Review Essay

The Tree May Prefer Calm but the Wind Will Not Subside

China's Borders: Settlements and Conflicts
NEVILLE MAXWELL
Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014
xiii + 289 pp.
ISBN 978-1-4438-6246-2

The Pragmatic Dragon: China's Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements
ERIC HYER
Vancouver, Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2015
xii + 359 pp.
ISBN 978-0-7748-2635-8 doi:10.1017/S0305741018000395

July 2017 saw the outbreak of yet another border conflict between India and China.[1] It is therefore timely to review two books that deal with the border issues that China has with its neighbours. China is one of a few countries that have borders with many other states, most of which are small. To see how China has dealt with these small countries is relevant to the fact that China, being labelled as a communist dictatorial state,[2] has often been perceived to be unpredictable and lacking transparency in its behaviour. The two books reviewed here may therefore surprise some readers.

After an introduction which outlines the contents of the two books, I set out the landscape of China's historical legacies or "burden of history" that both authors assume or argue as the background for China's behaviour in dealing with its border issues. This is followed by a discussion, first of what Maxwell and Hyer have in common, and then of their differences, specifically in what they cover or don't cover. Some space is also given to what I think they should have included in their analyses. Finally, a section is devoted to the discussion of the South China Sea issue, as this might be the most serious dispute ahead of us in the region.

Neville Maxwell's *China's Borders: Settlements and Conflicts* consists of four parts: an introductory exposition of China's approach to territorial issues; seven articles dealing exclusively with border disputes between China and India; four articles that discuss Sino-Soviet/Russian disputes; and a final part that deals with the Hong Kong settlement, written in 1995, two years before the territory's handover to China. While Maxwell's book is a collection of selected articles by the author from 1970 to 2006, Eric Hyer's *The Pragmatic Dragon* is a standard monograph which also has four parts. Part one provides

1 Maxwell 2017.
2 Ringen 2016.

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a historical context, while part two consists of five chapters dealing with China's settlements with Burma, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Pakistan and Afghanistan, under the umbrella theme of the Sino-Indian dimension. Part three has four chapters dealing with the Soviet Union/Russia, Mongolia, Japan and Vietnam, under one umbrella theme of the Sino-Soviet/Russian dimension. Hyer obviously takes this approach to show that China's disputes and settlements with these countries are strategic and have to be understood in the bigger picture. Finally, in part four, Hyer places China's settlements with the post-Soviet Union states and the South China Sea territorial disputes under the heading of contemporary settlements and disputes.

The Burden of History: the Background

Throughout more than two thousand years of recorded history, as dynasties emerged and disappeared, the territories of so-called China sometimes became larger or smaller. However, the history of the last dynasty, the Qing, was different in two important ways: first, it was so strong at the height of its influence that it formed one of China's largest territorial empires, and second, when the dynasty came to its end China was carved up by Western imperialism and colonialism. Other dynasties had risen and fallen in China, but the dynamics had always been within peoples of China's geographical neighbours. When Western influences arrived during the 18th and 19th centuries the dynamics were different: the Chinese not only had to take up the challenge of different cultures and technology but also different conceptualizations of existence, such as clearly delimited boundaries of nation states. Therefore, this legacy of history left two related and interacting issues: Chinese nation building and colonialism. The conundrum of the Chinese nation state derives not only from the fact that its territory encompasses so many ethnic groups, but also from the fact that the last dynasty, the Manchu-ruled Qing dynasty, left China with its largest territory, but one that was disintegrating. This is what Hyer calls "a dual legacy of pre-nineteenth-century regional hegemony followed by a colonial domination by the West" (Hyer p. 22).

Furthermore, many border areas were not accurately delimited by geographical surveys or treaties, and, in the words of Hyer, "[t]he boundary disputes between China and its neighbours are one legacy of the age of imperialism: imposed boundaries that may ignore 'historical customary' divisions or boundaries that were never clearly delimited and often never demarcated" (Hyer pp. 34–35). In the case of Sino-Indian territorial disputes, for instance, from the Chinese perspective there is no reason to accept the so-called "McMahon Line" drawn up by British colonialists as the legitimate delimitation line between India and China. So, when the Chinese make a claim on the late-Qing dynasty territories, some of which were lost to colonialism, China is likely to be seen to be irredentist. On the other hand, where should China draw a line of concession? Surely, no country would agree unquestioningly that any territory that had been taken

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was lost forever. The territories that had been taken were rarely clearly delimited in the first place. How to reconcile the consequences of the so-called "hundred years of humiliation" with the geographical reality on the ground? This "burden of history" question faces all those who have run the post-imperial Chinese state, communist or not.

Maxwell and Hyer in Agreement

Both Maxwell and Hyer demonstrate that, irrespective of who is in power, contemporary China responds strategically to the international situation when dealing with its border disputes. For instance, the PRC left Hong Kong alone when it could have taken it over in 1949. Strategically it was good for China to let Britain run Hong Kong, as by doing so the PRC could more or less hijack a major Western country to be less hostile to the new government. At the same time, it could use Hong Kong as a window to deal with the West in trade, information, intelligence and technology. But when the Chinese realized that it was not easy to settle the Taiwan issue, especially during the US Reagan administration, Beijing started to prepare the settlement of Hong Kong using the formula of "one country, two systems" as a model to solve the Taiwan issue.

One overwhelming theme in both Maxwell's and Hyer's books is that a detailed examination of China's approach and its settlement of territorial disputes reveals that China is ready to compromise and has not been an aggressor, in contrary to the common perception and assumption that China is threatening. Maxwell especially wants to drive this message home to the reader:

> The assumption, or axiom, that underlies Western political and strategic thinking about the problems of Asia is that the designs of the Communist China are basically militant and aggressive. Sometimes this is summed up in the unexplained and unthinking phrase "the threat from China"- for example in a *Times* leading article on June 18 this year. (Maxwell, p. 3)

That was written by Maxwell in 1970, but not much has changed since then. Paul Hasluck, then Australia's minister for external affairs, said in 1964 that "the fear of China is the dominant element in much that happens in Asia" (Maxwell, p. 3–4). In 2014, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said that Australian attitudes towards China can be summed up in two words: fear and greed. Four and half decades later the basic element of fear has not changed. Why?

After examining the settlements of border disputes that China had with Russia, Korea, Burma, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Laos and Vietnam, Maxwell concludes "… the PRC's record in dealing with the always delicate and potentially explosive issues of territorial ownership is good, and but for the blemish of its aggression against Vietnam [1979] might be considered exemplary" (Maxwell p. 44). China has had land territorial disputes with 14 countries and has settled disputes with all of them except India and India's semi-satellite Bhutan, and the reason why China could not settle disputes with Bhutan is most likely because of India, as observed by Hyer: "[w]e can safely assume that the basic reason it took so long to even initiate negotiations for a

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Sino-Bhutanese boundary treaty is India's domination of Bhutan's foreign affairs" (Hyer p. 104–105). Maxwell goes even further by saying that the reason why the Sino-Indian border dispute remains unsettled is that the Indian government under Nehru was not only inflexible and rigid but also arrogant and deceitful, and that the 1962 war has made subsequent reconciliation emotionally difficult for India. For Maxwell, India simply refuses to negotiate with anyone.

Both Maxwell and Hyer demonstrate the continuity of China's strategy in dealing with territorial disputes. This strategy was not only maintained through the era of Mao to the post-Mao era, but also by the Republic of China (ROC) under the Kuomintang (KMT), even when they ruled only Taiwan. As Hyer documents, this continuity persists today: the ROC government on Taiwan supports the PRC positions and actions on the disputes surrounding the South China Sea, sometimes implicitly and very often explicitly, even when it is not ruled by the KMT.

Both Maxwell and Hyer show that, while maintaining a Qing-dynasty China as an overall framework, China is willing to come to a compromise agreement on the basis of existing arrangements. Thus, the ROC under Chiang Kai-shek agreed in 1945 to the independence of Outer Mongolia, and the PRC under Mao did not try to reverse that. China did not try to claim back the territories ceded to Russia in the 19th century and China settled disputes not only with Russia but also the other states that came to existence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, China under Mao even agreed to negotiate with India on the basis of what is termed the McMahon Line.

Both authors agree with two main conclusions: first, the Chinese are strategic, and second, they are willing to compromise. They are strategic in that the settlement of disputes with one country is always balanced with China's overall security and foreign policy issues with other countries, and they compromise in that they are willing to give concessions in order to achieve an overall strategic goal. This is consistent with Henry Kissinger's assessment of China being a *weiqi* (or *go*) player. Kissinger stresses that China does not play trickery and is willing to forgo pettiness. Indeed, Maxwell quotes Kissinger when he starts his discussion of the Hong Kong issue: "trickery sacrifices structure to temporary benefit. Reliability is the cement of international order even among opponents: pettiness is the foe for permanence."[3]

To the current reviewer, a good summary of what Maxwell, Hyer and Kissinger hold in agreement is that the overall Chinese approach to its border disputes with its neighbours is guided by the conceptualization of *qiu datong, cun xiaoyi* 求大同，存小异一 (seek what both sides have in common and leave the small differences aside). This non-belligerent approach has a deep Chinese philosophical source which dictates that long-term benefit should take priority over short-term gains. What is considered right and wrong, what one is passionate

3 Kissinger 1979, 746–47, quoted in Maxwell 2017, 243.

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about and what makes one's emotions boil are always time- and space-specific. Considerations of honour and integrity are also historical. Emotions and values vary depending on material conditions and mentality at any historical point. Issues that are considered important now may be seen as trivial in times to come and vice versa. Putting differences aside is the best way to preserve peace for future generations.

Examples of Chinese compromise include "China had given up its claims to larger areas while Burma had made only minor concessions to offset China's transfer of the Namwan Assigned Tract" (Maxwell p. 78); "…but Nepal gained about three hundred square miles and China received about fifty-six square miles of the disputed territory (Hyer p. 89); "[t]he boundary settlement generally corresponded to Pakistan's initial claims…" (Hyer p. 112); and "…China accepted almost all of the Mongolian claims, settling the boundary dispute in a way "highly favourable to Mongolia" (Hyer p. 174).

China took the approach of shelving the dispute on the territorial sovereignty of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands to establish diplomatic relations with Japan, although since 2010, "Japan has asserted that it 'never recognized the existence' of a dispute over the Senkaku Islands" and that there was no agreement to shelve the issue (Hyer p. 183). Whatever the case, sidestepping the issue made it possible to establish the diplomatic relationship between China and Japan, benefitting not only the people of two countries but also the whole world. That is the *datong*大同 (great common). Equally, the normalization of relationship between China and the US was a win-win for both countries and for the world while the Taiwan issue was a *xiaoyi* 小异 (small difference) – small as understood *at that time*: it was a regional dispute and a Chinese internal conflict that could be left for themselves to settle. The approach taken by Zhou/Mao and Kissinger/Nixon was to put that difference aside, acknowledging each other's different positions on certain issues while seeking to reach a goal that was good for both sides.

Hyer shows that "Beijing has been much more pragmatic in approaching territorial and boundary disputes than many had assumed" (Hyer p. 7). Referring to Taylor Fravel,[4] he states that "[i]n fact, China obtained less than 30 percent of the territory it claimed in the already concluded settlements, and is seeking only 25 percent of the disputed territory in its outstanding disputes with India and Bhutan. These claims and settlements exclude the vast territories that Chinese believe were historically part of imperial China before being carved off by imperial powers, and Beijing has not insisted on the far-reaching historical claims it initially asserted" (Hyer pp. 7–8).

A good example of how Hyer places border disputes in the larger picture is his convincing analysis that the Sino-Indian relationship worsened when 1) the Sino-Soviet relationship deteriorated, 2) the India–Soviet relationship improved, 3) India supported the Tibetan exile government and 4) the US started to get

4 Fravel 2005.

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involved in the Tibetan rebellion. Like Maxwell, Hyer agrees that the Chinese 1962 war with India was not a Chinese aggression "bent on occupying more disputed territory but rather sought a boundary settlement and launched the invasion in a desperate attempt to force India back to the negotiating table" (Hyer p. 56).

Both Maxwell and Hyer document that the Chinese claim that all the treaties and agreements signed during what they call "the hundred years of humiliation" were unequal and therefore China would not in principle recognize or be bound by them. But this rhetoric of moral high ground does not mean the Chinese do not bend to historical reality. Thus, they waited until the 1979 expiry of the 99-year lease of the New Territories to recover Hong Kong. By the same token, although the Chinese claim that territory ceded to Russia was taken by unequal treaties they actually negotiated disputes based on the existing borders. It was "the Soviets [who] changed their position to argue that the 1689 treaty was unequal whereas subsequent treaties were equal" (Hyer p. 133), because the 1689 treaty was in China's favour as it was signed at a time when the Qing dynasty was strong, whereas subsequent treaties were signed when the Chinese state was weak. "Beijing insisted that it sought only Russian recognition of this historical fact in principle, and not any major readjustment of the current boundary. Moscow rejected this assertion and responded inflexibly" (Hyer p. 138).

What Maxwell and Hyer have in agreement is also clearly confirmed by Chas W. Freeman, Jr, a former US Ambassador to China, in his comment on the current situation:

> China clearly prefers to use measures short of war to protect itself but has shown that it is fully prepared to go to war to defend its borders and strategic interests. Chinese uses of force have been notably purposive, determined, disciplined, and focused on limited objectives, with no moving of the goalposts. China waited a decade to respond to multiple seizures of disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea by other claimants. The Philippines began the process of creating facts in the sea in 1978, Vietnam followed in 1982, and Malaysia did the same in 1983. It has not attempted to dislodge other claimants from any of the four dozen outposts they have planted in Chinese-claimed territories. China has been careful not to provoke military confrontations with them or with the U.S. Navy, despite the latter's swaggering assertiveness. A similar pattern of restraint has been evident in the Senkaku Islands, which China considers to be part of Taiwan and Japan asserts are part of Okinawa. There, China seeks to present an active challenge to Japanese efforts to foreclose discussion of the two sides' dispute over sovereignty. China negotiated the reunification of both Hong Kong and Macau, although it could have used force, as India did in Goa, to achieve reintegration. China has negotiated generous settlements and demarcations of its land borders with Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Vietnam. China's borders with the former British empire in Bhutan, India, and Myanmar remain formally unsettled but for the most part peaceful.[5]

Maxwell and Hyer in Difference

Maxwell deals at length with the issue of Hong Kong and the border disputes between China and India, understandably since he is a journalist of British background and authored a definitive book on the 1962 India–China war.[6] On the

5 Freeman 2017.
6 Maxwell 1970.

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other hand, Hyer discusses the South China Sea issue, which is not covered in Maxwell. Though both come to the same conclusion about China's behaviour in settling border issues, Maxwell is more biting and defensive of China. Hyer, seemingly sympathetic with China's positions, remains stand-offish. The difference is shown by the fact that while Hyer does not get involved in media attitudes Maxwell is scathing in his critique of Western media reporting of China.

In the paper on Hong Kong, when discussing Chris Patten's last-minute push to change the status quo before the handover in 1997, Maxwell comments: "[i]n the polemics between Patten and the Chinese the governor won the plaudits of the Western press. The instinctive assumption, applied whenever the PRC comes into conflict with another government, that Beijing must be in the wrong, came into play" (Maxwell p. 272). Throughout the book Maxwell shows how the Western media adopts the stance of what this reviewer considers "two whateverism": whatever China does must be wrong, and whatever the other side has in conflict with China must be right.

Maxwell is especially good at placing details of specific events or personalities in the broader context. The chapter on Hong Kong illustrates this combination well. Maxwell first provides personal details of the last governor, Chris Patten, that reveal his reasons for trying to champion democracy by confronting China, like the fact that he is a demonstratively devout Catholic, the fact that although he had conducted a successful election campaign for the Conservative Party, of which he was chairman, he had lost his own seat and therefore had a "broken career" (Maxwell p. 267), the fact that the then Prime Minister was his good friend, to whom Patten had personal access, and the fact that he had influential media friends like Jonathan Dimbleby to support him. The appointment of a politician like Patten and the "unwavering support" (Maxwell p. 272) he received from the media has to be understood in the context following the 1989 Tiananmen uprising, which took place under the full scrutiny of the international media that had gathered in Beijing to cover the Gorbachev visit. This, along with the collapse of the former Soviet Union, naturally inclined the Western-media-led sphere of Western influence (the so-called "international community") to think that a little push by the last governor in Hong Kong would lead to the death of the communist regime in China.

On Sino-Soviet disputes, Hyer acknowledges that "it is not clear that China was attempting to occupy territory that it was disputing with the Soviet Union in 1969, or whether this border skirmish was triggered by the high level of tension at the time, caused by the Cultural Revolution" (Hyer p. 267). Maxwell, however, after visiting the sites and talking to the Chinese there, clarifies why they fought over what they call Zhenbao Island:

> What I was told there (and in other sectors of the Ussuri and later on the Amur River) indicates that in the summer of 1967 Soviet Frontier Guards received orders finally to make good Moscow's claim that the dividing line on the boundary rivers lies along the Chinese bank, and consequently any Chinese use of the rivers, for fishing, navigation, or patrolling, could only be with Soviet permission… by the beginning of 1969 this increasing Soviet pressure had succeeded in making it practically impossible for the Chinese to use the rivers for fishing or their islands for agriculture.." (Maxwell p. 192).

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The Soviets also started to blockade Chinese access to Bear Island in 1967, and it was the Soviet lifting of these blockades that finally led to boundary settlements between the two countries. The dispute centred on border lines when there is a river separating two countries: the Russians claimed the border line should be on the Chinese side of the river bank, while the Chinese claimed that according to international practice it should be midstream. However, it is still unclear why it was in 1967 that the Soviets started to impose their claim. If the Cultural Revolution had anything to do with it, it is possible that the Soviets, seeing the chaos of 1967, thought there was an opportunity to impose their claim without much cost, since the Chinese could hardly put up any effective resistance in the middle of intense political turmoil.

Some Reflective Critique

To this reviewer, both books deal with the continuity of China's approach to border disputes well, but neither deals with the changes, especially China's domestic changes, that might have influenced its foreign policies. It is absolutely correct and necessary to place China's approach to territorial disputes within the context of international order and geopolitics, as both Maxwell and Hyer do. But domestic politics do affect China's foreign policies. While it was fighting the US, Vietnam did not raise its territorial dispute with China. Equally, had Mao been alive, it is very unlikely that China would have invaded Vietnam in 1979. Maxwell rightly condemns China's invasion of Vietnam in the name of "teaching a lesson" (Maxwell p. 41). That "lesson" is one of the landmarks of post-Mao China under Deng turning towards capitalism. In fact, Deng's actions could be interpreted as paying a "lesson" fee, following his visit to the US, to curry favour with capitalism. In the era of Mao, China's domestic politics were guided by the theory of class struggle, so the disputes with Vietnam could be interpreted as internal contradictions among the people (*renmin neibu maodun* 人民内部矛盾). Once class theory was thrown out, disputes of this kind became *minzu maodun* 民族矛盾 (contradictions between different nation states of different ethnic identities).

In discussions of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands disputes, the continuity of different Chinese governments is amply demonstrated by the fact that both the PRC and the ROC in Taiwan claim the islands; indeed, the ROC "passed legislation in 1970 allowing oil exploration in waters surrounding Taiwan that include the Senkakus, and Chinese from Taiwan landed on the islands and planted the ROC flag…" (Hyer p. 182). During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Hyer argues, China took a softer position towards Japan because strategically China felt threatened by Russia and therefore was more willing to shelve its dispute with Japan. Hyer argues that since the 1990s the rise of Chinese nationalism has matched Japan's "more muscular foreign policy" and "more rigid policy towards the Senkaku Islands" (Hyer p. 192), thus the dispute has accelerated. Even in this situation Hyer agrees that China only exercised "reactive assertiveness," and

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that "Beijing had pushed for negotiations and proposed joint resource development around the Senkakus in 1990, in 2006 and in 2010" (Hyer p. 193). He argues, "…China has restrained popular nationalism in order to prevent the dispute from damaging bilateral relations in other vital areas" (Hyer p. 196). However, Hyer's explanation for the escalation of the dispute over these islands requires more effort. For the Japanese part, Hyer argues that Japan's "more intransigent policy" (Hyer p. 192) was due to "the conservative turn in Japan" and the dispute was "a symbol of Japan's concern over a rising China." This is true and accurate. But what is the explanation for China's rise of popular nationalism?[7] The standard explanation often offered in the media and scholarly writings is that the Chinese power holders want to divert the Chinese people's discontent from domestic oppression to external targets in order to legitimize the CCP's hold on power. They cite evidence like the massive production of TV programmes demonizing the Japanese in the genre of narrating the Japanese invasion and occupation of China. While this explanation seems plausible, especially if one wants to stick to the Cold War framework of anti-communism, we may question whether this is the only or even the most important reason. The propaganda model of a communist China is totally out of date. China is a far more diverse and complex society now and the media is vastly commercialized.[8] The fact that there were so many anti-Japanese invasion and occupation TV programmes was at least partly a pursuit of market opportunity. Even with the current increasing political pressure of censorship, capitalist logic still drives the Chinese media market.

In fact, the rise of Chinese popular nationalism against Japan is related to the bitter legacy that Hyer outlines. This bitter legacy may be traced to two factors. One is that the Chinese don't feel they actually defeated Japan. The Japanese did not in reality surrender to the Chinese but to the Americans and the Russians. The other is that the Chinese feel that although they suffered most from the Japanese invasion they did not get to punish the Japanese: they did not get any war compensation and have not even received a sincere formal apology. This sense of the Japanese being unpunished was reinforced by the Cold War, for the convenience of which the US not only preserved the Japanese emperor system but also let many war criminals go unpunished. The current Japanese prime minister's grandfather was initially accused of being a war criminal. He was not only let off the hook but also became a post-war prime minister. One will understand the extent of emotion if one compares how the victims of the Holocaust have hunted down their persecutors even until the present day, something that is supported without hesitation in the West.

Another profoundly complex explanation stems from Chinese domestic politics. During the entire Mao era, the philosophical guidance for Chinese politics was dominated by the theory and practice of class struggle as understood and

7 Gries 2004.
8 Zhao 2008 and Xie 2014.

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implemented largely by Mao. Within this narrative, wartime brutality and horrors such as the Nanjing Massacre could be firmly blamed on the capitalist imperial system. The Chinese could have a good relationship with the people of Japan who were exploited and used by the ruling class. Once this paradigm was abandoned ethnic identity became the only target, hence Chinese popular nationalism against the Japanese. Just as has happened in Xinjiang and Tibet, once the state depoliticizes society any tensions and conflicts of interest are interpreted in the framework of ethnicity.[9] I would argue that the relationship between Japan and the Chinese worsened after the class category of Japanese people was replaced by the identity category of ethnicity. It is therefore premature for Hyer to claim that "China's policy was only marginally affected, if at all, by domestic politics or elite factionalism" (Hyer p. 265). Yes, China's dealing with its neighbours in border settlements may not have been much affected by elite politics but domestic politics in ideological orientation does affect foreign policies and border issues. As another example, the issue of the border line along the Amur and Ussuri rivers was put aside when China and the Soviet Union were ideological friends.

Hyer would argue for instance that China's approach of shelving the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island disputes is based on its strategy of obtaining a secure international environment and to seek Japan's assistance in capital and technology. This might well be the case. But we need to probe further: surely China would have wanted to have a better relationship with Japan sooner. Why 1971? This is where one might see the inadequacy of Hyer's analysis: an insufficient account of other parties of the Cold War and the Chinese intellectual legacy. If Japan had been unwilling, nothing would and could have happened, no matter how hard China tried. Japan was willing to come to the table because the US changed its position after Kissinger's secret visit to China and the announcement of the Shanghai Communiqué. Japan wanted to raise the issue of the Islands but China wanted to shelve it, not just because China was too weak to fight but also because of its intellectual and philosophical guidance of *qiu datong, cun xiaoyi*.

The South China Sea

Hyer makes it clear that the PRC claim over the South China Sea is not expansionism or China becoming more aggressive as it becomes economically and militarily more powerful. Zhou Enlai declared the sovereignty of the PRC over the South China Sea as far back as August 1951, inheriting the claims previously made by the ROC. China had occupied Woody Island (Yongxing dao) in the Paracel group after the evacuation of the Nationalist troops in 1950. In 1974 Chinese forces occupied the remaining islands in the Paracel group held by the collapsing South Vietnam. All these claims and enforcement of them were in fact inherited from the ROC: in 1935 the Nationalist government's China Map

9 Wang Hui 2006, 2011 and 2014.

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Verification Committee declared sovereignty over 132 islands, reefs and shoals in the South China Sea. In 1947 the committee published a map that included a U-shaped line (eleven dash lines) encompassing the entire area. The Chinese point of view is expressed as below by Chen Jie (as quoted by Hyer p. 240)

> Initially taking advantage of China's turbulent domestic policies and its preoccupation with superpower threats, regional countries have occupied China's islands and reefs, carved up its sea areas, and looted its marine recourses. Beijing does not view establishing a foothold in the South China Sea as constituting territorial gains but minimizing territorial losses.[10]

As Hyer convincingly shows, the South China Sea has become a hot spot for dispute not only because of its potential energy resources but also because of anxiety caused by the rise of China. From the late 1940s to the late 1970s when the Cold War was hot, the influence of the US on the one side and the Soviet Union on the other side maintained a sort of equilibrium in the area. However, with the end of the Vietnam War, the retreat of the Americans and the Russians seems to have left an opportunity for a Chinese dominance which many fear.

According to Hyer, despite the Chinese National People's Congress promulgating in 1992 a "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone" that asserted China's claims on the Dongsha (Pratas), the Xisha (Paracel), the Zhongsha (Macclesfield Bank) and the Nansha (Spratly) islands, "it is unlikely that Beijing will block a settlement if other parties are all willing to compromise or participate in a joint development agreement while putting off settlement of the sovereignty question" (Hyer p. 246). This is because "China's vigilance is not unlike the behaviour of the other disputants, however, and does not necessarily foreshadow aggressive action to assert control over all of the South China Sea" (Hyer p. 250). For Hyer it is encouraging that "[f]ollowing Deng Xiaoping's decision to shelve the controversy and pursue cooperative development, China did not unilaterally pursue oil or other resource development in disputed areas of the South China Sea whereas other states did, especially Malaysia and Vietnam" (Hyer p. 252). The "voice of pragmatism" won out – China has not elevated the South China Sea to a "core interest'" (Hyer p. 255). In conclusion and in agreement with Fravel,[11] Hyer predicts that as China has taken and will continue to take a compromise position between history and reality, a middle way between "axiomatic" and "calculated" policies,[12] "if nothing occurs to threaten Beijing's security interests in the South China Sea, the status quo could continue indefinitely" (Hyer p. 259).

Conclusion

Hyer's seems to be an optimistic conclusion, too optimistic perhaps because there is no guarantee that "nothing occurs." To start with, there is no guarantee that

10 Chen 1994, 893–94.
11 Fravel 2010.
12 May 1962.

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China will do nothing. China may make fatal moves either as a result of new external challenges or as a result of its leadership's change of conceptualization of domestic governance. The two books reviewed are excellent in putting China's past moves regarding border disputes in the big picture of externality, but short on China's conceptual direction domestically. As the difference between the leadership under Mao and under Deng shows, a different conceptualization of human society frames a different understanding of national interest, which in turn dictates different foreign policies and moves in border disputes. The current Chinese leadership under Xi Jinping is at a crossroads deciding on a new conceptualization of the future direction of China. The jury is out.

There is no guarantee that nothing will occur externally either. According to the legendary documentary maker and journalist John Pilger, the "coming war with China" has been the design of the US for quite some years.[13] Headlines like "It is high time to outmaneuver Beijing in the South China Sea"[14] and "Taiwan, Trump, & the Pacific defense grid: towards deterrence in depth"[15] appear from time to time. As Michael McDevitt, senior fellow in strategic studies at the CNA Corporation, admits, for instance, the US has not only set the agenda of condemning China over the South China Sea, but was also "indirectly" responsible for "Manila's decision to go to the Permanent Court of Arbitration over Chinese claims and actions in the SCS [South China Sea]."[16] As the global fear of China is on the rise, China may face an externality beyond its control. The tree may prefer calm but the wind will not subside (*shu yu jing er feng bu zhi* 树欲静而风不止): the US industrial-military complex has the ability to "summon the wind and call for rain" to change the course of history.

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13 Pilger 2016.
14 Babbage 2016.
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