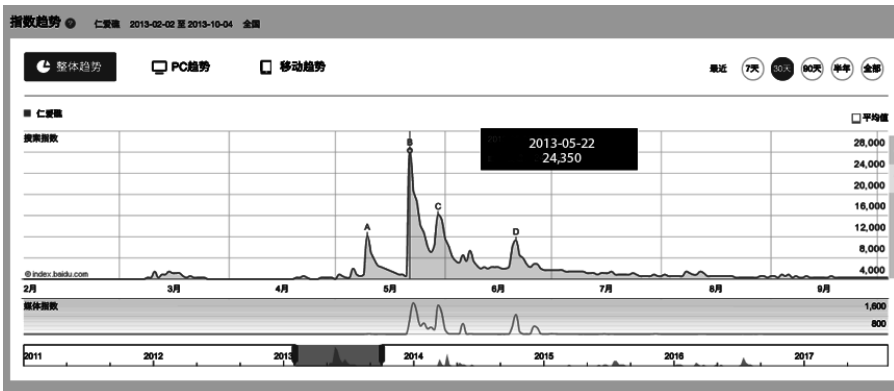
There are few, if any, signs of substate contention contributing to this line of behavior, and the BSI data contain further evidence against the elite-contention models of nationalist public opinion's effect on policy. Activity on “Second Thomas Shoal” as a search term indicates that the networked public's demand for information on the matter spiked on precisely the days when the foreign ministry made major statements on the matter: 10 May, 22 May, 30 May, and 21 June 2013, and 10 March and 30 March 2014.<sup>292</sup> This indicates that the central party-state's official information releases largely determined the issue's salience on the online public's agenda. In contrast to the Sino-Indonesian fisheries issues (case study 3), when an assortment of provincial and commercial media reports sourced to Fisheries Administration officials drove the public's interest, substate actors

do not appear to have attempted to use public opinion to pressure central decision makers into assertive moves at Second Thomas Shoal.

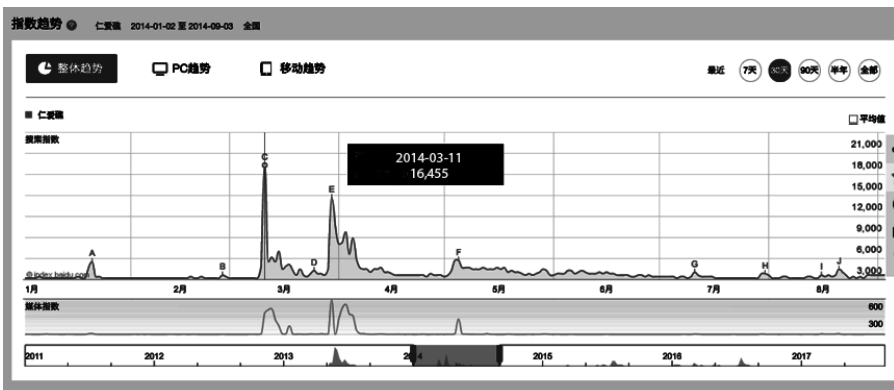
In the absence of nationalist public pressure and with no indication of any attempt to draw on public opinion for diplomatic advantage, why did the PRC go public with the situation at Second Thomas Shoal? The most likely explanation is that, having initiated the CCG vigil at the shoal successfully, the party-state authorities sought to bank some nationalist legitimacy points.

The context is instructive in this regard. On 9 May, one day *after* China began intensive patrolling at Second Thomas in 2013, an incident occurred in which Philippine Coast Guard personnel shot to death a Taiwan fisherman. The public outcry this generated in China probably increased Beijing's incentives to appear, at least, to get tough on Manila. This may explain the MFA's apparent desire to inform the public about the patrolling

**Figure 20.** Baidu search activity on 仁爱礁 (Second Thomas Reef), 2013, showing spikes after MFA announcements on 10 May (A), 22 May (B), 30 May (C) and 21 June (D).



**Figure 21.** Baidu search activity on 仁爱礁 (Second Thomas Reef), 2014, showing spikes after MFA announcements on 10 March (C) and 30 March (E).





activities at Second Thomas from 10 May onward. If the MFA’s publicity indeed was aimed at neutralizing nationalist criticism over the Taiwan fisherman’s death, it is possible the party-state was not even intending to inform the public of the Second Thomas patrols had the death not occurred. That possibility further reduces the likelihood that the patrolling actions themselves were intended to appeal to nationalist audiences.

*Explanations.* As with earlier cases, new maritime constabulary capabilities developed to administer new UNCLOS-created jurisdictional entitlements directly enabled the PRC’s new patterns of behavior. Maintaining the constant presence at the shoal would have been impossible without the large, high-endurance patrol vessels developed after China enacted its EEZ law in 1998. More specifically, these gray-zone behaviors at Second Thomas Shoal probably became an option only with the arrival of the third wave of modern surveillance cutters beginning in early 2013.<sup>293</sup> In 2012, the PRC had drawn on vessels from all three regional CMS and Fisheries Administration fleets, plus provincial law enforcement, to maintain its minimum monthly patrol presence in the Diaoyu Islands area. This suggests that it would have lacked the ability to maintain a constant presence at the shoal for months or years on end, if not for the new additions.

This explanation—resting on specific capabilities developed to meet the UNCLOS era—needs to be distinguished from more-general balance-of-power arguments. In fact, there are good reasons to doubt that the favorable changes in the regional military balance actually enabled, let alone motivated, China’s policies around Second Thomas Shoal. First, China had enjoyed naval dominance over the Philippines for decades, but not over the Philippines’ ally the United States. The PLA’s increasing 反介入 (anti-intervention) power-projection capabilities may have increased Beijing’s confidence about deterring or defeating any possible U.S. military involvement, but this may not have made a difference to its choices in this case. Counterfactually, if the same set of events had occurred in the 1990s, before China developed its asymmetric capabilities to inflict damage on the U.S. Navy in the area, it is still highly unlikely that the United States would have become involved militarily—this was clear from the lack of U.S. response to the PRC’s occupation of Mischief Reef in 1994–95. So, improved military power-projection capabilities meaningfully contributed to the policy shift only to the extent that, without them, Beijing would have been concerned enough about U.S. intervention to refrain from using coast guard ships in this way. China’s words and actions offer no sign of such concern.

The PRC’s escalatory action plausibly could be explained as an attempt to respond to new challenges that weakened its position in the dispute, either in a general sense or in the particular local area. Most obviously, the CCG’s vigil at the shoal began around three months after the Philippines initiated arbitration proceedings under UNCLOS. The threat that Beijing understood this legal case to pose to its claims in the area was apparent, first of all, from Beijing’s bellicose objections and desperate attempts to evade,

delay, and ultimately discredit the process. Three years later, Beijing's anxiety about the arbitration was revealed as justified when the tribunal handed down a judgment explicitly denying China any resource rights based on the nine-dash line, affirming that submerged reefs such as Mischief Reef cannot be appropriated as sovereign territory, and greatly reducing the area of the South China Sea over which China could claim jurisdiction under UNCLOS. The initial submission of the Philippines did not raise the issue of Second Thomas Shoal specifically, but China's actions there may have been one aspect of its comprehensive attempt to pressure the Philippines into dropping the case.

Beijing also may have understood its harassment of the Philippine supply ships as an attempt to forestall the possibility of a permanent "loss" of the reef. The MFA repeatedly stated that China's principal objection was to the Philippines' attempts at consolidating its soldiers' crumbling foothold on the rapidly disintegrating hulk. If so, this could explain the use of coercion against the Philippine supply missions. Beijing's public statements contained no hint of this until 30 May 2013, three weeks after the constant presence at the shoal began, so it is possible this was simply an *ex post facto* rhetorical justification for a coercive policy on which the regime already had decided for other reasons.<sup>294</sup> But equally, the Philippines' plan to consolidate the outpost may have become known to the PRC authorities only through the constant surveillance. If so, the threat to China's position in this area could help explain the use of coercion against Philippine supply missions, though not the decision to apply pressure to the Philippine outposts through the maintenance of a constant presence there.

However, the greatest challenge to the PRC's local position in the dispute came *after* the confrontations in March 2014, when both the Philippines and the United States recognized the outpost for the first time. Manila had insisted since 1999 that the ship had not been placed on the reef deliberately, and was instead to be treated as a navy ship at sea, but on 14 March 2014, it referred to it for the first time as a "permanent Philippine Government installation." Two days earlier, the United States had affirmed that Philippine efforts to preserve its crumbling position on the reef were maintaining the "status quo."<sup>295</sup> This surely was the most significant shock to the PRC's undefined claims over the atoll, but if it had any effect on Beijing's conduct it was a moderating one, for the escalatory trend did not continue.

The confrontations commenced several months after Xi Jinping's assumption of the top CCP leadership position, and thus may have resulted from Xi's own distinct, hawkish preferences compared with those of his predecessors. The incident also followed soon after the announcement of the "reorganization" of the State Oceanic Administration, creating the CCG—an organizational restructuring that prompted significant resistance at the substate level.<sup>296</sup> Thus, it is possible that the mission was given to the units partly

to force the merger forward—a bureaucratic logic that also may help to explain the *HYSY 981* rig mission (see case study 9).

There is, however, solid evidence against substate agencies having acted contrary to the center’s intentions in this case. Not only did the foreign ministry promptly affirm the CCG’s actions in press conferences, but those actions were protracted, giving the center ample opportunity to intervene. This extended duration also indicates that the move was not a strategic probe aimed at testing the response of the Philippines and the United States; it continued across eighteen months or more, despite significant Philippine resistance. With the passing of the Eighteenth CCP Congress and the transition to Xi Jinping’s leadership, elite contention likely was lower in 2013–14 than in the preceding year, so this is unlikely to explain the timing of the change in China’s policy over Second Thomas Shoal. And while the area has been referred to as the “gateway” to Reed Bank, this appellation is rather tenuous, for several other occupied features lie closer to that resource-rich area. Although scattered reports have suggested that Chinese fishermen may have entered the Second Thomas Shoal lagoon and cut coral there, such activities do not appear to have been carried out on any large scale. Therefore neither fisheries nor energy resources are likely to have been a primary motivation for the move.

*Conclusion.* The PRC’s actions at Second Thomas Shoal—first, in establishing a constant coast guard presence there, and second, in harassing Philippine ships carrying supplies to repair the Philippines’ crumbling outpost and replenish its marooned personnel—are fully understandable without introducing nationalist public opinion into the picture. Newly arrived maritime constabulary capabilities probably made the enterprise possible, and in the Philippines’ request for an arbitration under UNCLOS and the country’s plans to consolidate its outpost at Second Thomas Shoal the PRC perceived serious challenges to its position locally and in the South China Sea more generally. Once we consider the way the issue was presented in the domestic media throughout most of the duration of the standoff—downplaying the assertiveness of China’s new policy—as well as the close correlation between central information releases and surges in public attention toward the issue, the alternative explanations are sufficient. Most likely, China’s publicity of its activities was aimed at banking a popular nationalist legitimacy windfall for a policy choice already made.

*Case Study 9. The HYSY 981 Incident, 2014:  
Keeping Nationalism on the Sidelines*

On May 2, 2014, China positioned a massive oil-drilling platform, *HYSY 981*, in disputed waters 120 nm from the Vietnamese coast and 17 nm south of Triton Island. The location was similar to, if slightly less provocative than, that of the 2007 rig incident examined in case study 1.<sup>297</sup>

In response, the Vietnamese government sent law-enforcement ships and maritime militia to attempt to disrupt the drilling. Anticipating some Vietnamese response, China organized a multiregional, cross-departmental fleet of government patrol boats from both national and provincial coast guard and fisheries forces to guard and escort the rig. Several weeks of dramatic on-water clashes ensued, including numerous rammings by both sides' vessels, water cannon battles, and the sinking of one Vietnamese fishing boat.<sup>298</sup> Vietnam also launched a truculent campaign to oppose the operation in domestic and international media, typified by its dispatch of fishing militia and patrol boats, accompanied by domestic and foreign journalists, to confront the PRC escort ships.<sup>299</sup>

China has engaged in drilling operations in certain disputed parts of the South China Sea periodically, beginning in 1997 at the latest. What made the *HYSY 981* case representative of China's current gray-zone policy, as distinct from the pre-2006 period, was the deployment of coercion via white-hulled maritime law-enforcement vessels to secure the operation—a new line of coercive behavior apparent in the 2007 *Triton 626* incident. Once again, as in 2007, the PRC authorities made no attempt to claim the credit for their bold policy; and after serious, and in many cases violent, anti-China protests flared up across Vietnam, Beijing successfully used well-coordinated information-control techniques to keep Chinese public opinion on the sidelines.<sup>300</sup> The crisis ended two months later in July, when the PRC withdrew *HYSY 981* a month ahead of schedule. This demonstrated the PRC's ongoing ability to stay in control of popular nationalist sentiments toward the South China Sea issue in the Internet era.

*Official Comments and State Media.* In contrast to instances of PRC maritime assertiveness that ostensibly were tough responses to actions by rival claimants, the *HYSY 981* incident clearly began as a unilateral Chinese initiative. Therefore, Beijing had excellent opportunities to use the gray-zone operation to rally domestic support, or draw international attention to domestic nationalist public opinion, or both, if it had chosen to do so. It did neither, strongly contradicting both the legitimacy and instrumental models of popular nationalism's role in foreign policy. Nor was there uneven media coverage that would suggest that contending elites enlisted public opinion to bring about the policy through internal debates.

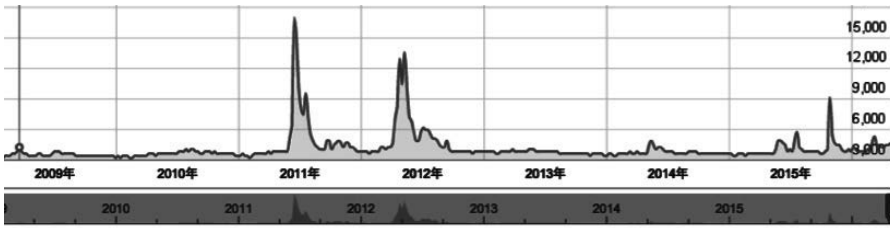
Chinese authorities made no attempt to use this assertive maritime behavior to impress the domestic mass audience. On the contrary, CCP official comments and propaganda actively downplayed its significance. On 7 May, as the early on-water clashes raged, an order from the Central Propaganda Department instructed online media to find and delete any reports on Sino-Vietnamese collisions at sea rigorously.<sup>301</sup> Two days later, when PRC media finally began reporting the issue, coverage was dominated by MFA official Yi Xianliang's remark that China was "stunned" to have had its ships rammed 171 times during "completely normal" operations.<sup>302</sup>

As the crisis continued, PRC officials repeatedly emphasized that such operations had been carried out in the area for more than a decade.<sup>303</sup> Far from showing unprecedented strength and boldness in a controversial disputed area, the official line presented China simply as the victim of inexplicable acts of madness by its unruly southern neighbor. This strongly suggests that impressing the public to build domestic nationalist legitimacy was not among Beijing’s motivations for undertaking the *HYSY 981* operation. Nor did the party-state attempt to channel public opinion toward the issue for international diplomatic purposes. Indeed, as shown below, spiraling anti-China violence in Vietnam demonstrated the CCP’s concern with, and ability to *avoid*, involving Chinese popular nationalist sentiments in its assertive maritime policy at this time.

*Public Attention and Mobilization.* As noted, the CCP opted to keep the public on the sidelines rather than attempting to claim the credit for the *HYSY 981* operation. But the difficulty of doing so intensified greatly when the anti-Chinese riots broke out in Vietnam. This resulted in the deaths of four Chinese citizens and severe damage to businesses—an event that ordinarily would spark outrage among citizens of any country so affected. But rather than attempting to harness patriotic power to engage Vietnam in a battle of “public will” over disputed maritime possessions, as it had done in 2012 with the Philippines and Japan (case studies 6 and 7), the CCP sought instead to minimize the risk of instability within its own borders. Available quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that this was highly successful. Compared with the Philippines’ attempted detention of fishermen at Scarborough Shoal in 2012, the harm to Chinese citizens during the *HYSY 981* incident was far worse, yet the reaction from the online public in China appears to have been much smaller. Figure 22 shows that the weekly average BSI for 南海 (South China Sea), which offers a proxy for public demand for information on the dispute, peaked at just under 2,000 in mid-May 2014, compared with over 10,000 during the Scarborough Shoal incident two years earlier.

Using a combination of traditional mass media control, social media censorship, and calibrated guidance of online media, the PRC prevented news of the dramatic developments in Vietnam from spreading among the wider population for nearly forty-eight hours.<sup>304</sup> Rather than simply ordering online news providers to delete all information on the topic, propaganda authorities demanded that the issue be kept off the front pages of major news-portal websites and apps, thereby relegating the story to low-traffic subsections.<sup>305</sup> A total information blackout might have prompted outrage or panic among groups potentially affected, such as residents of border areas, PRC citizens in Vietnam, and their families. This kind of calibrated censorship allowed vital information to reach users who already knew about the events while reducing the further spread of information on the issue.

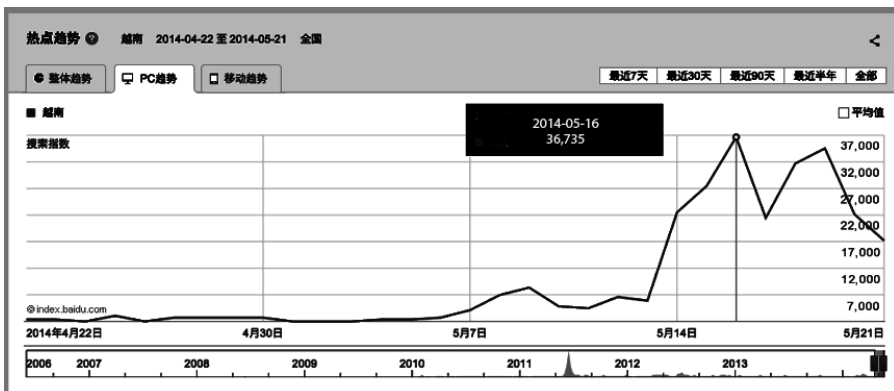
Figure 22. Baidu search activity for "South China Sea," 2009–15.



Once the situation in Vietnam had stabilized, the CCP propounded a version of events that obscured the linkage between the anti-China riots and China's assertive actions at sea while forestalling anger among the Chinese population by framing the violence as "antiforeign" and emphasizing Vietnam's contrition.<sup>306</sup> As a result, Beijing was able to delay the peak in the Chinese public's interest in the issue until 16 May—three days after the deadly anti-Chinese riots across Vietnam (figure 23). Importantly, when it did decide to comment on the violence in Vietnam, it did so in a restrained manner that decoupled the events in Vietnam from its own foreign policy choices while emphasizing the corrective measures that Hanoi already was taking. Some Chinese nationalist activists called for protests against Vietnam, but this appeared to achieve little if any resonance among the broader public. One demonstration reportedly was permitted by authorities in Kunming, but it attracted only a handful of people.<sup>307</sup> In sum, the party-state appears to have mounted a careful, coordinated campaign to keep popular nationalism on the sidelines throughout the *HYSY 981* episode.

*Explanations.* Any explanation of why Beijing launched the *HYSY 981* operation starts with the country's growing specific maritime capabilities. The action was a continuation of the PRC's "offshore oil exploration strategy," with comparable actions having been pursued in disputed areas, albeit with less-advanced equipment, in 1997, 2004, and 2007.<sup>308</sup> With the element of a coercive on-water escort, the *HYSY 981* episode continued

Figure 23. Baidu search activity for "Vietnam," April–May 2014. The figure in the box shows the peak in PRC users' demand for related information on 16 May.



the pattern first seen in the *Triton 626* incident in 2007: a state-owned oil company conducts drilling, maritime law-enforcement agencies organize cordons around the platform to prevent interference, and clashes ensue as Beijing attempts to convince its adversary to acquiesce. Given the unprecedented size of the escort fleet (according to Vietnamese sources, it consisted of up to forty-two CCG cutters), the UNCLOS-enabled gray-zone maritime law-enforcement capabilities were evidently necessary to the operation.<sup>309</sup>

Another key factor was the acquisition of the gargantuan oil rig itself, which had been launched in 2011. This dramatically increased the maximum depth at which China could drill for offshore oil, which in turn expanded the exploration area potentially available to China’s offshore oil companies in untapped disputed areas of the South China Sea. As for the coercive actions of *HYSY 981*’s on-water escort, this also continued the pattern seen previously in the 2007 *Triton 626* incident discussed in case study 1—but once again on an unprecedented scale. This being the case, the growth of the PRC’s specific maritime administrative and technological capabilities offers a strong rationale for its actions.

However, capabilities quite possibly are not the whole story. It seems likely that Beijing failed to anticipate the diplomatic costs of the project and Vietnam’s fierce reaction. If so, the decision to proceed could be understood as a result of substate bargaining processes.<sup>310</sup> PRC state-owned oil companies often have been eager to explore in disputed areas, but the party-state routinely has ignored these lobbying attempts.<sup>311</sup> But according to International Crisis Group sources, the decision to approve the *HYSY 981* operation was made by the Maritime Rights Leading Small Group (LSG). While Xi Jinping himself headed the LSG at its establishment in 2012, these sources suggest that the body lacked specialized knowledge of Southeast Asia that would have flagged the likely consequences.<sup>312</sup> If this was so, the decision to go ahead with the provocative operation was also partly the outcome of substate PRC bureaucratic politics.

A related possibility is that the operation also may have been intended partly to foster cooperation among the competing maritime law-enforcement agencies within the CCG, which reportedly remained antagonistic after the CCG’s formation in 2013.<sup>313</sup> Finally, the timing also may have been related to the events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, which greatly reduced the (already somewhat remote) prospect of Vietnam receiving assistance from its main security ally, Russia.

*Conclusion.* There was no role for Chinese popular nationalism, as either a cause of assertive policy or an instrument of coercive diplomacy, in the 2014 *HYSY 981* episode. Chinese citizens were not informed about the party-state’s bold move until Vietnam’s on-water opposition prompted fierce on-water clashes. When Beijing did inform its audiences, it actively refuted any notion that it had acted assertively, instead presenting itself as exercising patient forbearance in the face of irrational Vietnamese opposition.

Once the crisis escalated, even with terrible violence against Chinese citizens, Beijing demonstrated that, with a range of careful information-management techniques, including subtle censorship of online media to keep the issue out of the headlines without imposing a dangerous information blackout, it could keep popular nationalism on the sidelines of its maritime policy in the Internet era.

China's increased maritime administrative and technological capabilities, together with the development of its gray-zone maritime law-enforcement capabilities, offer a compelling explanation for Beijing's actions. Substate actors may have pushed the project for months or years, but this time the party-state appears to have failed to understand the consequences of its decision, owing to a lack of expertise on the relevant decision-making bodies.

### **Conclusion: Policy Implications**

The case studies examined above suggest that the intensification of China's gray-zone maritime operations has had much less to do with popular nationalism than commonly is assumed. In several important cases, including the early intensifications of white-hull activities in 2006–2007, the 2009 *Impeccable* incident, and the 2014 Sino-Vietnamese oil rig confrontations, bottom-up influence can be disconfirmed quite strongly, as the state made no effort to publicize its assertive actions or claim patriotic plaudits for them.

The most plausible cases of popular nationalist influence involve (1) the enlistment of media and public opinion in an effort to secure greater operational authority, or resources for maritime law enforcement, or both, in the Sino-Indonesian clashes; (2) the possible cumulative effect of several months of policy moderation, combined with elevated elite tensions, ahead of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff; and (3) a feedback loop from Beijing's unsuccessful attempt to deter Tokyo's Diaoyu Islands purchase by drawing public attention toward the dispute in August 2012. Even these potential cases lack clinching evidence; the latter two cases arguably are explicable without any reference to popular influence. In several cases we have seen signs that state-guided outpourings of popular patriotic sentiment have helped the state project deterrence signals in support of its gray-zone policy guideline of simultaneous "rights defense and stability maintenance."

However, it is worth reiterating the limited scope of the analysis presented here, which focuses only on cases typical of the changes in China's coercive on-water behavior since 2006. As the Diaoyu Islands cases in particular showed, public opinion may well have affected other aspects of China's conduct in these disputes, such as diplomatic behavior, deployment of economic coercion, and cancelation of cooperative initiatives. Beijing undoubtedly takes nationalist public opinion on sensitive foreign policy issues seriously;



the finding here is simply that this has not had any significant impact on the conduct of China’s ships in disputed areas.

Despite the restricted scope of the analysis, some policy implications are apparent. First, the evidence of sharply limited effects of popular nationalism on even these sensitive issues, together with the decidedly mixed results of Beijing’s apparent attempts at strategic communication via public opinion, suggests a need for deeper dialogue between Chinese government personnel and their foreign counterparts on the foreign policy roles of public opinion. Chinese officials frequently claim to be constrained or pressured by their nationalist citizenry, but such claims often are either dismissed reflexively or silently accepted as plausible rather than followed up and discussed in greater depth.

Such occasions are opportunities for China and its interlocutors to understand better each other’s political circumstances and beliefs about politics. Why exactly would an MFA diplomat worry about nationalism? Have such officials been attacked or stymied in the past by rival elites aligning themselves with the supposed *vox populi*, or do they actually fear the possibility of nationalist-proletarian insurrection? Would a diversionary conflict work to China’s advantage during a domestic crisis? What sorts of messages, if any, should foreign observers take away when China allows popular nationalist indignation to flow toward foreign countries? When have these signals been misinterpreted, or missed altogether, in the past, and with what consequence? With many Western states now grappling with rises in antforeign sentiments fueled by rapidly developing information technology, it is an opportune time for PRC officials and their counterparts to discuss these complex but vital questions.

Second, not surprisingly, popular nationalist influence appears most likely to arise where human citizens are involved. Three of the four most plausible cases of a bottom-up nationalist factor involved the detention of fishermen in PRC-claimed areas. This implies that leaders should make special efforts to handle incidents involving personnel swiftly and diplomatically—away from the eyes of the public—even if the stakes may appear low. At the same time, however, the *HYSY 981* case reaffirmed that the party continues to possess the capability to shape the prevalence of such issues in public discourse, even where violence has occurred against Chinese citizens. Once again, foreign interlocutors of China should seek to open frank discussions about these capabilities with their PRC counterparts, both to signal their awareness of them and potentially to open up possibilities for improved communication during future contentious foreign policy events.

The third, more general, policy implication flows from this volume’s findings on what *does* drive China’s maritime policy. Some of the assertive maritime behavior examined above likely was motivated by growing incentives to access the disputed area’s resources—a motivation that could recede somewhat as the share of hydrocarbons in

China's (and the world's) energy mix decreases. Other assertive actions at sea appear to have been responses to new challenges to the viability of China's prospects of realizing particular claims. At least one—the *Impeccable* incident—may have been a strategic probe. But, above all, these cases suggest how China's specific maritime administrative capabilities, many of which were developed in response to the country's accession to the UNCLOS regime in the 1990s, lie behind much of the recent intensification of the PRC's assertive maritime activities.

This bears directly on both the general policy issue of deterrence in slow-burning maritime disputes and the specific question whether other states can have a meaningful influence on China's conduct. If China's on-water activities generally have been a result of calculated policy rather than irrational behavior driven by domestic nationalist impulses, this implies that external actors potentially can shape China's actions using rational incentives and disincentives. But at the same time, the finding that much of China's recent assertiveness likely was set in motion by long-term processes and decisions made many years earlier suggests the country may be following a kind of path-dependent logic largely immune to carrots and sticks. Foreign policy makers considering how to respond to assertive PRC behavior at sea need to take into account these contradictory logics.

One way to do so is to distinguish different types of maritime activities, on the basis of how they relate to particular policy goals or normative standards. For parties with an interest in peace and stability, the simplest distinction may be the most useful: coercive versus noncoercive actions. Because they involve the threat or use of punishment, coercive actions naturally are more apt to result in escalation—but they also may be easier to deter. Among the cases examined above, the coercive actions generally appear to have been ad hoc initiatives or responses (e.g., *Impeccable* or Scarborough Shoal), rather than the result of slow-moving, institutionalized policies involving heavy, long-term investments (e.g., regular patrols, offshore energy explorations, or island construction). This suggests that, although some assertive PRC maritime activities likely will grind onward as long as the country's relative power continues to increase, current officials probably have greater discretion over ad hoc coercive operations. Where foreign policy makers find long-planned, costly, but noncoercive aspects of China's policy (e.g., island building or intensifying routine patrol presence) objectionable, rather than attempting to deter them entirely, a more realistic goal may be to seek moderation in the intensity or frequency of the action in question and to mitigate its strategic implications.

## Notes

1. As used throughout, the term *party-state* refers to a state that is constitutionally subordinate to a ruling party. This means, *inter alia*, that in a Leninist party-state a vanguard party is formally in charge of the government and institutionally penetrates and leads all major social organizations, imposing tight discipline on its functionaries.
2. References to the “Diaoyu Islands” within this book reflect its focus on the PRC’s actions and internal dynamics, and do not imply any judgment on the sovereignty of the islands.
3. Zheng Wang, “The Nine-Dash Line: ‘Engraved in Our Hearts,’” *The Diplomat*, 25 August 2014, [thediplomat.com/](http://thediplomat.com/); Bill Hayton, “The Modern Origins of China’s South China Sea Claims: Maps, Misunderstandings, and the Maritime Geobody,” *Modern China* 45, no. 2 (March 2019), published ahead of print, 4 May 2018, available at [journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0097700418771678?journalCode=mcxa](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0097700418771678?journalCode=mcxa).
4. Ely Ratner, “China’s Victim Complex: Why Are Chinese Leaders So Paranoid about the United States?,” *Foreign Policy*, 19 April 2013, [foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/19/chinas-victim-complex/](http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/19/chinas-victim-complex/).
5. Thomas J. Christensen, “The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing’s Abrasive Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (March/April 2011), pp. 54–68.
6. Rory Medcalf, Raoul Heinrichs, and Justin Jones, “Crisis and Confidence: Major Powers and Maritime Security in Indo-Pacific Asia,” *Lowy Institute*, 20 June 2011, p. 21, [archive.lowyinstitute.org/publications/crisis-and-confidence-major-powers-and-maritime-security-indo-pacific-asia](http://archive.lowyinstitute.org/publications/crisis-and-confidence-major-powers-and-maritime-security-indo-pacific-asia). See also Robert S. Ross, “China’s Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response,” *International Security* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2009), pp. 46–81.
7. Lee Hsien Loong, “Scenarios for Asia in the Next 20 Years” (address to Nikkei Conference, Tokyo, 22–23 May 2014), available at [www.pmo.gov.sg/media-release/scenarios-asia-next-20-years/](http://www.pmo.gov.sg/media-release/scenarios-asia-next-20-years/).
8. Robert O. Work, “Strategic and Budgetary Dynamics Facing the U.S. Military” (remarks at Global Security Forum, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 12 November 2014), available at [www.csis.org/events/global-security-forum-2014-opening-session/](http://www.csis.org/events/global-security-forum-2014-opening-session/).
9. “Shanmugam Warns against Under-estimating Risks from South China Sea Dispute,” *Today*, 13 November 2012, available at [www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC121113-0000101/Shanmugam-warns-against-under-estimating-risks-from-south-china-sea-dispute/](http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC121113-0000101/Shanmugam-warns-against-under-estimating-risks-from-south-china-sea-dispute/), accessed via *Internet Archive*, [archive.org/](http://archive.org/).
10. U.S. Defense Dept., *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2011* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2011), p. 14.
11. International Crisis Group [hereafter ICG], *Stirring Up the South China Sea (I)*, Asia Report 223 (Beijing/Brussels: 2012), pp. 26–27.
12. Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2001), pp. 5–6; Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing,” *International Security* 41, no. 3 (Winter 2016/17), pp. 14–15.
13. To the extent that PRC leaders believe in the validity of China’s claims and the use of state power to advance them at the expense of rival claimants, elite nationalism is a given. Few reliable indications currently exist on Chinese elites’ specific foreign policy preferences, but one rare elite survey conducted in the first half of 2012 indicated that PRC government officials were *more* likely than the PRC general public to say they viewed the United States as an enemy and less likely to see it as a partner. Michael D. Swaine et al., *U.S.–China Security Perceptions Survey: Findings and Implications* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), p. 11.
14. As Robert Ross points out, it is important to be conscious that words or actions impinging on foreign interests actually may be aimed at domestic audiences and are not foreign directed at all. Robert Ross, *Chinese Security Policy: Structure, Power and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 184.
15. In a comment relayed to the author via a British diplomat, a Japanese official emphasized the importance of a distinction between policy and

- behavior: "If it is policy we can deter. If it is behavior we cannot." Japanese official, e-mail to author, April 2013.
16. This hinges on unavoidable judgments about decision makers' awareness of foreign interests and about other states' diplomatic corps' abilities to communicate their own states' views of their interests. As Jakobson points out, many frontline agencies may have poor understanding of foreign states' interests. See Linda Jakobson, *China's Unpredictable Maritime Security Actors* (Sydney: Lowy Institute, December 2014), p. 15.
  17. Michael J. Green, Kathleen H. Hicks, and John Schaus, *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2017), p. 21. For an examination of the concept of assertiveness in maritime disputes, see Andrew Chubb, "Measuring and Explaining China's Assertiveness in the South China Sea, 1970–2015" (working paper, 7 February 2018; available from author).
  18. For a broader concept of the gray zone that includes techniques such as propaganda and diplomacy, see Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2015), esp. pp. 4, 58.
  19. Matthew A. Baum and Philip B. K. Potter, "The Relationships between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2008), pp. 39–65.
  20. Thomas Shugart, "China's Artificial Islands Are Bigger (and a Bigger Deal) Than You Think," *War on the Rocks*, 21 September 2016, [warontherocks.com/2016/09/chinas-artificial-islands-are-bigger-and-a-bigger-deal-than-you-think/](http://warontherocks.com/2016/09/chinas-artificial-islands-are-bigger-and-a-bigger-deal-than-you-think/); Bonnie S. Glaser, "The Growing Militarisation of the South China Sea," *Lowy Interpreter*, 29 July 2015, [www.lowyinterpreter.org/the-interpreter/growing-militarisation-south-china-sea](http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/the-interpreter/growing-militarisation-south-china-sea).
  21. A 1993–94 U.S. Geological Survey study estimated the oil reserves of the South China Sea at twenty-eight billion barrels, but the preliminary estimates by the PRC Ministry of Land and Resources (MLR) are up to ten times higher, at 138–240 billion. "South China Sea," *U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)*, March 2008, [www.eia.gov/](http://www.eia.gov/); Li Weifeng, "Fangfei lanse guotu meng—Lianghui daibiao weiyuan reyi haiyang ziyuan kaifa liyong" [Release the dream of blue territory—representatives and committee members enthusiastically discuss the development and exploitation of maritime resources at the Two Meetings], *Zhongguo guotu ziyuan bao* [China land and resources news], March 11, 2013, [www.mlr.gov.cn/xwdt/jrxw/201303/t20130311\\_1188886.htm](http://www.mlr.gov.cn/xwdt/jrxw/201303/t20130311_1188886.htm). The MLR estimate was of twenty-three to thirty billion tons of oil and sixteen trillion cubic meters of natural gas (approximately 560 trillion cubic feet).
  22. As Jie Chen notes, "The Chinese have always claimed in all seriousness that they have all along shown self-restraint," even when they have resorted to military force in the South China Sea. Jie Chen, "China's ASEAN Policy in Deng Xiaoping's Era: Major Political and Security Issues and General Trends" (PhD dissertation, Australia National Univ., 1994), pp. 146–48.
  23. Swaran Singh, "Continuity and Change in China's Maritime Strategy," *Strategic Analysis* 23, no. 9 (1999), p. 1506; Chen, "China's ASEAN Policy," pp. 160–62.
  24. Sheila A. Smith, *Intimate Rivals: Japanese Domestic Politics and a Rising China* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2015), pp. 107–10; Jian Zhang, "China's Growing Assertiveness in the South China Sea: A Strategic Shift?," in *The South China Sea and Australia's Regional Security Environment*, ed. Leszek Buszynski and Christopher Roberts, National Security College Occasional Paper 5 (Canberra: Australian National Univ., 2013), pp. 18–24. This argument is developed in detail in chapter 4 of my doctoral dissertation. Andrew Chubb, "Chinese Popular Nationalism and PRC Policy in the South China Sea" (PhD dissertation, Univ. of Washington, 2016). See also Isaac B. Kardon, "China's Maritime Interests and the Law of the Sea: Domesticating Public International Law," in *China's Socialist Rule of Law Reforms under Xi Jinping*, ed. John Garrick and Yan Chang Bennett (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 179–96.
  25. M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), p. 9; Michael Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Assertive Behavior, Part Two: The Maritime Periphery," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 35 (Summer 2011).
  26. John W. Garver, "China's Push through the South China Sea: The Interaction of Bureaucratic and National Interests," *China Quarterly*, no. 132 (December 1992), pp. 1026–27; Jakobson, *China's Unpredictable Maritime Security Actors*, p. 6; ICG, *Stirring Up the South China Sea (I)*, pp. 18–19, 22–26.
  27. Thomas J. Christensen, "Chinese Realpolitik," in *Chinese Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. Guoli Liu (New York: Transaction, 2004), p. 65.
  28. Susan L. Shirk, *Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 147–48.

29. Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism," p. 60. For arguments linking this legitimacy concern with specific maritime incidents, see Robert S. Ross, "Chinese Nationalism and Its Discontents," *National Interest*, no. 116 (November/December 2011), pp. 45–51, and Robert S. Ross, "The Problem with the Pivot: Obama's New Asia Policy Is Unnecessary and Counterproductive," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 6 (November/December 2012), pp. 70–82.
30. A diversionary state's main intention may be to focus popular anger on the external threat rather than its own response. But it is not plausible that, having done so, such an insecure state would forgo the opportunity to take credit for actions that confront the threat strongly.
31. Baum and Potter, "The Relationships," p. 43.
32. The growth in China's Internet population is factored into the index, so the numbers are comparable across time. And in contrast to online forum and microblog content, which is highly skewed toward a small minority of active users, the BSI measures an activity that almost all Internet users perform daily to obtain the information they want or need. With Baidu controlling 60–80 percent of China's Internet search market and more than 90 percent of its users located in Mainland China, use of its search engine provides a good indication of overall interest levels toward a given issue among the PRC's Internet users.
33. For further details on these online sources, see appendices 1 and 5 of Chubb, "Chinese Popular Nationalism."
34. Joseph Fewsmith and Stanley Rosen, "The Domestic Context of Chinese Foreign Policy: Does 'Public Opinion' Matter?," in *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978–2000*, ed. David M. Lampton (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 151–87.
35. Jakobson, *China's Unpredictable Maritime Security Actors*, pp. 32–33.
36. James Reilly, *Strong Society, Smart State: The Rise of Public Opinion in China's Japan Policy* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2011), pp. 48–49; James Reilly, "A Wave to Worry About? Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and China's Anti-Japan Protests," *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 86 (2014), pp. 200–201.
37. Alastair Iain Johnston and Daniela Stockmann, "Six Hypotheses on Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in China" (working paper, 14 March 2011), pp. 4–5.
38. Assignments to CCP leadership positions are believed to be decided before, not during, party congresses, so intensified jockeying for positions typically begins months or even years beforehand. And once the transition is complete, a new administration may take years to consolidate its influence.
39. Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988), pp. 427–60.
40. Jessica L. Weeks, "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve," *International Organization* 62, no. 1 (2008), pp. 35–64.
41. Jessica Chen Weiss, "Authoritarian Signaling, Mass Audiences, and Nationalist Protest in China," *International Organization* 67, no. 1 (2013), pp. 1–35. Another possible use for antiforeign protests in diplomacy would be to appeal for international support. John Ciorciari and Jessica Chen Weiss, "Nationalist Protests, Government Responses, and the Risk of Escalation in Interstate Disputes," *Security Studies* 25, no. 3 (2016), pp. 549–50.
42. Chubb, "Chinese Popular Nationalism," pp. 275–80.
43. Andrew Bennett, "Process Tracing: A Bayesian Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, ed. Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady, and David Collier (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), p. 711.
44. For a quantitative demonstration of the timing of China's change in behavior in the South China Sea, see Chubb, "Measuring and Explaining China's Assertiveness." On the selection of typical cases, see John Gerring, "Case Selection for Case-Study Analysis," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, ed. Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, and Collier, pp. 648–50.
45. *Investigating the Chinese Threat, Part I: Military and Economic Aggression; Hearing before the H. Comm. on Foreign Affairs*, 112th Cong. (2012) (statement of Taylor Fravel), available at [www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg73536/html/CHRG-112hhrg73536.htm](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg73536/html/CHRG-112hhrg73536.htm); Tran Truong Thuy, "Recent Developments in the South China Sea: Unconstrained Waves of Tensions" (paper presented at "Maritime Security in the South China Sea" conference, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 20–21 June 2011); Chubb, "Chinese Popular Nationalism," pp. 92–103.
46. Qian Xiuli, "Woguo jianli quan haiyu weiquan xunhang zhidu, 300 wan pingfang gongli guanxia haiyu naru dingqi weiquan xunhang zhidu guanli fanwei" [China establishes rights-defense patrol system for all waters, 3 million sq km of administrative waters brought

- into administrative scope of regular rights-defense patrol system], *Zhongguo haiyang bao* [China ocean news], 5 August 2008, available at [www.soa.gov.cn/xw/hyyw\\_90/201211/t20121109\\_1902.html](http://www.soa.gov.cn/xw/hyyw_90/201211/t20121109_1902.html).
47. Ryan Martinson, "The Arming of China's Maritime Frontier," China Maritime Studies Institute China Maritime Report 2, *U.S. Naval War College*, June 2017, p. 7, [usnwc.edu/](http://usnwc.edu/).
  48. *Nanhai jixing* [South China Sea Chronicle], episode 8, "Lan jiang weishi" [Defenders of the blue domain], aired 31 December 2013, on CCTV-4, available at [news.cntv.cn/special/nh/jx](http://news.cntv.cn/special/nh/jx).
  49. *Ibid.*
  50. *Ibid.*; Scott Bentley, "Vietnam and China: A Dangerous Incident," *The Diplomat*, 12 February 2014, [thediplomat.com/2014/02/vietnam-and-china-a-dangerous-incident/](http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/vietnam-and-china-a-dangerous-incident/).
  51. The branch's deputy director general, Chen Huaibei, stated that the commanders found ordering the ramming "extremely stressful" because "we normally teach our crews to observe safety and try to avoid collisions." This time, however, "we were ordering them to actively initiate collisions." Chen concluded: "As glorious as the objective was, the action itself created a degree of risk to our staff's safety." See "Defenders of the Blue Domain."
  52. The national-level SOA party committee bestowed shared honors on four of the CMS vessels involved and gave individual commendations to ninety-five staff members. SOA party secretary Sun Zhihui delivered an "important speech" at the event, further underscoring its national-level significance. SOA, *Zhongguo haiyang nianjian* [China ocean yearbook] 2008 ([Beijing]: Haiyang, 2008), p. 128 and photo section.
  53. The official title of the continental shelf operation was 越南外大陆架地质调查的干扰与阻止行动 (Action to Interfere and Block Vietnam's Outer Continental Shelf Geological Survey). NISCSS, 2007 *nian Nanhai xingshi pinggu baogao* [Evaluative report on developments in the South China Sea in 2007] (Haikou City, Hainan, China: National Institute for South China Sea Studies, 2008) p. 38. (Subsequent citations to this annual report, published in the year following the year covered, use *Evaluative Report* and the year covered, and omit the publication data.) With regard to the other surveys, see case study 5.
  54. A Baidu News search for 定期维权巡航 between 1 January 2005, and 31 December 2007, returned ten results.
  55. CCTV *Xinwen Lianbo* (Network News), 12 July 2008.
  56. The network's 19 October bulletin also appears to have created another, smaller spike when it reiterated that "several days ago CMS realized rights-defense patrol law enforcement in the southern part of the South China Sea." CCTV *Xinwen Lianbo* (Network News), 19 October 2008.
  57. SOA, *China Ocean Yearbook 2008*, p. 128.
  58. NISCSS, *Evaluative Report 2007*, p. 41.
  59. The two-stage project was approved personally by Premier Zhu Rongji and Vice-Premier Wen Jiabao, who instructed the State Planning Commission (SPC) to organize its implementation. The SOA quickly established a ship-construction leading small group to begin program establishment and report preparation work, and in March 2000 submitted the proposal to build thirteen ships. The SPC issued its in-principle approval in October of that year. The first stage included four ships in the 1,000-ton class, plus one 1,500-ton and one 3,000-ton vessel, along with two aircraft. Stage 2 of the same shipbuilding project, commenced in 2009, delivering an additional seven cutters by 2011. Four of these ships were in the 1,000-ton class, two in the 1,500-ton class, and one in the new 4,000-ton design. One was completed in 2010 and the remaining six were introduced in 2011. Su Tao, "Zhongguo Haijian xinxing chuanbo, feiji jianzao ceji" [Profiling CMS's new vessel and aircraft construction], *Zhongguo haiyang bao* [China ocean news], 17 December 2007, available at [www.zzofa.cn/news\\_view.asp?newsid=412/](http://www.zzofa.cn/news_view.asp?newsid=412/); Zhang Xudong, "Zhongguo jijian wancheng 13 sou qiandunji haijian chuan jianzao zengqiang haiyang weiquan nengli" [China will soon complete 13 1,000t-class marine-surveillance ships, will strengthen maritime rights-defense capabilities], *Xinhua*, 6 January 2011, [news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-01/06/c\\_12953441.htm/](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-01/06/c_12953441.htm/); CMS, "Zhongguo Haijian Nanhai Zongdui jiang jian 4000-dun ji zhifa chuan jiaqiang haixun" [CMS South Sea Branch to construct 4000t-class law enforcement ship to strengthen maritime patrols], *Zhongguo Haijian Nanhai Zongdui* [CMS South China Sea Branch], 21 July 2009, [www.scsb.gov.cn/html/2/13/article-15.html](http://www.scsb.gov.cn/html/2/13/article-15.html). A third, even bigger law-enforcement vessel construction project followed, this one aimed at equipping provincial CMS detachments with large ships to participate in maritime rights defense. Most relevantly to the South China Sea maritime disputes, the Guangdong and Hainan provincial detachments were each allocated one 1,500-ton and two 1,000-ton ships and Guangxi one 1,000-ton ship. Coastal provinces on the East China Sea also have been equipped under this project. Fujian was assigned one of each type of ship, Zhejiang one 1,500-ton cutter, and Jiangsu one

- in the 1,000-ton class. Feng, “China’s Recent Expansion of the Maritime Agencies,” *Information Dissemination* (blog), 20 January 2013, [www.informationdissemination.net/2013/01/chinas-recent-expansion-of-maritime.html](http://www.informationdissemination.net/2013/01/chinas-recent-expansion-of-maritime.html). Note: this blogger goes by the single name “Feng.”
60. Once the SPC had allocated the funds, numerous studies were conducted to discover “scientifically” the best way to proceed. SOA, *Zhongguo haiyang nianjian* [China ocean yearbook] 2001 ([Beijing]: Haiyang, 2001), p. 109.
  61. SOA, *Zhongguo haiyang nianjian* [China ocean yearbook] 2005 ([Beijing]: Haiyang, 2005), pp. 187–88.
  62. Vietnamese government researcher, interviewed by author via e-mail exchanges, 2015.
  63. Chinese government researchers, interviewed by author, April 2016.
  64. The confrontations began on 5 March, when a PLAN frigate twice cut across *Impeccable*’s bow and a Y-12 surveillance plane swooped past eleven times. On 7 March, a PLAN surveillance ship hailed *Impeccable* by radio, ordering it to leave the area or “suffer the consequences.” Jim Garamone, “Chinese Vessels Shadow, Harass Unarmed U.S. Survey Ship,” *U.S. Department of Defense*, 9 March 2009, [www.archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=534011](http://www.archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=534011). More details are available in Raul Pedrozo [Capt., USN], “Close Encounters at Sea: The USNS *Impeccable* Incident,” *Naval War College Review* 62, no. 3 (Summer 2009), pp. 101–11.
  65. The CMS ship involved was referred to as *Haijian 83* in “Long-Term Plan for Senkaku Provocations in Works,” *Japan Times*, 14 January 2013, available at [www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20130114a2.html](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20130114a2.html).
  66. Video of the incidents can be accessed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5CK3rEMiW0/](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5CK3rEMiW0/).
  67. “Raw Data: Pentagon Statement on Chinese Incident with U.S. Navy,” *Fox News*, 9 March 2009, [www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/03/09/raw-data-pentagon-statement-chinese-incident-navy/](http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/03/09/raw-data-pentagon-statement-chinese-incident-navy/).
  68. Associated Press, “Pentagon: Chinese Vessels Harassed U.S. Ship,” *ABC Action News*, 9 March 2009, [6abc.com/archive/6698613](http://6abc.com/archive/6698613).
  69. Ross, “Chinese Nationalism and Its Discontents,” pp. 45–46.
  70. Christensen, “The Advantages of an Assertive China,” p. 55.
  71. Ma’s comments—on (1) the U.S. version’s alleged inaccuracy, (2) China’s adherence to international and domestic laws, (3) China’s protest against *Impeccable*’s activities, and (4) China’s demand that the U.S. side prevent further incidents—formed a separate “MFA spokesperson statement” posted on the MFA website on 11 March. This indicated that these four points constituted the most important elements of the PRC’s official position. MFA, “Waijiaobu fayanren Ma Zhaoxu jiu Mei haijun jiancechuan zai Zhongguo zhuanshujingji qu huodong shi da jizhe wen” [MFA spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu’s remarks on U.S. Navy surveillance vessel’s activities in China’s EEZ], *MFA*, 11 March 2009, [www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt\\_673021/dhdw\\_673027/t541674.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt_673021/dhdw_673027/t541674.shtml).
  72. Ma’s first and only reference to the Chinese ships’ behavior was on 12 March. Asked whether they had been police, navy, or civilian vessels, Ma restated that *Impeccable*’s activities were illegal, and then added, “It is totally justified and reasonable for China to take 维权行动 [rights-defense actions] in the sea areas under its jurisdiction in accordance with law.” He then immediately added that China saw “a stable and sound Sino-US. relationship” as being in its “fundamental interests.” This fleeting and indirect comment only tenuously supports the notion that a desire to impress public opinion or avoid nationalist criticism was behind China’s actions.
  73. CNS, “Guofangbu: Mei haijun jiancechuan zai Zhongguo jingji qu huodong feifa” [Defense Ministry: U.S. Navy surveillance ship’s activities in China’s economic zone illegal], *Zhongguo xinwen she* [China news service], 11 March 2009, [news.qq.com/a/20090311/004338.htm](http://news.qq.com/a/20090311/004338.htm).
  74. CNS, “Haijun gaoceng: Meifang zhi Zhongguo chuanzhi genzong shi e’ren xian gaozhuang” [High-level navy official: U.S. claim of following by Chinese boats is the villain suing the victim], *Zhongguo xinwen she* [China news service], 10 March 2009, [news.qq.com/a/20090310/002059.htm](http://news.qq.com/a/20090310/002059.htm).
  75. PLAN deputy political commissar Wu Huayang, for example, stated on 10 March that no clash had occurred and that the incident was “American hype.” In the same report from the central news agency CNS, Rear Adm. Zhang Deshun was quoted saying that the United States was “turning the facts upside down” and that China’s fishing boats merely had been “conducting normal fishing activities.” CNS, “High-Level Navy Official.”
  76. On the significance of these CCTV news bulletins, see Jiang Chang and Hailong Ren, “Television News as Political Ritual: *Xinwen Lianbo* and China’s Journalism Reform within the Party-State’s Orbit,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 97 (2016), p. 21.

77. Derived from a manual check of CCTV *Xinwen Lianbo* (Network News) and *Wanjian Xinwen* (Evening News) headlines of 10–30 March 2009. Check conducted 27 February 2014.
78. Cui Xiaohuo and Zhang Haizhou, “Top Military Officers Lash Out at U.S. Espionage,” *China Daily*, 11 March 2009, [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-03/11/content\\_7565312.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-03/11/content_7565312.htm).
79. A Baidu News search for 张华臣 东海舰队 in full text, across all dates, returned twelve results, none from 2009. A Baidu News search for 林永青 少将 in full text, all dates, returned 147 results, only three from 2009, and none relevant to the South China Sea. Searches conducted 26 February 2014.
80. Quoted in Oriana S. Mastro, “Signaling and Military Provocation in Chinese National Security Strategy: A Closer Look at the *Impeccable* Incident,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 2 (April 2011), p. 225.
81. Fisheries Administration, *Zhongguo Yuyue nianjian 2010* [China Fisheries yearbook 2010] (Beijing: Nongye [Agriculture], 2010), p. 124. Subsequent citations to this annual publication omit the pinyin and publication data.
82. The combined three-term BSI registered values of around 1,000 from 1 March onward. This rose to just over 2,500 on 13 March, in the incident’s aftermath.
83. See 中国海洋权益遭受多国染指 应多管齐下维权 [“China’s Maritime Rights Suffer Encroachment from Many Countries, Need Coordinated Rights Defense”], 中国新闻社 [CNS], March 17, 2009, [mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-03-17/0900545628.html](http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-03-17/0900545628.html). The same evening CCTV *Evening News* broadcast two prominent stories about the new fisheries patrolling in disputed areas. CCTV *Wanjian Xinwen* (Evening News), 17 March 2009. CCTV publicized the MFA’s denial of the evacuation rumors in the following day’s *Evening News*. 外交部发言人就有传闻称中方考虑从菲律宾车桥答记者问 [“MFA Spokesperson Answers Journalists’ Questions on Rumors Claiming China Is Considering Evacuating Its Nationals from the Philippines”], 晚间新闻 [Evening News], aired 18 March 2009, on CCTV.
84. See Jessica Chen Weiss, *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China’s Foreign Relations* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), chap. 3. This likely is owing both to the dramatic implications of great-power (or even superpower) conflict and to historical animosities. Not only is America commonly regarded as one of the imperialist powers that humiliated China during the so-called century of humiliation emphasized in “patriotic education” since the 1990s, but the Belgrade embassy bombing continues to be seared into the minds of PRC citizens as a de-liberate act of 悍然、野蛮 (violent barbarism)—language repeated in coverage of Xi’s visit to Belgrade in June 2016. Unlike Japan, from whom the PRC sought assistance after 1949, the United States was the subject of sustained vilification in CCP propaganda and education throughout the 1950s and 1960s. See Yanan He, “Remembering and Forgetting the War: Elite Mythmaking, Mass Reaction, and Sino-Japanese Relations, 1950–2006,” *History and Memory* 19, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2007), pp. 43–74.
85. David Morgan, “U.S. Says Chinese Fishing Vessels Confront Navy Ship,” *Reuters*, 5 May 2009, [www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-navy/u-s-says-chinese-fishing-vessels-confront-navy-ship-idUSTRE5443IY20090505/](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-navy/u-s-says-chinese-fishing-vessels-confront-navy-ship-idUSTRE5443IY20090505/).
86. See “Chinese, U.S. Top Diplomats Hold Talks,” *Xinhua*, 12 March 2009, [news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/12/content\\_10998372.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/12/content_10998372.htm), and Cui Xiaohuo and Li Xiaokun, “Sea Confrontation Will Not Affect Exchanges,” *China Daily*, 12 March 2009, [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-03/12/content\\_7570405.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-03/12/content_7570405.htm). Both these pieces were cited in a working version of Kacie Miura and Jessica Chen Weiss, “Will China Test Trump? Lessons from Past Campaigns and Elections,” *Washington Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (December 2016), pp. 7–25.
87. Critics of audience-cost theory have argued that the costs of backing down in international spats are relatively small and that leaders can finesse their compromises. See Jack Snyder and Erica D. Borghardt, “The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound,” *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (August 2011), pp. 437–56; Marc Trachtenberg, “Audience Costs: An Historical Analysis,” *Security Studies* 21, no. 1 (2012), pp. 3–42; and Matthew S. Levendusky and Michael C. Horowitz, “When Backing Down Is the Right Decision: Partisanship, New Information, and Audience Costs,” *Journal of Politics* 72, no. 2 (2012), pp. 323–38.
88. The case examined here illustrates one mechanism by which the domestic price of conciliation may be discounted from what rationalist audience-cost theories expect. At a time of heightened international tension and domestic scrutiny, a moderating signal, such as China’s affirmation that Sino-American cooperative initiatives were going ahead after the *Impeccable* incident, may dampen audiences’ expectations for further confrontation, thereby reducing attention levels, which in turn reduces the domestic costs of subsequent cooperative steps. Sending the initial signal of moderation during heightened tensions therefore might be seen as



- a kind of investment that stands to reduce the marginal audience costs of further cooperation or moderation. The price of the investment is limited to the reputational damage incurred among those audience members who (1) were attentive to the state's handling of the issue at that time, and (2) believed that de-escalation was the incorrect course of action. These initial outlays are also offset by any approval from attentive citizens who believed that de-escalation was the right policy. If attention levels drop as a result of this initial moderate signal—which may simply be a *lack* of further escalatory signals—the domestic audience costs of subsequent, more-substantive efforts to defuse tensions will be lowered. In other words, by first dampening audiences' sense of the likelihood of conflict, states may be able to pursue subsequent de-escalation at a discount. And to the extent that audience members simply tune out from the issue without drawing a normative judgment about the state's policy, the initial investment is costless.
89. Peter Dutton, ed., *Military Activities in the EEZ: A U.S.-China Dialogue on Security and International Law in the Maritime Commons*, China Maritime Study 7 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2010). During the UNCLOS negotiations in the early 1970s, PRC negotiators argued that *all* marine scientific research activities “have potential military applications . . . and they therefore constitute a danger to national security and sovereignty.” Tung Shih-Chung [Dong Shizhong], *The Policy of China in the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea* (Geneva: Graduate Institute of International Studies, 1981), p. 60.
  90. Hans Kristensen, “New Chinese SSBN Deploys to Hainan Island,” *Federation of American Scientists*, 24 April 2008, [fas.org/blogs/security/2008/04/new-chinese-ssbn-deploys-to-hainan-island-naval-base/](http://fas.org/blogs/security/2008/04/new-chinese-ssbn-deploys-to-hainan-island-naval-base/).
  91. Morgan, “U.S. Says Chinese Fishing Vessels.”
  92. For a different view, see Mastro, “Signaling and Military Provocation,” p. 239.
  93. The PRC's ill-fated close interception of a U.S. EP-3 spy plane over the South China Sea in April 2001 occurred four months into George W. Bush's presidency. Only days before the EP-3 incident, on 23 March 2001, a Military Sealift Command surveillance ship had been confronted in the Yellow Sea, resulting in a vehement U.S. protest. See Pedrozo, “Close Encounters at Sea,” p. 101.
  94. Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Knopf, 2014), p. 414. Michael Swaine also has listed the *Impeccable* incident as a possible example of the PLA acting autonomously. Swaine, “China's Assertive Behavior, Part Three: The Role of the Military in Foreign Policy,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 36 (2012), p. 8.
  95. Chubb, “Chinese Popular Nationalism,” p. 221. It is worth noting that, although this cable reveals that Zheng Zeguang, the director general of the MFA's American and Ocean Affairs Department, was ready with a detailed defense of the Fisheries Administration ships' actions, he apparently was unaware that PLAN ships were present. This probably reflects the compartmentalization between China's party and military systems. The PLA leadership does not possess any formal institutional authority over the MFA or the CCP propaganda department, despite the PLA's higher institutional rank.
  96. Chen Yide, Ma Weijun, and Yang Changjian, “Xin xingshi xia zuohao huyu weiquan weiwen gongzuo de sikao yu jianyi” [Thoughts and suggestions on properly doing fisheries rights-protection and stability-maintenance work in the new circumstances], *Zhongguo shuichan* [China fisheries], no. 3 (2012), p. 15. The authors refer to the incident indirectly, but unmistakably, as the “expulsion of a foreign surveillance warship.”
  97. This time frame should have been sufficient to prevent reoccurrences if the leadership had been strongly opposed to such actions.
  98. The Fisheries Administration's South Sea Regional Bureau's designation of *Impeccable*'s activity as illegal and its description of the operation to expel it from China's EEZ—the new maritime zone created under UNCLOS—also suggest this connection. Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2010*, p. 124.
  99. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
  100. Because the operation was against an unarmed surveillance ship relatively close to the Hainan coast, it is likely that fishing boats and small patrol boats accompanied by navy ships—capabilities China had possessed since the 1980s—would have been sufficient to mount such an operation.
  101. Chubb, “Chinese Popular Nationalism,” p. 228.
  102. Chinese government-affiliated scholar, interview by author, November 2013. The interviewee used this term.
  103. Developing the field is believed to be commercially viable only if oil prices exceed one hundred dollars per barrel. Aaron L. Connelly, *Indonesia in the South China Sea: Going It Alone* (Sydney: Lowy Institute, December 2016), p. 15 note 7.

104. Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2011*, p. 126.
105. The other cases are likely to have occurred within the vicinity of the Spratly Islands and therefore would not necessarily imply coercive enforcement of the “historic rights” claim.
106. Ryan D. Martinson, “Shepherds of the South Seas,” *Survival* 58, no. 3 (2016), p. 205. A chart referring to the area as the “Spratly Southwest Fishing Grounds” can be viewed in the following reference: 薛满意 [Xue Manyi], 独家: 印尼进九段线抓中国渔船 混淆主权与专属区 [“Exclusive: Indonesia Enters Nine-Dash-Line Area and Arrests Chinese Fishermen, Mixing Up Sovereignty and EEZ”], 凤凰军事 [Phoenix Military], 22 March 2016, news.ifeng.com/a/20160322/48079022\_0.shtml.
107. Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2004*, p. 139; Martinson, “Shepherds of the South Seas.” Large, new, armed cutters were sent to the Spratlys from early 2009 and, besides the Fisheries Administration, South China Sea policy advisory organs had been flagging the general issue of detentions of Chinese fishermen in disputed parts of the South China Sea for some years. Examples can be found in NISCSS, *Evaluative Report 2003*, p. 37; NISCSS, *Evaluative Report 2006*, pp. 25–26; NISCSS, *Evaluative Report 2007*, p. 37; and NISCSS, *Evaluative Report 2008–2009*, p. 47.
108. See Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2007*, pp. 146–47, and Chen, Ma, and Yang, “Thoughts and Suggestions,” p. 14.
109. Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2010*, p. 124.
110. Martinson, “Shepherds of the South Seas,” p. 196.
111. *NIDS China Security Report 2011* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2012), pp. 18–19.
112. Scott Bentley, “Mapping the Nine-Dash Line: Recent Incidents Involving Indonesia in the South China Sea,” *ASPI Strategist*, 29 October 2013, www.aspistrategist.org.au/mapping-the-nine-dash-line-recent-incidents-involving-indonesia-in-the-south-china-sea/.
113. Connelly, *Indonesia in the South China Sea*, pp. 5–6. Connelly details two subsequent incidents in May and June in which Indonesia detained PRC fishing boats in similar areas but was not coerced by Chinese government vessels into releasing them.
114. 中国海洋21世纪议程 [China’s Maritime Agenda for the 21st Century] (Beijing: State Oceanic Administration, March 1996), chap. 10, sdingfo.coi.gov.cn/hyfg/hyfgdb/fg8.htm.
115. 印尼在我国南海传统捕鱼区扣押75名渔民 [“Indonesia Detains 75 Fishermen in Our Country’s South China Sea Traditional Fishing Area”], 环球时报 [Global Times], 25 June 2009, news.sina.com.cn/c/2009-06-25/072218091025.shtml.
116. Of course, it is possible that the story was released in coordination with the party-state authorities, once they had decided to go public with their demand for the fishermen’s release.
117. 赵叶苹 [Zhao Yeping], 中国渔民南海历经劫难 [“The History of Suffering of Chinese Fisherfolk in the South China Sea”], 国际先驱导报 [International Herald Leader], 30 June 2009, news.sina.com.cn/c/sd/2009-06-30/085418122130.shtml; 揪心南海! [“Worrying about the South China Sea!”], 广州日报 [Guangzhou Daily], 28 June 2009, p. B2, gzdaily.dayoo.com/html/2009-06/28/content\_615916.htm, accessed via Internet Archive, archive.org/; 专访中国南海区渔政管理局局长: 保护渔民利益是当务之急 [“Exclusive Interview with South Sea Regional Fisheries Administration Bureau Director: Protecting Fishermen’s Interests Is an Urgent Task”], 中国日报网 [China Daily Online], 1 July 2009, news.163.com/09/0701/02/5D3R06NB000120GU.html; 黎云 [Li Yun], 南海渔民生存现状: 被别国抓扣就要倾家荡产 [“South China Sea Fishermen’s Situation: Losing a Fortune to Detention by Other Countries”], 瞭望东方周刊 [Oriental Outlook Weekly], June 2009, news.sina.com.cn/c/sd/2009-06-22/170818070293.shtml.
118. 落晖 [Luo Hui], 中国渔政与印尼炮艇对峙夺回被扣渔船 [“China Fisheries in Standoff with Indonesian Gunboat, Gets Back Detained Fishermen”], 环球时报 [Global Times], 28 July 2010, news.163.com/10/0728/12/6CM7R3BV00011MTO.html.
119. 葛蕾 [Ge Lei] and 李天宇 [Li Tianning], 自主给力“南锋号”渔业科考“海龙王” [“The Awesome Nanfeng Fisheries Survey ‘Dragon-King’”], 中国网 [CNS Online], 2 February 2015, ocean.china.com.cn/2015-02/02/content\_34713697.htm.
120. 中国人印尼使馆前打横幅“哀悼南沙被害渔民” [“Chinese People Unfurl ‘Mourn the Fishermen Harmed in the Spratlys’ Banner outside Indonesian Embassy”], 环球网 [Global Times Online], 5 July 2009, mil.huanqiu.com/world/2009-07/506059.html.
121. The BSI average for the “South China Sea” search term was 602 in the second half of 2009, compared with 296 in the second half of 2008.
122. *NIDS China Security Report 2011*, pp. 18–19. Martinson cites *Yuzheng 301* and *Yuzheng 302*

- as units involved. Martinson, “Shepherds of the South Seas,” p. 197.
123. Photographs from the incident lack sufficient resolution to make out hull numbers.
  124. Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2009*, pp. 159–60.
  125. Martinson, “Shepherds of the South Seas,” p. 196.
  126. The letter made a parenthetical reference to the map at the end of a single sentence claiming sovereignty over the disputed islands *and* sovereign maritime resource rights. This suggested that the map was relevant to the maritime rights claims as well as the island claims that were its original purpose when the Kuomintang government published it under the title 南海諸島位置圖 (*Location Map of Islands in the South China Sea*). The 7 May 2009 letter is available from the United Nations website, document number CML/18/2009.
  127. See ICG, *Stirring Up the South China Sea (I)*.
  128. Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2014*, p. 157.
  129. Video footage is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LijVEvpbRA&list=UUak2fQSLgixrnBjjGdvjXag](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LijVEvpbRA&list=UUak2fQSLgixrnBjjGdvjXag).
  130. Sourabh Gupta, “China-Japan Trawler Incident: Reviewing the Dispute over Senkaku/Daiyou [sic] Waters,” *East Asia Forum*, 6 December 2010, [www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/12/06/china-japan-trawler-incident-review-of-legalities-understandings-and-practices-in-disputed-senkakudaiyou-waters/](http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/12/06/china-japan-trawler-incident-review-of-legalities-understandings-and-practices-in-disputed-senkakudaiyou-waters/). The trawler and its crew were sent back to China on September 13.
  131. See “Japan Frees Chinese Fishing Boat Captain amid Diplomatic Row,” *BBC*, 24 September 2010, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-11403241](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-11403241), and Keith Bradsher, “Amid Tension, China Blocks Vital Exports to Japan,” *New York Times*, 22 September 2010, [www.nytimes.com/2010/09/24/business/global/23rare.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/24/business/global/23rare.html).
  132. Swaine and Fravel, “China’s Assertive Behavior, Part Two,” p. 23 note 44.
  133. Johnston’s examination of import statistics from the Japanese government found only patchy evidence for this proposition. Alastair Iain Johnston, “How New and Assertive Is China’s New Assertiveness?,” *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013), pp. 7–48. The PRC also arrested a group of Japanese tourists in China for allegedly approaching military installations, a move the MFA denied was related to the crisis.
  134. The JCG had expelled more than one hundred PRC fishing boats from the area in August, compared with a usual number of around ten per month. Green, Hicks, and Schaus, *Counter-*  
*ing Coercion in Maritime Asia*, p. 71. This type of mass-scale fishing expedition could not have occurred without state support, although it is not known at what level of the bureaucracy the voyage was approved.
  135. MFA press conference, 9 September 2010.
  136. “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu’s Remarks on China Enhancing Law Enforcement Activities in Relevant Waters,” *USC U.S.-China Institute*, 19 September 2010, [china.usc.edu/foreign-ministry-spokesperson-jiang-yus-remarks-china-enhancing-law-enforcement-activities-relevant/](http://china.usc.edu/foreign-ministry-spokesperson-jiang-yus-remarks-china-enhancing-law-enforcement-activities-relevant/).
  137. Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2010*, p. 126.
  138. Swaine and Fravel, “China’s Assertive Behavior, Part Two,” pp. 9–10.
  139. Zhu Zhiqin, “Chinese Foreign Policy: External and Internal Factors,” *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (September 2011), p. 190.
  140. Willy Lam, “Is China Afraid of Its Own People?,” *Foreign Policy*, 28 September 2010.
  141. Johnston, “How New and Assertive?,” p. 22.
  142. “Assistant Foreign Minister Hu Zhengyue Lodges Solemn Representations Again on Japan’s Seizure of Chinese Fishing Boat in Waters off the Diaoyu Islands,” *MFA*, 8 September 2010, [www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjbj/zjzg/yzs/xwlb/t739174.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjbj/zjzg/yzs/xwlb/t739174.shtml).
  143. 我国政府接回被日方非法抓扣的14名渔民 [“Our Country’s Government Receives 14 Fishermen Illegally Detained by Japan”], *CCTV Network News*, 13 September 2010, [news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20100913/103658.shtml](http://news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20100913/103658.shtml).
  144. 中国渔船船长詹其雄安全返抵福州 [“Chinese Fishing Boat Captain Zhan Qixiong Safely Returns to Fuzhou”], *CCTV Network News*, 25 September 2010, [news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20100925/103324.shtml](http://news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20100925/103324.shtml).
  145. 外交部表示日方非法扣押中国渔船船长严重影响中日关系 [“MFA States Japan’s Illegal Detention of Chinese Fishing Boat Captain Has Seriously Affected Sino-Japanese Relations”], *CCTV Network News*, 19 September 2010, [news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20100919/103086.shtml](http://news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20100919/103086.shtml).
  146. *CCTV Wanjian Xinwen (Evening News)*, 17 September and 28 September.
  147. 温家宝敦促日方立即无条件释放中国船长 [“Wen Jiabao Urges Japan to Immediately and Unconditionally Release Chinese Captain”], *CCTV Network News*, 22 September 2010, [news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20100922/101885.shtml](http://news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20100922/101885.shtml).
  148. 外交部发言人答记者问 [“MFA Spokesperson Answers Reporters’ Questions”], *CCTV Network*

- News, 24 September 2010, news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20100924/101994.shtml.
149. 日本内阁官房长官表示将努力修复中日关系 ["Japanese Cabinet Secretary States He Will Try to Restore Sino-Japanese Relations"], CCTV *Evening News*, 24 September 2010, news.cntv.cn/world/20100924/102296.shtml.
  150. As reported on CCTV *Network News*, 25 September 2010.
  151. "Premier Wen Urges Japan to Release Captain," *China Daily*; 22 September 2010, www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-09/22/content\_11337158.htm; 外交部副部长王光亚就日方决定继续非法扣押中方船长提出严正交涉 ["MFA Vice-Foreign Minister Wang Guangya Delivers Solemn Representations over Japan's Decision to Continue Illegally Detaining the Chinese Side's Boat Captain"], *MFA*, 19 September 2010, www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa\_chn/wjbxw\_602253/t753878.shtml.
  152. See 1990s poll results cited in Erica Strecker Downs and Phillip C. Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999), p. 127 note 49.
  153. Reilly, *Strong Society, Smart State*, p. 197.
  154. The BSI for the search term 钓鱼岛 (Diaoyu Islands) had peaked at around 3,500 on 23 August, well above the long-term average of 400–500. This apparently was related to reports about possible nationalization of the islands by Japan (23 August)—precisely the issue that would explode two years later, as detailed in case study 7. Other contributing factors appear to have been talk of U.S. commitment to defending the islands (17 August), U.S. military exercises in the area (24 August), and a provocative *International Herald Leader* story on possible Japanese military occupation of the islands (31 August). Overall, the BSI for "Diaoyu Islands" averaged around 1,100 between 17 August and 6 September. Baidu News search for 钓鱼岛 in headlines between 12 August and 31 August, 381 results as of 12 March 2014. Prior to this, however, attention levels toward the Diaoyu issue appear to have been sitting at a long-term baseline level through most of 2010.
  155. The BSI for "Diaoyu Islands" averaged 468 between 2006 and 2008. In June 2008, it rose to a peak of more than 10,000 after the Japan Coast Guard sank a Taiwan fishing boat in the area, and after the controversy over a Sino-Japanese agreement for joint development of East China Sea energy resources. The CMS fleet's landmark December 2008 patrol within the 12 nm territorial seas, as well as a diplomatic war of words in February 2009 over the islands' status under the U.S.-Japan mutual-defense treaty, prompted smaller peaks of between 2,500 and 4,000. After this, however, the BSI reading remained basically stable, with the only notable spike occurring in response to a comment in May 2010 by then–prime minister Yukio Hatoyama, and more particularly the MFA's response to it, which pushed the index briefly above 12,000. Baidu News search for 钓鱼岛 (Diaoyu Islands) in headlines between 19 May and 31 May, producing 151 results, performed on 12 March 2014.
  156. Weiss, *Powerful Patriots*, p. 69.
  157. *Ibid.*, chap. 7. See also Lam, "Is China Afraid of Its Own People?"
  158. As noted at the time in Wenran Jiang, "New Twists over Old Disputes in China-Japan Relations," Jamestown Foundation *China Brief* 10, no. 20 (8 October 2010), jamestown.org/single/?no\_cache=1&tx\_ttnews%5Btt\_news%5D=37019&tx\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=b97ce86ecc#UyMXEIGSwdV/.
  159. Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2012* (Tokyo: 2012), pp. 36–37, www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\_paper/2012.html; "China's Tightened East China Sea Patrol Could Raise Tension with Japan over Disputed Isles," *Nikkei Report*, 3 April 2009, Factiva.
  160. James Manicom, "China's Energy Development in the East China Sea," Jamestown Foundation *China Brief* 13, no. 18 (12 September 2013), jamestown.org/program/chinas-energy-development-in-the-east-china-sea; Mure Dickie, "Japan Seeks Answers over Chinese Warships," *Financial Times*, 13 April 2010, www.ft.com/content/865f06e2-46d7-11df-bb5a-00144feab49a/.
  161. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Status of Activities by Chinese Government Vessels and Chinese Fishing Vessels in Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan* [hereafter *MOFA* and country name], 12 August 2016, p. 10, www.mofa.go.jp/.
  162. 钟声 [Zhong Sheng], 中国需要这样的坚守 ["China Needs This Type of Resoluteness"], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*], 8 October 2012, paper.people.com.cn/rmr/htm/2012-10/08/nw.D110000renmrb\_20121008\_2-03.htm.
  163. A group of academics at the SOAs think tank, in Beijing, stressed that China's behavior toward Japan in 2012 was a response to an accumulation of Japanese actions including the 2010 Diaoyu incident, challenges to China's activities in the Chunxiao oil and gas field, and changes to textbooks. Interview by author, November 2013.
  164. Guifang (Julia) Xue, "Bilateral Fisheries Agreements for the Cooperative Management of the

- Shared Resources of the China Seas: A Note,” *Ocean Development and International Law* 36, no. 4 (October 2005), p. 375.
165. Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, p. 31; M. Taylor Fravel, “Explaining China’s Escalation over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands,” *Global Summitry* 2, no. 1 (June 2016), pp. 24–37.
  166. “Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China,” *MFA*, 25 September 2010, [ly.china-embassy.org/eng/zxxx/t757408.htm](http://ly.china-embassy.org/eng/zxxx/t757408.htm).
  167. James M. Reilly, “The Role of Public Opinion in China’s Japan Policy, 1997–2007” (PhD dissertation, George Washington Univ., 2008), pp. 226–31.
  168. “Vice Foreign Minister Song Tao Lodges Solemn Representations on Japan’s Interception of Chinese Fishing Boat in Waters off the Diaoyu Islands,” *MFA*, 7 September 2010, [in.china-embassy.org/eng/zgbd/t738875.htm](http://in.china-embassy.org/eng/zgbd/t738875.htm).
  169. Jerome Aning and Norman Bordadora, “China Snubs PH Protest,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 5 March 2011, [www.philstar.com/headlines/2011/05/687877/palace-no-hurry-file-china-protest](http://web.archive.org/web/20110306021752/newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20110305-323560/China-snubs-PH-protest; Aurea Calica, “Palace in No Hurry to File China Protest,” <i>Philippine Star</i>, 21 May 2011, <a href=).
  170. Ian Lewis, “China Rattles Its Sabre over Disputed Reserves,” *Petroleum Economist*, 5 April 2011, [www.petroleum-economist.com/articles/upstream/exploration-production/2011/china-rattles-its-sabre-over-disputed-reserves](http://www.petroleum-economist.com/articles/upstream/exploration-production/2011/china-rattles-its-sabre-over-disputed-reserves).
  171. AFP, “Philippine Military Accuses China in Sea Spat,” *Google*, 3 March 2011, [hreplib.congress.gov/pg/cgi-bin/koha/opac-MARCdetail.pl?biblionumber=73917](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iwE10PzHfznq6BOGJaFfc94aKKAw?docId=CNG.5eda08e8eb1b42b79c577796fd7c8cba.261; Danessa Rivera and Angie Rosales, “Noy Sends Spratlys ‘Specialist’ to China,” <i>Daily Tribune</i>, 7 March 2011, available from <a href=).
  172. Ian Storey, “China and the Philippines: Implications of the Reed Bank Incident,” Jamestown Foundation *China Brief* 11, no. 8 (6 May 2011), [jamestown.org/program/china-and-the-philippines-implications-of-the-reed-bank-incident/](http://jamestown.org/program/china-and-the-philippines-implications-of-the-reed-bank-incident/); Aning and Bordadora, “China Snubs PH Protest.”
  173. “Press Briefing by President Benigno S. Aquino III in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental on March 4, 2011,” *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*, 4 March 2011, [www.gov.ph/2011/03/04/press-briefing-by-president-benigno-s-aquino-iii-in-bacolod-city-negros-occidental-on-march-4-2011](http://www.gov.ph/2011/03/04/press-briefing-by-president-benigno-s-aquino-iii-in-bacolod-city-negros-occidental-on-march-4-2011). Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Erlinda Basilio lodged a protest with Chinese chargé d’affaires Bai Tian on 4 March. See Carlyle A. Thayer, “China’s New Wave of Aggressive Assertiveness in the South China Sea” (paper presented at “Maritime Security in the South China Sea” conference, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 20–21 June 2011), p. 6.
  174. PetroVietnam released video that is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTws82pQIEs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTws82pQIEs).
  175. “Russian Captain Condemns Cable Destruction,” *Tuoi Tre*, 2 June 2011, [english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/society/8434/russian-captain-condemns-cable-destruction.html](http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/society/8434/russian-captain-condemns-cable-destruction.html). While the report quotes Captain Belov as saying that *Binh Minh 02* was in “Vietnamese territorial waters,” he presumably meant Vietnam’s EEZ, given that the area was 120 nm from the coast of Vietnam, suggesting there may have been some degree of looseness in his recollection of the Chinese ships declaring *Binh Minh 02* to have been in violation of Chinese “sovereignty.” On 31 May Chinese MFA spokesperson Jiang Yu described the Vietnamese ships as operating “illegally.”
  176. “VN Condemns Chinese Intrusion,” *Vietnam News*, 28 June 2011, [vietnamnews.vn/Politics-Laws/211762/VN-condemns-Chinese-intrusion.html/](http://vietnamnews.vn/Politics-Laws/211762/VN-condemns-Chinese-intrusion.html/); “Press Conference on Chinese Maritime Surveillance Vessel’s Cutting Exploration Cable of PetroViet Nam Seismic Vessel,” *MOFA (Vietnam)*, 29 May 2011, [www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt\\_baochi/pbnfn/ns110530220030/](http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt_baochi/pbnfn/ns110530220030/).
  177. “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nguyen Phuong Nga Answers Question from the Media at the Press Conference on June 9th 2011 Concerning the *Viking II* Incident,” *MOFA (Vietnam)*, 9 June 2011, [www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt\\_baochi/pbnfn/ns110610100618](http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt_baochi/pbnfn/ns110610100618). See also “Vietnam Alleges High-Sea Interference,” *UPI*, 10 June 2011, [www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2011/06/10/Vietnam-alleges-high-seas-interference/UPI-58011307739896](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2011/06/10/Vietnam-alleges-high-seas-interference/UPI-58011307739896). PetroVietnam released a video purportedly showing the *Viking II* incident, but its footage does not conclusively identify any vessel or any actions being taken.
  178. Zhao Suisheng, “Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: The Strident Turn,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 22, no. 82 (2013), pp. 537, 548–49; Ross, “Chinese Nationalism and Its Discontents.”
  179. MFA press conference (Jiang Yu), 8 March 2011. PRC Manila embassy spokesperson Ethan Sun

- Yi had issued an earlier reply by text message, reaffirming China's sovereignty. Aning and Bordadora, "China Snubs PH Protest."
180. MFA press conference (Jiang Yu), 24 March 2011. The reporter asked Jiang to comment on news that the Philippines' Reed Bank energy survey had been completed. The identity of the reporter is strongly suggested by his/her follow-up question inviting Jiang to "please introduce the situation of the third meeting of the BRICS leaders to be held next month." Both the subject matter and the wording of this question are atypical of foreign reporters.
  181. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Remarks on Vietnamese Ships Chasing Away Chinese Fishing Boats in the Waters off the Nan-sha Islands," *MFA*, 9 June 2011, www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2535/t829427.shtml.
  182. The closest the MFA seems to have come to this type of language was in a general comment on 14 June that 维护自己的正当权益 ("China is defending its own legitimate rights").
  183. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu's Remarks on China's Maritime Law Enforcement and Surveillance on the South China Sea," *MFA*, 28 May 2011, www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/t826601.htm; MFA press conference (Jiang Yu), 31 May 2011; MFA press conference (Hong Lei), 14 June 2011.
  184. Edward Wong, "Beijing Warns U.S. about South China Sea Disputes," *New York Times*, 22 June 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/asia/23china.html.
  185. Don Durfee, "China Urges U.S. to Stay Out of Sea Dispute," *Reuters*, 22 June 2011, uk.reuters.com/article/uk-china-sea-dispute/china-urges-u-s-to-stay-out-of-sea-dispute-idUKTRE75L16Q20110622. The only major, widely shared story on Cui's comments was from the *Global Times*, relying on translations of a *Wall Street Journal* report. See Chubb, "Chinese Popular Nationalism," app. 5.
  186. 崔天凯: 正告美国勿搅南海浑水 ["Cui Tiankai Warns America Not to Stir South China Sea's Muddy Waters"], 环球视线 [CCTV *Global View*], 23 June 2011, news.cntv.cn/china/20110623/113556.shtml.
  187. News of Dai's meeting was republished at least eighty-five times, under headlines to this effect. See Chubb, "Chinese Popular Nationalism," app. 5.
  188. Baidu News search for 礼乐滩 (in text) between 1 February and 30 June 2011, 236 results in total. Conducted 12 February 2014. The list of major stories can be found in Chubb, "Chinese Popular Nationalism," app. 5.
  189. Manual check of CCTV *Network News* and *Evening News* headlines, 1–20 March 2011; Google searches for 礼乐滩 on CCTV and *People's Daily* (2008 onward). Conducted 18 February 2014. Prominent topics on CCTV's news bulletins included the "Two Meetings" (i.e., of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference), the Japanese earthquake, and the evacuation of Chinese personnel from Libya.
  190. Baidu News search for 南海问题 and 南海争端 (in headline) between 1 March and 20 March 2011. Conducted 13 February 2014.
  191. Manual check of CCTV *Network News* and *Evening News* headlines, 25 May–30 June 2011. Conducted 12 February 2014.
  192. 戴秉国会见越南领导人特使胡春山 ["Dai Bingguo Meets Vietnamese Leadership's Special Envoy Ho Xuan Son"], 新闻联播 [*Network News*], aired 26 June 2011, on CCTV. The report ran again under the same title later that evening on the CCTV *Evening News*.
  193. See Chubb, "Chinese Popular Nationalism," app. 5. Commercial online media coverage of the *Viking II* incident also emphasized the official version of events, which presented it as a case of Vietnamese interference with Chinese fishing. For example, 外交部就越南在南海海域驱赶中国渔船答问 ["MFA Answers Questions regarding Vietnam Chasing Away Chinese Fishing Boat in Spratly Waters"], 环球网 [*Global Times Online*], 9 June 2011, world.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-06/1747416.html.
  194. 越南南海冒险念头增加 中国克制是有限度的 ["Vietnam's Risky Ideas in SCS Increase, China's Restraint Has Limits"], 环球时报 [*Global Times*], 31 May 2011, military.people.com.cn/GB/42969/58518/14781178.html.
  195. 愤怒不是处理南海争端的正道 ["Anger Is Not the Right Way to Handle the South China Sea Dispute"], 环球时报 [*Global Times*], 9 June 2011, military.people.com.cn/GB/42969/58520/14863644.html.
  196. 环球时报社评: 用两手准备回应越南挑衅 ["*Global Times* Editorial: Use Two Means to Prepare Response to Vietnam's Provocations"], 环球时报 [*Global Times*], 21 June 2011, news.sina.com.cn/pl/2011-06-21/084222677864.shtml.
  197. Some reports that should have helped maintain public attention in May included inflammatory remarks from Philippine politicians, discussion of cross-straits cooperation with Taiwan over the South China Sea, a Wen Jiabao interview with Malaysian and Indonesian journalists, and a Xinhua translation of a *New York Times* article by three former U.S. defense officials

- arguing that ratifying UNCLOS would allow the United States to play a more powerful role in the South China Sea. See Chubb, “Chinese Popular Nationalism,” app. 5.
198. Yu Wenqiang and Xiao Delun, “Jiefangjun Haijun Luzhandui mou lü zuzhi kuazhouye qiangtan denglu yanxi” [PLA Navy Marines brigade holds day-night beach-landing exercises], *Jiefangjun bao* [PLA daily], 14 June 2011, available at [news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-06/14/c\\_121532487.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-06/14/c_121532487.htm); Xiao Delun, “Mou Luzhan lü pojie liangqi zhuangjiache fuza tiaojian xia fudu zhuangxiezai nanti” [Marines brigade resolves difficult issues of amphibious tank crossing, loading, and off-loading under complex conditions], *Jiefangjun bao* [PLA daily], 16 June 2011, available at [news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-06/16/c\\_121541436.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-06/16/c_121541436.htm); Zhong Kuirun and Xiao Delun, “Nanhai Jiandui 12 yongshi zhengzhan haishang leichang, chuangzao haishang saolei zhanfa” [12 warriors from South Sea Fleet take on minefield, invent on-water minesweeping tactics], *Jiefangjun bao* [PLA daily], 20 June 2011, available at [military.people.com.cn/GB/14945262.html](http://military.people.com.cn/GB/14945262.html).
  199. 罗援称中国是南海问题受害者已经一忍再忍(图) [“Luo Yuan Says China Is South China Sea Victim, Has Suffered Again and Again”], *Renmin Wang* [People’s net], 15 June 2011, [military.people.com.cn/GB/14902087.html](http://military.people.com.cn/GB/14902087.html); 菲媒高调宣称在南海拆中国标识 [“PHL Media Loudly Announces Demolition of Chinese Markers in South China Sea”], *Huanqiu Wang*, 16 June 2011, [world.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-06/1761659.html?agt=15422](http://world.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-06/1761659.html?agt=15422).
  200. 廖雷 [Liao Lei], 中国主流媒体在南海争端中的作用与影响: 基于信号传递视角的分析 [“The Role and Influence of Chinese Mainstream Media in the South China Sea Disputes: An Analysis from the Perspective of Signal Transmission”], *外交评论 [Foreign Affairs Review]*, no. 4 (2012), p. 60.
  201. Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts, “How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression,” *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 2 (2013), pp. 17–18.
  202. M. Taylor Fravel, “All Quiet in the South China Sea: Why Beijing Is Playing Nice (for Now),” *Foreign Affairs*, 22 March 2012, [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2012-03-22/all-quiet-south-china-sea](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2012-03-22/all-quiet-south-china-sea).
  203. “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu’s Remarks on China’s Maritime Law Enforcement and Surveillance on the South China Sea.”
  204. “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei’s Remarks on Vietnamese Ships Chasing Away Chinese Fishing Boats in the Waters off the Nan-sha Islands.” Emphasis added.
  205. *China Statistical Yearbook* and World Bank figures agree that after a temporary decline in 2009, the value of China’s oil imports bounced back so rapidly that the 2010 figure was an all-time high. The value of other raw materials followed the same pattern.
  206. M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33, no. 3 (2011), p. 307; also Thayer, “China’s Aggressive Assertiveness.” According to Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam researchers Do Thanh Hai and Nguyen Thuy Linh, “China has continuously obstructed and damaged hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation operations of other countries.” Do Thanh Hai and Nguyen Thuy Linh, “In Retrospect of China’s Policy toward the South China Sea Disputes since 2007,” *Vietnam Journal of International Studies* 2, no. 85 (2011), p. 3.
  207. Carlyle Thayer, “Chinese Ship Cuts Second Vietnamese Cable,” *Thayer Consultancy*, 9 June 2011, [www.viet-studies.info/kinhte/57491115-Thayer-China%92s-Cable-Cutting-Once-is-an-Incident-Twice-is-a-Pattern.pdf](http://www.viet-studies.info/kinhte/57491115-Thayer-China%92s-Cable-Cutting-Once-is-an-Incident-Twice-is-a-Pattern.pdf).
  208. This proposal was repeated twice in the MFA’s 8 March press conference, although it seemingly was not raised publicly during the May–July period.
  209. *Haijian 71*, one of the first vessels delivered from the CMS project approved in 2000, was commissioned in 2005. *Haijian 74* and *Haijian 84*, constructed in stage 2 of the same project, were commissioned in 2010 and 2011, respectively. One of the two Fisheries Administration vessels, *Yuzheng 303*, entered service in 2000 following a 1999 allocation. *Yuzheng 311*, a refurbished former PLA support ship, began its second career in 2009—see case study 3.
  210. Huy Duong was one of the first to point out that the location of the *Binh Minh 02* incident was precisely *outside* the theoretical Chinese EEZ that would be generated by the Paracel and Spratly groups. Dương Danh Huy, “Sự kiện ‘Binh Minh,’” *BBC Vietnamese*, 30 May 2011, available at [www.viet-studies.info/kinhte/SuKienBinhMinh\\_DDHHuy\\_BBC.pdf](http://www.viet-studies.info/kinhte/SuKienBinhMinh_DDHHuy_BBC.pdf).
  211. The same 2008 report that emphasized the need to “maintain the dispute” also recommended responding to Vietnam’s public offering of oil and gas tenders by “imposing countermeasures at the appropriate time”—after the Beijing Olympics. The report also recommended delaying the implementation of the controversial plan to establish Sansha City until after the Olympics. NISCSS, *Evaluative Report 2007*, pp. 40–41.

212. MOFA Vietnam official, interview by author, October 2013.
213. ICG, *Stirring Up the South China Sea (I)*.
214. See “Defenders of the Blue Domain.” This documentary shows the CMS patrols in disputed areas routinely encountering rival claimants’ ships carrying out not only energy surveys but even actual exploitation of hydrocarbon resources. CMS’s normal law enforcement against such activities was limited to announcements over 喊话 (two-way radio). However, the documentary also shows that, when authorized, the CMS took ad hoc coercive actions against Vietnamese ships.
215. 国防部举行记者会回应热点问题 [“Defense Ministry Holds Press Conference to Respond to Current Issues”], 新闻联播 [CCTV Network News], 27 September 2012, news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20120927/106361.shtml.
216. See, for example, 军报文章: 激化矛盾无助于南海问题解决 [“Military Newspaper Article: Agitating Contradictions Is Unhelpful to Resolution of SCS Issue”], 解放军报 [PLA Daily], 14 June 2011, news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-06/14/c\_121530930.htm.
217. Vietnamese media had published detailed reports of harassment of *Viking II* by unidentified fishing boats several days before the incident took place. “1 More Vietnam Ship Harassed by Foreign Vessels,” *Tuoi Tre*, 1 June 2011, english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/society/8634/1-more-vietnam-ship-harassed-by-foreign-vessels.html. You Ji reports that the cutting of the cable was ordered by the PLA’s Xisha Surveillance Unit, but for safety reasons rather than aggression. You Ji, “The PLA and Diplomacy: Unraveling Myths about the Military Role in Foreign Policy Making,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 86 (2014), p. 251 note 79. This suggests the protagonists were members of the 海上民兵 (maritime militia), conducting operations under PLA command—an interpretation supported by the passive role the Fisheries Administration authorities ascribe to themselves in their account of events. See Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2012*, p. 62.
218. South China Sea Arbitration (Phil. v. China), Case No. 2013-19, Award, p. 325 (Perm. Ct. Arb. 2016), pca-cpa.org/.
219. For a blow-by-blow account from fishermen involved, see Zeng Ming, “Hainan yumin: Qu Huangyan Dao yao zuolao” [Going to Huangyan Island means going to jail], *Nanfang zhoumo* [Southern weekend], 4 May 2012, available at news.qq.com/a/20120504/000428.htm.
220. By August, Manila had issued twelve formal diplomatic protests over the incident. Ryan Chua, “Philippines to Bring China Dispute to World Body,” *ABS-CBN News*, 3 August 2012, news.abs-cbn.com/-depth/08/03/12/philippines-bring-china-dispute-world-body.
221. In late 2016, following new Philippine president Rodrigo R. Duterte’s strong pro-Beijing overtures, the PRC moderated its position somewhat, tolerating Filipino fishing activities. However, as of June 2018, it has not withdrawn its ships from the shoal. “Pinoy Fishermen Say They Can Fish in Scarborough Shoal Again,” *ABS-CBN News*, 28 October 2016, news.abs-cbn.com/video/news/10/27/16/pinoy-fishermen-say-they-can-fish-in-scarborough-shoal-again.
222. A string of comparable cases of Philippine authorities detaining PRC fisherfolk at the atoll had occurred between 1997 and 2006, but Beijing never attempted to impose punishment in response, beyond diplomatic protests.
223. 28 April saw one of the earliest instances of coercive PRC actions to deny Philippine access to the shoal. See *South China Sea Arbitration*, p. 418.
224. Christopher Bodeen, “Trade, Public Anger Sharpening in Beijing-Manila [sic] Spat,” *Yahoo!*, 10 May 2012, www.yahoo.com/news/trade-public-anger-sharpening-beijing-manila-spat-053211750--finance.html; Madel Sabater and Marvyn Benaning, “President Seeks to Expand Banana Market,” *Manila Bulletin*, 14 May 2012, www.mb.com.ph/articles/359519/president-seeks-to-expand-banana-market/.
225. Zhao, “Foreign Policy Implications,” pp. 549–50; Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot,” pp. 73–75, 80.
226. Fu Ying and Wu Shicun, “South China Sea: How We Got Here,” *National Interest*, 9 May 2016, nationalinterest.org/feature/south-china-sea-how-we-got-stage-16118?page=show. According to the two officials: “Almost instantly, images of the arrested Chinese fishermen being stripped to the waist and exposed to the scorching sun on the deck made headlines on print and digital media in China, triggering off an outcry among the Chinese general public. China was thus forced to take countermeasures, making urgent diplomatic representations to the Philippines, and sending marine surveillance ships and fishing administrative ships to the waters around Huangyan Island.” But the CMS ships in fact had arrived at the shoal long before any media coverage began. The Philippine navy’s official version of events states that the Chinese ships arrived around 4:10 PM on 10 April, which is consistent with a Xinhua report that states they arrived around 5 PM. See Nathaniel Y. Casem [Col., PN]



- to Chief of Staff, Armed Forces of the Philippines, “Report on Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal Incident,” 11 April 2012, annex 77 in Memorial of the Philippines, South China Sea Arbitration (Phil. v. China), Case No. 2013-19 (30 March 2014), available at [www.pcacases.com/pcadocs/The%20Philippines%27%20Memorial%20-%20Volume%20IV%20%28Annexes%2061-102%29.pdf](http://www.pcacases.com/pcadocs/The%20Philippines%27%20Memorial%20-%20Volume%20IV%20%28Annexes%2061-102%29.pdf), and “Chinese Fishing Boat Returns after Stalemate with Philippine Navy,” *Xinhua*, 18 April 2012, [news.xinhuanet.com/english/video/2012-04/18/c\\_131535352.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/video/2012-04/18/c_131535352.htm).
227. Most of these bulletins were based on the MFA spokesperson’s remarks, including the demand that the Philippines withdraw its ships. On 16 April, CCTV reported that Minister of Defense Liang Guanglie had toured the Guangzhou Military Region to inspect mobilization work for border and coastal defense. There, the report read, “he emphasized that border and coastal defense was at the front line of defending sovereignty and maritime rights.” CCTV *Wanjian Xinwen* (*Evening News*), 16 April 2012.
228. “Liang Guanglie jiu Huangyan Dao duizhi biaotai: Junfang xingdong genju wajiao xuyao” [Liang Guanglie states position on Huangyan Island standoff: Military’s actions are according to diplomatic requirements], *Qilu wanbao* [Qilu evening news], 25 April 2012, [news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-04-25/041924324793.shtml](http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-04-25/041924324793.shtml).
229. Ministry of Defense (MOD) press conference (Geng Yansheng), 26 April 2012. The spokesperson declined to answer when asked for specifics of this cooperation with civilian maritime agencies.
230. “Jiefangjun junguan: Yidan zhongyang jiu Huangyan Dao zuochu juece haijun yiburongci” [PLA officer: The moment the center makes a decision on Huangyan Island, navy will be duty-bound], *iFeng*, 30 April 2012, [news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/nanhaizhengduan/content-3/detail\\_2012\\_04/30/14246733\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/nanhaizhengduan/content-3/detail_2012_04/30/14246733_0.shtml).
231. Yu Jingjie and Xing Lei, “Zhongguo liang sou zhifachuan shili Huangyan Dao” [Two Chinese law-enforcement ships leave Huangyan Island], *Renmin ribao* [People’s daily], 24 April 2012, p. 21; Zhang Ming, “Zhongguo Yuzheng-310 he yi sou haijianchuan likai Huangyan Dao haiyu” [China’s *Yuzheng 310* and one marine surveillance ship leave Huangyan Island], *CNS*, 23 April 2012, [www.chinanews.com/gn/2012/04-23/3840431.shtml](http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2012/04-23/3840431.shtml).
232. The head of the Philippines’ Northern Luzon Command, the unit responsible for Scarborough Shoal, stated that as of 8 PM, 23 April, *Yuzheng 310* was located eight nautical miles southeast of the shoal and *Haijian 71* was twelve nautical miles away from the Philippine Coast Guard ship. “Chinese Ships Remain at Scarborough Shoal, Says Alcantara,” *Zambo Times*, 25 April 2012, [www.zambotimes.com/archives/46753-Chinese-ships-remain-at-Scarborough-Shoal,-says-Alcantara.html](http://www.zambotimes.com/archives/46753-Chinese-ships-remain-at-Scarborough-Shoal,-says-Alcantara.html). In another example of lax information control, on 23 April the Communist Youth League’s official newspaper, citing local media, reported that two Philippine warships and an antisubmarine aircraft were “heading for Huangyan Island.” This was refuted promptly by the commander of the Philippine Navy, as well as the PRC embassy in Manila, but not before it created a sensation across commercial news sites and social media. Chen Xiaoru, “Feilubin jie waili tiaoxin Zhongguo Nanhai quanyi” [Philippines enlists outside help to challenge China’s South China Sea rights], *Zhongguo qingnian bao* [China youth daily], 23 April 2012, p. 3, [www.cyol.net/](http://www.cyol.net/); Gao Fei and Zhao Jiemin, “Fei junfang founen xiang Huangyan Dao haiyu zengpai jianchuan feiji” [PHL military denies sending ships and aircraft toward Huangyan Island], *Xinhua*, 24 April 2012, [news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-04/24/c\\_123025235.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-04/24/c_123025235.htm). A detailed account of this perplexing PRC media coverage, and online reactions from Chinese readers, can be found at Andrew Chubb, “Comfortable with Their Mistresses, the Leaders Haven’t Gotten Out of Bed’: Perplexing Chinese Media Coverage of the Scarborough Standoff,” *South Sea Conversations* (blog), 26 April 2012, [southseaconversations.wordpress.com/](http://southseaconversations.wordpress.com/).
233. Bo Xilai had been a contender for a position on the Politburo Standing Committee and a potential rival to Xi Jinping as the next top leader. However, his career ended dramatically when his police chief and trusted confidant Wang Lijun fled to the U.S. consulate in Chengdu in February 2012. The CCP spent the following six months deciding what Bo’s fate would be, eventually expelling him from the party and charging him with an array of crimes, including corruption. See John Garnaut, *The Rise and Fall of the House of Bo* (London: Penguin, 2012).
234. “Waijiaobu fubuzhang Fu Ying jiu Huangyan Dao shijian zaici yuejian Feilubin zhuhua dashiguan linshi daiban” [Vice-foreign minister Fu Ying summons Philippines embassy chargé d’affaires again over Huangyan Island incident], *MFA*, 7 May 2012, [www.mfa.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t929746.shtml](http://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t929746.shtml).
235. In the first quarter of 2012, the index’s average daily value was around 1,000, down from 1,500 in the fourth quarter of 2011, and nearly 3,500 through the middle part of that year.
236. See Andrew Chubb, “‘Their Bottom Line Is Beijing’s 2nd Ring Road’: Reactions to the Philippines Navy–Chinese Fishing Boat Incident,”

- South Sea Conversations* (blog), 20 October 2011, southseaconversations.wordpress.com/. The South China Sea BSI was around 3,000 in October 2011, when the Philippines seized a group of dinghies in the Spratly Islands, attracting widespread commercial media attention. On that occasion, China did not escalate the situation, but instead defied nationalist public opinion and handled it diplomatically.
237. The *People's Daily* on 21 March (p. 9) had featured an illustrated splash on "regular rights-defense patrols," with pictures from a Xinhua photographer who accompanied the mission. See also Rong Shoujun, "Gaoqing zutu: Benwang jizhe zhiji Zhongguo Haijiao Nanhai xunhang" [High-res gallery: Our reporter shoots CMS South China Sea patrol], *Xinhua*, 28 March 2012, news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2012-03/28/c\_122892633.htm. In a 26 February interview with the *Guangzhou Daily*, Luo Yuan had predicted crises in the South China Sea in 2012. With uncanny timing, he also had penned a commentary on 9 April warning the Philippines' politicians that "the bird that sticks its neck out will pay the price." Li Mingbo, "Jiang Zhongguo dang jiaxiangdi Meiguo xuancuo le duishou" [U.S. making China its prospective enemy is choosing the wrong target], *Guangzhou ribao* [Guangzhou daily], 26 February 2012, p. A8, gzdaily.dayoo.com/html/2012-02/26/content\_1623366.htm, accessed via *Internet Archive*, archive.org/; Luo Yuan, "Shaojiang: Fei wu qizhang, Zhongguo zai gei heping yi zuihoude jihui" [Major general: PHL should not be naughty, China is giving peace its last chance], *Huanqiu shibao* [Global times], 9 April 2012, mil.huanqiu.com/Observation/2012-04/2593306.html.
238. Documented in Chubb, "Comfortable with Their Mistresses." See also Chubb, "Chinese Popular Nationalism," app. 5.
239. Bill Bishop, "Today's China Readings," *Sinocism*, 10 May 2012, sinocism.com/2012/05/. The hashtag eventually was dislodged from the top of the list by a video report from a provincial TV reporter embedded with the Fisheries Administration who landed on the disputed reef to "replant" the five-star red flag at Scarborough Shoal. The change from the movement of Chinese warships to the journalist's vainglorious mission typified the media agenda's turn away from suggestions of impending military confrontation and toward assuring readers that China was already in control of the tiny territory.
240. Documented in Andrew Chubb, "Small-Scale Protests in Manila, Even Smaller-Scale Protests in Beijing," *South Sea Conversations* (blog), 18 May 2012, southseaconversations.wordpress.com/2012/05/18/small-scale-protests-in-manila-even-smaller-scale-protests-in-beijing/. A petition proclaiming that the Chinese people "absolutely will not tolerate" the Philippines' "attempts to seize our territory" and "piratical acts" was signed at least 12.7 million times. "Qianqu huaren da qianming huodong" [Great global petition movement], Shouji tengxun wang [Tencent mobile], accessed 30 September 2015, infoapp.3g.qq.com/g/s?sid=AVM-ILmyogI1x7dFLz-Nk4N&aid=express\_index&action=1 (no longer available).
241. On 3 May, the Philippines' military announced that China had increased its patrol boat presence from three to four ships, along with ten fishing boats, making a total of fourteen PRC ships, the highest number since the standoff began. Alexis Romero, "Chinese Boats Crowding Shoal," *Philippine Star*, 3 May 2012, p. 1, www.philstar.com/headlines/2012/05/03/802659/chinese-boats-crowding-shoal. By 7 May, China's government ships were using floodlights to drive Philippine fishing boats from the lagoon and fishermen reported being shadowed by rifle-carrying PRC personnel in rubber boats. Alexis Romero, "Philippine Officials: Pinoys Can Fish in Panatag's Lagoon," *Philippine Star*, 7 May 2012, www.philstar.com/breaking-news/804938/philippine-officials-pinoys-can-fish-panatags-lagoon; Agence France-Presse, "Filipino-Chinese Ocean Comradery Fades amid Row," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 12 May 2012, globalnation.inquirer.net/36647/filipino-chinese-ocean-comradery-fades-amid-row.
242. The story begins by declaring, "The Chinese people are enraged by the offensive behavior of the Philippines over the Huangyan Island dispute," and goes on to suggest, at least three times, that China might use military force. Interestingly, it accuses Manila of "tr[ying] to use domestic sentiment as a weapon against China." If this was the perception in Beijing—and there is little reason to doubt that it was—this would suggest China was seeking to do the same.
243. For example, in an interview several months later, discussing Beijing's decision to maintain its permanent presence at Scarborough Shoal, Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario said, "I can see the constituency of China becoming more assertive and the leadership will not be able to ignore that environment." Greg Torode, "China 'Dictatorial' in Scarborough Shoal Dispute, Says Albert del Rosario," *South China Morning Post*, 30 November 2012, www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1094200/china-dictatorial-scarborough-shoal-dispute-says-del-rosario. Aquino appears to have had an acute awareness of the popular nationalist factor before the standoff began. In a 2011 media interview, he declined to answer a question on the South China Sea issue, on the

- basis that “we will be driven by our respective publics not to talk to each other.” “Press Briefing by President Benigno S. Aquino III in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental on 4 March 2011.”
244. Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2009*, pp. 159–60.
  245. Conor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson, “Model Maritime Militia: Tanmen’s Leading Role in the April 2012 Scarborough Shoal Incident,” *CIMSEC*, 21 April 2016, [cimsec.org/model-maritime-militia-tanmens-leading-role-april-2012-scarborough-shoal-incident/24573/](http://cimsec.org/model-maritime-militia-tanmens-leading-role-april-2012-scarborough-shoal-incident/24573/); Matthew Carney, “China’s Secret Maritime Militia: Fishermen the Forward Guard in South China Sea Dispute,” *ABC*, 8 May 2016, [www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-09/china-secret-maritime-militia-the-forward-guard-in-south-china/7391216/](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-09/china-secret-maritime-militia-the-forward-guard-in-south-china/7391216/).
  246. Geoff Wade, “Beidou: China’s New Satellite Navigation System,” *FlagPost* (blog), *Parliament of Australia*, 26 February 2015, [www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2015/February/Beidou\\_China\\_new\\_satellite\\_navigation\\_system/](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2015/February/Beidou_China_new_satellite_navigation_system/).
  247. “Liu Cigui: Bohai yiyu haishang wuran yan-zhong, haiyang fazhan luobi shengtai baohu” [Liu Cigui: Pollution serious from Bohai oil spill, signing up to ecological protection], *Phoenix TV*, 11 June 2012, [phtv.ifeng.com/program/wdsz/detail\\_2012\\_06/11/15202134\\_0.shtml](http://phtv.ifeng.com/program/wdsz/detail_2012_06/11/15202134_0.shtml).
  248. SOA, *China Ocean Yearbook 2010*, p. 126; SOA, *China Ocean Yearbook 2012*, p. 176.
  249. Thus, Beijing’s willingness to use coercion to contend with Manila for control of the shoal may have existed earlier, but without being tested and revealed. Indeed, Philippine government records of its earlier interactions with Chinese fishing boats at the shoal presented to the UNCLOS arbitral tribunal also suggest a progressive hardening of the PRC position even before 2006. *South China Sea Arbitration*, pp. 322–25.
  250. See Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2007*, p. 139; Fisheries Administration, *China Fisheries Yearbook 2009*, pp. 159–60; SOA, *China Ocean Yearbook 2010*, p. 126; SOA, *China Ocean Yearbook 2012*, p. 176; “Huangyan Dao yu yeyu wuxiandian” [Huangyan Island and amateur radio], *MIIT*, 19 June 2012, [www.miit.gov.cn/n1146285/n1146352/n3054355/n3057735/n3057736/c3542821/content.html](http://www.miit.gov.cn/n1146285/n1146352/n3054355/n3057735/n3057736/c3542821/content.html); and “Zhongguo yu Feilübin Zhongsha Huangyan Dao zhi zheng” [The China–Philippines spat over Scarborough Shoal], *Sohu*, 21 April 2012, [pic.news.sohu.com/group-274150.shtml](http://pic.news.sohu.com/group-274150.shtml).
  251. Commissioned in 2010, *Haijian 75* was the first cutter from the second stage of the shipbuilding project the State Council had approved back in 2000. For *Haijian 84*, see note 209. Once the stage 1 ships were all completed and operational, stage 2 was handed over to the National Development and Reform Commission for implementation in 2007. See SOA, *China Ocean Yearbook 2008*, p. 129.
  252. Counterintuitively, although the PLAN probably guaranteed the operation’s security from over the horizon, China’s increased naval power may not have been a major factor behind China’s change in behavior, as China already enjoyed overwhelming military superiority over the virtually nonexistent Philippine navy from the 1990s or early in the next decade onward. If Beijing based its 2012 decision on increased confidence of prevailing even if the U.S. Navy became involved, then these new capabilities could have been a factor in the policy change; but it seems unlikely that PRC decision makers would have been this confident.
  253. The global financial crisis also may have been a factor. Beijing began increasing its on-water presence almost immediately after the U.S.–Philippines foreign and defense ministers’ (2+2) meeting on 30 April, at which Washington declined to take a position on the administrative control of Scarborough Shoal or declare that it was covered under the two countries’ defense treaty. This compared unfavorably with the recognition by the United States of Japan’s “administration” of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, also claimed by China, in September 2010, affirming that they did fall under the bilateral defense treaty between the two. “Joint Statement of the United States–Philippines Ministerial Dialogue,” *State Department*, 30 April 2012, 2009–2017, [state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/04/188977.htm](http://state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/04/188977.htm).
  254. Tina G. Santos, “92 Ships Now in Panatag Shoal; Tensions Up,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 24 May 2012, [globalnation.inquirer.net/37711/92-china-ships-now-in-panatag-shoal-tensions-up/](http://globalnation.inquirer.net/37711/92-china-ships-now-in-panatag-shoal-tensions-up/).
  255. Liu, who was passed up for promotion at the 2012 CCP Congress, eventually became governor (and deputy party secretary) of Hainan Province in 2015—evidence of his ambition. Linda Jakobson reports that Liu was “embittered” after failing to get the SOA’s administrative rank upgraded in 2013. Jakobson, *China’s Unpredictable Maritime Security Actors*, p. 18. Still, given that the situation involved a capable military warship on the Philippine side, it is unlikely Liu would have proceeded without agreement from the PLAN—the ultimate security guarantor for his civilian law-enforcement agency’s operations.

256. According to Chinese officials whom Jakobson interviewed, Xi was put in charge of a new top-level maritime-policy-coordination body sometime in “mid-2012,” and multiple sources indicate that he oversaw the PRC’s response to the crisis over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands later that year. See Linda Jakobson, *China’s Foreign Policy Dilemma* (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 5 February 2013), p. 9, available at [www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/jakobson\\_chinas\\_foreign\\_policy\\_dilemma\\_web3\\_use\\_this\\_0.pdf](http://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/jakobson_chinas_foreign_policy_dilemma_web3_use_this_0.pdf). In 2013, Xi also chose to associate himself prominently with the maritime militia company at the center of the Scarborough Shoal confrontations, suggesting a possible personal claim on the operation (see CCTV *Xinwen Lianbo* [Network News], 10 April 2013). But Beijing’s assertive on-water actions in the 2012 incident were quite consistent with the direction PRC maritime policy had taken under Hu from 2007 onward, in terms of both greater interest in Scarborough Shoal and increased use of coercion in the South China Sea more generally. So even if Xi was in charge, another leader would not necessarily have handled it differently.
257. For example, the PLA, MFA, and SOA; the Fisheries Administration and Customs Administration; and state-run tourism enterprises.
258. Other aspects of what might be regarded as strategic culture, such as the Maoist concept of “people’s war at sea,” using fisherfolk as frontline combatants, or Sun-tzu’s “winning without fighting” maxim, arguably were evident.
259. See Andrew Chubb, “Assessing Public Opinion’s Influence on Foreign Policy: The Case of China’s Assertive Maritime Behavior,” *Asian Security* 15, no. 2 (April 2018), pp. 12–14, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14799855.2018.1437723](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14799855.2018.1437723).
260. It was only on 28 September—more than two weeks after the nationalization of the islands and China’s response—that party media announced Bo’s expulsion from the party and the date for the opening of the Eighteenth Party Congress.
261. Peter Hays Gries, Derek Steiger, and Tao Wang, “Popular Nationalism and China’s Japan Policy: The Diaoyu Islands Protests, 2012–2013,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 98 (2016), p. 266; Weiss, *Powerful Patriots*, pp. 217–18; Reilly, “A Wave to Worry About?,” p. 215.
262. Song Yushan, “Liang an san di baodiao renshi jihua 12 ri chufa qianwang Diaoyu Dao xuanshi zhuquan” [*Baodiao* people from across the Taiwan Strait, Hong Kong, and Macao plan to set off for Diaoyu Islands on the 12th to proclaim sovereignty], *iFeng*, 11 August 2012, [news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/diaoyudaozhengduan/content-3/detail\\_2012\\_08/11/16733229\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/diaoyudaozhengduan/content-3/detail_2012_08/11/16733229_0.shtml).
263. 我们登上钓鱼岛 [“We Land on Diaoyu Islands”], CCTV, 15 August 2012, [news.cntv.cn/china/20120815/109598.shtml](http://news.cntv.cn/china/20120815/109598.shtml).
264. James Pomfret and Linda Sieg, “China Demands Japan Release Activists over Island Protest,” *Reuters*, 15 August 2012, [www.reuters.com/article/us-china-japan-diaoyu/china-demands-japan-release-activists-over-island-protest-idUSBRE87E0BJ20120815](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-japan-diaoyu/china-demands-japan-release-activists-over-island-protest-idUSBRE87E0BJ20120815).
265. “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang’s Remarks on the Diaoyu Islands Issue,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 17 August 2012, [www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2535\\_665405/t962128.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2535_665405/t962128.shtml).
266. Cited in Weiss, *Powerful Patriots*, p. 207 note 166.
267. “Zhongguo Haijian chuanbo biandui jintian dida Diaoyu Dao haiyu” [CMS fleet arrives today in Diaoyu Islands waters], CCTV *Xinwen Lianbo* [Network news], 14 September 2012, [news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20120914/106644.shtml](http://news.cntv.cn/program/xwlb/20120914/106644.shtml). The same day, CCTV also aired suggestive imagery of naval ships firing antiship missiles and the East Sea Fleet’s airborne division conducting paratroop drills. See, for example, “Wojun zhankai yixilie junshi yanxi” [Our military launches series of military exercises], CCTV, 14 September 2012, [news.cntv.cn/china/20120914/107354.shtml](http://news.cntv.cn/china/20120914/107354.shtml).
268. Reinhard Drifte, “The Japan-China Confrontation over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands: Between ‘Shelving’ and ‘Dispute Escalation,’” *Japan Focus* 12, no. 30 (27 July 2014), [ajiff.org/2014/12/30/Reinhard-Drifte/4154/article.html](http://ajiff.org/2014/12/30/Reinhard-Drifte/4154/article.html).
269. Christopher Cairns and Allen Carlson, “Real-World Islands in a Social Media Sea: Nationalism and Censorship on Weibo during the 2012 Diaoyu/Senkaku Crisis,” *China Quarterly* 225 (March 2016), p. 34. Protests were reported in at least forty cities on 19 August, according to Jeremy L. Wallace and Jessica Chen Weiss, “The Political Geography of Nationalist Protest in China: Cities and the 2012 Anti-Japanese Protests,” *China Quarterly* 222 (June 2015), p. 426.
270. Teddy Ng and Keith Zhai, “Japanese Prime Minister Noda Admits ‘Miscalculation’ over Diaoyus,” *South China Morning Post*, 21 September 2012, [www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1041878/japanese-prime-minister-noda-admits-miscalculation-over-diaoyus](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1041878/japanese-prime-minister-noda-admits-miscalculation-over-diaoyus).
271. Firsthand accounts include Eric Fish, “On Beijing’s Anti-Japan Protests,” *Sinostand* (blog), 15 September 2012, [sinostand.com/2012/09/15/on-beijings-anti-japan-protests](http://sinostand.com/2012/09/15/on-beijings-anti-japan-protests), and Andrew Chubb, “A Lazy Sunday Afternoon at the Beijing Anti-Japan Protests,” *South Sea*

- Conversations* (blog), 17 September 2012, southseaconversations.wordpress.com.
272. For example, headlines about hundreds of Chinese fishing boats heading for the disputed islands were prohibited. “Zhenlibu: Yuzhengchuan zhifa jinzhan” [Ministry of Truth: Fisheries Law Enforcement developments], *China Digital Times*, 18 September 2012, www.chinadigitaltimes.net/.
  273. For more on the tendency of assertive actions to stimulate rather than assuage nationalist sentiments, see Chubb, “Chinese Popular Nationalism,” chap. 5.
  274. See Andrew Chubb, “The Halting of the Anti-Japan Protests (and Bagpipes in Beijing),” *South Sea Conversations* (blog), 19 September 2012, southseaconversations.wordpress.com/.
  275. He Xiaojing, Liu Yungang, and Ge Qiuqing, “Diaoyu Dao shijian de chidu zhengzhi yu yanlun fenxi” [Analysis of the Diaoyu Islands incident by politics of scale and textual analysis], *Shijie dili yanjiu* [World geography research] 24, no. 3 (2015), p. 28.
  276. Zhang Shiming, “Gaige shiqi yingxiang Zhongguo duiwai zhengce de ruogan guonei yinsu” [Several domestic factors affecting China’s foreign policy in the reform era], *Haerbin Gongye Daxue xuebao* [Journal of Harbin Industrial University] 8, no. 5 (2006), p. 31. There are domestic motivations for channeling public sentiments via tough rhetoric, besides the well-known “release valve” logic of allowing the public to vent. Recent research indicates that hard-line verbal rhetoric actually may satisfy public expectations for responses to perceived international provocations. Frances Yaping Wang, “The Dog That Barks: Understanding Propaganda Campaigns on Territorial Disputes” (PhD dissertation, Univ. of Virginia, 2018), available at [libraetd.lib.virginia.edu/public\\_view/4x51hj41s/](http://libraetd.lib.virginia.edu/public_view/4x51hj41s/).
  277. “Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan’s Response,” *MOFA (Japan)*, 4 April 2017, www.mofa.go.jp/.
  278. Johnston, “How New and Assertive?,” pp. 27–28.
  279. “Status of Activities by Chinese Government Vessels and Chinese Fishing Vessels in Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands,” *MOFA (Japan)*, 12 August 2016, p. 10, www.mofa.go.jp/.
  280. Yu Jianbin, “Lixing xunhang, xuanshi zhuquan” [Routine patrols, proclaiming sovereignty], *Renmin ribao* [People’s daily], 21 March 2012, p. 9.
  281. *Ibid.*; Agence France-Presse, “China to Step Up Patrol in Disputed Islands: Report,” *Asia One*, 20 March 2012, news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Asia/Story/A1Story20120320-334521.html. These public comments were made four weeks before Tokyo governor Ishihara announced his plan to purchase the islands, and so may have been unrelated to Japan’s actions. However, Ishihara reportedly had opened negotiations on the issue in December 2011, so the PRC may have become aware of the plan before the announcement in April. If so, the PRC officials’ comments—made to separate media outlets two days apart—could have been an attempt to warn Tokyo not to allow the plan to go ahead. See “Senkaku Snafu Laid to Broad Miscalculation,” *Japan Times*, 20 November 2012, www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2012/11/20/national/senkaku-snafu-laid-to-broad-miscalculation, and “Inside Look: Japan Tried but Failed to Avert Disaster in China Dispute,” *Asahi Shimbun*, 26 September 2012, [ajw.asahi.com/article/behind\\_news/politics/AJ201209260067](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201209260067), accessed via *Internet Archive*, [archive.org/](http://archive.org/).
  282. Hull numbers of ships participating in patrols in the Diaoyu 12 nm zone were published regularly on the SOA website. Provincial units involved in sustaining the regular presence included the Guangdong fisheries law-enforcement boat *Yuzheng 44061* and Fujian CMS ship *Haijian 8002*. Li Mei and Zhang Wuke, “Zhongguo Yuzheng-44061 chuan Diaoyu Dao weiquan huyu shengli guilai” [China Fisheries *Yuzheng 44061* boat victoriously returns from Diaoyu Islands rights-defense fisheries protection], *Zhanjiang Fisheries Administration*, 5 November 2012, www.hfdsb.gov.cn/News/fanzhu/201211/20121105103637\_17559.html; Cai Zhengwen, “Fujian sheng zongdui shangbannian gongzuo huigu” [Review of Fujian provincial fleet work in first half of the year], *Zhongguo haiyang bao* [China ocean news], 19 July 2013, www.oceanol.com/zfjc/dwjianshe/27060.html.
  283. Fravel, “Explaining China’s Escalation over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands,” p. 31.
  284. Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, p. 33. External threats accentuate the preventive logic of displays of resolve to deter encroachments elsewhere, while internal threats—including divisions and unrest—elevate the domestic political incentives to show strength externally. Following the former logic, You Ji explains the initiation of the patrols around Diaoyu as being aimed at deterring further external provocations. You Ji, *Deciphering Beijing’s Maritime Security Policy and Strategy in Managing Sovereignty Disputes in the China Seas*, RSIS Policy Brief (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, October 2013), p. 6.

285. According to one source, the multiagency Maritime Rights Leading Small Group was formed under Xi Jinping's leadership on 14 September, the day the regular patrols began. Kenji Minemura, "China's Senkakus Operations Overseen by Party Task Force Led by Xi," *Asahi Shimbun*, 4 February 2013, [ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201302040089/](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201302040089/).
286. Green, Hicks, and Schaus, *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, pp. 169–201.
287. The foreign ministry repeatedly answered questions about the actions of Chinese ships, defending them as being "irreproachable" (无可非议), and the Ministry of Defense stated that "Chinese navy warships patrolling in jurisdictional waters are completely justified." MFA press conferences, 10 May (Hua Chunying) and 22 May and 28 May (Hong Lei); MOD press conference, 30 May (Geng Yansheng).
288. MFA press conference (Qin Gang), 10 March 2014.
289. 菲报道称菲海军向南沙仁爱礁派出3艘军舰 ["PHL Reports Claim PHL Navy Dispatches 3 Warships to Ren'ai Reef in Spratlys"], *Xinhua*, 10 May 2013, [news.sina.com.cn/c/2013-05-10/113727083683.shtml](http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2013-05-10/113727083683.shtml).
290. 菲军舰非法坐滩侵犯中国领土主权 ["Philippine Warship's Illegal Grounding Violates China's Territorial Sovereignty"], 晚间新闻 [CCTV *Evening News*], 30 May 2013, [news.cntv.cn/2013/05/30/VIDE1369924919937596.shtml](http://news.cntv.cn/2013/05/30/VIDE1369924919937596.shtml).
291. Baidu News search for 仁爱礁 (Second Thomas Shoal) in the full text of news stories between 1 January 2003 and 31 December 2012 finds only six results, none focused on the issue.
292. The issue also was covered repeatedly by state television, and exclusive information from "authoritative channels" in the centrally owned tabloid *Huanqiu Shibao* repeatedly drove the issue up the public agenda during this period. On 23 May, for example, numerous stories from central media outlets mentioned that China's ships had "powerfully blocked" Philippine attempts to construct on the shoal, using a "watch and prevent" approach while staying in "actual control" of the shoal. The *Huanqiu* also issued numerous editorials on the topic (e.g., on 24 and 31 May).
293. Ryan Martinson, "Power to the Provinces: The Devolution of China's Maritime Rights Protection," Jamestown Foundation *China Brief* 14, no. 17 (2014), [jamestown.org/program/power-to-the-provinces-the-devolution-of-chinas-maritime-rights-protection/](http://jamestown.org/program/power-to-the-provinces-the-devolution-of-chinas-maritime-rights-protection/).
294. The first prominent mention of this idea appears in a *Huanqiu Shibao* report from 23 May, which cited "authoritative channels" stating that the Philippines had sent three military ships toward the shoal on 9 May, with the intention of consolidating its outpost there. 中国海军严密监视 力阻菲律宾赖在仁爱礁 ["Chinese Navy Closely Monitors, Powerfully Blocks Philippine Lingerling at Ren'ai Reef"], 环球时报 [Global Times], 23 May 2013, [world.huanqiu.com/exclusive/2013-05/3961234.html](http://world.huanqiu.com/exclusive/2013-05/3961234.html). The first official mention of this narrative appears to have occurred on 29 May, in comments made to Philippine defense secretary Voltaire Gazmin. Tarra Quismundo, "PH Tells China: Don't Tell Us What to Do within Our Territory," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 30 May 2013, [globalnation.inquirer.net/76051/ph-tells-china-dont-tell-us-what-to-do-within-our-territory](http://globalnation.inquirer.net/76051/ph-tells-china-dont-tell-us-what-to-do-within-our-territory). It was hinted at in Hong Lei's 30 May press conference.
295. Green, Hicks, and Schaus, *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, p. 187.
296. Jakobson, *China's Unpredictable Maritime Security Actors*, p. 19. For a summary of the SOA reorganization, see Lyle Morris, "Taming the Five Dragons? China Consolidates Its Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies," Jamestown Foundation *China Brief* 13, no. 7 (28 March 2013), [jamestown.org/program/taming-the-five-dragons-china-consolidates-its-maritime-law-enforcement-agencies/](http://jamestown.org/program/taming-the-five-dragons-china-consolidates-its-maritime-law-enforcement-agencies/).
297. This area was slightly less provocative because it was to the south of Triton Island, rather than to the west (i.e., toward the Vietnamese coast), as the *Triton 626* work area had been.
298. MFA official Yi Xianliang claimed that Vietnam had committed 1,547 acts of 冲撞 (charging) up to 13 June. Yi Xianliang, "Waijiaobu Bianhaisi fuzizhang Yi Xianliang jiu Zhongjian-nanxiangmu juxing chui Fenghui" [MFA Boundary and Oceanic Affairs Department deputy Yi Xianliang holds briefing on Triton-South project], *MFA*, 13 June 2014, [www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjb\\_673085/zjzg\\_673183/bjhsyws\\_674671/xgxw\\_674673/t1165600.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjb_673085/zjzg_673183/bjhsyws_674671/xgxw_674673/t1165600.shtml).
299. See Euan McKirdy, "A Dangerous Dance: China, Vietnam Posture in the South China Sea," *CNN*, 2 June 2014, [www.cnn.com/2014/05/28/world/asia/vietnam-china-dispute-mckirdy/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/28/world/asia/vietnam-china-dispute-mckirdy/index.html).
300. In all, protests were reported in twenty-two out of Vietnam's sixty-three provinces and municipalities. In the worst incident, a mob numbering around a thousand attacked a Taiwan-owned steel mill that was being constructed by PRC state-owned enterprise China Metallurgical Group Corporation. According to a statement from the company, four Chinese workers were killed and 153 injured, twenty-three seriously.

- “Zhongzhi Jituan quanli zuzhi zai Yue yuangong jiu zhu chehui gongzuo” [CMGC organizes aid and evacuation for Vietnam-based staff], *China Metallurgical Group Company*, 20 May 2014, [www.mcc.com.cn/Item/45926.aspx](http://www.mcc.com.cn/Item/45926.aspx), accessed via *Internet Archive*, [archive.org/](http://archive.org/).
301. “Minitrue: Gao Yu, Dispute with Vietnam, Bitcoin,” *China Digital Times*, 8 May 2014, [chinadigitaltimes.net/2014/05/minitrue-gao-yu-dispute-vietnam-bitcoin](http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2014/05/minitrue-gao-yu-dispute-vietnam-bitcoin).
302. Xinhua, “Yuenan 5 tian 171 ci chongzhuang Zhongfang chuanzhi” [Vietnam charges Chinese side’s ships 171 times in 5 days], *Beijing wanbao* [Beijing evening news], 9 May 2014, [bjwb.bjd.com.cn/html/2014-05/09/content\\_177688.htm](http://bjwb.bjd.com.cn/html/2014-05/09/content_177688.htm), accessed via *Internet Archive*, [archive.org/](http://archive.org/).
303. *Ibid.*; MFA press conference (Hua Chunying), 12 May 2014; Xinhua, “China Once Again Urges Vietnam to Immediately Stop Disruptions of Chinese Company’s Operation,” *Xinhuanet*, 17 May 2014, [news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-05/17/c\\_133339964.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-05/17/c_133339964.htm).
304. Andrew Chubb, “China’s Information Management in the Sino-Vietnamese Confrontation: Caution and Sophistication in the Internet Era,” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief* 14, no. 11 (June 2014), pp. 14–18, [jamestown.org/](http://jamestown.org/).
305. Authorities use the term 双首页 (the double front pages) to refer to the general and news sections of portal websites, which receive the most traffic. See, for example, “Minitrue: CCTV’s Rui Chenggang Detained,” *China Digital Times*, 12 July 2014, [chinadigitaltimes.net/2014/07/minitrue-cctvs-rui-chenggang-investigation/](http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2014/07/minitrue-cctvs-rui-chenggang-investigation/).
306. The party line, when it came out—nearly forty-eight hours after the Vietnamese rioting began—elided any linkage between the violence and the South China Sea issue, and emphasized the actions the Vietnamese party-state was taking to make amends. The case is detailed in Chubb, “China’s Information Management.”
307. Brian Eyler, “The Anti-Vietnam Protest That Didn’t Happen,” *East by Southeast*, 19 May 2014, [www.eastbysoutheast.com/anti-vietnam-protest-didnt-happen/](http://www.eastbysoutheast.com/anti-vietnam-protest-didnt-happen/).
308. “China Rejects Vietnamese Complaints over Oil Drilling in South China Sea,” *Spratlys*, 23 November 2004, [www.spratlys.org/news/nov04/23a.htm](http://www.spratlys.org/news/nov04/23a.htm); “Economics, Geopolitics Fuel Vietnam-China Row,” *Reuters*, 20 March 1997, Factiva.
309. “Chinese Warships Rush toward Vietnamese Vessels in Vietnam’s Waters,” *Tuoi Tre*, 10 July 2014, [tuoitrenews.vn/society/20883/chinese-warships-rush-toward-vietnamese-vessels-in-vietnams-waters/](http://tuoitrenews.vn/society/20883/chinese-warships-rush-toward-vietnamese-vessels-in-vietnams-waters/), via *Internet Archive*, [archive.org/](http://archive.org/).
310. For a detailed argument to this effect, see also Yingxian Long, “China’s Decision to Deploy HYSY-981 in the South China Sea: Bureaucratic Politics with Chinese Characteristics,” *Asian Security* 12, no. 3 (2016), pp. 148–65, esp. p. 160.
311. PRC state-owned oil companies long had been eager to explore in disputed areas, but the party leadership routinely rebuffed these lobbying attempts during the Hu era. Erica S. Downs, “Business and Politics in the South China Sea: Explaining HYSY 981’s Foray into Disputed Waters,” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief* 14, no. 12 (June 2014), pp. 6–8, [jamestown.org/](http://jamestown.org/).
312. The source specified that the foreign ministry’s representation on the LSG comes from its relatively hawkish 边海司 (Department of Boundary and Oceanic Affairs), with the specialist 亚洲司 (Department of Asian Affairs) left on the sidelines. ICG, *Stirring Up the South China Sea (III)*, Asia Report 267 (Beijing: 2015), p. 10.
313. On the integration issues affecting the CCG around this time, see Jakobson, *China’s Unpredictable Maritime Security Actors*, pp. 18–20.

## About the Author

Andrew Chubb is a British Academy postdoctoral fellow at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. A graduate of the University of Western Australia, his work examines the linkages between Chinese domestic politics and international relations. More broadly, Andrew's interests include maritime and territorial disputes, strategic communication, political propaganda, and Chinese Communist Party history.





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