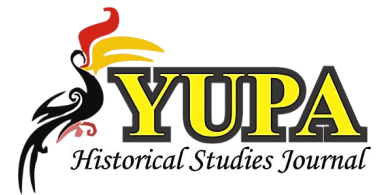


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## History and Effect of South China Sea Conflict in Southeast Asia Political Stability after World War II

Saiful Anwar Matondang<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Ricky Hardiyansyah<sup>2</sup>, Surya Aymanda Nababan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>saiful.matondang@fkip.uisu.ac.id, <sup>2</sup>murickyha@gmail.com, <sup>3</sup>suryaaymanda@gmail.com

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**Abstract** *The purpose of this study is to describe the history and influence of the South China Sea conflict on the political stability of Southeast Asia after World War II. The South China Sea has tremendous potential, both in the sea and above the sea. Thus, countries in Southeast Asia and the two major world powers, namely the United States and the People's Republic of China, are trying to claim or at least maintain their influence in the region. This research method uses literature research, and data analysis techniques used use content analysis methods. The findings of this study are that mutual claims between countries in Southeast Asia will become a major conflict in the future if it is not resolved. The negotiations were about the process of resolving conflicts that occurred in the South China Sea in reviewing the problems, and prospects in the South China Sea area for the benefit of all countries.*

**Keywords:** *South China Sea, multilateral conflict, political stability, Southeast Asia*

**Abstrak** *Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan sejarah dan pengaruh konflik Laut Cina Selatan terhadap stabilitas politik Asia Tenggara setelah Perang Dunia II. Laut Cina Selatan memiliki potensi yang luar biasa, baik di laut maupun di atas laut. Dengan demikian, negara-negara di Asia Tenggara dan dua kekuatan besar dunia, yaitu Amerika Serikat dan Republik Rakyat China, berusaha mengklaim atau setidaknya mempertahankan pengaruhnya di kawasan. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kepustakaan, dan teknik analisis data yang digunakan menggunakan metode analisis isi. Temuan penelitian ini adalah bahwa saling klaim antar negara di Asia Tenggara akan menjadi konflik besar di masa depan jika tidak diselesaikan. Perundingan tersebut membahas tentang proses penyelesaian konflik yang terjadi di Laut Cina Selatan dalam mengkaji permasalahan, dan prospek di kawasan Laut Cina Selatan untuk kepentingan semua negara.*

**Kata kunci :** *Laut Cina Selatan, konflik multilateral, stabilitas politik, Asia Tenggara*



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## INTRODUCTION

Talking about disputed areas will remind of the dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia, which emerged in 1967 when in a technical meeting on the law of the sea between the two countries, each country apparently included the island of Sipadan and the island of Ligitan within its territorial boundaries (Wirajuda, 2017). The two countries then agreed that Sipadan and Ligitan be declared in a state of status quo, however this understanding is different. The Malaysian side is building a new tourism resort managed by a private party, because Malaysia understands the status quo as remaining under Malaysia until the dispute is resolved, while the Indonesian side means that in this status means the status of the two islands may not be occupied/occupied until the issue of ownership of the two islands this is finished (Novitasari, 2021; Sanjaya, 2021).

The South China Sea area consists of waters and land from a group of two large islands, namely the Spratlys and Paracels, as well as the banks of the Macclesfield River and Scarborough Reef which stretches widely from Singapore, starting from the Malacca Strait to the Taiwan Strait. Because of this vast expanse of territory and the history of successive domination by traditional rulers of nearby countries (Novelin & Setiabudhi, 2018; Sobarini, Amalia, Nurmala, Syukur, & Wisesa, 2021). Currently, several countries such as the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei Darussalam are involved in a confrontational effort to claim some or all of these territorial waters.

Due to the long history of navigation and commerce in the South China Sea, which was followed by successive control of the territory, countries in the region and even outside the region have given different names to the contested territory. In most languages used by European sailors, the sea is called the South China Sea or the South China Sea (in Indonesia the use of the word China is replaced with Cina) (Lan, 2018; Pertiwi, 2021). Portuguese sailors, the first Europeans to sail in these waters and at the same time gave the name, called it Mar da China or the China Sea (Fujitani, 2016). They later turned it into the South China Sea. Similarly, the International Hydrographic Organization refers to it as the South China Sea or Nan Hai (South Sea) in Chinese or Chinese. The government of the People's Republic of China assumes that the South China Sea is its sovereign territory, they are guided by the historical background of ancient China on the map of China's sovereign territory (Kim, 2015; Sinaga, 2016).

According to China, the islands and areas of the South China Sea were discovered by China's predecessor, the Han Dynasty since 2 centuries BC which in the 12th century BC by the Yuan Dynasty the islands and sea areas in the South China Sea were included in the map of China's territory and then strengthened with the Ming and Qing Dynasties in the 13th century BC. In the early 19th and 20th centuries, China suggested that the Spratly Islands were approximately 1,100 km from the port of Yu Lin (Hainan Island) as part of the Nansha Islands

and the Paracel Islands, which are located north of the Spratly Islands, it is approximately 277.8 km from Hainan Island as part of the Xisha Islands part of Hainan province (Junef, 2018). But in 1930 France occupied one of the Spratly islands and in 1931 sent a note to the Chinese Embassy in Paris demanding Vietnam's sovereignty over the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands which the PRC protested. Despite these protests, France occupied the Spratlys, as well as seven other islands and declared them part of the kingdom of Vietnam from 1933 to 1939.

Japan then replaced France in occupying the Spratly islands from 1939 to 1945 (Granados, 2008; Patalano, 2015). After Japan's defeat in World War II in 1945, France again occupied the Spratly islands in 1946. The PRC again protested the French actions and a month later sent its senior officials on warships to occupy the Spratlys. In 1947, China placed the Spratly islands under its jurisdiction as part of the Guangdong province. In 1947 China issued a map of the South China Sea with 9 dashed lines forming the letter U, and declared all areas within the red dotted line as Chinese territories. Since 1976 China has occupied several islands in the Paracel archipelago and in 1992 Chinese law reaffirmed these claims (Rowan, 2005).

Although Taiwan is still considered an integral part of China, Taiwan also claims ownership of territory in the South China Sea (Ferhat, 2006). Like China, Taiwan has also made historical claims. Vietnam has also filed its claim over the Spratly islands based on centuries of history. Vietnam's claim to the Spratly islands is also based on the acquisition of Emperor Gia Long in 1802 AD and merging it with Vietnam in 1832 AD. Emperor Minh Mang who ruled the Kingdom of Vietnam in 1834 AD has also erected pagodas and stone tablets on the Spratly Islands. According to Heinzig (in Usman & Sukma, 1997), from a historical point of view, Vietnam's demands were weaker than China's because this country had difficulty proving their continued control over the country and territory since 211 BC. As a result of the PRC colonialism which was then continued with French colonialism after being independent in a very short period of time. But Vietnam pointed out that many documents showing Vietnam's ownership of the Spratly islands were destroyed by the PRC at the time it colonized Vietnam.

After World War II, Vietnam laid out the basis for its demands by referring to the 1951 San Francisco peace treaty. Vietnam, which was present at that time and signed this agreement, has affirmed its claim to the Spratly Islands as stated by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam, Tran Van Hhu (Usman & Sukma, 1997) that "... we affirm our rights to the Spratly and Paracel Islands which have always been belong to Vietnam." In 1956 Vietnam incorporated the Spratly Islands into Phuoc Tuy Province by a decree dated October 22, 1956. The Philippines began to pay attention to the Spratly islands after gaining independence from the United States and filed a claim for ownership at the United Nations General Assembly in 1946. After independence, the Philippines Foreign Minister issued a statement that The New Southern

islands (Japanese term for islands in the South China Sea) were handed over by Japan to the Philippines (Usuki, 2018).

But in 1956, Tomas Cloma, a fishing boat owner discovered and occupied some of the Spratly islands which were then called the Kalayaan Islands as terra nullius territory (territory not owned by any country). The Philippines also bases its demands on the doctrine of immediacy and the urgent need for its defence. Malaysia's claim based on part of the territory in the Spratlys is based on the principle of the continental shelf, in this regard Malaysia has made the boundaries it claims with clear coordinates (Roach, 2014). Malaysia's claim was made on 21 December 1979 at the time the map of the Malaysian Continental Shelf was published. Malaysia considers the islands in the Continental Shelf and its EEZ, namely Swallow Reef, Matanani (Mariveles Reef) and Ubi (Dallas Reef) as its territory.

Brunei does not claim the islands, but does claim part of the nearby South China Sea as part of the continental shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Brunei has lodged a protest against a map issued by the Malaysian government in 1979 that included Louisa Reef called the West Semarang Reef into Malaysia's sovereign territory (Ahmad & Mohd Sani, 2017). In 1984, Brunei declared an EEZ covering Louisa Reef in the Spratly Islands. Indonesia is not a claimant state in the South China Sea area, especially the Spratly Islands. However, the claims of China and Taiwan in the South China Sea with 9 broken lines and the shape of the letter U cover the continental shelf and the Indonesian Exclusive Economic Zone, the EEZ automatically covers Indonesia's gas fields on the island of Natuna (Suharna, 2012).

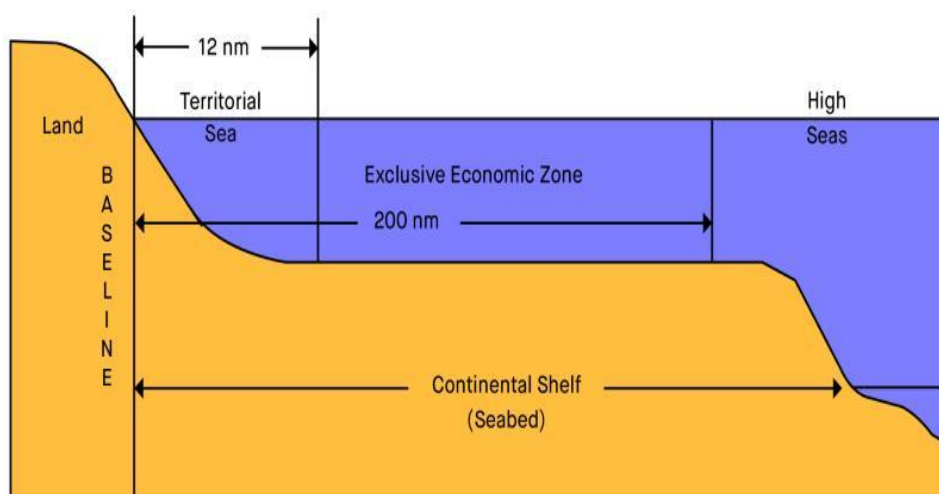


Fig 1.1 Continental Shelf (Council for the Final Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries, 2022)

Disputes over ownership or territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea actually refer to the sea and land areas in the two clusters of the Paracel and Spratly Islands (Nugroho & Hikam, 2021). In both groups of islands there are uninhabited islands, atolls or corals. The territory that is the arena for the struggle for territorial claims for sovereignty stretches hundreds of miles from South to East in Hainan Province. The People's Republic of China claims their claims date

back 2000 years, when the Paracels and Spratlys had become part of the Chinese nation. According to the Government of the People's Republic of China, in 1947 the Government of the People's Republic of China issued a map detailing the sovereignty claims of the People's Republic of China over the South China Sea (Gao & Jia, 2013).

The statement from the Government of the People's Republic of China was refuted by the Government of Vietnam, which also claimed sovereignty over the area, saying that the government of the People's Republic of China had never claimed sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands until the 1940s. The Vietnamese government later declared that the two islands were included in their territory, not part of the territory of China. Since the 17th century and they have documents as evidence. The Philippines also has the same claim to sovereignty, by adopting geographical proximity to the Spratly Islands as the basis for claiming parts of the archipelago (Gonzales, 2014).

Malaysia and Brunei also have sovereign claims to parts of the South China Sea. According to the two close neighbours, the waters of the South China Sea are still within their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as stipulated by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Beckman, 2013). Seeing that many countries in Southeast Asia are involved in overlapping claims to control and ownership of the South China Sea, it is feared that it will threaten the stability of political stability in the Southeast Asian region. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe the history and influence of the South China Sea conflict on political stability in Southeast Asia.

## **METHOD**

This study uses literature research to examine the history and influence of the South China Sea conflict on the political stability of Southeast Asia after World War II. Literature study or literature can be interpreted as a series of activities related to the methods of collecting library data, reading and taking notes and processing research materials (Zed, 2008). Meanwhile, Creswell (in Amboro, 2020) states that literature review is a summary of articles from journals, books, and other documents that describe the theory and research results that are currently needed. The steps for literature research according to Kuhlthau (in Herlina, 2014) are as follows, (1) topic selection, (2) information exploration, (3) determining the focus of research, (4) collecting data sources, (5) preparing presentation data, and (6) preparation of reports. Meanwhile, data collection is carried out by reviewing and/or exploring several quality journals, books, and documents (both printed and electronic) as well as other sources of data and/or information deemed relevant to historical studies and the influence of the South China Sea conflict on Southeast Asian political stability. Articles are selected based on the quality of the published journal (such as Google Scholar, Science and Technology Index (SINTA), Directory of

Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and others). Furthermore, in an effort to analyze, researchers also use political-economic theory, and realism to obtain comprehensive results.

Elo et al., (2014) argued that the data analysis technique used in library research could be using the content analysis method. Aspers & Corte (2019) states content analysis is a research tool that focuses on the actual content and internal features of media. This technique can be used by researchers to examine human behavior indirectly through analysis of their communications such as: textbooks, essays, newspapers, novels, magazine articles, songs, advertising images and all types of communication that can be analyzed. Analysis is used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences in texts or a series of texts (Carley, 1993). Texts can be broadly defined as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, news headlines and newspaper articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertisements, or in document form. To carry out content analysis, the text is coded first to make it easier to group and then write the research results.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The cause of the contested South China Sea**

China's military development and growing geopolitical influence in the ASEAN region which was formerly a "territory" of the United States as the "sole ruler" after the fall of the Soviet Union (Cold War) in 1991 (Radityo, Rara, Amelia, & Efraim, 2019). The rapid development of China's military makes China's influence so strong in ASEAN, it can even match the influence of the United States and its allies in ASEAN. The United States, which did not want to lose its influence in ASEAN, finally changed the focus of their military presence which was originally focused on the Middle East to shift to Asia Pacific (Narine, 1998). This has been confirmed by the US government and is marked by the deployment of approximately 2500 US Marines in Australia.

The South China Sea area in ASEAN, which is the busiest shipping lane in the world, has a very important meaning for the United States and China (Darmawan & Mahendra, 2018). If they can control the South China Sea, then they will automatically control a very large economic trade route and will increase the bargaining power of their country. The United States, which has been in power there, now has a new challenger, namely China. Several aspects make the South China Sea important for any country, namely: First, strategic location. Geographically, the South China Sea is surrounded by ten coastal countries (China and Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam and the Philippines).

The territorial waters of the South China Sea include the Gulf of Siam which is bordered by Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia and the Gulf of Tonkin which is bordered by Vietnam and China. The South China Sea area is an area of very important economic, political

and strategic value, its geographical position is strategically positioned as a trade shipping lane and international communication route that connects the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. This has turned the South China Sea route into the world's busiest route, as more than half of the world's trade sails through the South China Sea every year. Trade data of three major economic giants (India, United States and Japan) (Paul, 2019). It is estimated that more than half of the world's super tankers pass through this sea route.

Second, the economic potential and the importance of geopolitics, including the content of natural resources in it, have led to conflicts in territorial claims between China and some ASEAN member countries in the South China Sea area (Macaraig & Fenton, 2021). According to data from the Ministry of Geology and Mineral Resources of the People's Republic of China (PRC) estimates that the Spratly region has oil and natural gas reserves of 17.7 billion tons ( $1.60 \times 10^{10}$  kg), bigger than Kuwait, a country which is ranked as the 4th largest oil reserve in the world today with a total of 13 billion tons ( $1.17 \times 10^{10}$  kg). Meanwhile, natural gas in the South China Sea is probably the most abundant source of hydrocarbons. Most of the hydrocarbons in the South China Sea are explored by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Third, the South China Sea is part of the Pacific Ocean which covers part of the area from Singapore and the Malacca Strait to the Taiwan Strait with an area of about 3.5 million km. Based on its size, the South China Sea is the largest or second largest water area after the five oceans (Gunawan & Siregar, 2021). The South China Sea has potential sources of mineral wealth such as cobalt, copper, tin, phosphate, manganese nodules, especially gas and especially oil (Citradi, 2020; Ramli, Lumumba, & Burhanuddin, 2021).

Fourth, the South China Sea area when viewed in the international ocean system is an area that has economic, political and strategic values. The small islands in the South China Sea, which make up the archipelago, number in the hundreds. The sea and islands, which are largely uninhabited, are claimed by several countries. This claim is clearly reflected in the various names used to refer to these islands and seas. In addition, the South China Sea which contains oil and natural gas contained in it, as well as its very important role as a trade route and world oil distribution, has made the South China Sea area the object of regional debate for years (Steffens, 2013).

The South China Sea area is an area with economic and strategic potential that can be a source of conflict as well as cooperation. Located at the crossroads between Europe, West Asia and India on the one hand and Japan and China on the other and the various resources contained therein cause all claimants to pay attention to the strategic and economic potential of the South China Sea. Strategically, the South China Sea is a sea communication route, namely the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) that connects the European and Asian regions, the East

Asia region with the Indian Ocean and the Middle East (Zuhri & Hanifa, 2017). Several sea lanes in the South China Sea, namely the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, the Sunda Strait, the Lombok Strait and Makassar are the busiest shipping lanes in the world because almost half of all trading ships in the world pass through this area.

More than a quarter of the world's trade routes pass through the South China Sea each year, making it home to some of the busiest transportation routes in the world. More than 80 to 90 percent of Japan's and China's oil imports pass through these waters. Every year there are about 41,000 merchant ships passing through this area (Putra, 2016). The supply of oil transported through the Strait of Malacca from the Indian Ocean to East Asia reaches six times the number of ships that pass through the Suez Canal and 17 times that of those that pass through the Panama Canal. Apart from oil, two-thirds of the world's LNG is transported through the South China Sea. ALKI or Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) in the South China Sea is very important not only for the economy of Southeast Asia, but also East Asia, Europe and the United States (Bagus Dharma Agastia & Agung Banyu Perwita, 2016). ALKI is also important not only for economic and commercial purposes but also for military purposes.

In addition to being an important trade route for the world economy, the South China Sea is also rich in living and non-living natural resources. From the biological natural resources, the fishery potential in the South China Sea is very beneficial for coastal countries in this region. With a total area of 3.56 square kilometers, the South China Sea is the largest and deepest sea in the world with an average depth of 1212 meters and the deepest point of 5567 meters (Qiu, 2017). With this depth and breadth, the South China Sea area is very suitable for habitation and breeding of various types of fish in large numbers. Statistical data states that the economic value of fish caught in the South China Sea in the mid-1990s was around 3 billion USD.

The South China Sea provides 25 percent of the protein needed by 500 million people and 80 percent of the diet of the entire population of the Philippines. The South China Sea ranks 19th in the world's fishing zones in terms of marine product production with a catch of 8 million metric tons of fish per year. Meanwhile, the economic potential of the South China Sea is also getting bigger when in the late 1960s, the results of geological research reported the possibility of the presence of natural gas, petroleum and very rich fishery resources in the region. It is estimated that there are 11 billion barrels of untapped oil, as well as 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves in these waters.

In addition, the South China Sea has become the center of attention of many big countries because based on rough calculations, there is a wealth of crude oil in this region of around 7 billion barrels and 900 trillion cubic feet below sea level (Arbar, 2020). With the fact that the South China Sea is the busiest trade route in the world, any country that controls this



region can gain huge economic benefits as a country through which merchant ships from all over the world pass.

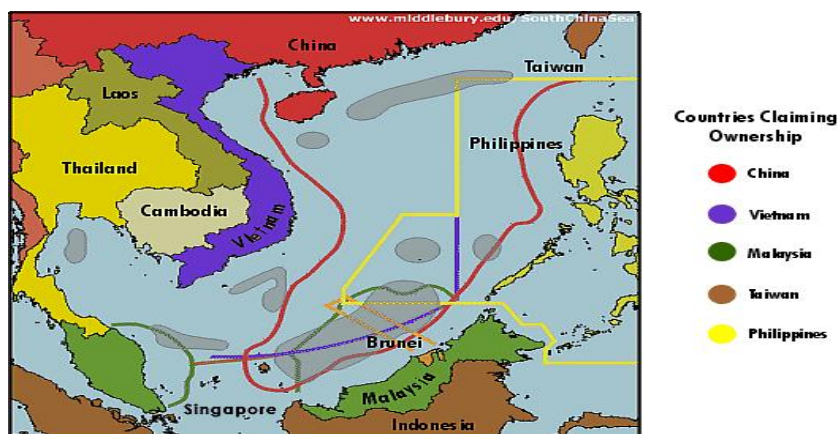


Fig 1.2 Map of claimant countries in the South China Sea

Therefore, it is not surprising that the South China Sea area is never "quiet" from disputes due to the determination of each claimant country who wants to control the economic and strategic potential contained in the South China Sea. Even today, the South China Sea is increasingly becoming a more "dangerous" waterway than it was in the past because of its potential to become a bone of contention for all claimants.

### Countries Involved in the South China Sea Conflict

Disputes that occur in the South China Sea are very complex because of overlapping claims between claiming countries. This overlap occurs because the territorial border of one claimant country overlaps with another. This happens because the measurement of the sea border is more difficult to do than the measurement of the land border because the sea border must also take into account the rise and fall of sea levels that affect the measurement of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the country concerned. In addition, the claimant countries of this region also have their own basis for claiming the area they believe is included as part of their territory, especially based on the principle of the continental shelf or EEZ in accordance with UNCLOS. The claims of several disputing countries in the South China Sea area can be seen from the table below:

Table 1.1: Territorial Claims of Countries Around the South China Sea Area (Veronika, 2010)

Country	South China Sea	Spratly Islands	Paracel Islands	Gulf of Thailand
Brunei	UNCLOS	No formal claim	Not claiming	No description

Cambodia	No description	No description	No description	UNCLOS
People's Republic of China	All claimed	All claimed	All claimed	No description
Indonesia	UNCLOS	Not claiming	Not claiming	No description
Malaysia	UNCLOS	3 islands	Not claiming	UNCLOS
Philippines	Significant	8 islands	Not claiming	No description
Taiwan	All claimed	All claimed	All claimed	No description
Thailand	No description	No description	No description	UNCLOS
Vietnam	All claimed	All claimed	All claimed	UNCLOS

The table above summarizes the various claims made by countries around the South China Sea region in particular, claims to the six disputed countries in the South China Sea. Show of force and aggressive and provocative maneuvers and even open conflict in the South China Sea area have occurred repeatedly since the 1970s, besides that it has taken place in the past in its history. This can be seen by the alternation of control in the area which has an impact on changing the name of the water area. Severe clashes were recorded in 1974 which killed Vietnamese soldiers, and in 1988 the PRC and Vietnamese navies again engaged in confrontation in the Spratlys, with Vietnam losing 70 military personnel (Roza, Nainggolan, & Muhamad, 2013).

The Philippine Navy has also been involved in minor tensions with the Chinese, Vietnamese and Malaysian navies. The conflict between the Philippine Navy and the PRC took place in the Scarborough Reef Shelf. Likewise between the Philippine and Vietnamese navies, which had heated up after ships from the two countries were involved in provocations that sparked mutual tension. Later, the PRC government issued a strong statement to countries claiming sovereignty over the South China Sea to stop oil and mineral exploration activities in these waters.

The historical reason put forward by China and Taiwan (both claim to be the sole heir to the Ancient Chinese Empire) is that the two islands have been discovered and utilized since Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty came to power in China in the 2nd century BC (Schubert, 2010). The next ruling dynasties in China, such as the Tang Dynasty, Song Dynasty, Ming Dynasty to Qing Dynasty as the last ruler of the Ancient China Kingdom, have alternately used the two islands both for the economic interests of the Chinese people (in the field of fisheries), military interests, and science for the Chinese people.

## CONCLUSION

The South China Sea area is an area that has enormous potential, namely in the form of potential natural resources such as oil and natural gas as well as natural wealth in the form of abundant fish products, as well as its geographical potential, namely its very strategic location, traversed by ships belonging to developed countries as world oil distribution channels, shipping

lines and international communications. This has attracted a lot of attention from countries that still need natural resources for their industrial development or global ambitions. The results of the study show that the conflicts that occurred in the South China Sea after World War II and which involved the People's Republic of China (PRC), Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Brunei Darussalam had political implications, and security caused by the conflict of interests between these countries. If these implications are left unchecked, and not handled quickly, it is possible that an open war will occur, which can harm the countries in conflict, as well as the countries around the South China Sea.

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