

**THE RISE OF CHINA AS A CONSTRUCTED NARRATIVE:
SOUTHEAST ASIA'S RESPONSE TO ASIA'S POWER SHIFT**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety.

I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

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Contents

Summary	5
List of Tables	6
Chapter 1 Introduction	7
Chapter 2 Explaining the Rise of China: IR Theories and Policy Studies	14
2.1 Situating the Rise of China in IR Theories	15
2.1.1 Realism, Power Transition Theory	15
2.1.2 The Logic of Balancing and Bandwagoning	18
2.2 Situating the Smaller Powers in IR	24
2.3 Why Does Perception Matter?	27
Chapter 3 Theory	33
3.1 Increased Chinese Assertiveness: Alternative Explanation	33
3.2 Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy	35
3.3 Politics of Asymmetry	38
3.4 Construction of Narratives	41
3.5 Causal Mechanisms	44
Chapter 4 Empirical Testing	47
4.1 Case Selection	47
4.2.1 Case Study I: Vietnam	51
4.2.2 Case Study II: The Philippines	62
Chapter 5 The Rise of China as a Constructed Narrative	71
5.1 The Construction of China's Rise	71
5.2 Cross-Case Comparison	93
Chapter 6 Conclusion	100
Bibliography	106
Appendix	116

Summary

This study examines the rise of China through the eyes of the smaller powers in Southeast Asia. The central argument of this paper is that the perception of the rise of China is a constructed narrative. By ‘constructed narrative’ I mean that state’s perception of China’s rise is a domestically-oriented, and contextually-specific story. The “rise of China is a peaceful one”, or “China’s rise is threatening to regional stability”—these are narratives that have been constructed and utilized by individual Southeast Asian states to fulfil certain political agenda. Existing studies largely fail to explain why there is a wide divergence of response to the rise of China in Southeast Asia. I point out that while China’s economic ascendance is an empirical fact and has been well acknowledged by its Southeast Asian neighbors, however, it does not necessarily mean that each state would perceive China’s rise in the same way. On the contrary, just as “there are a thousand hamlets in a thousand people’s eyes”, each state has come up with its own narratives for ‘China’s Rise’ that speaks to its own national interests. Seeing the rise of China through the eyes of each individual state is different, not homogenous; and therefore the ‘rise of China’ constitutes a specific set of meanings to each state in Southeast Asia. As such, the ‘constructed narrative’ framework offers a better approach to understanding perceptions of the rise of China.

List of Tables

Table 1 Case Comparison	74
Table 2 Narratives of the Rise of China	75

Chapter 1 Introduction

Over the past ten years, the ‘Rise of China’ has become one of the most prominently debated topics in both the academic and public sphere. China’s rise to regional hegemony as an empirical phenomenon has been examined from different perspectives and approaches in International Relations (IR). A large bulk of the existing literature focuses exclusively on great power competition, conflict, or cooperation; and theorizes the rise of China through the lens of great power politics, in particular the act of the United States of America (US) rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific. No rigorous research has been done on smaller regional powers’ responses to the changing political dynamics in the region engendered by China’s economic ascendance.

Integrating smaller powers into the IR literature is challenging as IR is predominantly a ‘great power’ discipline that “attracts scholars who are from great powers and interested in great power politics.”¹ However, understanding the role of smaller powers in shaping the development of regional politics would contribute to the core of IR literature on foreign policy because smaller powers are an integral part of the international system. Smaller powers are important because they play a crucial role in shaping the process of hegemonic power transition.² In this study I turn the perspective around by looking at how non-hegemonic powers in Southeast Asia perceive and respond to China’s ascendance.

¹ Kassimeris, C. (2009). The foreign policy of small powers. *International Politics*, 46(1), 86

² Randall Schweller and Pu Xiaoyu have argued that status recognition is necessary for a rising power to be regarded as hegemony by the small and medium sized powers.

Existing scholarship generally assumes that the rise of China has exerted homogenous effects on countries across the region. Yet there is a wide divergence of responses to China's rise in Southeast Asia. Many scholars emphasized the states' external environment, and presumably that a country's foreign policy is less constrained by domestic factors as opposed to the external threat.³ States' responses to China's rise have been broadly categorized into 'balancing', 'bandwagoning', and 'hedging', all of which are deduced from the balance of power (BOP) logic.

Since 2010, China has been commonly represented as an assertive power projecting its hegemonic influence in Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, regional responses to China's rise have demonstrated a high degree of volatility and inconsistency.⁴ In spite of being a claimant state competing for disputed waters with China in the South China Sea, Malaysia opted for a quieter and non-hostile approach to deal with the issue. Vietnam and the Philippines, on the other hand, clearly adopted a more proactive strategy which has caused the

³ Elman, M. F. (1995). The foreign policies of small states: Challenging neorealism in its own backyard. *British Journal of Political Science*, 25(2), 175.

⁴ First, perceptions and responses to a rising China differed drastically across countries. On the one hand, official discourses in Cambodia and Myanmar generally regarded China as a peaceful rising power, and its economic ascendance would have brought overall benefits to this region. On the other hand, countries like Vietnam and the Philippines have questioned the intention of China in the South China Sea, and they have the incentive to believe that China's rise would be threatening should the balance of power is absent. Second, inconsistency and volatility is also evident within a country, reflected in the foreign policy shifts. For example, David Shambaugh noted that most states in the Southeast Asian region now identify China as a good neighbor, a constructive partner, a careful listener, and a nonthreatening regional power. While this perspective is striking because not very long time ago most states were concerned about the possibility of China becoming a threat to regional stability. Shambaugh, D. (2004;2005;). China engages asia: Reshaping the regional order. *International Security*, 29(3), 64-99. Evelyn Goh pointed out regional evaluations of the implications of China's rise remain mixed. Evelyn Goh, "Southeast Asian responses to China's rise, Managing the "elephants"?" in Cooney, K. J., Sato, Y., & NetLibrary, I. (2009). *The rise of china and international security: America and asia respond*. New York, NY: Routledge.

escalation of tensions.⁵ Current studies offer no insightful explanations for variations of this sort. Clearly, the ‘exogenous shocks explanation’⁶ for regional responses to China’s rise is insufficient to tell the full story. I argue that domestic politics has played an equally, if not more important role in shaping the perception of China’s rise.

This study aims to explain the divergence of response to the rise of China. To complement the existing explanations, I argue that domestic political changes will alter the state’s perception and response towards China. Therefore the theorization of the rise of China should take into account domestic variables by identifying various sources that have affected perceptions. **The central argument of this paper is that the perception of the rise of China is a constructed narrative.** By ‘constructed narrative’ I mean that perception of the rise of China is not to be understood as a reaction to China’s rise of material capability and international status.⁷ Perception of China’s rise is a domestically-oriented, constructed narrative. It is both contextually-specific and historically-contingent. For example, the “rise of China is a peaceful one”, or “China’s rise is threatening to regional

⁵ Newspaper articles reveal that the Malaysian government opted for a peaceful and quiet approach to resolve South China Sea dispute, see, Amin Mokhtar, “Malaysia believes South China Sea dispute can be resolved peacefully.” 13 July 2016, New Straits Times <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/07/157950/malaysia-believes-south-china-sea-dispute-can-be-resolved-peacefully>> ; Ralph Jennings, “Why Malaysia stays quiet about its claims in the South China Sea.” 2 June 2016, Forbes <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/ralphjennings/2016/06/02/why-malaysia-stays-quiet-about-its-claims-in-the-disputed-south-china-sea/#b2737a61beb9>>.

⁶ This explanation basically argues that the increased Chinese assertiveness has caused an escalation of tension in the region. China is largely, if not solely responsible for it.

⁷ Current studies hold that China’s growing economic and military influence is arguably the most important factor shaping the regional security environment in the light of the US rebalancing to Southeast Asia. Please refer to Ely Ratner “China and the Evolving Security Dynamics in East Asia: Security Dynamics in Southeast Asia and Oceania and Implications for the United States”. March 13, 2014. Testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. http://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Ratner_Testimony.pdf

stability”—these are narratives that have been constructed and utilized by individual Southeast Asian states to maximize national interest.

Existing literature often equates remarkable economic growth with China’s rise. This approach treats China’s rise as an abstract yet vague concept. Certainly, China’s economic ascendance is an empirical fact and has been well acknowledged by its Southeast Asian neighbors. However, it does not necessarily mean that each state would perceive an economically rising China in the same way. On the contrary, just as ‘[There] are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people’s eyes’, each state has come up with its own narratives of ‘China’s Rise’ that speaks to its own national interests. Seeing the rise of China through the eyes of each individual state is different, not homogenous; and therefore the ‘rise of China’ constitutes a specific set of meanings to each state. It is important to analyze the rise of China by moving down from the level of abstraction with a more empirically-grounded approach. I am going to demonstrate that the ‘constructed narrative’ framework offers a better way to understand perceptions of the rise of China and foreign policy shifts.

I select three Southeast Asian countries for empirical testing: Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia. I hypothesize that **political legitimacy crises** are critical disjunctures that allow us to observe variations and to explain different narratives about China’s rise. I argue that countries experiencing legitimacy crises are more likely to witness an inconsistent narrative being constructed by the state authority. This is because in times of legitimacy crises on the national-level, the state is more likely to change the foreign policy orientation.

The effects of political legitimacy on a country's perception and foreign policy shifts are observed in Vietnam and the Philippines. In addition, to control for the exogenous effects brought by the perceived Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea, I use Malaysia as a contrasting case. This allows me to better observe and identify the conditions whereby narratives are constructed, while explaining the reasons behind each approach the state has adopted to cope with China's rise in the region.

I examine major leadership transitions and legitimacy crises that have occurred in Vietnam and the Philippines after independence. In Vietnam, political legitimacy crises that occurred both before and after the unification had a great impact on the country's foreign policy orientation. Vietnam is classified as an authoritarian regime ruled by one single party—the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP); the party has had experienced several legitimacy crises. The most recent one which was caused by the global economic crisis in 2008 has triggered the rise of anti-China nationalism in Vietnam.⁸ Nationalism has exerted an important impact on Vietnam's foreign policy towards China. Post-2008 Vietnam attempted to maintain a good relations with China at the party-to-party basis, but also became intolerable for the increased Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. Overall, Vietnam-Sino bilateral relations have worsened since 2010.

The Philippines is a practicing democracy that has experienced rather frequent leadership changes. Legitimacy issues have concerned Philippine

⁸ HIEP, L. H. (2012). Performance-based legitimacy: The case of the communist party of Vietnam and "doi moi". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 34(2), 145-172.

politicians constantly right before each general election.⁹ Legitimacy crises in this country were often accompanied by leadership transitions.¹⁰ The lose of legitimacy of the ruling government would trigger legitimacy crises. One tactic that Benigno Aquino's (also known as Aquino III) government practiced to justify his rise to power is attacking the sources of political legitimacy that had once supported his predecessor Gloria Arroyo and her cabinet. Consequentially, Philippines' foreign policy towards China had been reoriented into a different direction after Aquino came to power because Chinese investment was deemed important to Arroyo's government. A rising China after 2010 is identified less as an economic powerhouse, the image of a trouble-maker threatening to regional stability has instead become more prominent. In addition to that, a new narrative of China that both explains and justifies the foreign policy approach took up by Aquino's government has been materialized.

The contribution of this study is two-fold. One, my findings supplement the classic IR theories on hegemonic power transition by filling up the gaps in the literature. I point out that the power transition literature emphasizes almost exclusively the consequences of power transition, and little has been said about the process of each transition. Locating my research in this scholarship, my approach aims to better examine some of the important factors that will shape the process of power shift occurring in Asia today.

⁹ See, for example, Croissant, A., & Martín, B. (2006). *Between consolidation and crisis: Elections and democracy in five nations in southeast asia*. London;Münster;: Lit. 32-33

¹⁰ John T. Sidel, "The Philippines The Languages of Legitimation" in Alagappa, M., Case, W. F., & Khong, C. O. (1995). *Political legitimacy in southeast asia: The quest for moral authority*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Two, this study offers a more empirically tuned explanation for regional responses to China's rise. Instead of applying the abstract IR concepts to explain interstates relations and diplomatic behaviors, I am focusing on a country's domestic domain with the aim of drawing the connection between domestic politics and foreign policy making. My work looks into detail of political changes at home in relation to its China's policy. Since I examine and assess the foreign policy towards China across a few Southeast Asian countries, this work is also policy-relevant. My findings will shed light on government's decision making; government officials in both China and Southeast Asia countries will be able to better assess the pros and cons of their foreign policy.

Chapter 2 Explaining the Rise of China: IR Theories and Policy Studies

In this chapter, I first discuss studies on the rise of China and power shifts. The study on the rise and fall of states and international order is an enduring grand question that the scholarship of International Relations (IR) has attempted to explain. IR scholars are genuinely interested to find out the causes and consequences of power shifts. The rise of China has been examined from mainly three broad approaches—the grand IR theories aim to forecasting the possible trajectories of China’s rise and its implications for the transformation of international system; the mid-range theories that look into specific tactics which other states have adopted to cope with the rise of China; and the policy-oriented works that focus on the debates of current affairs such as the South China Sea territorial disputes.

I highlight three gaps in the existing literature, more specifically, the theoretical limitations of each established theory on the explanation of China’s rise. One common problem in the existing literature is failure to acknowledge and to explain the inconsistency of response to the rise of China across Southeast Asia. There is a mismatch between the theoretical claims and the empirical facts.

The second gap is closely related to the first one, that many approaches existing studies have adopted to conceptualize the rise of China are problematic. I critique some of the conventional approaches which take China’s rise as a static concept. More specifically, China’s rise is being

understood as a self-evident phenomenon of economic or military expansion.¹¹ This conceptualization shed no light on the understanding of how states would have responded to a rising hegemony because it said little about the perception of the rise of China which is heterogeneous in nature and subject to changes.

Lastly, current works make predications for the rise of China based on the model of great power competition, in which smaller regional powers are excluded from the game. Even though some mid-range theories have been applied to explain behaviors that are beyond the explanatory power of the logic of balancing and bandwagoning. In general there lacks a good assessment on smaller regional powers in shaping the process of today's power shift. This section ends with my new approach—I explain how and why it helps to offer a more empirically-informed understanding of the power shift in Asia today.

2.1 Situating the Rise of China in IR Theories

2.1.1 *Realism, Power Transition Theory*

China's rise to regional hegemony has captured the attention of IR theorists over the past decades. The established grand theories in IR—specifically Realism and power transition theory, have given account to the possible outcomes to international system with the effects of China's economic ascendance. The rise of China has now been closely associated with power

¹¹ Most works I have read so far take the rise of China as given, and a self-evident empirical phenomenon because of its remarkable economic growth and military modernization observed over the past ten to fifteen years.

transition theory. As noted by Jack Levy, “many scholars writing on the rise of China and its consequences for world politics in the twenty-first century attempt to ground their analyses in power transition theory.”¹² Undeniably, power transition theory offers a powerful conceptual tool for IR scholars to examine rising powers and the consequences of power shifts. In particular, one essential question this scholarship asks is: “How do power shifts reshape and transform international hierarchies and world order?” As observed by Wohlforth, Kirshner and Mastanduno, power transitions represent an enduring theme in International Politics because power transitions create opportunities for the, which often violent, transformation of international order.¹³

The theoretical importance of hegemonic transition, as highlighted by many scholars, explains the prominence of power transition theory throughout the long tradition of IR theory. For example, A.F.K. Organski developed a systematic theory of power transition to correct the deficiencies he identified in balance of power theory.¹⁴ Robert Gilpin in his 1981 classic *War and Change in World Politics* argues that international order is created and directed by powerful states when rising up through hegemonic transition.¹⁵ Gilpin’s work has a profound impact on the IR theorization of international order. Scholars have subsequently developed theories of rising and declining powers based on the premise of Gilpin’s larger theoretical framework; the

¹² Jack S. Levy, Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China, in *China’s Ascent* edited by Robert Ross and Zhu Feng, pp.11.

¹³ See works by William C. Wohlforth, Jonathan Kirshner, and Michael Mastanduno in *Power, Order, and Change in World Politics*.

¹⁴ Organski, A. F. K. (1968). *World politics* (2d [rev.] ed.). New York: Knopf.

¹⁵ Gilpin, R. (1981). *War and change in world politics*. Cambridge; New York;: Cambridge University Press, pp.3.

recent scholarly debates have been developed around China's rise in the Asia-Pacific.

If we were to study transitions, we must know where they are coming from in the first place. The biggest problem I saw in power transition theory is the lack of explicit and systematic theorization for the causes of power transitions. In other words, there is no explicit explanation for important questions such as: when and under what conditions do power transitions occur? For instance, one prominent view suggests that as China gets more powerful and the US hegemonic position declines, a series of strategic competition between China and the US-led liberal order will be inevitable.¹⁶

An opposing view hold by many liberal scholars such as John Ikenberry, claim that while the international order of unipolarity since the end of the Cold War will end, it does not necessarily mean that the US-China competition will be a zero-sum game but one that is more accommodating since China has been highly integrated into the liberal world order.¹⁷

While both beliefs offer a useful way of thinking the possible outcomes of power shifts, they clearly excluded factors which matter and therefore will shape the process of power transitions. Failure to address these questions means there is no appropriate explanation for the process of each power transition, and thus, we would not know which factors would be considered

¹⁶ See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); Aaron Friedberg, "The Future of US-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?," *International Security*, Vol.30, No.2 (Fall 2005).

¹⁷ John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can Liberal System Survive?," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (January/February 2008)

important in shaping the development along the process. As a result, current studies generally take power transition as a condition, and a starting point which is used to predict the implications of China's rise to hegemonic status. However, the predicated outcomes would illuminate little light in illustrating other possible trajectories of China's hegemonic power transition. This is because many approaches in this body of literature presuppose non-hegemonic actors' acceptance to the notion of China's rise, while dismisses the fact that along the process these actors are also actively transfiguring hegemonic transition, and are part of the development. Incorporating the perspective of non-hegemonic actors' responses to the changing political dynamics engendered by China's rise provides an insightful way of dissecting the process of power shift.

2.1.2 The Logic of Balancing and Bandwagoning

Apart from power transition theory, a huge bulk of the existing literature on hegemonic transition has been developed around the dichotomy of balancing and bandwagoning. Among all the hypotheses deduced from the grand IR theories to conceptualize the implications of a power shift on regional order, the logic of balancing and bandwagoning emerged to become the most commonly applied analytical tool. The balance of power or threat arguments, which also provide theoretical support for the 'China Threat' literature, contend that China's rise will inevitably lead at least a "minimum to rivalry

and tension, and at a maximum to a major confrontation.”¹⁸ As a result, non-hegemonic states are more likely to balance against the rising hegemon and keep the existing hegemonic power as a counter-weight.¹⁹ This position is grounded in the long tradition of realism, as many prominent realist scholars have argued, that states rarely allying with, [they] rather against a powerful state because bandwagoning means “disproportionate share of the spoils”²⁰ which turns against “states maximize relative power”²¹

Theorists arguing for the logic of balancing contend that in times of power transitions, states are more likely to balance against, and less likely to bandwagon with a potential hegemon, this is especially true when the rising hegemon is perceived as having revisionist intentions.²² Kenneth Waltz draws an explicit link between high levels of uncertainty and possible balancing behaviors. When the levels of uncertainty increase, according to Waltz, that bandwagoning is less likely to happen as “uncertainty constrains the individual

¹⁸ Yan Xuetong, *The Rise of China and its Power Status*, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2006, 7.

¹⁹ See, for example, Denny Roy, ‘Hegemon on the Horizon? China’s Threat to East Asian Security’, *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1994, pp. 149–68; Robert Ross, ‘Balance of Power Politics and the Rise of China: Accommodation and Balancing in East Asia’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2006, pp. 355–95; Adam Ward, ‘China and America: Trouble Ahead?’, *Survival*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2003, pp. 35–56; Peter Hays Gries, ‘China Eyes the Hegemon’, *Orbis*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2005, pp. 401–12; Thomas J. Christensen, ‘Posing Problems Without Catching Up: China’s Rise and the Challenges for US Security Policy’, *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2001, pp. 5–40; Thomas J. Christensen, ‘Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and U.S. Policy toward East Asia’, *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2006, pp. 81–126. Christensen, Thomas J. “Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and U.S. Policy toward East Asia.” *International Security*, 1 (2006): 81–126; Kuick, Cheng-Chwee. “The China Factor in the US’ ‘Re-Engagement’ with Southeast Asia: Drivers and Limits of Converged Hedging.” *Asian Politics & Policy*, 3 (2012): 315–344. Michael Mastanduno and William C. Wohlforth. “Introduction: Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences.” *World Politics*, 1 (2009): 1–27; Zhou Fangyin, “China’s Rise, the Transformation of East Asian Regional Structure, and Development Direction of the East Asian Order”, in *The world in 2020 according to china : Chinese foreign policy elites discuss emerging trends in international politics* edited by Shao Binghong 2014, pp.172.

²⁰ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. New York: Norton, pp.163.

²¹ Ibid

²² Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt, Hans Morgenthau, William R. Thompson, and John Mearsheimer have argued for the prevalence of the balance of power theory because in an anarchic international order, states seek to expand their power to survive.

states' ability to cooperate with one another."²³ Contrasting with Waltz's structuralist explanation, some realist scholars hold the belief that balancing is necessary to counter not only the external, but also the internal threats. Steven David, for example, attributes domestic politics as a contributing cause for balancing behaviors. David argues that state leaders facing the need to balance against both internal and external threats to ensure regime survival and to appease secondary adversaries.²⁴ John Mearsheimer argues that the rise of China, in spite of any other factor, will threaten America hegemony and therefore, lead to great power conflict with the US. For Mearsheimer, states do not just seek security but power maximization by becoming regional hegemons and to establish their own spheres of dominance. China, therefore, would not be satisfied with just becoming more powerful under the current international system, but instead would seek to minimize the US presence in Asia by building a new system under its own sphere of influence. Mearsheimer's overly deterministic argument is unable to explain when non-aggressive actions are preferred by the states while experiencing regional power shifts.

While the BOP logic provides a useful way of conceptualizing the rise and fall of great powers, this logic, however, does not by itself appropriately explain why balancing is being or will be applied to China. Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory argues that it is the perceptions of whether a rising

²³ Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, pp.79-80.

²⁴ David, S. R. (1991). *Choosing sides: Alignment and realignment in the third world*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp.236.

China is threatening rather than the distribution of power itself that would determine the act of balancing. According to Walt, Southeast Asian states would balance China due to its 'assertive actions' in the South China Sea. Therefore, other regional players are motivated to ensure the US maintains their, specifically military presence in the region.

The BOP theory also largely fails to predict regional response to China's rise in Post-Cold War Southeast Asia. After the end of the Cold War, Southeast Asia identifies a rising China as having benign intentions,²⁵ and therefore Southeast Asia lacks of balancing behavior. This is because the grand IR theories largely operate at the level of abstraction, and lack explanatory power to adequately explain empirical phenomena. More empirical oriented studies conducted by some mid-range theorists provide a viable supplement to this field. In particular, they have examined Southeast Asia's response to China's rise by looking at the specific areas of cooperation. And it is believed by many, that Southeast Asia as a whole copes with China's economic rise and military modernization by working closely with China for greater economic benefits but maintain strategically ambivalent with suspicion.²⁶ Based on empirical evidence, Southeast Asian states generally identify positively with China's economic rise, and that they do not hesitate in seeking economic cooperation

²⁵ See Shi Chunlai, "China-Australia Relations: A Chinese View," (<http://www.aiaa.asn.au/news/chunlai.html>.)

²⁶ See, Amitav Acharya's Containment, engagement, or counter-dominance? Malaysia's response to the rise of China; Michael Leifer's Indonesia's encounters with China and the dilemmas of engagement; Yuen Foong Khong's Singapore: a time for economic and political engagement in *Engaging China* edited by Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (1999).; Evelyn Goh's Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies

with China, which can be explained by Randall Schweller's 'bandwagoning for profit' argument.²⁷

Regional experts have also supported the 'bandwagoning for profit' explanation. For example, Evelyn Goh examines the lack of balancing behavior in Southeast Asia in response to China's rise, she argues that the pressure to maintain a balance between the US and China offers states a continuum of policy options rather than a stark choice between balancing and bandwagoning.²⁸ These states have adopted a mixed strategy to engage with China.²⁹ Goh's observation is well supported by the empirics. For instance, China has become a dialogue partner and later a full member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), a regional political and security multilateral platform in 2002. On the whole regional states do not seem to be entirely, but selectively bandwagoning with China. Like Goh, David Kang also highlights on the lack of balancing behavior in Southeast Asia which he provides an cultural and historical explanation to it.³⁰

Following the balancing and bandwagoning discussion is the debate on whether China being a status quo or revisionist power, and has become one of the most popular topics in seminars, academic conferences, and for media reports.³¹ Similar to the balancing and bandwagoning debate, the status quo

²⁷ Schweller, R. L. (1994). Bandwagoning for profit: Bringing the revisionist state back in. *International Security*, 19(1), 72-107.

²⁸ Goh, E., & East-West Center Washington. (2005). *Meeting the china challenge: The U.S. in southeast asian regional security strategies*. Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Kang, D. C. (2003). Getting asia wrong: The need for new analytical frameworks. *International Security*, 27(4), pp.58.

³¹ See, for example Qin Yaqing, National Identity, Strategic Culture and Security Interests, *China's Security Strategy*, and Feng Huiyun, Is China a Revisionist Power? *Chinese Journal of International Politics*

versus revisionist power debate sets another dichotomy, but with more emphasis on intention. At the core of the status quo versus revisionist debate has been whether or not China has incentives to change the system.³²

A common characterization of China is that it is a dissatisfied, revisionist state, expressed in everything with the ultimate aim of replacing the US unipolarity with a multipolar distribution of power.³³ The counter-argument claims that China does not have intention to overthrow or violently alter the existing world order and international system. Ikenberry believes that “while non-Western rising powers such as China seek greater voice and authority in the global system, surprisingly perhaps, they still embrace the basic principles and institutions of an liberal world order”³⁴ Buzan’s observation for China’s rise is that it is a peaceful one, similar to Ikenberry’s argument. Buzan understands peaceful rise to mean that a growing power is able to make both absolute and relative gains in both its material and its status positions, in relation to the other powers in the international system, and to do so without precipitating major hostilities between itself and either its neighbors or other major powers.³⁵

³² The debate on whether China is a status quo power or revisionist power. See, for example, David Lake’s *Dominance and Subordination in World Politics: authority, liberalism, and stability in the modern international order*; John Ikenberry’s *The logic of order: Westphalia, liberalism, and the evolution of international order in the modern era*; Michael Mastanduno’s *Order and change in world politics: the financial crisis and the breakdown of the US-China grand bargain*; Qin Yaqing, *National Identity, Strategic Culture and Security Interests, China’s Security Strategy*, Feng Huiyun, *Is China a Revisionist Power? Chinese Journal of International Politics*

³³ Observed by Iain Johnston in “Is China a Status Quo Power?” , *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 5-56.

³⁴ Ikenberry, G.J. 2008, *The Rise of China and the Future of the West*.

³⁵ Buzan, B. (2010). China in international society: Is 'peaceful rise' possible? *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3(1), pp.5.

However, both dichotomies do not provide convincing answers for the phenomenon of inconsistent perceptions and responses. The analytical framework of this binary, regional actors are expected to behave homogeneously in the context of China's rise. Empirical evidence has proven otherwise. To explain the variations which are not well captured by the dichotomy requires one to pay more attention to regional powers, and treat each as unique actor and not a homogenous entity.

2.2 Situating the Smaller Powers in IR

The general assumption which the mainstream IR literature holds is that powers rise and fall are predominantly the game of great powers, and small powers play an insignificant role in the process of power transitions. The study on the rise of China has largely focused on the rivalry between great-powers. According to David Shambaugh, major power rivalry refers to the inevitable clash between the existing dominant power (the US) and the rising power (China), owing to the asymmetric structural properties of the regional system. He further claims that "historically, rising powers inevitably challenge dominant powers, and that this zero-sum competition for dominance is a virtual law of international relations, at least for the realist school."³⁶ The period of "power transition" is particularly unstable and conflict-prone.³⁷ Therefore, to individual Southeast Asian states, the greatest threat to their strategic interests lies in the potential for great-power rivalry to undermine

³⁶ Shambaugh, D. L., & NetLibrary, I. (2006). *Power shift: China and asia's new dynamics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.13.

³⁷ Ronald L. Tammen et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century*

regional autonomy.³⁸ Yahuda and Pollack both argue that a full-fledged regional order has yet to emerge.³⁹ Under this circumstance, the fear of the US-China rivalry which will threaten regional stability, has become a major concern for Southeast Asian states.

Few scholars have examined the role of the smaller states in Southeast Asia in shaping the process of power transition, with the exception of David Kang, Amitav Acharya, Robert Ross, Evelyn Goh and Denny Roy and Ja Ian Chong. Chong believe that non-hegemonic states in Southeast Asia often adopt a mixed approach that goes beyond the balancing versus bandwagoning dichotomy such as hedging,⁴⁰ or buffering, bonding, binding and beleaguering.⁴¹ Instead of focusing on the debates at the level of abstraction, the above mentioned scholars opted for the mid-range level theories to analyze regional players' response to great power competition.

Their approaches help to escape the dichotomous conceptualisation of the change in the international system which is ill suited for the understanding of China' rise in the context of power shift. Evelyn Goh sees Southeast Asia as facing a parallel US-China "resurgence" in the region, requiring adaptive responses that fit neither the logic of bandwagoning nor balancing. Both Goh

³⁸ Thayer, C. A., & S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. (2010). *Recent developments in the south china sea: Grounds for cautious optimism* / carlyle A. thayer. Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.

³⁹ Michael Yahuda, "The Evolving Asian Order: The Accommodation of Rising Chinese Power"; Jonathan Pollack, "The Transformation of the Asian Security Order: Assessing China's Impact" in *Power Shift*, edited by David Shambaugh

⁴⁰ Ross, Robert. (2007) "Balance of Power Politics and the Rise of China: Accommodation and Balancing in East Asia," in William W. Keller and Thomas G. Rawski eds., *China's Rise and the Balance of Influence in Asia*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 121-145.

⁴¹ Chong, Ja Ian. (2003) "Revisiting responses to power preponderance: going beyond the balancing-bandwagoning dichotomy," Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies Singapore

and White agree that ASEAN has lost its ability to control the Great Power dynamics that are now dominating Southeast Asia's strategic architecture, despite the fact that regional institutions have been deliberately layered around ASEAN in order to reinforce its self-styled "centrality" to regional multilateralism. As noted further by Evelyn, as small or medium-sized states, Southeast Asian states have had a particularly difficult time adjusting to these new structural conditions. By and large, they have attempted to maintain a balance between the US and China by facilitating the retention of US involvement and forward deployment in the region, and by engaging China both politically and militarily.

These scholarly works make an important supplement to the grand-theory approach by incorporating the smaller actors into the picture of hegemonic transition. Their aim is to give a more nuanced account for regional responses to China's rise. The grand IR theory was focusing on the analysis of possible trajectories on a broad level as the grand IR theory literature had attempted to do, whereas the mid-range level theories were paying attention to the specific sets of tactics or strategies that smaller actors employed to cope with China's economic expansion as well as perceived military assertions. The mid-range theory literature also gives a stronger regional focus.

However, in this body of literature, Southeast Asia is often portrayed as having a unified stance. They could not explain changes in perception and response to China's rise both within a country and across countries in the region. Specifically I refer to inconsistent and sometimes even contradictory

foreign policy and diplomatic rhetorics. For example, what explains the sudden shift in the Philippines' stance on the claim of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea by becoming more hostile and assertive towards China after Aquino III assumed office in 2010? And why did the Vietnamese government opt for the so-called "ally of convenience" strategy to cope with US against China in light of the South China Sea hostility? The ways individual Southeast Asian states' engage with China have demonstrated a high level of inconsistency. Inconsistency does not necessarily contradict with the overall strategy that a state has taken to cope with China—whether it is hedging, binding, or balancing; here I am highlighting another important aspect—change of perception of China's regional presence and involvement. Perception is an important variable that unlike the general strategy, it operates at a different level. I argue that perception is equally important in defining the rise of China.

2.3 Why Does Perception Matter?

Why is perception important for us to better analyze the rise of China? Answering this question requires prior understandings of the factors that would have affected perceptions of China. The existing literature offers neither a clear definition nor systematic theorization for the 'rise of China'. This concept is being treated as given, and understood as an empirical phenomenon of 'the growing of influence with the intention of asserting hegemonic status.' In terms of measurement, 'remarkable economic growth', 'active participation

in regional and international affairs’, and ‘military modernization’ are proxies that are used as convenient indicators for the rise of China and ever since they have been closely associated with this concept.

However, upon a closer examination, these indicators are only useful at telling whether China is growing when compared with itself, not whether it is rising to hegemonic status. The presentation of China’s rise in the current works often conflate growth with rise. According to Randall Schweller, Pu Xiaoyu, T.V. Paul, Deborah Larson, and William Wohlforth, rising states have a strong desire to seek for status recognition and respect.⁴² For China to become a new hegemonic power, it will firstly attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the hegemon, and along the process the emerging power will face various forms of resistance from other states to hegemonic domination.⁴³ Thus, the very idea of power rise cannot be viewed in isolation but to take into account perceptions of other states. China’s growing of influence begins in the Asia-Pacific, and its growth is being felt most strongly by its neighbors.

Empirically, Southeast Asian states’ perceptions of China’s engagement in the region have played a significant role in depicting the contour of a rising China. China has become the most important economic investor in the region second to the US. The Chinese-initiated infrastructural projects in the Philippines launched under the presidency of Gloria Arroyo, for instance, were deemed as a great economic benefit for the Philippines, as proclaimed by

⁴² Paul, T. V., Larson, D. W., & Wohlforth, W. C. (2014). *Status in world politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁴³ Schweller, R. L., & Pu, X. (2011). After unipolarity: China's visions of international order in an era of U.S. decline. *International Security*, 36(1), 41-72.

Arroyo on the Philippine-China Friendship Day: “[both countries to] enjoy and cherish together in the fields of socio-cultural, economic, and education cooperation.”⁴⁴ Evidently, both China and the Philippines back then had portrayed a positive and friendly image for each other. The relations of the two countries became hostile and intense over territorial claims after 2010. One think-tank report stated that “[If] China is increasingly aggressive in defending its territorial claims, it is partly because of the balance of the change of Philippine presidents.”⁴⁵

While the Arroyo administration emphasized the importance of economic cooperation, Aquino and his cabinet have decided to take a more assertive stance over territorial claims to defend national integrity. Here, I am not arguing that foreign policy shifts is tantamount to the change of perception of China and its rise, but these changes would be regarded as important indicators that help us to better understand the rise of China—whether a powerful China would be more assertive in projecting its strength, which would be seen as a sign of having revisionist intention. On the other hand, if China continued to focus on forging economic ties and not territorial claims, it is more likely China would be labelled as a status quo power, and China’s rise a peaceful rise.

The policy-oriented works, which is a separate body of literature I have examined, are better at capturing more recent changes of political dynamics in

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Ruth Deyro “In Numbers: Philippines-China relations”. <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/95744-in-numbers-philippines-china-relations> (Accessed June 6 2016).

⁴⁵ Paterno Esmaguél II “Why China prefers Arroyo over Aquino”. <http://www.rappler.com/nation/9128-how-china-views-aquino-arroyo> (Accessed June 6 2016).

the region. Policy analysts are interested in the debates over current regional affairs and they have attempted to explain how regional actors have responded to China's involvement in the region. Some of the most prevalent themes in the past five years are, for instance, the South China Sea disputes and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) programs.

Arguably, however, this body of works generally lacks theoretical focus and generalizability. This is because many of them speak to a more general audience who are more interested in knowing '*What is happening right now in the region?*' and not '*How could we theorize these empirical phenomena?*' More importantly, many of the issues that have been discussed in those works were quite recent, which means there is insufficient evidence to test the claims and predications that have been offered.

Nevertheless, one important contribution offered by these works is an illustration of responses to a rising power from the perspective of the smaller regional actors. As such, the illustration of responses to China's regional involvement could be utilized as proxies to gauge state's perception of the rise of China. In this case, the policy-oriented works serve as an important empirical source for my hypothesis-testing. In sum, my study offers a theoretically robust and empirically-informed framework that better explains how individual regional actors perceive and respond to the rise of China in the Asia-Pacific.

The theorization of China's rise in the present literature takes rising powers as given, and there is little conceptualization for the perception of rising

powers—why certain powers are considered by other states as rising to hegemonic status at some points of time. Certainly, indicators such as the annual growth rate released by prestigious global financial institutions serve as legitimate criteria for the measurement of rising economies or powers. Similarly, one could roughly gauge a country's military capability by looking at the arms the government has purchased or innovated. However, the meaning of a rising power changes at different points of time. Part of the central argument I am making in this study is that domestic political changes in individual Southeast Asian states will shape states' perception of China's role and status in the region. Inter-states interactions play a more important role in making the narrative of China and China's rise.

Inter-states interactions are shaped by a more complex combination of elements, and among them I argue that domestic politics, especially legitimacy crises, could drastically alter the perception of a rising hegemon. Therefore, a more important question that needs to be answered is: when and under what circumstances did Southeast Asian states start to recognize China as a rising regional hegemon? Answering this question is crucial to understand many other important questions that have been debated regarding China's rise, such as: when did the discourse of 'China Threat' emerge? And why is this discourse getting more popular and salient in some states and not others? The same question we should ask, and is also applicable to 'China's peaceful rise',

one which many scholars took for convenience to explain China's "benign intention" as perceived by the region.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The 'benign intention' argument can be found largely in policy papers which discuss Southeast Asian states or ASEAN's perception the rise of China. See, for example, Zhao Hong's "The Maritime Silk Road and China-Southeast Asia Relations" *ISEAS Perspective*, No. 35, 8 July 2015

Chapter 3 Theory

3.1 Increased Chinese Assertiveness: Alternative Explanation

Before introducing my theory, I will firstly discuss alternative explanations. This is important as I will set the parameter of my theory after discussing alternative arguments that could have been raised. The most prominent alternative explanation for the change of Southeast Asia's attitudes towards China is the increased Chinese assertiveness over disputed waters in the South China Sea.⁴⁷ There saw an increasing concern for regional prospect especially among some claimants states which regard growing Chinese incursion as a sign of threat to their national integrity.⁴⁸ Simultaneously a new discourse in the region on China has emerged supporting the view that a rising China is threatening. China's changing approach to deal with the South China Sea issue has deteriorated its bilateral relationship with the some claimant states, especially with Vietnam and the Philippines since 2010. For example, since 2011 China began to interfere with the commercial operations of oil exploration vessels operating in the Philippines and Vietnamese Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), and demonstrate its jurisdiction by deploying Chinese civilian vessels in disputed waters.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ A bulk of the scholarly articles and newspaper reports contend that the China's assertive approach to the South China Sea dispute starting from 2010 resulted in an escalation of tension.

⁴⁸ See, Jian Zhang, 'China's Growing Assertiveness in the South China Sea: a strategic shift?', in Buszynski and Roberts, *The South China Sea and Australia's Regional Security Environment*, pp. 19.; Li, Mingjiang (2010), "Reconciling Assertiveness and Cooperation? China's Changing Approach to the South China Sea Dispute, *Security Challenges*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Winter, pp. 49-68. Thayer, C. A. (2011). Chinese assertiveness in the south china sea and southeast asian responses. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 30(2), 77.

⁴⁹ Thayer, C. A. (2011). China's new wave of aggressive assertiveness in the south china sea. *International Journal of China Studies*, 2(3), 555.

China's projection of an assertive gesture in the South China Sea might have generated more speed-sensitive, exogenous effects on regional perceptions towards China. However, it explains only part of the story. It does not tell us, why, for example, China's assertiveness had only severally deteriorated Beijing's bilateral relations with Manila and Hanoi, and not with Kuala Lumpur.⁵⁰ So if perceptions of China's rise are shaped and determined only by the level of Chinese assertiveness, then why has it not significantly altered Malaysia's perception of China's rise and its relationship with China?

Undeniably, disputes over territorial sovereignty and resources are crucial realities that have deteriorated individual Southeast Asian states' bilateral relations with China, it is equally important to acknowledge that a large part of the rhetorics and narratives are constructed. I am not saying that events such as territorial disputes do not matter or matter less in shaping a state's perception, what I am stressing here is the importance to identifying when and under what circumstances does the construction of narratives begin to matter.

This study aims not to make an ambitious claim that everything about China and its rise is a domestic-oriented narrative. Chinese assertiveness, for example, certainly contributes to an increased concern for the future prospect of regional peace and stability. However, this explanation only justifies some cases and not others. Similarly, my argument which serves as a complement to the current approaches, will be useful to explain some but not all empirical

⁵⁰ See, for example, Prashanth Parameswaran, "Playing it safe: Malaysia's Approach to the South China Sea and Implications for the US". February 2015, Center for a New American Security

observations. But this does not mean a non-universal explanation is less important or less credible. I am here to set the scope or the parameter of this work: the 'constructed narrative' framework which I offer, is particularly useful in explaining inconsistent perceptions and foreign policy shifts. Domestic politics, in addition to Chinese assertiveness, also contribute to perceptual and foreign policy changes.

3.2 Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy

To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of a state's perception of China's rise empirically, I look into different variables that would matter in a country's domestic sphere. Indeed, a state's foreign policy is deeply informed by its domestic political agenda. For instance, if a country's domestic interest is largely in favor of forging friendly relations with China, China will be more likely identified as a 'peaceful or friendly' rising power. On the other hand, if the country witnesses the rise of anti-Chinese nationalistic sentiment, then it is more likely that China would be identified as a 'threatening' or revisionist power.

This study argues that domestic political changes will lead to a change of the content of the 'China's rise' narratives. It is important to take into consideration of domestic politics because parts of the narrative are a result of political agenda shifts. As such, the literature which studies China's rise should have taken domestic variables of individual regional actors into consideration in order to generate a more empirically-persuasive explanation.

I challenge the dichotomy of balancing and bandwagoning in the IR scholarship and argue that the two extremes of the continuum—total balancing or bandwagoning is rather rare in the real world. Southeast Asian states have collectively identified both ends as costly options. Historically, individual Southeast Asian states' relations with China and other major powers such as the former Soviet Union and the US tend to fluctuate rather frequently. The smaller states in Southeast Asia have been constantly in searching of a way to cope with great powers that would allow them to maximize benefit without upsetting each one of them. In this situation, any attempt to explicitly balancing or bandwagoning with China would be deemed too costly a choice.

In order to make sense of the kind of choice Southeast Asia has adopted, I ground my study in domestic politics by asking: how do changes of domestic political environment at different levels affect their stance on China? I argue that the rise of China is an intersubjectively constructed narrative through multilevel and multilateral interactions between China and individual Southeast Asian states. Traditional IR scholarship largely dismisses the agency of smaller powers while emphasizes only the competition between great powers.⁵¹ In these works, regional players are treated as merely passive recipients—have little choice but to respond to China's rise vis-a-vis the US's relative decline in a particular manner. However, I argue that power transition is not a game between great powers. Instead, China gained regional

⁵¹ Jonathan Pollack, for example, suggests that the Sino-US relationship in the Asia-Pacific region is the key determinant for the emergence and transformation of a new regional order. See "The Transformation of the Asian Security Order: Assessing China's Impact" in *Power Shift*, edited by David Shambaugh.

recognition by interacting, cooperating, and bargaining directly with the smaller-states.

I ground my research within the domain of the intersection between domestic politics and international relations. I am going to demonstrate that the domestic domain matters. The Southeast Asia region has had experienced volatile political changes, both internally and externally. Some states have experienced more frequent legitimacy crises due to regime or leadership changes as compared to others. As Robert Putnam stated: “It is fruitless to debate whether domestic politics really determine international relations, or the reverse. The more interesting questions are ‘When?’ and ‘How?’” Thus, I ask: When and how does domestic politics play a role in the construction of the rise of China narrative?

Domestic politics has been studied and used by foreign policy analysts and IR scholars to explain foreign policy and diplomacy. Regime types, electoral cycles, bureaucratic politics, public opinion, and economic situation were some of the critical domestic factors that have been highlighted in the literature.⁵² In the context of Southeast Asia, due to the presence of different ruling systems, regime type has been regarded as the most critical determinant for the country’s foreign policy. However, this study points that there are other important variables in the domestic sphere that deserve more attention. Political legitimacy, I argue, has been a crucial factor in shaping the narratives of China’s rise. I will illustrate in the subsequent sections that political

⁵² See Brule & Mintz, 2006; Holsti, 1991; Levy, 1989; Levy & Vakili, 1992; Putnam, 1988; Russett, 1993; Smith, 1996

legitimacy matters for both Vietnam and the Philippines, which are countries of two different regime types.

3.3 Politics of Asymmetry

Apart from domestic politics, I also borrow insights from the concept of politics of asymmetry, which is an analytical tool applied by scholars such as Brantly Womack to examine interstate relations between the great powers and the smaller ones. Womack has called us to pay attention to the misfits between the mainstream IR theory which is derived from the European context, and the Asian politics. In particular, according to Womack, “nations are sovereign entities and Western international relations theory arose from the competition of roughly equal powers in Europe and then concentrated on great power conflicts... [It] is assumed that either the weaker state will balance its vulnerability by means of alliances with other states or it will be subject to the hegemony of the stronger state, either balancing or bandwagoning.”⁵³

I have pointed out that the balance of power theory and power transition theory are ill-suited to explaining Southeast Asia’s response to China’s rise in the previous sections. Womack’s approach to the study of international politics in Southeast Asia, that could be better understood as a political relationship of asymmetry, helps to explain the inconsistency of a country’s foreign policy towards China. Politics of asymmetry, referred specifically by Womack as the “disparity in capacity being the more than obvious fact about the relationship

⁵³ Womack, B. (2006). *China and Vietnam: The politics of asymmetry*. Cambridge; New York;: Cambridge University Press.

between China and Vietnam, but also applicable to other smaller powers.”⁵⁴ It has always been the most important structural factor.

Womack’s conceptualization of asymmetry is useful for the analysis of the fundamentals—the structural factors that have always determined the Sino-Vietnam relationship. One important aspect of these long-term asymmetric relationships is that and the stronger cannot always impose its will on the weaker. “If an asymmetric relationship cannot be “solved” through force, then it must be managed by both sides.”⁵⁵ Indeed, in the long history of struggling to either fight against or strike a balance between the great powers, Vietnam has developed a strategy that could best serve its national interest when necessary. The strategy of exploiting the great power competition or conflict (i.e. Sino-Soviet Split) to gain benefits from both sides had helped Vietnam fought against the US in the 1970s. Today, Vietnam is applying the same strategy while the US and China are competing for influence in the Asia-Pacific.

The asymmetrical relationship between China and its neighbours has a profound implication on the ways Southeast Asian states perceive and narrate the rise of China. Womack argues that an asymmetric relationship between two powers is not defined by the difference in capacities. “[Rather], mutual perceptions and interactions will be fundamentally shaped by the different situation of opportunity and vulnerability that each side confronts.”⁵⁶ More

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Womack, B. (2006). *China and Vietnam: The politics of asymmetry*. Cambridge; New York; Cambridge University Press, pp.17-18.

specifically, under the asymmetric structure, both China and Vietnam would manage their foreign affairs with the acceptance of the relationship as normal, that the power of the stronger one would not be challenged and the security of the smaller side would not be threatened.⁵⁷ For example, Vietnam characterizes Vietnam-Sino relations in the 1980s as a mixture between hostility and peaceful economic relations. The seemingly contradictory relations laid an important background for normalization in the early 1990s. As Womack further argued, normalcy is a negotiated and not imposed, relationship between China and Vietnam.

In this connection, although China has always been presented as a superpower in the region in this regard, smaller states' perceptions of China are in fact more nuanced. China's rise would not necessarily be perceived by smaller regional powers as either a 'bless' or 'threat'. On the contrary, China's rise is to be understood as a mutual acceptance between China and the weaker ones. The relationship between a rising China and the smaller regional powers, is one that is negotiated, not imposed. The framework of asymmetry is a useful tool to conceptualize inconsistent or even the contradictory narratives in a country's foreign policy discourses.

The relationship of asymmetry also explains the reasons behind the emergence of competing narratives. The theory of asymmetry offers a more convincing explanation for inconsistent and ambivalent attitudes Vietnam adopted to cope with China both in the past and in the present days. If we are

⁵⁷ Ibid

about to view asymmetry as a structural factor that has shaped the relationship between China and its small neighbors, according to Womack's logic, the smaller powers prefer a less conflict-prone and a more accommodating approach to manage its relations with great powers. As noted by scholars and policy analysts, most Southeast Asian states have shown a remarkable degree of strategic ambivalence,⁵⁸ that states in this region have made conscientious efforts to avoid appearing to take side with any of the great powers.

In the next section, I will define and explain the key concept "constructed narrative" in this study, followed by the illustration of the causal mechanisms of my hypothesis.

3.4 Construction of Narratives

I define narratives as a state-specific story about China's rise. To be more specific, the narrative about China as a rising regional hegemon is a domestically-oriented and state-specific piece of depiction that is made up by the state authority to justify and to serve the its political agenda. A narrative also justifies and informs a country's foreign policy decision-making towards another country both rhetorically and strategically. When I say 'made up', I do not mean a fiction that comes out of nowhere; neither do I mean the overly exaggeration of an event. Under circumstances such as but not limited to, legitimacy crises, the state authority sees the need to make up a story to justify

⁵⁸ See ROY, D. (2005). Southeast asia and china: Balancing or bandwagoning? *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 27(2), 305-322.; Percival, B., & Net Library, I. (2007). *The dragon looks south: China and southeast asia in the new century*. Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International.; Goh, E. (2007;2008;). Great powers and hierarchical order in southeast asia: Analyzing regional security strategies. *International Security*, 32(3), pp.113-157.

a particular foreign policy or stance; this is the part of the story that I am interested in, and this is the kind of narrative about China's rise that I am referring to. Narratives are exemplified through state's official claims, such as leadership speeches or statements which are commentaries of another country's intention or action.

Some scholars have pointed out that Southeast Asian states' foreign policies towards China are subject to, and are often response to China's foreign policy shifts. For example, disputes over the Spratly Islands are particularly pertinent to the ways which Vietnam and the Philippines perceive China's engagement in the region.⁵⁹ Perceptions of China's incursions in the South China Sea have had adverse effects on these countries' incentives of forging closer economic ties with China.

In response to this explanation, first of all I do not deny that factors such as the perceived Chinese assertiveness do not matter. However, as I have pointed out earlier, not all claimants states in the South China Sea have become extremely concerned about Chinese assertiveness. Brunei and Malaysia are not as vocal as Vietnam and the Philippines, and do not take it as a threatening sign. Having said that, China's behaviors only outline the external condition, which defines the levels of perceived uncertainty. When there exists more than one dominant power in the region, and great powers are competing with each other for influence, this in turn increases the possibility of uncertainty that the smaller states seek a greater security or economic benefits under this

⁵⁹ Atsumi Okabe "Coping with China" and Donald S. Zagoria's "Joining ASEAN" in *Vietnam Joins the World*

circumstance. However, if we were to examine process of a country's foreign policy decision-making, the internal condition is equally important. This is where my 'constructed narrative' argument comes in. The internal condition, which is the focus of this study, explains the reasons behind the emergence of a particular narrative.

Domestic political changes could lead to an alteration of a country's foreign relations, its diplomatic orientation and a specific set of policy. The critical juncture for this change to happen is when foreign policy shifts are perceived by the leadership to be necessary for domestic political changes in times of a legitimacy crisis under leadership transitions.

A narrative which depicts the rise of China is a socio-political discourse constructed by the state to support and substantiate their foreign policy orientation. They explicitly address the country's engagement of foreign affairs that speaks to its political interests, and it is one way to tell the story of domestic political changes. As such, changes within the domestic sphere are more likely to cause the narrative to be less consistent, with all other key variables remain unchanged.

How does a narrative covary with domestic politics? Observation of variations requires the control of exogenous effects to rule out confounding variables. Hence, I choose to examine the critical junctures that have significantly changed the dynamics of the country's domestic politics. In this regard, I am able to isolate the effects that are likely to be caused by other variables and therefore, better examine the causal relations between domestic

politics, particularly leadership transitions and the construction of a domestic-motivated narrative about China. The influence of China's rise is defined and shaped by a state's domestic interests which is often contingent to leadership transitions. In the following section, I will explain in details the methodology and how I will conduct my empirical tests.

3.5 Causal Mechanisms

States experiencing or prone to legitimacy crises are more likely to participate in the construction of inconsistent narratives than states that are not experiencing or less prone to political legitimacy crises. Political legitimacy defines the conditions that lay out a country's foreign relations and thereby, the basis for narrative construction. This is because when the ruling party or the current leadership's political legitimacy is being questioned, restoration of political legitimacy will be prioritized. If the political legitimacy is perceived to be threatened by an external source, political elites who aim to strengthen the legitimacy would diversify domestic attention from the current domestic crises by making up an external threat.

The rally 'round the flag' effect as a manifestation of nationalism for instance, is often used by the state to restore and bolster its political legitimacy.⁶⁰ It is mostly relevant when the ruling elites see the need to construct an external 'threat' to bolster its legitimacy. Southeast Asian states

⁶⁰ See, for example, Levy, Jack S. (1999). "Economic Competition, Domestic Politics, and System Change: The Rise and Decline of the Anglo-Dutch Rivalry, 1609-1688." In *Great Power Rivalries*, ed. William R. Thompson. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press. 191; Schreiber, Anna P. (1973), Economic Coercion as an Instrument of Foreign Policy: U.S. Economic Measures Against Cuba and the Dominican Republic, *World Politics*, 25, 3, 387-413.

have explored China's economic rise to fulfil domestic political interests—the economic benefit or political leverage against domestic rivalries.

Vietnam makes a good example to illustrate the above point. The authoritarian regime is vulnerable to legitimacy crises although the ruling party has not been significantly threatened by other political parties. Drawing from Weber's conceptualization of socio-economic legitimation, White contends that "For communist and other authoritarian systems, socioeconomic or "performance" grounds of this kind have typically been seen as the single most important basis upon which they may seek legitimation."⁶¹ In this regard, if political legitimacy of an authoritarian state is being challenged and when political elites have no viable alternative sources to turn to, nationalism—the identification of an external threat will become a convenient tool for the state to exploit.

Political legitimacy may be an issue of concern for states that are undergoing leadership transitions. When leadership transitions occur, especially when the successor sees the need to establish the authority by discrediting the predecessor(s). Very likely the new government would systematically dissolve and dismiss political sources of the previous government. In the Philippines, Aquino's government heavily criticized the economic projects signed between China and his predecessor Arroyo for instance. This is largely the case whereby the state's economic relations with the rising hegemon is determined by the patron-client relations or other forms

⁶¹ White, S. (1986). Economic performance and communist legitimacy. *World Politics*, 38(3), pp.463.

of informal relations as opposed to the formal ones, that the economic activists had contributed to corruption of the country.

I am here to identify the scope and conditions under which leadership transitions lead to inconsistent narratives of the rise of China. The inconsistency of the narrative is particularly apparent when the legitimacy of the previous leadership is being challenged. Electoral means as a legitimate tool to enable leadership changes, will alter some if not all political objectives that the previous government envisioned to achieve. The creation of a different narrative of China is a deliberate, strategic choice attempted by the new government to establish authority domestically. As such, an inconsistent narrative will be observed under two possible conditions: one, leadership transition that involves the delegitimization of the previous government; Second, foreign policy shift would enhance the political legitimacy of the new government. Thus, I identify political legitimacy crisis a critical condition and leadership transitions critical disjunctures that determine the country's domestic politics vis-a-vis its foreign policy.

Chapter 4 Empirical Testing

4.1 Case Selection

This study uses a small-n and cross-time comparison case study for empirical testing. As John Gerring has argued, case studies are especially appropriate when exploring new causal mechanisms.⁶² Current approaches to study the intersection between domestic politics and foreign policy are interested to find out a general pattern about the impact of domestic political variables on its foreign policy and diplomacy. For example, a bulk of the scholarship is interested in finding out how bureaucratic politics affect the foreign policy decision-making.⁶³ Another prominent research attempts to theorize the link between regime type and foreign policy.⁶⁴ The scholarship has yet made an effort to look at how political legitimacy would affect perception in this context. What I am trying to do here is to reveal the causality between the two variables. Since the rise of China begins in the Asia-Pacific and it has generated a greater impact on this region as opposed to anywhere else, I will select Southeast Asian countries for empirical testing.

⁶² Gerring, J. (2004). What is a case study and what is it good for? *American Political Science Review*, 98(2), 341-354.

⁶³ See, for example, Morton Halperin, Priscilla Clapp, and Arnold Kanter's *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (2006), the book examines the role of bureaucracy in the US—civilian officials, political appointees, military figures, and the Congress—in formulating the country's security policy. In particular, the book contends that foreign policy making is a complex process because different bureaucratic bodies have different priorities and interests when coming to foreign policy formulation and implementation. Bureaucratic manoeuvring plays an important role in influencing US's international relations.

⁶⁴ Democracy peace theory views democracies as a key factor for peace in the twenty-first century, see, for example, Russett, B. M., & Oneal, J. R. (2001). *Triangulating peace: Democracy, interdependence, and international organizations*. New York: Norton. Some scholars examine the subtypes of a regime with the aim of capturing the nuanced political patterns in relation to foreign policy both within and across regimes. See also, Snyder, J. (1991) *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; and Schweller, R.L. (2006) *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

The criteria for selecting case studies are as such: first, levels of analysis—I examine political legitimacy crises and narratives constructed at the state-level. The decision-making processes conducted by national political leaders are generally accountable to the state. Second, the independent variable is political legitimacy crises, I select countries that have in recent years experienced political legitimacy crises. To rule out the confounding variables, I select a country which has not experienced legitimacy crisis as a contrasting case. If a country fulfils the above mentioned conditions, and that domestic political legitimacy problems occur prior to narrative changes, then I can make a plausible claim that there is a strong causal relationship between a country’s political legitimacy and the narratives of China’s rise.

In Southeast Asia region, two cases satisfy for these two conditions: Vietnam and the Philippines. I use the case of Malaysia to triangulate, and thereby test the robustness of my hypothesis. I demonstrate that Malaysia’s relations with China has not been adversely affected by the increased Chinese assertiveness in the region. Malaysia handled the South China Sea issues rather peacefully and quietly with China, “balancing its national interest of maintaining close economic relations with China with the alleged regional interest of ASEAN solidarity vis-a-vis China.”⁶⁵ In chapter 5 I will discuss the differences between Malaysia and the other two claimant states in terms of perception and approach.

⁶⁵ CHENG-CHWEE, K. (2008). The essence of hedging: Malaysia and singapore's response to a rising china. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 30(2), 159-185.

Vietnam and the Philippines meet the three criteria and the two cases are highly comparable. Both have experienced political legitimacy crises at the national level to some extent. For the Philippines, it was the legitimacy crisis of leadership—Gloria Arroyo was brought down by Aquino III for rampant corruption. Vietnam after the year 2008 began to experiencing economic stagnation, a crisis that has challenged the legitimacy source of the ruling party which is based on a performance-based legitimation model. In addition, both countries are the claimant states competing with China over disputed waters in the South China Sea. In this aspect, I could isolate the exogenous effects caused by the territorial disputes.

The empirical testing consists of two parts. The first part explores the historical trajectories of regional powers' relationship with big powers. I argue that a narrative is historically contingent, and therefore the aim of drawing analogies from history is to show that the 'constructed narrative' argument is generalizable to explain more than one single case beyond the context of China's rise. I will explain how leadership competition for political legitimacy have affected the portrayal and manoeuvring of an external great power in the past. I also aim to spell out the causal mechanism of my hypothesis through illustration using historical evidence. The second part examines how narratives of China's rise is being constructed in today's context. I examine Vietnam and Philippine's perception and portrayal of China's hegemonic rise today, and identify the causes which have led to the creation of inconsistent narratives.

I look at Vietnam's foreign relations in the 1960s and 1970s in light of the Sino-Soviet split with China and the Soviet Union, as well as the Vietnam-Sino relations in the early 1990s. Party factionalism in Hanoi served as a unique characteristic of Vietnamese domestic politics that had contributed to the construction of different narratives of big powers. Political legitimacy of the war-time Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) was defined primarily by its capability in defending the nation against the US in the Vietnam War. In the 1960s and 1970s Hanoi struggled to maintain a favorable stance between the Soviet Union and China in order to gain as much benefit as possible by exploiting the Sino-Soviet split. Hanoi constantly adjusted its strategy to cope with China and the Soviet Union throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Along the process of foreign policy adjustment, Hanoi came up with different narratives to describe both China and the Soviet's involvement in Vietnam and Indochina. These descriptions, I argue, had justified Hanoi's foreign policy; and those narratives had gradually evolved to become Vietnamese official discourse on China in the Cold War phrase—a discourse which could be best characterized as a mixture of love and hostility.

In the 1990s, Vietnam-Sino diplomatic relations was resumed with a new phrase of normalization. However, party split continued, and in the 1990s the party was split between the pro-Chinese group and the pro-US group. The two groups constantly debated with each other over an important issue of whether getting Vietnam was getting too close with China or the US. This debate is still

going on as factionalism continued to manifest itself along the pro-Chinese, pro-US, and the 'neutral' group in Vietnam today.

I then turn to the Philippines, I examine Philippine's relations with the US in the immediate post-Marcos era. The Philippines was the US close ally under president Ferdinand Marcos. However, Marcos lost the legitimacy and was overthrown through a mass protest known as the People's Power Movement in 1986. The group of political figures who toppled the Marcos regime believed that the US was largely responsible for supporting the Marcos dictatorship. As a result, Corazon Aquino, Marcos's successor who was brought in to power through the People's Power movement, had initiated the closing down project to remove the US military bases in the Philippines despite her personal pro-US preference, and eventually led to a cooling-off period for their bilateral relations. Along the process of leadership transition, Manila made up narratives about the American imperialism and neocolonialism to counter the hegemonic discourse of American domination.

4.2.1 Case Study I: Vietnam

Political legitimacy in Vietnam is based on a the Vietnamese Communist Party's (VCP) collective leadership. Although Vietnam is a communist country, unlike other communist countries of its time such as the former Soviet Union and China, political power was more dispersed in Vietnam that it was not concentrated in the hands of a particular person.

In Vietnam, collective leadership refers to the “decision-making process within the party in which high-ranking members, through bargains and compromises on goal priorities, achieved unanimity in endorsing policy guidelines and carried collective responsibility for their consequences.”⁶⁶ As believed by Vasavakul, it was “the unity of the [collective] leadership that sustained the legitimacy of the party among both the political elite and the rank-and-file.”⁶⁷

In spite of being an authoritarian state, collective leadership has prevented a monopoly of power by one person and political polarization. There are three main principles that define the party’s approach to collective leadership. Firstly, decision-making is made collectively as a result of the maintenance of factional representation in both the Politburo, as well as regional and ethnic representation in the Central Committee. Secondly, the formulation and implementation of final decisions are achieved through bargaining and compromise on policies and strategies. As such, policies and strategies are synthesised. Lastly and most importantly, power is shared among key personalities and political institutions.⁶⁸

Collective leadership has had an important impact on Vietnamese foreign policy. The split between the pro-Chinese and the pro-Soviet faction of the ruling party between the 1960s and 1970s is one key determinant factor that has shaped its foreign relations with China and the Soviet Union. In particular,

⁶⁶ Stephen J. Morris, “The Soviet-Chinese-Vietnamese triangle in the 1970s: the view from Moscow” in *Behind the bamboo curtain: China, Vietnam, and the world beyond Asia* edited by Priscilla Roberts, pp.263.

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid

factional disagreements were the source of the alternation of perceptions and narratives vis-a-vis China and the Soviet Union.

The link between party division and Hanoi's foreign policy is exemplified in Vietnam's ambivalent attitudes towards China and the Soviet Union during the period of the Sino-Soviet Split. The prolonged war had forced North Vietnam to adopt a flexible strategy, that as long as the war went on, the Vietnamese communist party had to "maintain a middle-of-the-road position between Russia and China even though the two had fallen out."⁶⁹ Since the party was split into predominantly the pro-Chinese and the pro-Soviet factions which are equally powerful and influential. And since the decision-making was informed by the collective leadership, Hanoi kept strategic balance between China and the Soviet Union. This strategy is viewed by most scholars as a means upon which Vietnam could maximize its interests by obtaining more aid from both sides.⁷⁰

The disagreements between China and the Soviets over the transit of Soviet aid materials over Chinese rails placed Vietnam which was eager to obtain massive quantities of supplies of war-equipments, in a dilemma.⁷¹ North Vietnam turned to the Soviet for more 'generous' support was evident as "Hanoi preferred a strong offensive and called on China to supply more

⁶⁹ Canh, N. V., & Cooper, E. (1983). *Vietnam under communism, 1975-1982*. Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, pp.70.

⁷⁰ Hershberg, James G. (James Gordon), Chen, J., & Cold War International History Project. (1996). *The cold war in asia*, p240-241. Khoo, N. (2010). Breaking the ring of encirclement: The sino-soviet rift and chinese policy toward vietnam, 1964-1968. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 12(1), 3-42.

⁷¹ Li Danhui, " The Sino-Soviet Dispute over Assistance for Vietnam's Anti-American War, 1965-1972" in *Behind the bamboo curtain: China, Vietnam, and the world beyond Asia* edited by Priscilla Roberts, pp.301.

sophisticated weapons. China was not prepared to supply such weapons. On the other hand, it did not want Moscow in the Sino-Soviet dispute. The Chinese recommendation for Hanoi, therefore, was a strategy of protracted war.”⁷²

North Vietnam’s strategy in dealing with the Sino-Soviet split acted as a counter-force to the one-sided foreign policy orientation. Li points it out in his analyses, that Vietnam’s first priority was to ensure that military resources from the Soviet Union would be successfully transported to Vietnam. To govern its priority, Vietnamese leadership took up two measures. First, Hanoi exerted pressure on Beijing by informing Chinese leaders that Hanoi had signed an agreement with the Soviets and the Eastern European nations to arrange direct shipment to Vietnam harbors for war equipment and economic assistance. This was to signal China that with the assurance from the Soviet Union, Vietnam would be able to counter any possible Chinese aggression. When Soviet aid to Vietnam continued to increase, and surpassing Chinese aid by a large margin. Hanoi believed that “it could capitalize on and maximize its gains from the conflict between China and the SU.”⁷³ For this purpose, as such, “only one month after Beijing turned down its request for additional assistance, the Vietnamese sought—and received—aid from the Soviet Union.”⁷⁴

⁷² Morley, J. W., Nishihara, M., & NetLibrary, I. (1997). *Vietnam joins the world*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe. Tatsumi Okabe “Coping with China”, pp.118.

⁷³ Shen Zhihua, “Sino-US Reconciliation and China’s Vietnam Policy” in *Behind the bamboo curtain: China, Vietnam, and the world beyond Asia* edited by Priscilla Roberts, pp.364.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

Secondly, despite of concluding a formal alliance with the Soviets, Vietnamese would not want to lose China's support entirely. From Vietnamese perspective, China was an equally valuable supporter as a substantial quantity of aid came from China more directly and promptly than its Soviet equivalent.⁷⁵ To secure assistance from both "big brothers", Vietnam kept a 'neutral' position between China and the Soviet Union on a strategic basis.

Political legitimacy of the 1960s and 1970s North Vietnam government was determined by its credibility in fighting against the American troops. This national agenda set the tone for North Vietnam's foreign relations. As such, North Vietnam's foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s was primarily aid-driven. Any constraint to its access to material aids from external parties would be deemed as a threat to its survival and hence, VCP's political legitimacy. Confrontations between the Soviet Union and China in Indochina laid the overall context for Vietnam's relations with its two significant external Others. North Vietnam's choice not to side-line with either one of them was a strategic yet highly risky approach. It was not entirely intuitive for North Vietnamese leadership to adopt such an approach because it might have offended both Beijing and Moscow, and as a consequence, Vietnam would have lost support from the two most important external sources.⁷⁶ No doubt Beijing and Moscow were both eager not to lose Vietnam in the Southeast

⁷⁵ Li Danhui, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute over Assistance for Vietnam's Anti-American War, 1965-1972" in *Behind the bamboo curtain: China, Vietnam, and the world beyond Asia* edited by Priscilla Roberts, pp.301.

⁷⁶ Crockatt, R. (1995). *The fifty years war: The united states and the soviet union in world politics, 1941-1991*. New York;London;: Routledge, pp.245.

Asia battlefield—this had provided a favorable condition for the Vietnamese to implement their strategy.

To keep the strategy work, Hanoi systematically constructed a set of narratives to address both its domestic and international audience via political rhetorics. When China was criticized by the Western media for “blocking the transit of equipment”, Vietnam stood up to defend China against the West by issuing a statement through its central news agency on Feb 28, 1967. Vietnam declared that China had “transported properly and according to schedule all aid materials from the Soviet Union and other nations to Vietnam.”⁷⁷ To justify and to make the strategy of maintaining a stance of neutrality in the Sino-Soviet confrontation work to its advantage, Vietnam came up a story about China’s positive engagement in the communist camp in Southeast Asia and put it up to the public front. It turned out that no matter what conflicts existed between the Beijing and Moscow, or how intense the conflicts became, as a consequence Vietnam managed to continue to benefit from the two countries’ delivery of material assistance. Partly because both China and the Soviet Union was reluctant to lose its leadership status in the communist camp, but more credits should be attributed to Vietnam’s strategic approach which had turned the situation to its own advantage.

I point out that the stories which the Vietnamese government came up with to describe the two great powers’ role in Southeast Asia have determined the effectiveness of the strategy. The narrative about China being an important

⁷⁷ Ibid

regional leader that is secondary to the Soviet Union in terms of influence and recognition created more room for Vietnam to manoeuvre between major regional powers. Competition between Beijing and Moscow for regional influence and leadership in Indochina created the larger context for the development of regional politics. However, regional politics was also informed and shaped by domestic politics in Vietnam.

The existence of the pro-Soviet and the pro-Chinese factions in the party and the politburo means that a decision was to be discussed and debated before a consensus to both factions to be reached, with each being a counter-force for the other group. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Vietnam identified and portrayed China both as a 'big brother' and an 'enemy'. As remarked by a Vietnamese diplomat to Nayan Chanda in 1977, that: "[In all history,] we have been secure[d] from China in only two conditions. One is when China is weak and internally divided. The other is when she has been threatened by barbarians from the north. In the present era, the Russians are our barbarians."⁷⁸ Under this circumstance, North Vietnam constructed an ambivalent image of China's involvement in Indochina that was subjected to changes. For example, when Beijing was perceived by Hanoi to be less supportive to its decision to go more aggressive in the battlefield, the party's pro-Soviet faction urged for a more consolidated ally with the Soviet. Similarly, the pro-Chinese group acted to prevent the party from falling completely to one particular power. North Vietnam's attitudes towards China

⁷⁸ *Vietnam's future policies and role in southeast asia* (1982), pp. 37.

were strategically ambivalent—positioning itself in a more flexible status and greater room for manoeuvring.

Vietnam altered its foreign relations with other major powers again as a result of domestic legitimacy crisis from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. As noted by Thayer, political legitimacy since 1986 has largely rested on the economic performance—a performance based legitimacy depended on the ability in delivering economic growth.⁷⁹ Prior to the 1975 unification, Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP)’s legitimacy was based on its leadership in national resistance against foreign intervention. Thayer also noticed that “although Vietnam remains a ‘soft authoritarian’ state, its political legitimacy rests on multiple sources including responsiveness to challenges from within and below to speed up the pace and scope of political change.”⁸⁰ Undeniably, socio-economic performance has become the most important source of political legitimacy among a variety of other sources such as Marxist ideology, socialist objectives and popular mobilization after the launch of Doi Moi in 1986.⁸¹ The government was expected to provide social and economic benefits for its citizens. It could be regarded as the single most important source from which communist regimes derive their legitimacy.⁸²

The implementation of the Doi Moi policy brought important changes to Vietnam’s foreign policy towards major powers, most significantly, the US

⁷⁹ THAYER, C. A. (2010). Political legitimacy in Vietnam: Challenge and Response. *Politics & Policy*, 38(3), 423-444, pp.440.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁸¹ HIEP, L. H. (2012). Performance-based legitimacy: The case of the communist party of vietnam and "doi moi". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 34(2), 145-172.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 151.

and China in the 1990s. Vietnam adopted a new strategy to cope with an economically expanding China. Hanoi aimed to forge a close economic ties with China with the aim to bolster its own economic growth. Thus, the normalization of Sino-Vietnam relations from the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War was another important turning point and policy shift. I wish to highlight that the normalization was a result of intensive debate between party factions. Donald Zagoria argues that there had been a debate within the top Hanoi leadership over two conflicting options. Factionalism continued to persist in the party between the pro-Chinese group and the ‘realist’ group. The pro-Chinese faction, which was supported by older party officials and a group of military cadres, “stressed the common ideology ties of the two communist states, and the fact that they allegedly shared a common external threat from the West, particularly the US.”⁸³ This group supported the strategy of peaceful evolution and to forge a closer relationship with Beijing. The realist faction, on the other hand, countered the pro-Chinese group’s claims while emphasizing China’s expansionist ambitions in the region historically, often at Vietnam’s expense. For a time during the early 1990s, the pro-Chinese group in Hanoi seemed to gain the upper hand, and finally in November 1991, Vietnam’s relations with China were fully normalized at both the party and the state level.⁸⁴

As part of the legacy of Vietnam’s complicated relations with China, the pro-Chinese would always be accompanied by a less supportive, if not anti-

⁸³ Donald S. Zagoria, “Joining ASEAN” in *Vietnam Joins the World*, pp.155.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

Chinese group. Vietnam's attitudes towards China often swings forward and backward rather frequently. Evidently, the good relations which had just been built up between China and Vietnam did not last long. By 1992, relations between the two countries were seriously troubled. According to Zagoria, the troubled relations was "largely [due to] China's continued assertiveness in the South China Sea, where China's claims overlap those of the Republic of China on Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, as well as of Vietnam. [And] since then the conflict has continued to escalate, a recent incident occurring in early 1995 when China took a step that marked a major turning point in its relations not only with Vietnam but with the entire region."⁸⁵

However, as Le Hong Hiep, Brantly Womack and some other scholars have noted, that "changes in Vietnam's foreign policy and its China policy originated first and foremost from the VCP's domestic agenda of promoting economic reform and protecting the regime's survival."⁸⁶ As such, although post 1990s Sino-Vietnam bilateral relations had been dominated by concerns for the territorial issue, both governments were determined not to let such problems fatter the development of bilateral ties.

On the contrary, both parties preferred the framework of negotiation to manage and to resolve the problems, and most importantly, conflict between the two countries' armed forces [had been] avoided.⁸⁷ Since 1991, political and

⁸⁵ Ibid., 155-156.

⁸⁶ HIEP, L. H. (2012). Performance-based legitimacy: The case of the communist party of Vietnam and "doi moi". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 34(2), 145-172.

⁸⁷ Ian Storey, "Conflict in the South China Sea: China's Relations with Vietnam and the Philippines", presented on May 22 2008, at the symposium on Crises in the Asia-Pacific at Sophia University, Tokyo.

diplomatic bilateral relations have developed quickly, that the two countries initiated an annual routine summit visits, giving the top leaders the opportunity to discuss economic reforms on a regular basis.⁸⁸ It is evident that the South China Sea issue, despite being a recurring theme and potential source of conflict for both China and Vietnam, might not always trigger similar outcomes. VCP aimed to strengthen its political legitimacy that they suspended the territorial issue in exchange for greater economic benefits. In this aspect, in the 1990s Vietnam narrated China as a model to emulate, a guidance for its market reform from a socialist economy into a market-oriented economy incorporable into the global economic system. Hence, in spite of the presence of territorial disputes, Vietnam had chosen to ‘ignore’ Chinese assertive claims. The ‘China as role model’ narrative is an illustration of a domestic-oriented foreign policy discourse reflecting a smaller state’s perception of a rising hegemonic power.

Thus, one should be paying more attention to the causes behind Vietnam’s strategic makeup, and not simply focusing on the outcomes and concludes that it is a result of strategic reorientation based on realistic concerns. No doubt Vietnam’s policy adjustments in the 1990s towards China reflected the overall national interests, I urge this scholarship to pay attention to both the decision-making process of Vietnamese foreign policy in the 1990s.

Vietnam’s switch to performance-based legitimacy has had important impact on its foreign policy. The consistency of the country’s economic

⁸⁸ Xiaosong, G., & Womack, B. (2000). Border cooperation between china and vietnam in the 1990s. *Asian Survey*, 40(6), 1042-1058.

growth would directly affect the country's legitimacy. The ruling party is now presented with serious challenges in maintaining "uninterrupted socio-economic development."⁸⁹ The situation has become especially challenging in the context of the global economic downturn since 2008 whereby Vietnam has been trying to integrate into the system. Against this backdrop, nationalism regarding Vietnam's territorial claims in the South China Sea, has been revived as an additional source of legitimacy in times of economic difficulties.

4.2.2 Case Study II: The Philippines

I examine foreign relations of the Philippines with big powers in the Asia-Pacific at two critical junctures. The fall of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 marked the victory of the "People's Power", as well as a critical moment that had cooling-off the US-Philippine relations and set the prelude for the US withdrawal from the Subic Bay naval base in 1992. As a result of this drastic change in Philippine domestic politics, there witnessed a surge of anti-American sentiment amongst political Leftists and ordinary Filipinos. The Philippines' foreign policy had been oriented into a direction which had led to an cooling-off of its bilateral relations with the US.

Political legitimacy in the Philippines is particularly pertinent to crises in times of leadership transitions. This is largely because patronage and paternalism defines the nature of politics in the Philippines, and patron-client

⁸⁹ HIEP, L. H. (2012). Performance-based legitimacy: The case of the communist party of vietnam and "doi moi". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 34(2), pp.147.

relationship the centre of the legitimation model.⁹⁰ Clientelism persists across the entire social system of governance. According to Muthiah Alagappa, “the efforts to legitimize political and economic power on a personal basis, as well as the deemphasis of the formal institutions and laws of the Philippines’ constitutional democracy, underline the need to distinguish between the legitimation of individual holders of political and economic power, on the one hand, and the legitimation of the nation-state and the regime on the other.”⁹¹ Therefore, Philippine politicians are motivated to make a consistent effort to establish bonds with their constituency and to strengthen the idiom of the family in order to achieve political eternity. Many scholarly works and newspaper reports have shown, that Philippines politicians have typically expressed claims to legitimacy in terms of family. One example given by Alagappa, is that “the town mayor often represents the interests of a particular clan, and it is not uncommon for mayorships to be passed down within a family or rotated.”⁹²

Given that Philippine politics is dominated by a small number of extremely political and economically powerful families, political legitimacy which is based on personal ties and family relations, is particularly fragile. The

⁹⁰ Many scholars of comparative politics and experts of the Philippines politics hold this belief. Some of the more prominent ones such as Anderson, B. (1988). *Cacique democracy and the philippines: Origins and dreams*. *New Left Review*, (169), 3.; Kang, D. C. (2002). *Crony capitalism: Corruption and development in south korea and the philippines*. New York: Cambridge University Press., and Hutchcroft, P. D. (2001). *Centralization and decentralization in administration and politics: Assessing territorial dimensions of authority and power*. *Governance*, 14(1), 23-53.

⁹¹ Alagappa, M., Case, W. F., & Khong, C. O. (1995). *Political legitimacy in southeast asia: The quest for moral authority*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, pp.138.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 156.

legitimacy issue will be manipulated by the new leadership as a way to justify the new government's legitimacy to power.

Regime legitimacy in the Philippines began to decline since the mid-1970s, and was faced with the most serious crisis in 1986 after the assassination of Ninoy Aquino. This assassination marked a critical disjuncture in the political history of the Philippines, both at home and abroad. The country's foreign relations with the US had been significantly altered as a result of the rise of anti-American sentiment in the immediate post-Marcos era.⁹³

Corazon Aquino's rise to power altered Philippine-US relations in a critical way. One direct as well as the most significant repercussion was the withdrawal of the US forces from the Subic Navy base and the closing down of the Clark Air base in 1991, followed by a cooling-off period of the bilateral relations between the Philippines and the US. The triumph of the 'People's Power' movement changed the legitimacy basis of the country significantly to the extent that the Corazon Aquino had to accommodate the needs of the Leftists who were intensively suspicious of the US and who had played an important role in toppling down Marcos, sometimes even against her own will.⁹⁴ Many opposition leaders also maintained an anti-bases position included prominent political figures such as Jovito Salonga, President of the Liberal Party, and several important senators.⁹⁵ In this respect, Aquino had to

⁹³ David Wurfel "Philippine Foreign Policy" in Wurfel, D., Burton, B., Stubbs, R., & Lim, L. (1990). *The political economy of foreign policy in southeast asia*. Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan.

⁹⁴ Bello, W. (1986). Aquino's elite populism: Initial reflections. *Third World Quarterly*, 8(3), 1020-1030.

⁹⁵ Baker, Anni. (2004) *American Soldiers Overseas*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, pp. 115-116.

compromise her pro-US stance and elitist identity. One convincing explanation that would account for Aquino's accommodating gesture to the leftists and the anti-American groups was the aim to consolidating her legitimacy to govern.

Corazon Aquino's political legitimacy is grounded in the people's power movement, and there emerged a strong anti-American sentiment in Manila. Unlike her successor Marcos, Corazon Aquino was not being supported by the US, at least not from the very beginning of her candidature. As noted by David Wurfel, "Mrs. Aquino being most sharply critical of the US...[She] emerged without the prior blessings of the White House, which was loyal to Marcos almost to the end."⁹⁶ Since Mrs Aquino's administration was established based on the overthrow of the Marcos regime, there emerged a new source of the country's political legitimacy—one that was backed up by the collusion of anti-Marcos forces fuelled by anti-American sentiment.

Evidently, concerns about political legitimacy in the domestic sphere had a direct impact on its foreign relations with the US. Mrs. Aquino's unprecedented popularity granted her a new autonomy in both the national and international realms. Unlike her predecessor Marcos, She was less compelled to use foreign policy as a tool to strike for regime survival. As such, the importance of the presence of the US military inside the country, was deliberately downplayed by Corazon Aquino.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ David Wurfel "Philippine Foreign Policy" in Wurfel, D., Burton, B., Stubbs, R., & Lim, L. (1990). *The political economy of foreign policy in southeast asia*. Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan.

⁹⁷ Bello, W. (1986). Aquino's elite populism: Initial reflections. *Third World Quarterly*, 8(3), 1020-1030.

Another piece of evidence to illustrate how legitimacy problems surfaced attributable to the 1986 leadership transition was a real concern for Aquino. Such that she would be the sacrifice of her personal wills in exchange for support from both the socialist leftists as well as the right-wing Marcos loyalists in her cabinet. According to Aquino's top advisers, "she has been forced to keep her feelings about the US largely to herself. Her government faces unprecedented pressure from liberal nationalists who supported her in the election...[And] it was the hardened leftists [Aquino] feared the most. It was obvious that they were mobilizing all their forces and their propaganda machine to force her hand on the issues concerning the US."⁹⁸

The rise of anti-American sentiment in post-Marcos Philippines was partly responsible for the government's decision on chasing out the US military presence. Corazon Aquino had favored the removal of the bases in the late 1985 election. Evidently, this decision had caused some real concerns from the perspective of the White House. The article *What Ronald Reagan should tell Cory Aquino* illustrated how Washington was truly worried about the anti-American faction of Corazon Aquino's cabinet, and was hoping to make use of Aquino's visit to the states as a chance to mitigate a variety of problems, including the growing communist insurgency in the Philippines.⁹⁹ Although later Mrs Aquino softened her stance on the removal of the US military in

⁹⁸ Mark Fineman, "US-Philippine Relations Turning Warmer in Post-Marcos Era" July 12, 1986. (Accessed 16 June 2016) <http://articles.latimes.com/1986-07-12/news/mn-22628_1_philippine-relations/2>

⁹⁹ Richard D. Fisher "What Ronald Reagan Should Tell Cory Aquino" September 12 1986. (Accessed 17 June 2016) <<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/1986/09/what-ronald-reagan-should-tell-cory-aquino>>

early 1986 with the ambiguous claim of “keep my options open”¹⁰⁰, this position was carefully made to hold together the disparate wings of her coalition.¹⁰¹

The foreign policy shift towards the US in the Philippines in the late 1980s was however, not an coincidence. Corazon Aquino came to power, not through elections, but through extra-parliamentary means which was largely backed by spontaneous people’s movement.¹⁰² Massive popular support formed the basis of her governance, and continued to serve as key source of legitimacy in the early post-Marcos years. Therefore Aquino had the incentive to keep her ‘promise’ to her people, for otherwise she would have lost her presidency for not being able to keep the anti-American groups happy since they constituted a large body of the anti-Marcos crowd. Evidently, she kept her promise to the people, that ‘I will not allow myself to be stopped...[The] people are on my side and I can still draw large crowds in the squares.’¹⁰³ A feature that underlined the critical difference between Marcos and Aquino’s government as a result of leadership transition was the offset of the interests of the ruling class that it became ambivalent toward the US.

Aquino’s concern over the legitimacy of her governance altered Manila’s perception of the US as a regional hegemony. The ascendancy of Corazon Aquino as president created a popular sentiment not only among the leftists

¹⁰⁰ Mynardo Macaraig, ‘Millions miss out under Arroyo’s watch, analysts say,’ Agence France Presse, 26 June 2010.

¹⁰¹ David Wurfel “Philippine Foreign Policy” in Wurfel, D., Burton, B., Stubbs, R., & Lim, L. (1990). *The political economy of foreign policy in southeast asia*. Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan.

¹⁰² Bello, W. (1986). Aquino's elite populism: Initial reflections. *Third World Quarterly*, 8(3), 1020-1030.

¹⁰³ Ibid

but also many average Philippine citizens against the continuation of the US military presence as “a violation of national dignity and sovereignty.”¹⁰⁴ Even many within the Philippine elite argued that “the US presence was causing the Philippine military to rely too much on the US and neglect its own naval and air forces.”¹⁰⁵ The anti-bases stance held by the increasingly powerful leftists and supported by more and more average Filipinos in the late 1980s pressurized the Philippine Senate to reject the newly negotiated base agreement and set in motion a total US withdrawal from Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base by the end of 1992.¹⁰⁶ According to Khong, by 1989 it became clear that “[The] negotiations had become entangled with a fierce domestic political debate within the Philippines. The surge in Filipino nationalism derailed the negotiations.”¹⁰⁷

One consequence of the change of perception towards the US, I argue, was the emergence of a new discourse on the US hegemony. The counter-US hegemony narratives became more prominent in the Philippines due to the change of political dynamics at home. The US was represented as an undesirable imperialist power in the Philippines’ official discourses after the anti-American nationalists emerged to become a powerful political force. At the national level, the people’s power movement to oust Marcos—the oppositions most invested in strident anti-Americanism were those who

¹⁰⁴ U.S. alliances and emerging partnerships in southeast asia. (2009). Center for Strategic and International Studies, pp.19.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ He, K., & NetLibrary, I. (2009). *Institutional balancing in the asia pacific: Economic interdependence and china's rise*. Abingdon, Oxon;New York, NY:: Routledge, pp.73.

¹⁰⁷ Yuen Foong Khong, “Coping with Strategic Uncertainty, The role of Institutions and Soft Balancing in Southeast Asia’s Post—Cold War Strategy” in Suh, J. J., Katzenstein, P. J., & Carlson, A. (2004). *Rethinking security in east asia: Identity, power, and efficiency*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

restored order to the Philippines. Given the critical role these people had played in defining the country's new source of legitimacy, they had become a part of the new settlement, and "their strongly anti-American views would presumably have been incorporated into the dominant account of the episode and the legitimating frame of the new regime."¹⁰⁸

The anti-American narrative became even more prominent in the public sphere. According to a new report, "[When] Secretary of State George P. Shultz arrived in Manila, about 100 demonstrators waving red flags and shouting anti-American slogans greeted his motorcade from the airport. Many carried signs denouncing "U.S. Imperialism" in the Philippines, demanding the dismantling of two U.S. military bases here and declaring, "Shultz Go Home."¹⁰⁹ The persistence of the anti-US hegemony narratives had long term repercussions, particularly in shaping the post-colonial discourse in the Philippines, that "[The] legitimation crisis of imperial power frames all discourse on US-Philippines relations. Conceived as one ideological discourse mobilized for the post-Marcos era of mending "fences" and "bridges".¹¹⁰

Domestic competition for political legitimacy and influence had remarkable impacts on the country's foreign policy vis-a-vis its significant Others. In the case of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos relied on American support for his presidency, and the US had backed him up against his political opponents

¹⁰⁸ Katzenstein, P. J., & Keohane, R. O. (2007). *Anti-americanisms in world politics*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, pp.262.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Fineman "U.S.-Philippine Relations Turning Warmer in Post-Marcos Era" July 12, 1986 <http://articles.latimes.com/1986-07-12/news/mn-22628_1_philippine-relations>

¹¹⁰ San Juan, E. (1998). *Beyond postcolonial theory* (1st ed.). Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, pp.65.

almost till the end. Therefore, Marcos's opponents who eventually came to power found it necessary to criticize the US for supporting Marcos at the expense of Philippine's national interests. The strategic choice made by Washington not only sowed the seeds of the later anti-American movements, but also changed the way the US hegemony was being perceived by the Philippines.

Narratives exerted a real impact on foreign policy decision-making. First, anti-American narratives had become a part of a chaotic democratic polity in the Philippines in the post-Marcos era. This polity has created "uncertainty about the strength and reliability of Philippine partnership."¹¹¹ The closing of the US bases would mean a great economic loss for the Philippine state. For the Philippines, the biggest advantage deriving from the US military bases had been economic. "Some 70,000 skilled and unskilled workers have been employed there, with earnings of approximately \$100 million annually in recent years. In addition, the bases have brought in US bilateral economic aid."¹¹² The two countries had ushered into a severe cooling-off period after the Philippine Senate rejected a new base agreement in 1992. The US security assistance fell to minimal levels, and US strategic planners bypassed the Philippines in their calculation.

¹¹¹ U.S. alliances and emerging partnerships in southeast asia. (2009). Center for Strategic and International Studies, pp.19.

¹¹² Kahin, G. M. (1993). The US-philippine security relationship: Dependent on the bases? *South East Asia Research*, 1(2), 127-142.

Chapter 5 The Rise of China as a Constructed Narrative

5.1 The Construction of China's Rise

This section examines the construction of the rise of China narratives in Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Vietnam after 2008 began to experience a legitimacy crisis due to the slowing down of the global economy. As such, Vietnamese government began to explore alternative sources of legitimacy, and eventually the government turned to nationalism. Since 2010, Vietnam has become particular about its territorial integrity, and started to act hostile towards China in the South China Sea.

A similar trend is also observed in the Philippines, leadership transition from Gloria Arroyo to Aquino III was caused by a legitimacy crisis whereby Arroyo was charged for rampant corruption and electoral fraud. Philippine's relations with China was rosy under Arroyo administration and her government identified positively with a rising China. However, Aquino III came to power by questioning Arroyo's legitimacy to rule, and therefore for him to be identified as legitimate in the eyes of his people. Aquino III cut all the possible legitimacy sources that had once supported Gloria Arroyo. Therefore it was not surprising that Aquino III blamed China for indirectly contributed to the corruption in the Philippines. As a result, all major economic projects and agreements signed between Arroyo and China got cancelled. Like Vietnam, Aquino III also turned to nationalism in the South China Sea to boost legitimacy under his rule.

On the other hand, Malaysia has not suffered major legitimacy crises over the past decade, which is the timeframe I use for my hypothesis testing. With this case, I am hoping to show that China's changing approach to deal with the disputed waters in the South China Sea is not a sufficient condition for the change of perception towards China. On the contrary, Malaysia's portrayal of a rising China has been one that is positive and consistent.

To facilitate my illustration, I present both the similarities as well as differences across the three selected cases in Table 1, I highlight that with other things being equal, legitimacy crises is a variable that has caused the construction of inconsistent narratives in Vietnam and the Philippines. Next, I present the most prominent narratives of China's rise constructed in the three countries in Table 2.

The methodology which I applied to obtain these narratives is Content Analysis—I select a variety of sources that are representative of the official discourses of a country including leadership speeches, interviews, and some secondary literatures (See Appendix). I examine articles or reports on the widely circulated publications in English including *The Diplomat*, *East Asia Forum*, and *The Straits Times*. Cross-referencing helps to improve reliability. To control for selection bias, I randomised the selection process and avoided cherry-picking the sources. For example, I used only neutral and simple keywords for keyword search (i.e. 'China,' 'China's rise', and 'Vietnam'; 'Philippine and China'). I did not add adjectives such as 'assertiveness' , 'threat', or 'peaceful rise' in my search that the search result might be skewed

toward a particular direction. This way, the source selection is one that is consistent. The timeframe is one that is less systematic because it is largely dependent on the availability of sources, which is mostly event-based. The tactic I applied to control for this matter is to supplement the primary sources with secondary scholarly sources, for which would provide me with a holistic view of the event.

I coded each narrative from text descriptions of China's rise and its implications; specifically, I ask: what does the rise of China mean to the country from the perspective of political elites? While coding, I took note of their expressions—the choice of words, tone and analogies. Table 2 also compares responses as well as foreign policies before and after the occurrence of the legitimacy crisis. I show that legitimacy crises affect not only the state's perception but also behaviors in foreign policy decision-making. I will elaborate how narratives were being constructed in these countries in the following paragraphs.

Table 1 Case Comparison

Countries	Claimant state in the South China Sea	Increased Chinese assertiveness	Legitimacy crises	Inconsistent narratives
Vietnam	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The Philippines	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Malaysia	Yes	Yes	No	No

Table 2 Narratives of the Rise of China

Countries	Narratives of the rise of China	Actions taken in response to China's rise	Foreign policy towards China
Vietnam before the 2008 global economic crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -economic powerhouse -helps to reduce poverty -friendly neighbor -total cooperation -provide stable and long-term benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -more trade cooperation -attracted Chinese economic investment -imported and praised Chinese agricultural technologies -adopted new and business systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -normalized its relations with China since 1991 -significantly strengthened bilateral ties -regarded China's economic reform as a role-model -China became an important trading partner for Vietnam
Vietnam after the 2008 global economic crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -presents both opportunities and threats -old friends and old enemies -a powerful China means potential threat -competitor in Southeast Asia -threat to Vietnam's national integrity -expansionist intention -desire to become a global leading superpower -regards the US as a threat and have the intention to counter the US threat -militarily ambitious -revisionist power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hanoi decided not to further damage relations with Beijing. -Party Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and president Truong Tan Sang's embrace the idea that Beijing is a "good comrade." -avoid taking moves that could provoke Beijing -started to enhance its external defense capacity by purchasing arms from the US and Russia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Despite clashes over territorial issues, the trading relationship between China and Vietnam remains strong -economic relations between 2009 and 2010 have been enhanced. -cooperation at the party-to-party level has remained substantive

Countries	Narratives of the rise of China	Actions taken in response to China's rise	Foreign policy towards China
The Philippines under Gloria Arroyo (2001-2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -provide fresh competition and cooperation -generate opportunities and stability -global economic powerhouse -fastest-growing country in the region and in the world -significant opportunity for the Philippines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -signed 65 bilateral agreements with China (the largest number in Philippine's history) -initiated major economic projects such as the ZTE and North Rail projects -Arroyo herself was the founding member of APCU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -China emerged to become one of the Philippines' biggest trading partners and an important foreign investor -strict adherence of the Philippines to the One-China Policy -more receptive to Beijing's commercial incentives, willing to compromise Philippine claims
The Philippines under Benigno Aquino (2010-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -violating international rule and law -stirring tension in the region -likened the Nazi Germany -potential to cause war -forceful -assertive -generate undesirable economic outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -played down the value of China's economic investment -took a position of patriotism which is largely anti-China -renamed the disputed waters the "West Philippine Sea" -agreements with China entered into by the previous government have been suspended or cancelled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -took a multilateral track approach (i.e. ASEAN, East Asia Summit) with the hope of binding and socializing China into the framework. -advocates for a rules-based approach in solving disputes -strengthened its military capabilities to project a more credible defense

Countries	Narratives of the rise of China	Actions taken in response to China's rise	Foreign policy towards China
Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -a force for peace and stability -enhance the security of the Straits of malacca -responsible stakeholder in the security of Southeast Asia -harmless -non-threatening -no expansionist intent -will never seek hegemony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -fully committed to the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea -low-key in its response to the SCS issue -tried to avoid rocking boats in disputed waters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -expanded bilateral cooperation with China in many important sectors including security and defense. -prioritize productive ties with China and emphasize the use of diplomatic means in managing the disputes.

Vietnam's perception of China and foreign policy is influenced by two major domestic factors: rising nationalism with regard to the maritime territorial disputes with China, and disagreements between party leaders on the positioning of China in the country's future foreign policy.¹¹³ The 2008 global economic crisis has deteriorated Vietnamese economy.¹¹⁴ As illustrated in the above section, post-reform Vietnam regarded constant economic growth as core to the party's legitimacy.

Consequentially, in response to the country's poor economic performance after the slowing down of the global economy in 2008, Hanoi attempted to bolster its legitimacy from additional sources to supplement its performance-based legitimacy.¹¹⁵ According to Le Hong Hiep, "Among the most important sources that the CPV has resorted to is nationalism."¹¹⁶ The territorial disputes with China over sovereign claims of the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea has become a focal point in bolstering its nationalist sentiments. Importantly, to quote directly from Le's analyses, that "[Although] Vietnam's disputes with China has been a long standing issue in bilateral relations, it is noteworthy that Vietnam's position on the dispute and its reactions to China's moves in the South China Sea have been particularly strong and bold in the past few years. Although tensions in the South China

¹¹³ "China's relations with Burma, Malaysia, and Vietnam" A testimony by Murray Hiebert, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) May 13, 2015

¹¹⁴ HIEP, L. H. (2012). Performance-based legitimacy: The case of the communist party of Vietnam and "doi moi". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 34(2), 145-172.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Alexander L. Vuying "Vietnam, Arriving in the World—and at a crossroads" in Singh, D., & Tin Maung Maung Than. (2008). *Southeast Asian Affairs 2008*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. THAYER, C. A. (2009). Vietnam and the challenge of political civil society. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 31(1), 1-27. THAYER, C. A. (2010). Political legitimacy in Vietnam: Challenge and response. *Politics & Policy*, 38(3), 423-444.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

Sea have been rising for a variety of reasons, including increased competition for access to maritime resources and China's more assertive policy, the CPV's revival of nationalism at a time of economic difficulties has also become an important driver of the dispute."¹¹⁷

The significance of Vietnamese government's turn to nationalism against China since 2010 goes beyond the rally-round-the-flag effects. More importantly, disputes with China has in the effect exacerbated the economic turmoil in Vietnam. It suggests that nationalism has become an additional source of legitimation for the communist party in Vietnam to "offset the negative effects that economic difficulties have generated on this performance-based legitimacy."¹¹⁸ However, the strong emphasis on nationalism as a source of legitimacy only in times of economic downturns and when performance-based legitimacy is in decline.

Vietnam's construction of China as a rising regional hegemon follows historical trajectories in the 1970s and 1990s. The decline of political legitimacy coupled with party factionalism, together informed the narratives about China's rise which we are observing today. Party factionalism prevails and the debate about the position of China in foreign policy making continues between the pro-Chinese and the pro-US elites. As such, Vietnamese narrative of a rising China looks like a multifaceted image.

Perceptual inconsistency is reflected in Vietnamese attitudes towards China vis-a-vis its engagement in Southeast Asia. A survey conducted in 2008

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 165.

seeking Vietnamese about their attitudes towards China shows that 71 percent of Vietnamese believe China will be Asia's future leader, and 56 percent are comfortable with this outcome.¹¹⁹ Their perceptions towards China had been drastically altered just six years later, according to a Pew Research Center survey on global attitudes in 2014, only 16 percent of Vietnamese reported to have a favourable view of China, the second lowest level in Asia following Japan.¹²⁰

Notably, perceptual inconsistent does not necessarily create contradictory narratives. Next, I am going to demonstrate how competing narratives and discourses were being constructed by different authoritative bodies to strengthen their own political interests. In May 2014, China installed the oil-rig in the disputed waters which both China and Vietnam claim sovereignty near the Paracel Islands. The rig incident stirred a storm in the South China Sea as both Beijing and Hanoi regularly deployed vessels to the disputed areas and the tension had rapidly escalated. In response to perceived threat, protesters in Vietnam seized the opportunity to urge for domestic political reforms to gain leverage and to stand up more forcefully to China.

However, despite the increasing demand for the government to take up a more forceful stance against China, the attitudes towards China are largely informed and determined by the preferences of the most influential government officials. According to a 2014 commentary report, “[Right] after

¹¹⁹ Whitney, Christopher and David Shambaugh. “Soft Power in Asia: Results of a 2008 Multinational Survey of Public Opinion.” The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. 2008.

¹²⁰ Pew Research Center, “Global Attitudes & Trends: Global Indicators Database – Opinion of China,” (accessed 1 July 2016) <<http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/24/>>

the oil rig withdrawal, sources revealed that Dinh The Huynh, a pro-China camp member who heads the Communist Party's Department of Propaganda and Education, instructed the media not to go further to discredit China and make it lose face because of the move"¹²¹ Further supported by Southeast Asian specialist Carl Thayer, that the pro-Beijing group would avoid future conflict with China, and self-censor itself. "They would veto any policy likely to arouse Chinese ire. They would in effect bandwagon with China, that is, avoid criticism of China in the expectation of Vietnam would be rewarded economically for its good behavior."¹²²

Inferring from Dinh The Huynh's new approach to deal with China over territorial claims, one can plausibly argue that there is a correlation between party factions and the perception of and subsequently the depiction of China's rise. Today, the decision-making body of the Vietnamese Communist Party had been split into three camps.

The first one led by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung that wanted to pursue a proactive foreign policy towards China, and seek support from Japan and the US to balance China. On the other hand, the group seeking to forge a closer ties with China, led by Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong, is concerned that getting too close to the US would result in negative pressures or even sanctions by China. This division partly explains why certain narratives emerged to become more prominent than others. The victory of Nguyen Phu

¹²¹ Teddy Pham "A US-Vietnam Alliance? Not So Fast". The Diplomat, 4 August 2014. (accessed 2 July 2016) <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/08/a-us-vietnam-alliance-not-so-fast/>>

¹²² Ibid

Trong who was re-elected to the second five year term as General Secretary marked the triumph of the pro-Beijing group over the pro-US group led by Trong's major political rival Nguyen Tan Dung. The pro-Beijing leaders will come to rule the country. Analysts therefore pointed out that a closer strategic relations between the US and Vietnam is less likely to be materialized anytime soon.¹²³ A Washington-based Asia analyst Zachary Abuza said. "The Vietnamese have buckled to Chinese pressure. A majority of the Politburo is unwilling to stand up to China at this time."¹²⁴

In sum, the continued contestation between the pro-Beijing and pro-Washington groups means that foreign policy change is possibly a constant. Interestingly, whether or not China is acting assertively in the disputed waters has become less of a concern for the Vietnamese government whereby domestic division seems to matter more in terms of orienting the foreign policy both rhetorically and strategically. China's retreat has come at a "convenient juncture for the pro-Chinese faction of the party to preempt any planned legal action against China and thwart the highly anticipated alliance with the US."¹²⁵ The post-2008 economic downturn in Vietnam gave the government a greater incentive to exploit nationalism as an alternative source of legitimacy. Given there exists two opposing views regarding China within the Vietnamese leadership, therefore competing narratives regarding China's role in the region will emerge. Legitimacy crises are critical disjunctures as

¹²³ Shannon Van Sant "Vietnam Political Transition May Improve China Ties" Voice of America, 27 January 2016. (accessed 2 July 2016) <<http://www.voanews.com/content/vietnam-political-transition-may-improve-china-ties/3164543.html>>

¹²⁴ Teddy Pham "A US-Vietnam Alliance? Not So Fast". The Diplomat, 4 August 2014. (accessed 2 July 2016) <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/08/a-us-vietnam-alliance-not-so-fast/>>

¹²⁵ Ibid

political rivalries would seize the opportunities to discredit the current leadership of the secretary general. For instance, the pro-US group leader Dung has spoken out strongly in public and asserting that “[Vietnam] would consider taking legal action against China. In addition, Dung actively enlisted US support to balance China’s growing assertiveness in the region.”¹²⁶ The persistence of party factionalism means that the narrative about China’s rise is constructed and will be constantly changing, as opposed to a fixed one.

The year 2010 witnessed the delegitimization of Gloria Arroyo and her administration in the name of ‘People’s Power’ (a term emerged firstly in 1986). Philippine’s perception towards China’s continued economic expansion in the region has changed. According to Thompson, “[The] 2010 elections in the Philippines suggest that the long dominant political narrative of ‘rich-versus-poor’ has been challenged by ‘reformist’ appeals for good governance.”¹²⁷ Noynoy Aquino revived calls for clean governance which he identified the “straight path” using the unpopular Arroyo administration—widely believed to have been the most corrupt in the post-Marcos Philippines—as a convenient foil. “Aquino had inherited the legacy of his saintly mother. He is thus viewed by Filipinos as a political descendent of people’s power, with strong upper class backing. His popularity and partly the legitimacy of Aquino’s new government, is largely based on a reputation for personal

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Mark Thompson’s “Philippine People Power Thirty Years” in Kane, J., Loy, H., & Patapan, H. (2011). *Political legitimacy in asia: New leadership challenges* (1st ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

honesty and for his ability to keep family and friends away from corruption scandals.”¹²⁸

The rise of China had once been portrayed by the Arroyo administration as a great source and opportunity for regional stability and development, that the bilateral relations between the Philippines and China was characterized as enjoying a “golden age of partnership” which was attributable to mutual efforts made by the two countries.¹²⁹ What happened next when Aquino III became the president in 2010 was crucial for the understanding of the country’s revised foreign policy towards China—nationalist-oriented with the emphasis on the governance of territorial integrity.

One immediate outcome of leadership change was the termination of several major infrastructural projects founded by the Chinese government including the \$329.48-million National Broadband Network project with China’s Zhong Xing Telecommunications Equipment (ZTE) Corp and the North Luzon Railway System (North Rail) project.¹³⁰ China’s economic investment in the Philippines was perceived by the new government under the leadership of Aquino as a curse rather than a blessing which had created more rampant corruption and social dissonances in the country. Drawing reference on policy shift led by leadership change, I further argue that the reexamination

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Overview of Philippines-China Relations, obtained from the official website of the Embassy of the Philippines on 15 June 2016, <<http://beijingpe.dfa.gov.ph/phl-china-relations>>

¹³⁰ “Philippines’ Aquino halts foreign funded infrastructure projects”, obtained on 15 June 2016. <<https://asiancorrespondent.com/2011/06/philippines-aquino-halts-foreign-funded-infrastructure-projects/>>

of the two countries' economic cooperation was a tactic employed by Arroyo's successor to consolidate its legitimacy basis.

Leadership transitions in the Philippines were often accompanied by legitimacy crises. According to a paper generated by RAND Corporation which examines Philippine response to China's rise, the paper notes that there has been an enduring political instability since the fall of Marcos in 1986, the outcome being that political leaders were more inclined to "focus on short-term political manoeuvring" rather than foreign and security policy strategies.¹³¹ The cumulative effect is the tendency of the ruling political elite to act in reactive response to foreign initiatives and external developments or crises.¹³² Domestic political instability has played a critical role in shaping Sino-Philippine relations, and "[A] key determinant of the Philippines' response to the rise of China is the nature of the state, specifically its relative internal instability."¹³³

The RAND Political analysts believed that as a consequence of domestic political instability, Philippine's ability to play a more active role in the South China Sea vis-a-vis China was constrained. "These weaknesses, combined with the prospect of China-oriented economic growth, have produced a policy

¹³¹ Medeiros, E., Crane K., Heginbotham E., Lvin N., Lowell J., Rabasa A., Seong S. (2008). Pacific Currents: The Responses of US Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise (RAND Corporation), available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG736.sum.pdf>

¹³² Aileen Baviera, "The Influence of Domestic Politics on Philippine Foreign Policy: The Case of Philippines-China Relations Since 2004", RSIS Working Paper 241 (5 June 2012), available at <<https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/rsis-pubs/WP241.pdf>>

¹³³ Medeiros, E., Crane K., Heginbotham E., Lvin N., Lowell J., Rabasa A., Seong S. (2008). Pacific Currents: The Responses of US Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise (RAND Corporation), available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG736.sum.pdf>

of general accommodation toward China—an orientation that is likely to continue.”¹³⁴ However, this statement has been proven wrong when Aquino III became the president in 2010, Philippine’s relations with China had significantly declined ever since. Leadership transition from Gloria Arroyo to Aquino III was accompanied by a serious legitimacy crisis which questioned the credibility of Arroyo administration, and this domestic political shift had altered Philippine’ perception of China’s rise and foreign relations with Beijing in substantially. First, unlike his predecessor Arroyo, China’s economic investment in the Philippines was no longer viewed by Aquino III as a great economic benefit, but a source of corruption; second, Aquino played the nationalism card in dealing with the South China Sea issues as a tactic to add weight to his government’s legitimacy and the cohesion of his party profile.

It is not surprising that Aquino III, after became the president, began to crush down the sources including external ones that had once supported his predecessor Arroyo’s government by launching the large-scale anticorruption campaign. This is largely because Aquino won the election partly by its ability in discrediting Arroyo’s government for causing one corruption scandal after another and promising his people a “clean government and rule of law”¹³⁵

The delegitimization of Arroyo had adversely affected Philippine-Sino relations because many China-founded economic projects signed between

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Ernest Z. Bower “Philippine Elections: Aquino to become 15th president of the republic of the Philippines” 11 May 2010, Center for Strategic and International Studies <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/philippine-elections-aquino-become-15th-president-republic-philippines>>

Arroyo and Beijing were involved in the corruption scandals. It was not just convenient but also legitimate for Aquino to cancel those corrupted projects and to frame China's economic investment in a negative way. Evidently, multiple sources have revealed that Arroyo and her major patron De Venecia who initiated the economic projects with China had been heavily penalized for selling Philippines' integrity in exchange for Chinese money.¹³⁶ The Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking (JMSU) Controversy was such example, that senators alleged that "the agreement weakens the government's position in its claim over the disputed islands."¹³⁷ They further alleged that "it is a "precondition" set by China in exchange of some loan agreements. China has committed Philippines \$2 billion USD a year in loans after signing the agreement. President Gloria Arroyo is suspected by some legislators to be hiding the facts that the agreement."¹³⁸ As a consequence of the controversy, some Philippine legislators became even more suspicious by increasing Chinese influence in the Philippines. A piece of evidence to illustrate the US's concern came right after the agreement is that "the US was "pissed off" by the Philippines' deal with China, signifying a war of the US and China for dominance in the ASEAN region."¹³⁹

Leadership transition from Arroyo to Aquino in 2010 presented a critical turning point of Philippine foreign policy towards China. First of all, major

¹³⁶ See, for example, Aileen Baviera, "The Influence of Domestic Politics on Philippine Foreign Policy: The Case of Philippines-China Relations Since 2004", RSIS Working Paper 241 (5 June 2012), available at <<https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/rsis-pubs/WP241.pdf>>

¹³⁷ Philippines and The Spratly Islands - History - JMSU Controversy <http://www.liquisearch.com/philippines_and_the_spratly_islands/history/jmsu_controversy>

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Ibid

loans and investments agreements entered into the Philippines by the Arroyo administration remain unimplemented, having been either suspended or cancelled due to corruption and collusion between Arroyo allies and their would-be Chinese partners.¹⁴⁰ Perceptions of China and its engagement in the region had been reoriented. For example, a poll of 33 nations done in January 2006 by GlobeScan and the Program on International Policy Attitudes shows that more than 54 percent of Filipino respondents had a favorable view of China.¹⁴¹

Nationalist discourses about disputes with China in the South China Sea are evidently products and processes of state construction. One crucial rhetoric which Aquino applied to buy himself votes as well as popularity is taking up a strong stance with China over disputed waters. Evidently, Aquino's 'hardline' position on the territorial dispute made him popular as well as a surge of anti-Chinese sentiment stoked by a nationalist literati.¹⁴² Today, issues related to the South China Sea turned out to become a regular topic of animated discussion in the Philippines, "if not outright sensationalization, in the Philippine media and among ordinary citizens."¹⁴³ One could say that the nationalist discourses only became more prominent in both the government

¹⁴⁰ Aileen Baviera, "The Influence of Domestic Politics on Philippine Foreign Policy: The Case of Philippines-China Relations Since 2004", RSIS Working Paper 241 (5 June 2012), available at <<https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/rsis-pubs/WP241.pdf>>

¹⁴¹ Medeiros, E., Crane K., Heginbotham E., Lvin N., Lowell J., Rabasa A., Seong S. (2008). Pacific Currents: The Responses of US Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise (RAND Corporation), available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG736.sum.pdf>

¹⁴² Patricio N Abinales "Aquino's mixed presidential legacy" East Asia Forum, December 30 2015 <<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/12/30/aquinos-mixed-presidential-legacy/>>

¹⁴³ Richard Javad Heydarian "Will Philippine elections bring about a new China policy?" February 23 2016 <<http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2016/02/23/Will-Philippine-elections-bring-about-a-new-China-policy.aspx>>

and public sphere after Aquino became the president, as “[Back] in the Arroyo administration days, barely anyone knew much about the South China Sea disputes.”¹⁴⁴ In sum, narratives of China’s rise in the Philippines in the recent years were largely a domestic story. Aquino’s concerns over his political legitimacy motivated the construction of a set of nationalistic-driven, anti-Chinese narratives.

Malaysia’s perception of the rise of China, by contrast, remains relatively consistent, and it is independent of the South China Sea issue throughout the last twenty years. As noted by many Malaysian specialists and reporters, Kuala Lumpur continues to adopt a quiet and “playing it safe” approach in dealing with the South China Sea issue even when there saw an increased Chinese incursions since 2011.¹⁴⁵ Malaysia’s way of managing its foreign relations with China differed greatly from Vietnam and the Philippines’ approach. A key variable that would explain this difference is the absent of major political legitimacy crises in Malaysia. Unlike the other two countries, the government of Malaysia has not been discovered to be seriously lacking in political legitimacy.¹⁴⁶ Case shares Crouch’s view and argues that since the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ See, Storey, I. (2011). Southeast asia and the rise of china: *The search for security*. Abingdon, Oxon;New York;: Routledge.; Parameswaran, P. (2015). *Playing it safe: Malaysia's approach to the south china sea and implications for the united states*.Center for a New American Security.; Ralph Jannings “Why Malaysia stays quiet about its claims in the South China Sea” June 2 2016, Forbes. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/ralphjennings/2016/06/02/why-malaysia-stays-quiet-about-its-claims-in-the-disputed-south-china-sea/#3d765c2c1beb>>

¹⁴⁶ Crouch, H. A. (1996). *Government and society in malaysia*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, pp.246

1970s, the government led by UMNO, although has faced three strain points, “it has never slipped into a legitimacy crisis.”¹⁴⁷

Government legitimacy in Malaysia has not seriously suffered because of electoral matters in Malaysia,¹⁴⁸ which has an important implication on its foreign policy towards China. Legitimacy crises in Vietnam and the Philippines have triggered anti-China nationalism vis-a-vis China’s perceived assertiveness in the South China Sea. In the case of Vietnam, post-2008 legitimacy crises undermined the credibility of the ruling party which is based on a legitimation model of sustained economic performance. And the 2010 Leadership transition in the Philippines was largely a consequence of the delegitimization of the Arroyo’s government. Competition for electoral victory in the Philippines and power struggle within the Vietnamese party makes the country’s foreign policy more prone to domestic political changes, especially legitimacy crises.

However, in Malaysia, the long-standing ruling party UMNO manages to secure its legitimacy to rule, in addition to the absent of viable counter-forces to generate a crisis from inside. Unlike Vietnam, economic performance is crucial for Malaysian government to maintain its credibility, but it is not the only source of legitimation; the party’s ability to maintaining Malay dominance and articulating certain interests for non-Malay is also critical to

¹⁴⁷ William Case. “Malaysia: Aspects and Audiences of Legitimacy” in Alagappa, M., Case, W. F., & Khong, C. O. (1995). *Political legitimacy in southeast asia: The quest for moral authority*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, pp.80

¹⁴⁸ Croissant, A., & Martín, B. (2006). *Between consolidation and crisis: Elections and democracy in five nations in southeast asia*. London;Münster;: Lit, pp.203.

retime survival in the eyes of the majority.¹⁴⁹ Thus, the government of Malaysian was not heavily contested when its economic growth slowed down right after the 2008 global economic crisis. Domestic political stability provides Malaysia with a more predicable environment for building foreign relations with the outside world. Malaysia's China policy reflects the ruling elites' desire to "capitalize on the big power's rise for the ultimate goal of enhancing and justifying its political authority at home."¹⁵⁰ As such, Malaysia's perceptions of China's rise maintain a high level of consistency as there are no internal distracting forces to serve the source of alternative narratives.

The consistency of Malaysia's attitudes towards a rising China is reflected both in state's rhetoric and foreign policy. As China's largest trading partner among ASEAN countries, Malaysia identifies a rising China as a key foreign investor which is critical to Malaysia's economic growth. Kuala Lumpur has always been using narratives to signalling Beijing of Malaysia's friendly and cooperative attitude. For instance, former Prime Minister Mahathir had spoken to the public that "[China] will never seek hegemony and will never do things to harm us."¹⁵¹ In spite of being confronted by Chinese assertiveness, Prime Minister Najib continued to refuse to identify that the rise of China posed a threat to regional security. He further argued that "China was a force for stability because it required a peaceful regional environment in which to

¹⁴⁹ Muthiah Alagappa, "Seeking a more durable basis of authority" in Alagappa, M., Case, W. F., & Khong, C. O. (1995). *Political legitimacy in southeast asia: The quest for moral authority*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

¹⁵⁰ Kuik, C. (2013). Making sense of Malaysia's china policy: Asymmetry, proximity, and elite's domestic authority. *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 6(4), 429-467.

¹⁵¹ Cited in 'The Chinese question', *FEER*, 5 December 1985.

pursue economic development.”¹⁵² Although in recent years Malaysia is becoming increasingly vocal over perceived Chinese assertiveness, that a counter-discourse which advocates for a stronger stance has emerged. Malaysia’s overall strategy with China has not yet changed. As noted by several analysts, “even the more vocal protests by Malaysia have been carefully calibrated to avoid souring relations with China.”¹⁵³

Clearly, Southeast Asia’s perception of Beijing’s revised approach to managing disputed waters since 2010 is not homogenous. The way China carried herself in the region might have caused an overall escalation of tension in the South China Sea, however, individual states had the autonomy to flame it up or proactively to scale it down peacefully. In contrast to Vietnam and the Philippines, to upset China was never Malaysia’s intention; the government continues to be cautious in deploying its capabilities vis-a-vis China by calling for a full implementation of the Declaration of Conduct (DoC) on the South China Sea, which is China’s preferred method of dealing with the disputes.¹⁵⁴ Malaysia’s framing of a rising China as a ‘non-threatening’ and ‘non-expansionist’ hegemony demonstrates the constructive nature of perceptions of China’s rise in Southeast Asia.

¹⁵² ‘China is a friend, not a threat, says PM’, *Bernama*, 27 January 2007.

¹⁵³ David Han “Why Malaysia’s South China Sea policy seems confused”, *The Straits Times*, May 5 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/why-malaysias-south-china-sea-policy-seems-confused> >

¹⁵⁴ Shahrman Lockman, “Why Malaysia isn’t afraid of China (for now),” The Strategist blog of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, April 2013, <[http:// www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-malaysia-isnt-afraid-of-china-for-now/](http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-malaysia-isnt-afraid-of-china-for-now/)>

5.2 Cross-Case Comparison

By comparing and contrasting Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia's perceptions and responses in relation to a rising China today, I highlight three major differences observed across the three countries that would be useful for the future study on the rise of China (Refer to Table 2). One, both Vietnam and the Philippines played the nationalism card to craft a stronger stance on the territorial issue, the two countries differed on the fundamental level. The Philippines under Aquino III took a nationalistic turn and re-oriented its foreign policy towards China based on its nationalist agenda; Vietnam's new approach, on the other hand, should be understood as a battle of the rhetoric as opposed to a total strategic shift.

Two, countries experience domestic legitimacy crises are more likely to experience more drastic foreign policy shifts. In this case, the 2010 legitimacy crisis in the Philippines was both the cause and outcome of leadership transition. Although Vietnam was experiencing the erosion of the party's legitimation due to the slow down of the country's economic growth, Vietnam did not experience regime shift or political chaos. Thus, Vietnam's policy towards China on its strategic front remained less inconsistent.

Three, 'The rise of China' contains more nuanced meanings that the study on the implications of China's rise should not be reduced to the hypotheses of 'threatening' an 'non-threatening.' Instead, the rise of China should be treated as a complex of discourses, some are even self-contradictory, constructed by individual state actors driven by domestic interests.

Vietnam's approach to the perceived Chinese assertiveness differed from the Philippines, that Vietnam began to stand up to China vocally, but maintained a positive party-to-party ties with China. For Hanoi, maintaining the friendship with Beijing is critical for economic development and security. Evidently, notwithstanding disputes with China in the South China Sea, Vietnam's economic relations with China have been strengthened, and in 2013, China surpassed Japan to become Vietnam's largest trading partner.¹⁵⁵ In this regard, Hanoi is reluctant to take the first move without first calculating Beijing's likely reaction. As noted by a few regional experts "[To] date, even as it has protested the oil rig and China's cordon around it, Hanoi appears to be trying to avoid taking moves that could provoke Beijing, such as increasing its naval presence in the area or inviting the US Navy for port visits."¹⁵⁶ Hanoi's preference to maintain a cooperative relationship with Beijing that it will not be interrupted by territorial disputes is reflected in their attitudes towards the anti-China nationalist movements at home. Despite the fact that the government had allowed the gathering of protestors in urban areas such as Hanoi, the state quickly dissolved the crowds and instructed the media to silence public debate on the South China Sea.¹⁵⁷ This crackdown was, however, unsurprising. Hanoi was motivated by its desire not to further

¹⁵⁵ Lam, P. E., Qin, Y., & Yang, M. (2013). *China and east asia: After the wall street crisis*. Singapore;New Jersey: World Scientific, pp. 227.

¹⁵⁶ Mark E. Manyin June 24 2014 US-Vietnam relations in 2014: Current issues and implications for US policy. Congressional Research Service <<https://www.fas.org/crs/row/R40208.pdf> >

¹⁵⁷ Teddy Pham "A US-Vietnam Alliance? Not So Fast". *The Diplomat*, 4 August 2014. (accessed 2 July 2016)<<http://thediplomat.com/2014/08/a-us-vietnam-alliance-not-so-fast/>>

damage relations with Beijing.¹⁵⁸ Between 2010 and 2014, “Hanoi and Beijing have continued to expand their diplomatic and party-to-party ties and appear to be seeking ways to prevent their maritime disputes from spilling over into other areas of the relationship.¹⁵⁹ Overall, in spite of the conflict of interests between the two countries over territorial disputes in the past few years whereby the tension has been escalated, Vietnam-China relations remains largely unshifted strategically.

On the other hand, Philippine foreign policy towards China has shifted towards a less cooperative, if not anti-China direction both rhetorically and strategically after Aquino III succeeded to the presidency in 2010. By comparing China twice with the pre-WWII Nazi Germany, Aquino III was signalling to China and other countries that the Philippines has always been suspicious towards China and regards China’s rise as a threat to the region. Aquino’s contestation did not stop at the rhetoric level, Philippine-China relation has been reoriented into a completely different direction which is largely driven by the state-led nationalist agenda.¹⁶⁰ Though China is the Philippines’ third largest trading partner, Aquino played down the importance of Chinese investments, he pointed out that “Filipinos have invested \$3 billion

¹⁵⁸ “Background note: Vietnam”, Department of State, 5 January 2012; Mark Manyin, “US-Vietnam Relations in 2011: Current Issues and Implications for US Policy”, Congressional Research Service, 18 May 2012.

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan London, “South China Sea Crisis Demands Vietnam’s Leadership Breakthrough,” Center for Strategic and International Studies CogitAsia Blog, May 19, 2014. <<http://cogitasia.com/south-china-sea-crisis-demands-vietnams-leadership-breakthrough/>>

¹⁶⁰ Aquino III has been more outspoken than Arroyo on defending the Philippine’s territorial claims, and has publicly appealed for US assistance with China’s challenge in the disputes. See Irene Chan and Li Mingjiang, “Political will and joint development in the South China Sea” in Beckman, R. C., LL.M, Wu, S., & Hong, N. (2014). *Recent developments in the south china sea dispute: The prospect of a joint development regime*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. pp.190

in China, while the Chinese have only invested \$1.5 billion in return.”¹⁶¹ Philippine under Aquino’s government, unlike Hanoi, did not regard a closer economic ties with China essential to the country’s economic survival and development.

The second difference is closely related to the first one, that countries which experience legitimacy crises, and the source of crises come from the domestic domain, are more likely to generate drastic foreign policy shifts. In the Philippines, leadership transitions caused by major legitimacy crises, namely from Marcos to Corazon Aquino, and from Gloria Arroyo to Aquino III, were often accompanied by the delegitimization of the previous government. Aquino III and his cabinet demarcated themselves from Arroyo’s political supporters and discredited her political resources which including Chinese investments which were deemed as the ‘source of corruption’ that had aided Arroyo and her greedy patrons. As noted by Chan and Li, “[Aquino’s] anti-corruption crusade against the former regime and its links to corruption-tainted Chinese investment deals and loans may have influenced his distrustful attitude toward China.”¹⁶² Instead of seeking foreign direct investment from China, Aquino turned to the US and Japan for economic and security support.

Unlike the Philippines, which has a security treaty with Washington, Vietnam has sought to develop stronger relations with several powers.¹⁶³ Party

¹⁶¹ Stirring Up the SCS (II): Regional Responses, Asia Report No. 229, 24 July 2012 International Crisis Group <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/229-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-ii-regional-responses>>

¹⁶² Irene Chan and Li Mingjiang, “Political will and joint development in the South China Sea” in Beckman, R. C., LL.M, Wu, S., & Hong, N. (2014). *Recent developments in the south china sea dispute: The prospect of a joint development regime*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp.190

¹⁶³ Lanteigne, M. (2016). *Chinese foreign policy: An introduction* (Third ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. 109-126

split between the pro-Beijing group and the pro-US group forbade the country's foreign policy from completely sliding into one direction and getting too close with any of the great powers. Hanoi's approach therefore, occupies the middle-ground in managing its relations with great powers. For instance, Hanoi today continued to seek benefits from both China and the US. In 2015, bilateral relations with China has entered into a difficult phase as the Chinese oil rig was returned to the disputed waters. Vietnam, however, retained a strong trading relationship with China. At the same time, Vietnam began to seek strategic partnership with the US in order to counter-balance a potential China threat in 2015.¹⁶⁴

However, due to party factionalism, the Vietnamese government has frequently debated to “what degree it should align itself with US strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific given the country's economic situation today.”¹⁶⁵ Thus, legitimacy crises in Vietnam did not trigger a complete shift of its foreign policy orientation as the political party is divided but an agreement has to be reached between different factions due to collective leadership when comes to decision-making. In the case of Malaysia, the lack of a viable political opposition to the ruling party and little internal division within UMNO, foreign policy towards China remains much more consistent and bilateral relations remains largely stable.

¹⁶⁴ Carl Thayer, “8 Developments in US-Vietnam Relations Show Emerging Partnership”, July 13 2015, *The Diplomat*, <<http://thediplomat.com/2015/07/8-developments-in-us-vietnam-relations-show-emerging-partnership/>>

¹⁶⁵ Lantaigne, M. (2016). *Chinese foreign policy: An introduction* (Third ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. 109-126

The most important difference that deserves a closer attention is perhaps, the divergence of narratives that have been constructed by different countries. Previous works examine the rise of China focus on only two possible outcomes or features by asking whether a rising China is threatening or non-threatening. My findings, however, demonstrate that the rise of China has more nuanced meanings other than threatening versus non-threatening, and they are subject to changes.

In Southeast Asia, the rise of China presents a spectrum of meanings and significance. Each narrative reflects the perception of a rising China from an unique perspective that may not be generalizable to other cases. For instance, one interesting narrative emerged from the Vietnamese discourse identifies a rising China as a key competitor in Southeast Asia. According to the illustrations in the source, that “Vietnam and China [are] increasingly competing for influence in mainland Southeast Asia, where Vietnam had dominated between the 1970s and late 2000s. China has become the largest aid donor, investor...[and] military partner to Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos... [There is a] race for regional influence [between China and Vietnam].”¹⁶⁶ This shows that a non-hegemonic power such as Vietnam perceives a rising China as a potential threat, but not for the exact same reasons which previous studies have forecasted. It is not the erosion of the neoliberal hegemony engendered by China’s rise that Vietnam is worrying for,

¹⁶⁶ Joshua Kurlantzick A China-Vietnam Military Clash, Contingency planning memorandum No. 26 September 2015< <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-vietnam-military-clash/p37029> >

as many institutionalist scholars have argued, but the loss of regional dominance and influence to China.

The notion of China's rise is to be examined within a specific context in order to appreciate the richness of this concept. All three countries identify a rising China as economic powerhouse; only Malaysia accepted that China's economic development would bring desirable outcomes without posing much doubt, Vietnam and the Philippines under Arroyo believed that China's rise brought both opportunities and challenges to the region. Thus, instead of focusing exclusively on the two extreme ends of the spectrum (threatening or non-threatening), it would be more useful to also look at more specifically the spectrum by itself and the reasons behind each position that was taken. This way will help us better analyze the process of each hegemonic transition.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This study examines the rise of China from the perspective of smaller regional powers in Southeast Asia. The primary aim is to get a more systematic understanding of individual actors' perception of China's rise because the importance of perception is underrepresented in the existing literature on the study of China's rise as well as hegemonic power transition. My analysis highlights the constructive nature of certain aspects of China's rise through the eyes of regional actors, that perception of the rise of China can be understood as a constructed narrative. The portrayal of China's rise to regional hegemony is partly informed by political agenda at home. Changes of perception which would also lead to the construction of inconsistent narratives are mostly observed in times of political legitimacy crises.

The constructed narrative framework which I offer in this study helps to uncover certain features of China's rise that are otherwise unattainable. First, China's rise is not a static concept, and one should not see only two possible trajectories of China's rise between peaceful rise and aggressive preponderance. Instead, China's rise has been portrayed as an multilayered image that reflects regional actors' mixed feelings towards China.

A conventional explanation for regional perception and response follows such a logic: on the one hand, China's economic ascendance has been regarded as presenting opportunities for regional development and security. On the other hand, the increased Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea created anxieties and animosities that some regional actors began to associate China

with having expansionist ambition. However, my analysis for Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia shows that there are other possibilities out there. Perceived Chinese aggressiveness, only affects certain countries at certain levels. Vietnam crafts China as an assertive power having expansionist intent in its rhetoric, but maintains a close diplomatic and party-to-party ties with Beijing. In the Philippines there saw a drastic shift in its foreign policy towards China after Aquino came to power. Aquino's government criticized China for both causing tensions in the region and for misusing its economic power. Thus, China's new approach in the South China Sea has only adversely affected its strategic relations with Vietnam; but with the Philippines, both economic relations as well as strategic relations were severally affected. Neither Vietnam nor the Philippines are completely buying into the idea that China is exerting hegemonic preponderance that is undesirable. The Philippines under Arroyo certainly did not identify China as such; Vietnam's responses have followed contradictory trends.

Second, narratives of the rise of China are inconsistent and are subject to changes. Existing scholarship on domestic politics and its effects on foreign policy focuses largely on regime changes. Upon a closer examination of a country's domestic politics, this study urges scholars to pay more attention to other important factors in the domestic domain such as party factionalism and leadership changes. Although Malaysia and the Philippines adhere to a democratic political system, over the past twenty years Malaysia's domestic politics is much more stable and predicible vis-a-vis its foreign policy.

Vietnam despite being a single party authoritarian state, party factionalism defines its rather unique approach in dealing with great powers in the region. As I have demonstrated in the section on historical analysis, my ‘constructed narrative’ argument is generalizable and is able to explain not only the phenomenon of China’s rise, but also regional actors’ relations with other major powers in the past.

My work claims to make two contributions to the existing scholarship on international politics. First, the analysis for Southeast Asia’s response to a rising China both illustrates the dynamics as well as explains the critical junctures in the process of hegemonic transition. The balancing and bandwagoning literature focuses on describing the features of the post-unipolar international order or predict the possible outcomes.

Most of these works, however, fail to explain adequately how non-hegemonic states in Asia are perceiving and to responding to the rise of China. The power transition theory which is the camp most scholars who study the rise of China ground themselves, does not pay attention to the process of power transition; they are unable to capture important factors that would define and shape the contour of a hegemonic power shift. Policy studies on Southeast Asia’s response to China’s rise attempted to evoke the importance of perception in a country’s foreign policy making process, but these works generally lack a systematic theorization of the role of perception in international politics. Existing literature is neither effective nor sufficient in explaining the divergence of regional responses to the rise of China in Asia.

My approach complements these works and argues that to obtain a holistic understanding of the rise of China and its implications in the region, it is necessary to dissect the domestic politics of individual regional actors.

My work is socially relevant as it generates insights for policy-making. China identifies Southeast Asia as an integral part of its security community, and values regional organizations such as ASEAN for the role it may play in the realization of China's desire to a sustained economic development. In order to achieve its primary objective in the region, Beijing needs to know its neighbors better. Among the many important things China's policy-makers are required to learn, the political environment that is rather unique to specific Southeast Asian countries deserves Beijing's attention.

To illustrate, the dynamics of domestic politics are different in ways that are critical to the country's foreign policy. In the Philippines, leadership changes are the critical junctures of foreign policy shifts; in Vietnam, party factionalism plays a big role in defining the direction of its foreign policy orientation; and in Malaysia, the longevity of the UMNO coalition as the legitimate ruling party to a large extent contributed to a consistent and stable foreign relations with China. As a result perhaps, speaking from a strategic point of view, Beijing should have adopted different approaches to dealing with different countries. Taking the case of the Philippines as an example, China could have reduced the economic losses due to the cancellation of the ZTE and the North Rail project should China took into account the potential risk of Philippine's leadership changes. Today, a foreign policy shift is likely

to happen again in the Philippines after Rodrigo Duterte became the newly elected president in May 2016 as Duterte announced his preference in engaging China with bilateral South China Sea talks, which is distinctively different from his predecessor. Given what has been observed over the last two leadership transitions, it is very likely that the narrative of China's rise would be reconstructed under Duterte's government.

Lastly, based on my analysis for the rise of China, I offer a new of framework to conceptualizing the rise and fall of hegemonic powers. I will explore and develop the importance of 'time' in my next project. I point out that the establishment of regional hegemony takes a long time to materialize and will be constantly confronted by non-hegemonic powers.

In this regard, China has experienced impressive economic growth over the past twenty to thirty years, and began to be recognized as a rising hegemon only for a decade. Speaking horizontally from the dimension of time, twenty years is too short for the image of a mature great power to be fully constructed. Similarly, the US has failed to establish itself as an American Hegemon as Cuba, Venezuela and other states have consistently challenged its hegemony in the western hemisphere. Counter-hegemonic regionalism has been attempted in America, and it is happening in Asia today. This explains why the narrative of the 'rise of China' changes rather frequently, that some Southeast Asian states' attitudes towards China swings forward or backward like a pendulum, while some remain strategically ambivalent to avoid side-

lining. In sum, the image of a regional hegemon takes time to characterize, and China has not yet reached to a great power status comparable to that of the US.

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Appendix

The Philippines

Speech delivered in front of the members of the Japanese parliament in June 2015 <<http://asianjournal.com/news/aquino-slams-china-in-speech-before-japans-congress/>>

“Aquino insisted that China has been **violating** the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea as it persists on reclaiming in the disputed waters, **stirring tension in the region.**”

“This reclamation effort seems to go against both the letter of this agreement entered into, as well as the spirit of the law. So, perhaps, we again... We reiterate, we ask China: Is this a necessary step?” He (Aquino) asked.

“And if **stability is a necessary prerequisite** to prosperity for all, and if prosperity for all our peoples is the be-all and end-all of any government, then perhaps they should reexamine all of these efforts and see whether or not this is necessary given the **increasing tensions** that are happening because of these activities,”

Benigno Aquino made the comments during a speech in the Japanese parliament during his visit to Tokyo in June 2015. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/03/china-nazi-germany-south-china-sea-philippine-president-benigno-aquino>>

“If there was a **vacuum**, if the US, which is the superpower, says ‘we are not interested’, perhaps there is no **brake to ambitions of other countries,**” he told an audience of business leaders in Tokyo.”

“I am an amateur student of history and I’m reminded of...how **Germany was testing the waters** and what the response was by various other European powers,” “referring to the Nazis’ territorial conquests in the months before the outbreak of the second world war. “They tested the waters and they were ready to back down if, for instance, in that aspect, France said to back down...But unfortunately, up to the annexation of the Sudetenland...**nobody said stop. If somebody said stop to Hitler at that point of time, or to Germany at that time, would we have avoided WWII.**”

Renato Cruz De Castro, “The Philippines in 2011: Muddling through a Year of Learning and Adjustment”, *Asian Survey*, vol. 52, no. 1 (January-February 2012)

“Tensions between the Philippines and China over the South China Sea have **steadily increased** since President Benigno Aquino III took office in 2010.”

Stirring Up the SCS (II): Regional Responses, Asia Report No. 229, 24 July 2012 International Crisis Group <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/229-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-ii-regional-responses>>

“The previous administration of Gloria Arroyo had been considerably more **receptive** to Beijing’s commercial incentives and was apparently willing to compromise Philippine claims in response.” (“The former government could be bought; the current government cannot. The Chinese are likely playing a waiting game, hoping that the government will eventually be out of power and a new government will enable them to return to their tried and true tactics”.

“President Aquino also sought to **undo the damage caused by his predecessor’s accession to the failed JMSU**, which he believes encouraged greater Chinese forcefulness.”

“Philippine officials since characterised the agreement as a confidence-building measure gone awry and argued that it only attests to how **China takes advantage of such opportunities** to behave in a more assertive way.”

“In May 2012, Foreign Secretary Del Rosario called on business leaders to “take a **position of patriotism** that what is ours is ours and we will stand for it. It is possible that everyone will need to make a sacrifice.” (“DFA chief calls for patriotism”, *The Philippine Star*, 17 May 2012) He **played down the value of Chinese investments**, though China is the Philippines’ third largest trading partner. (He pointed out that Filipinos have invested \$3 billion in China, while the Chinese have only invested \$1.5 billion in return. Remarks of Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert F. Del Rosario on Philippine Foreign Affairs at the Joint Membership Meeting of the Makati Business Club and the Management Association of the Philippines, 16 May 2012.)

President Gloria Arroyo’s Speech During the Opening Ceremony of the 40th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting Manila, 30 July 2007

“The rise of China and of India as **major economic powers** provides us with fresh competition as well as cooperation”

“The rise of China—as the most populated country in the world—as global economic powerhouse has opened a **lot of opportunities and challenges** for all the countries in the region.

[President Arroyo described China as the] "fastest-growing country in the region and in the world and the Philippines sees China's rise as a **significant opportunity** for the Philippines,"

Arroyo’s ‘stops’ deal with ZTE; China prexy accepts decision, October 2, 2007 <<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/62860/news/nation/arroyo-stops-deal-with-zte-china-prexy-accepts-decision>>

"At this point, the President reiterated the strict adherence of the Philippines to the **One-China Policy** and this was very much appreciated by President Hu," he said.”

In a speech on June 08, 2002, before the Filipino Chinese-Chamber of Commerce, Mrs Arroyo had recalled:

“I am also very proud that as founding member, lifetime member and co-chairman of the Association for Philippines-China understanding or APCU, I was one of those – along with the in-laws of Congressman Ocampo, Roxy Lim and her husband, and Manny Dy – I was one of those who worked for the establishment of this diplomatic relations between our two countries.”

Mrs Arroyo added: “Together with many of you, my colleagues in APCU, we started working for closer Philippines-China relations during the early 70s, even before the establishment of formal relations between our two countries in June 1975.”

APCU is one of only four organizations Mrs Arroyo acknowledges membership in.

Lanteigne, M. (2016). *Chinese foreign policy: An introduction* (Third ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. 109-126

“Aquino III was highly critical of Chinese actions in the South China Sea. In September 2012, he issued an administrative order which renamed the waters the “**West Philippine Sea**”, and twice the Philippine President compared Chinese actions in the region to the expansionist

policies of **Nazi Germany** in the period before the Second World War, drawing criticism and concern from Beijing. In June 2015, personnel with the Philippine military accompanied Japan's Self-Defence forces in a joint operation near Reed Bank, a region thought to be potentially rich in fossil fuels, and another area claimed by Beijing and Manila.”

“Unlike the Philippines, which has a security treaty with Washington, Vietnam has sought to develop stronger relations with several powers, including India and Russia as well as the US, to balance against China. The decision by China to place an oil rig in disputed waters near the Paracel Islands in mid-2014 marked a **low point** in the bilateral relationship, and Hanoi has also been wary of efforts since that time by China to engage in land reclamation of reefs which Vietnam has claimed. By mid-2015, bilateral relations appeared ready to enter another difficult patch as the Chinese oil rig was returned to another disputed part of the SCS in an area where the EEZs of Vietnam and China overlap. However, the **trading relationship between the two countries remains strong**, and the Vietnamese government has frequently debated to what degree it should align itself with US strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific given the country's economic situation today.”

Vietnam

“Background note: Vietnam”, Department of State, 5 January 2012; Mark Manyin, “US-Vietnam Relations in 2011: Current Issues and Implications for US Policy”, Congressional Research Service, 18 May 2012.

“Despite a history of conflict, Vietnam has balanced its opposition to China's territorial claims with its need to **maintain substantial economic relations** with its neighbour. While it is rapidly developing economic ties with other countries including the US.”

“Nationalist sentiments in Vietnam are rooted in historical grievances and are inflamed by political personalities and the influential pro-U.S. diaspora...As a Vietnamese foreign ministry official states, “the two countries are **old friends and old enemies**, therefore the government has to **avoid being perceived as selling out national interests to China.**” (While relations are not always smooth, cooperation at the **party-to-party level has remained substantive**. There is an agreement that management of the South China Sea issues should be kept within the region, but “at the same time we [Vietnam] are **ready to defend out interests** in the South China Sea”. Crisis Group interviews, Hanoi, May 2011; Beijing, June, 2012.) (Many Vietnamese believe that the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) cannot be trusted in its opaque

discussions with the Communist Party of China for fear that it will sell out Vietnamese interests. Crisis Group interviews, Ho Chi Minh City, July 2011; Hanoi, May 2011.)

“For the Vietnamese leadership, like its Chinese counterpart, **nationalism is a double-edged sword**, working to its advantage while also limiting its options.”

“For 1,000 years we **spilled blood to keep our country intact**. The East Sea disputes strike at the heart of what it means to be Vietnamese”. Territorial disputes, coupled with a history of violent conflict and a staggering bilateral trade deficit, have fostered widespread suspicion of and animosity toward China. This has increased in line with perceptions of China’s greater forcefulness since 2009. Political and military personalities have accused Hanoi of failing to stand up to China over the South China Sea, and the powerful pro-US Vietnamese diaspora has used this to criticize the government. As **economic problems erode its credibility**, the Vietnamese leadership cannot afford mismanagement, especially given rampant corruption. Nor can it afford being soft on China by appearing like it is once again giving up Vietnamese territory. (Crisis Group interview, Hanoi, July 2011...On 10 July 2011, twenty prominent “patriotic personalities” including former ambassador to China, Major General.....submitted a petition to Vietnam’s Politburo and National Assembly chairman, claiming that Hanoi had been “too soft” with China. “Petition Letter to the Vietnamese Government on the East Sea Issue”

“The government broke up the protests and stated to silence public debate on the SCS. Those who continued to demonstrate on the street or online were arrested. The **crackdown was also motivated by Hanoi’s desire not to further damage relations with Beijing**. (Crisis Group interview)

Vietnam-China Trade, FDI and ODA Relations (1998-2008) and the Impacts upon Vietnam by Ha Thi Hong Van and Do Tien Sam <http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Publish/Download/Brc/pdf/01_vietnamandchina.pdf>

In recent years, **trade cooperation between Quang Ninh province and China has been good**, especially with respect to the agricultural sector. Many opportunities have been created for the peasants and the Quang Ninh agricultural sector to adopt new technology and business systems. For example, we now have a lot of new varieties of rice seed, new breeds of livestock and new seafood products. In the past, Quang Ninh province imported raw materials. But now, with the use of new technology which resulted in the production of high-quality seafood products, importation of raw materials is not necessary. The resulting

surplus generated from the technological improvements brought by trade relations between Vietnam and China contributed to poverty reduction. Such piece of evidence is supported by a representative of Lao Cai province, who claims that new seed varieties imported from China are a “revolution”:

Rapid poverty reduction is dependent on achieving two goals. The first goal is attaining ‘seed revolution.’ Before the introduction of new seed varieties from China, people planted milpa and water field-based crops using intensive cultivation methods and poor-yielding seeds. This ‘seed revolution’ came from China, not England. The second goal is linked to Lao Cai province. Lao Cai has a relationship with Sichuan province in China. Sichuan is the centre for the development of new rice seed varieties. And this is where we purchase our rice seed from. (An interview with a Lao Cai representative)

Lam, P. E., Qin, Y., & Yang, M. (2013). *China and east asia: After the wall street crisis*. Singapore;New Jersey;: World Scientific. pp.227-238

“Although Vietnam’s foreign trade suffered heavily at the outset of the Financial Crisis, **Vietnam-China trade relations further developed**. In 2013, China surpassed Japan to become Vietnam’s largest trading partner.

“The US, EU and Japan are still mired in economic difficulties. Therefore, the present global economy is neither stable nor predictable and may well impact on the **Chinese and Vietnamese economies reliant on foreign trade**.

“**Notwithstanding territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Vietnam-China economic relations between 2009 and 2010 have indeed been enhanced**. Bilateral trade values between two countries increased even though Vietnam’s total foreign trade value has decreased in 2009. Efforts to strengthen friendship between the two countries have played an important role to stimulate economic cooperation.”

Mark E. Manyin June 24 2014 US-Vietnam relations in 2014: Current issues and implications for US policy. Congressional Research Service <<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40208.pdf>>

“For Vietnam, maintaining **stability and friendship** with its northern neighbor is **critical for economic development and security**; Hanoi usually **does not undertake large-scale diplomatic moves without first calculating Beijing’s likely reaction**. To date, even as it has protested the oil rig and China’s cordon around it, Hanoi appears to be

trying to avoid taking moves that could provoke Beijing, such as increasing its naval presence in the area, inviting U.S. Navy ships for unscheduled port visits, or initiating a legal case against China's actions and/or claims."

"A factor influencing leaders in Hanoi is a significant anti-Chinese sentiment inside Vietnam. These emotions surfaced in the days after CNOOC's positioning of its oil rig. Protests involving thousands of Vietnamese ensued. Reportedly most occurred in urban areas, were peaceful, and appeared to be tolerated by **Vietnamese authorities, who generally prevent large-scale gatherings.**

Jonathan London, "South China Sea Crisis Demands Vietnam's Leadership Breakthrough," Center for Strategic and International Studies CogitAsia Blog, May 19, 2014. <<http://cogitasia.com/south-china-sea-crisis-demands-vietnams-leadership-breakthrough/>>

"The second grouping gravitates toward a triumvirate of Communist Party Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, President Truong Tan Sang, and leader of the National Assembly Nguyen Sinh Hung. These are Vietnam's conservatives, or defenders of the status quo. Domestically, their loyalty has been largely to each other, the party, and the military. **Internationally, their loyalty has been to the enduring investment in the idea that Beijing is a "good comrade."**

"In recent years, Sino-Vietnam relations have followed seemingly contradictory trends. On the one hand, since Vietnam and China repaired relations in the early 1990s, **China has become Vietnam's most important bilateral partner and its biggest trading partner.** Maintaining stability and friendship with its northern neighbor is critical for Vietnam's economic development and security, and Hanoi does not undertake large-scale diplomatic moves without first calculating Beijing's likely reaction. Over the past four years, Hanoi and Beijing have continued to expand their diplomatic and party-to-party ties and appear to be seeking ways to prevent their maritime disputes from spilling over into other areas of the relationship."

"On the other hand, Vietnam's historical ambivalence and suspicions of China have increased in recent years due to concerns that China's expanding influence in Southeast Asia is having a negative effect on Vietnam. These concerns, in turn, have led Vietnamese leaders to take steps to lessen their dependence on and vulnerabilities to Chinese influence. In 2009 Vietnam signed contracts to purchase billions of dollars of **new military equipment from Russia...Vietnamese leaders**

have become increasingly sensitive to rising domestic criticism that they are being overly solicitous toward China.”

Joshua Kurlantizick “A China-Vietnam Military Clash, Contingency planning memorandum” No. 26 September 2015 <<http://www.cfr.org/china/china-vietnam-military-clash/p37029> >

“In addition, Vietnam and China **increasingly compete for influence in mainland Southeast Asia**, where Vietnam had dominated between the 1970s and late 2000s. China has become the largest aid donor and investor in many mainland Southeast Asian nations, as well as an important military partner to Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos. Rising nationalism in both Vietnam and China fuels this race for regional influence and makes it harder for leaders in each country to back down from any confrontation, whatever the initial genesis.

“Over the past five years, China has used visits by senior Chinese leaders to mainland Southeast Asian nations to announce large new aid packages. These initiatives have clearly worried Hanoi. After then Vice President Xi Jinping’s visit to Cambodia in 2010, during which China announced \$1.2 billion in new aid deliveries to Phnom Penh, Vietnamese leaders scrambled to get Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen to publicly highlight his bond with Hanoi.

China’s rise and Vietnam’s choices (part 1) 14/08/2014 <<http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/special-reports/109691/china-s-rise-and-vietnam-s-choices--part-1-.html> >

“Dr. Nguyen Hung Son: Well, certainly, as China rises, it wants to have a better or **higher status in the international stage**. One of the interpretations of China’s dream is that China would like to become a **global leading superpower**. From what we observed from China’s pattern of behavior, we could tell that China is heavily obsessed by what they see as **a threat from the US** and they would like to be able to counter that threat. And one of China’s dreams is to be **able to avoid or escape the threat from the US** and be on par with the US from what we see, that interprets China’s Naval Dream to become a naval power in the area. And to be able to become a naval power, China is increasingly investing in its naval military assets and increasingly asserting its power at sea, asserting its claims both in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. China has set its objectives maybe not directly from the top leadership but from various groups of interests inside China—that by 2021, by 100 years’ anniversary of the Chinese communist party, China would like to be able to monopolize or fully control the water space with

the first chain of islands, from Japan to Okinawa, Taiwan, Philippines down to the South China Sea. That is why China is undertaking several activities to assert their claims and enhance their presence within these borders of waters.

“Nobody opposes China’s rise, they have might have some concerns over how China rises but I do not think there is anyone who is afraid or who does not expect China to rise. I think it is a common consensus in the region that China is and is going to continue to rise. That is fully expected. What is not expected is that in the course of its rise. It is going to change the rules of the game altogether or is going to **change the status quo** to the extent that nobody is going to know what the rules of the game are, or they unilaterally change the rules or the norms of the region that countries in the region are so accustomed to and are so supportive. And what is essentially the system of international relations created after the WWII. So, I think, on the one hand, countries welcome China’s rise, especially economically rising China, but on the other hand, they also have certain expectations of China and China’s rise, especially in political and security fields. It is the common wisdom of the region that China is going to listen to the expectation of the international community and stay within the framework that they think is beneficial to China as well.

As China Rises, So Does Vietnam by Wayne Arnold 21 December 2010, *The New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/22/business/global/22chinavietnam.html?_r=0>

“One of the biggest beneficiaries of China’s rapid economic ascent is not China at all, but rather its historic rival, occasional enemy and fellow socialist neighbour to the South, Vietnam...Vietnam has instead managed to tag along a fast-growing population of 87 million people, cheap labor and a free-trade agreement that has enabled Vietnam to become part of the vast global supply chain that feeds China’s manufacturing machine.

Vietnam adds military muscle as SCS tensions escalate by Trefor Moss 21 Feb 2016, *The Wall Street Journal* <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/vietnam-adds-military-muscle-as-south-china-sea-tensions-escalate-1456095603>>

“It is obvious and necessary for Vietnam to invest in new military equipment, especially after the South China Sea has become a hot spot,” said Tran Cong Truc, former chief of the government’s border committee said, stressing that the new hardware isn’t aimed specifically at China.”

Storey, I. (2011). Southeast Asia and the rise of China: The search for security. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.

“It was an inauspicious start to the new relationship, but the desire to avoid military confrontation in the South China Sea helped concentrate minds in Hanoi and Beijing, and spurred the two sides into diplomatic action. In October 1993 agreement was reached on a framework for future discussions. Both sides agreed to **resolve their disputes through peaceful means and not to use force or the threat of force**. Priority was given to the land boundary and Gulf of Tonkin issues because they were seen as more amenable to a resolution than the South China Sea dispute, and because it was in their mutual economic interests to resolve these problems...At the close of the 20th century, both sides could take comfort from the fact that the normalization process had progressed better than expected, and that two of three territorial disputes had been resolved at least in principle.

The structure of Vietnam-China relations, 1991-2008, paper for the 3rd international conference on Vietnamese studies, Hanoi, Vietnam December 4-7, 2008 by Carlyle A. Thayer <http://www.viet-studies.info/kinhte/Thayer_Sino_Viet_1991_2008.pdf>

“In 1993 Vietnam and China reached agreement on the basic principles to manage their common border and maritime territory. This led to agreement on demarcating the land border in 1999 and the Gulf of Tonkin in 2000. By 2008 China and Vietnam put in place approximately eighty-five percent of the approved border markers. A border management treaty is currently under negotiated a protocol on a joint fishing area and agreed to joint naval patrols.”

China's relations in the Asia-Pacific: Vietnam by Hung Nguyen, The Diplomat, *The Diplomat*, February 15, 2011 <http://thediplomat.com/2011/02/vietnam/>

“The third phase began in 1991, with the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries through 2007. The first few years of this period saw a rapid improvement in bilateral relations based on ‘sixteen golden words’—**friendly neighbours, total cooperation,**

stable and long-term, future-oriented increased trade and settlement of border disputes, mostly in favour of China.”

“The fourth phase, which began in 2008, pitched China’s increasing assertiveness against Vietnam’s efforts to preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of the China challenge. The future of Vietnam-China relations depends on the interaction between two constants (geography and history) and two variables (China’s policy and changing big powers’ relationship).”

Malaysia

Aileen S.P. Baviera “Accommodation with Hedging: Southeast Asia’s Changing Perspective towards China.” in Yee, H. S. (2010). *China's rise: Threat or opportunity?*. New York; Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, [England];: Routledge.

“Malaysia, which like the Philippines is embroiled in maritime disputes with China in the South China Sea, was also highly suspicious of Chinese intentions especially following the Mischief Reef incident in early 1995 wherein China occupied a reef within the Philippines’ claimed area of the South China Sea. However, a since a 1997 visit by Premier Li Peng to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia appears to have reached greater agreement with China on the value of a bilaterally-negotiated joint development approach to disputed areas. From then on, Malaysia **publicly rejected the notion that China posed a threat to its neighbors**, with the latter even calling China “**a force for peace and stability**” while calling the US-led security and defense alliance in the Asia Pacific region “**unnecessary**” and “**destabilizing.**” Malaysia has also taken similar positions as China on the desirability of building an East Asian community inclusive only of ASEAN and the northeast Asian states, on the **preference for a multipolar world order**, and on criticism of the US’s foreign policy.

“Malaysia in late 2005 welcomed China’s role in **enhancing the security of the Straits of Malacca**. Malaysia and Indonesia had also signed an agreement with China to help develop long-range missiles through technology transfer. These agreements and developments may be seen as part of the “accommodation” to China, appearing to respond to China’s New Security Concept and good neighbor policy, and because they will mean China’s increasing involvement as a **responsible stakeholder in the security of Southeast Asia.**”

Shannon Tiezzi, November 18, 2015 “Can China Rebuild Its ‘Special Relationship’ with Malaysia?” *The Diplomat* <<http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/can-china-rebuild-its-special-relationship-with-malaysia/>>

“Xi assured Najib that China considers boosting relations with Malaysia to be a priority in its neighborhood diplomacy, playing into the narrative that the two countries have a ‘special relationship.’

“China and Malaysia are good neighbors and friends that trust and respect each other,” Xi told Najib, Xi also pledged increased investment in Malaysia, and pointed to the development of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road as an opportunity to advance relations between the two sides.”

“Najib, for his part, told reporters that he and Xi had agreed “the state of bilateral relations is at its best based on **mutual trust and friendly cooperation between the two countries as close partners.**”

“Kuala Lumpur is generally more low-key in its response than other claimants, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, choosing instead to raise its concerns in private bilateral discussions, which is China’s preferred method of dealing with the disputes). Malaysia clearly values its ‘**special relationship**’ with China, which is also its top trading partner, too much to risk disrupting ties with vocal opposition on the South China Sea issue.”

Amin Mokhtar, 13 July 2016. “Malaysia believes South China Sea dispute can be resolved peacefully” *New Straits Times* <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/07/157950/malaysia-believes-south-china-sea-dispute-can-be-resolved-peacefully>

“Malaysia is fully committed and calls on all parties to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety; and the early conclusion if a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) as agreed between China and ASEAN countries.” —the Foreign Ministry of Malaysia.”

Storey, I. (2011). *Southeast asia and the rise of china: The search for security*. Abingdon, Oxon;New York;: Routledge.

“Post-Mahathir, political relations between Malaysia and China remained cordial. Abdullah’s government continued to deny that the rise of

China posed a threat to regional security: to the contrary, Najib argued, China was **a force for stability because it required a peaceful regional environment in which to pursue economic development.** Far from being a threat, opined the Deputy Prime Minister, ASEAN looked to the PRC as **“an ally to strengthen and enhance its position and voice in regional affairs.** At the 2007 Davos Forum, Abdullah echoed his predecessor when he declared there was ‘no such thing as China threat’ and that ASEAN viewed the PRC as an integral part of the organization through its participation in the APT. Government officials also maintained their relaxed attitude to the modernisation of the PLA. For instance, Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar told parliament in 2007 that China was ‘merely looking after its own interests’ by upgrading its armed forces, and that Beijing had **no expansionist intent.”**