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## **A Philippines-China Perspective on the South China Sea Dispute**

The dispute over the South China Sea has garnered much discussion and until now its prevalence is still relevant. Since the 1990s many countries have fought over this resource-rich pocket of land with resolution far from being achieved (Johnson 3). In the past decade tensions have escalated, most notably between the Philippines and China, both sides have their claims over the sea and its micro islands (“South china Sea: Conflicting Claims and Tensions”). The Philippines is fighting for sovereignty over the West Philippine Sea which is a part of the South China Sea (Carpio), while China is fighting for the sovereignty over the entire South China Sea (Johnson 10). This research paper aims to show the perspective of both the Philippine and China in the South China Sea dispute.

### **What the South China Sea and its surrounding island have to offer**

It is important to note that many analysts consider that the cause of the dispute is primarily because of the resources the South China Sea contains (Agustine, et al). The South China Sea, including the Scarborough Shoal and the West Philippine Sea, is rich with different natural resources, one of which is fish; vital to any archipelagic or coastal country, it also important to note that the Philippines is the 6th largest producer of fish (Agustine et al.). Another resource and probably the most valuable are what the neighbouring islands have to offer is abundance of hydrocarbon, mineral and oil deposits (Agustine et al.). Researchers in

The University of the Philippines have stated that these resources, most notably the oil, are vital for any developing country, especially for the Philippines (Agustine, et al). The researchers also noted that the importance of sovereignty for the West Philippine Sea for the Philippines is of utmost importance, with 62% of the Philippines being coastal cities, it seen that the sea supports the country and its inhabitants with a stable income and economy (Agustine, al). For China, all of the said resources could have a lasting impact on their economy especially the oil deposits (Johnson 1). "Ownership of those [oil] reserves can either help keep China on pace to be the world's biggest economy," says Johnson.

### **The Philippines' claim over the West Philippine Sea**

The Philippines's main argument is that China's 9-dash line, published map showing 9 dashes encircling the entire South China Sea, contradicts the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea or the UNCLOS, it important to note that the UNCLOS was signed by many countries including the Philippines and China (Del Caller). Under the UNCLOS a country is given 200 nautical miles of sea as an exclusive economic zone, as well as an additional 150 miles of ECS (Carpio). This being said the Philippines should have sovereignty over the West Philippine Sea and its neighbouring islands, including Scarborough shoal (Carpio).

### **China's claim over the South China Sea, including the West Philippine Sea**

China's main argument is that the entire South China Sea belongs to them with historical maps as their basis. According to Felix K. Chang's article "Beyond the Unipolar Movement-Beijing's Reach in the South China Sea," China's claims over the region is primarily historical records (Johnson 9). Chinese officials argue that the territory was discovered around 200 AD; using maps as well as artifacts found in the islands to further support China's claim (Johnson 12). For example, Officials claim that a few islands in the

South China Sea were discovered by the Chinese in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, to support this they presented maps made in the 3rd and 18th Century AD (Johnson 12).

### **The contradicting claims between the Philippines and China**

As tensions grow ever higher it is inevitable for countries to start engaging in a political war. To illustrate, Philippine officials claim that China's 9-dash line claim has no clear and specific location (Carpio). In addition, Henry Bensurto, the Philippine Consul General, also argues that China is 800 nautical miles away from the West Philippine Sea compared to the Philippines' 200 nautical miles (Carpio). Moreover, Philippine officials also noted that the UNCLOS does not recognize historical maps as evidence, thus furthering their stand in the tribunal (Carpio). China on the other hand continues to stick to their historical maps as their main evidence (Holmes).

Obviously the situation is not getting any better. Despite the Philippines' overwhelming stand on the dispute, China still has the upper hand (Holmes). To illustrate, even if the Philippines wins the tribunal, China can simply ignore the results since the UNCLOS has no power to enforce the ruling (Holmes). Of course the United States is just around the corner in the eyes of many Filipinos; however, their involvement may only aggravate the situation as more and more officials turn to militaristic approach (Johnson 61). However, the officials of both countries must not choose the violent route as this would prove counterproductive (“Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea”). A peaceful outcome must still be the ultimate goal for both Philippines and China because the last thing this world needs is another bloody conflict.

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