

## Regional Integration and Conflict Resolution: Identity at stake

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### 1. Introduction

Territorial disputes revolving around the South China Sea constitute a source of regional insecurity. One of the easiest ways to deal with the issue might be to employ armed forces, but this option does not seem justifiable. Instead of a hard-ball approach, a soft and normative approach based on regional cooperation has been discussed as a viable alternative (Diez et al. 2006; Weissmann 2012). Although tangible and immediate results are hard to observe for the time being, there have been some endorsements from the parties concerned. The conflict parties have begun to recognize the possible contribution, when diverse regional summits and forums have provided venues to discuss the issues at stake in earnest. Some of the external stakeholders, such as the US, have also lent their support to such schemes – *albeit* in a complementary way (Clinton 2011).

Despite a view in favor of regional approaches in dealing with the current territorial issue, and despite some of the parties' supports, however, China, arguably at the heart of the current dispute, has displayed somewhat ambiguous attitudes. On the one hand, it has undoubtedly but gradually shown signs of change in terms of its attitude towards the possible contribution of regionalism, compared to its past principle that the resolution of disputes has to be left entirely with the parties directly involved (Zhao 2013). Yet it has, on the other hand, still insisted on the bilateral approach in dealing with the current dispute, seeing it as its domestic issue. The underlying reasons for China's oscillation in terms of its approach for conflict resolution requires further analysis and critical reflection, and this paper, among others, resorts to the concept of self-identity to this objective, evaluating whether and to what extent the self-identity of China in particular, and that of others (US and other claimant countries), plays a role in making sense of their conflictive relationship. If conflictive parties present the other as significant others, considering them as posing an existential threat - *albeit* in cognitive terms in this context (Campbell 1998), the key question is whose identity matters most. Will it be the identity of China that matters most, not least when it has recently attempted to come to terms with its past trauma caused by undue interference by external – particularly, western – forces, and when it seeks to reposition itself as a regional hegemon that seeks to act as a rule-maker, rather than rule-taker? Or will it be the US, which has recently shown growing interest in the region by the banner of its Asia

pivot policy, and reclaimed its hegemonic position in the area? Or will be the ASEAN claimant countries?

This paper examines the applicability of regional approach stressing multilateralism, focusing on the internal process of domestic politics in which actors create their own biographical narratives in an attempt to tell who they are and what motives them to act in certain ways, and which means they reflexively can possibly represent their own self (Steele 2007). It also evaluates these questions, putting them in the context of external relationship in which the self-identity is also discursively articulated. Answering these questions, the paper aims to examine to what extent identity politics can contribute to the transformation of regional conflicts centering around the South China Sea.

## **2. Identity at Stake**

While there are economic, political and geostrategic reasons behind the current territorial disputes, a closer look would reveal that the identity is also at stake. Despite some minor and sporadic confrontations among the littoral countries, a full-scale conflict is not a likely scenario. This does not necessarily deny its possibility entirely, but rather suggests that it is not the physical threat but ontological one. In that case, it is the incompatible subject position revolving around the territorial disputes, and the ways of addressing them, has actually created the current context of threat environment, constituting a source of regional insecurity. If this line of argument is plausible, how can it be applicable in this study? Thus to understand the ways in which identity is at work behind the current conflictive relations among the parties in conflict, and to understand why they prefer certain methods of addressing the issue, it is necessary to examine the discursive practices of self-identity, the fundamental causes of the identity threat, and the routines to keep self-identity one by one.

The identity of actors is first formulated at the domestic level, but also articulated, being subject to its discursive practices by exploiting the concept of danger and threat (Campbell, 1998). Such practices do not take place by themselves, but through the process of projecting the negative self onto other. This is a so-called othering process (Diez, 2005, 628) in which significant others are presented not simply alien or different, but rather dangerous and threatening (Kinnvall 2004, 755). By essentializing self and others, one's identity can be articulated as natural, and if it is denaturalized, an antagonistic position of others ensues. Such a kind of antagonistic position that seems to be critical to the identity formation process does not happen in vacuum, but is based on how biographical narratives describe referent objects (Steele 2008, 10). Biographical narratives, by organizing national history and experience in a particular fashion, allow actors to enhance their reflexive awareness of who

they are and what motivates their choices of action (Rumelili, 2015; 11). Moreover, speaking of the process of identity formation entails the relevant question of how to put it into the perspective of external relations, because it has been argued that it is not only important how one seeks itself, but also how it wants to be seen by others (Doty 1993)

There are two implications. On the one hand, discussing the implications of the interaction actors engage in has thus a particular significance for the discursive practices of one's identity. As it has been said that the self-identity is created, and affected by, through a particular way of narrating one's own national history and critical moments, the external relationship actors manage would also produce similar effects. This is largely because of the assumption that identity is socially constructed through inter-subjective understandings among parties concerned. On the other hand, it is possible to make an argument that the self-identity is also subject to change, depending on how the self and others perceive it to be. There are debates whether self-identity is truly transforming, depending on the ways in which intersubjective understandings are formed, and also on the contextual conditions that also affect them in a circular way. Subotić (2016) argues that narratives underpinning the formation process of self-identity are selectively manipulated, and provided a particular form of cognitive template for certain political purposes. If so, it is not surprising to observe a change in self-identity and this is also a bottom line that this paper accommodates as well when explaining why there is a gradual change in policy positions and also in the nature of self-identity.

Second, and equally important, how identity threat occurs, and why it emerges, should also be understood in a similar context. When the self-narratives of significant others are not perceived to be incongruent with its own, one would feel an identity threat. This observation is not uncommon, but should also be understood in relation to the particular character of the reference object in question (Buzan et al., 1998, 21). If so, the identity threat that actors feel is not one that is physical in nature, but one that is political in nature, in that it is also intricately related with a feeling of threat that one's constituting principles, such as sovereignty and ideology, are undermined (Buzan et al., 1998, 22). Such a conflict of identity would more often than not lead actors to enact securitizing moves aiming to ensure their own self, i.e., ontological security (For definition of ontological security, see Giddens 1991, 243). By doing so, they could also securitize their own subjectivity, even if this often leads to a conflictive (or cooperative (less likely)) interstate relations (Mitzen 2006b).

To ward off the existential uncertainty, a strategy called routines is relied upon (Giddens 1991: 39-40). Routines are internally programmed cognitive and behavioral responses to information and stimuli (Mitzen 2006b: 346). Depending on how actors' interests are derived from their self-identity in relation to the event, and on what policies they should use to pursue those interests, routines eventually serve the cognitive function of providing

individuals with ways of knowing the world and how to act. But such routines also vary, depending on which narratives are manipulated as core ones, which determine the ways actors behave, and which give a particular meaning, characters and a very specific political purpose to actors (Subotić 2016, 610). Hence, “the range of possible utterance and the range of possible actions” are determined accordingly because of the narratives’ functions of performative language (Yee 1996: 94). If the routines are pursued to realize the practical consciousness of actors that seek to cope with external existential threats, a feeling of certainty will be granted to them, and enable them to pursue their purposive choices, while inoculating themselves against the paralytic, deep fear of chaos (Mitzen 2006b: 347).

### 3. Narratives of the Self

Since this paper assumes that the current status of the territorial disputes and the corresponding methods to deal with them can be understood in light of how self-identity of actors engaged operate, it seems adequate to examine the self-narratives of relevant actors that are politicized (or even securitized) prior to the assessment of their actual impact. Let us first examine the core narratives constituting the self-identity of China. The self-identity of China is developed, based on its biographical narrative of *Zhongguo* (中國), or “Central Kingdom”. This narrative has underpinned its self-identity through thousands of years of national history. Despite its long-historical background of self-narrative, however, there was a moment when the self-disconnect was acute. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when there was an invasion from foreign countries, especially from Western ones, China’s national pride and, consequently, its self-identity as the Central Kingdom, was severely undermined. The event that particularly makes it felt a sense of disconnected self was the so-called ‘unequal treaties’ signed between the Qing dynasty and Western imperialists. Signing forcibly such unequal treaties indeed disgraced China, even, to the extent of questioning its own self-identity as a Central Kingdom (Fravel 2005: 47), and also imprinted its experience associated with the hundred years of national humiliation(百年屈辱) on its minds.

With the booms of Chinese economy, and particularly with its increasing reincorporation into the international community after the long-years of self-seclusion, China’s dormant self-identity began to be (re)articulated both domestically and internationally. Since the 1990s, in particular, reclaiming its assertive position in regional and global contexts, China has begun to take its regional hegemonic roles for granted, even putting forward the ‘lost territories’ narrative through the 1980s and 1990s (Buszynski 2003: 346). By reflexively representing itself as a regional hegemon that denies uncritical application of so-called universal values of multilateralism as a way to deal with the territorial disputes, and that

seeks to reinterpret the context of the regional relationship from its own rules and norms, the self-identity of Central Kingdom has once again been articulated, and begin to present western countries (the US in particular in this context) and its allies as significant others, whose ontological-security-seeking activities would in turn undermine its political security identified as its territorial sovereignty.

Second, although the South China Sea territorial disputes concern the national interests of China and its littoral countries, there is another critical player in this context: that is the US. As the US has become a world police, providing both global and regional security since the end of Cold War, examining the core narrative justifying its foreign policy routines in this regard is also important. How, then, has the US self been narrated? With the onset of the 1930s when the British hegemon declined, it was prompted to take up its position. With its vast size of land and natural resources, the US has since then narrated itself as a replacing hegemon, whose manifest destiny is to lead the world and to promote and disseminate its cherished ideologies, such as embedded liberalism, legalism and Christianity (Campbell, 1998: 134). The narratives of self, which is not only great in terms of its material power, but also admirable from the normative and ethical standards, also has a particular implications for the understanding of who the US is and why it acts in certain ways, facing the territorial disputes in the South China sea underneath which it sees China as the main instigator. Thus it seems that the US tends to project those who oppose its foundational narratives as significant others, from which a demarcating boundary has to be drawn in order to reassure its own self.

In contrast to the self-narratives of China and the US, the ways in which other claimant countries in general and the Philippines and Vietnam in particular are narrated not only differ, but also vary. This is largely because of the similarities and differences identified in their self-narratives and also due to the extent to which they can actually be articulated in their external relations with significant others. Specifically, first, it is worth noting that they share both Chinese culture and characteristics in making sense of their *modus vivendi*. The commonality that binds them together lies in their historical, cultural and ideational bondages with China. Not only could not most of the claimant countries, but also such recalcitrant countries, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, deny China's impact, when they attempt to construct their own self-identity. To put it another way, Vietnam would depict itself as half-Chinese and half non-Chinese, so does the Philippines, given its past colonial experience from such external forces as China, Japan and Western countries (Zialcita, 1995, 77). Developing a dual identity has a particular implication when they are connected with the choice of whether and how to differentiate their selves from Chinese one. Second, these claimant countries are also depicted as small states in relative terms. This also is of particular significance, because, as Lee (2006, 31-65) pointed out the implications of the small-state identity in making sense of their behavior patterns, they would act in a rather adaptive or

even submissive way, reflecting their relatively weak positions in their relationship with bigger and more power countries. It is for their characteristics as small states and its impact on the specific identification process that the ways their identity is discursively represented in their external relations are different.

#### **4. South China Sea Disputes and Conflictive Context of Interaction**

##### ***South China Sea Disputes***

The South China Sea is an area in which there always exists the potential for regional conflicts due to economic, political and geostrategic reasons, when it is an area comprising over 200 islands, rocks, and reefs, when China, Vietnam, the Philippines and other countries all have claims to certain parts of the territory, and when the various claims inevitably overlapped significantly in areas, such as the Spratly and Paracel Islands, and also in a number of coral reefs and maritime zones. The South China Sea issue is, indeed, a complex and complicate one, and thus requires all-inclusive approaches.

Looking back the past history, there two distinctive ways worth noting. First, there is a bilateral one, and this is largely ascribed to China's recalcitrant attitude. With end of Cold War, China began to be reincorporated into international society, but, at the same time, reasserted its territorial integrity, claiming it not only inevitable, but also appropriate, particularly, from their needs to reconstruct their own self-identity as a Great Kingdom. But this very assertive position has only intensified regional confrontation, and, more often than not, disquieted many of its neighboring countries by unintentionally entrapping them into spiral securitizing moves (Casarini 2013: 194; Valencia, 2014: 3).

Second, compared to the first one, there is a stance that draws on the idea and discourse of multilateralism, highlighting its relevance in dealing with the territorial disputes. It has been pursued with an importance attached to the roles of ASEAN and ARF and to those of multinational organizations, e.g., the role of the International Tribunal for the Law of Sea, which is mandated to adjudicate controversial maritime rights among conflict parties. Thus there have been debates whether this approach would produce desired outcomes and this can be explained from two accounts. First, when there is a growth of economic, political, and social-cultural interdependence not only between China and her littoral countries, but also between China and the US, among others, the territorial disputes cannot be addressed in isolation from other issues. In addition, when the US, after a period of silence, but unlike its previous hands-off approach, has recently expressed its will of reengagement under the banner of its Asia pivot policy (Frost 2008: 194; Hamzah 2014: 17), there is a suspicion on the part of China whether institutionalized frameworks could genuinely be conducive to

peaceful settlement of disputes, leading to a change in terms of the stakeholder's mindset, as well as the contextual conditions.

### ***Rejection of regional approach***

Having adhered to its position favoring a bilateral approach, China only sees the multilateral approach questioning its self-identity as a (regional) hegemonic power that still struggle to sever with its past trauma of imperialist invasion. China basically considers the South China sea issue as its domestic concerns, and refuses to discuss it within the regional context, in which undue external intervention could be unwittingly allowed (Zhao 2002: 110-113; China's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on June 4, 2012; May 31, 2012). Instead, it expressed its skepticism that the current context of multilateralism would only encroach upon its territorial integrity, and, therefore, its national self. This, in a sense, is an understandable attitude, if we reflect its core narrative: if territorial sovereignty is violated, this should be protected, because it would otherwise be posed as a cause of an existential threat (Buzan et al, 1998, 22). Thus the confrontations that occurred between the Philippines, Vietnam and China regarding fishery rights in their EEZs in 2011 (for details of clash, see Keine-Ahlbrandt 2011) should be seen as a reflexive representation of its die-hard ontological needs to ensure its own political sovereignty.

The renewed interest on the part of the US through its pivot policy to Asia has also increased China's skeptical attitude toward multilateral approaches. Facing growing interests on the part of the US, China reacted sensitively to it, even articulating, for instance, in 2010 that the territorial dispute is one of its "core interests". Of note here is that this is a term that is traditionally reserved for matters of national sovereignty relating to the cases of Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang (Swaine 2011: 2). Despite China's uneasiness, nevertheless, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated in 2010 that the US position concerning the South China Sea issue (Weitz 2010) is not irrelevant, given its self-identity as a global power seeking disseminate the idea of liberalism, which not only stresses the importance of free navigation, and that anyone who stands up against should be controlled. Particularly when there are conflicts between China and the Philippines (caused by the clash between China's patrol vessels and Filipino and Vietnamese seismic ships), and when there were subsequent military drills between the US and the Philippines for the sake of their strengthening military alliance (Ju 2013), Chinese antagonistic position that treats both the US and the other claimant countries endorsing its position as dangerous and threatening appeared to be understandable. By doing so, China not only dealt with physical threat, but also fostered its self-identity as *the* rule maker, rather than one of the rule takes. It thus seems unsurprising to see China continues to rely on conflictive routines, refuses US involvement, and blockade the internationalization of its domestic issue (Huanqiu Shibao 2010).

However, there are ambivalence in the ways other ASEAN claimant countries treat the territorial disputes. Although they could not entirely dismiss its perception that China would pose an uncontrollable existential threat any time in the future, the ways in which they cope with the assertive China also vary, largely because of the differences in terms of how to interpret their selves vis-a-vis China. That is, in engaging in the South China Sea issue, ASEAN members have been divided as to the question of how to balance their individual national interests and strategies against the normative needs as ASEAN members, which also reflects and constitutes who they are. Given that China has increasingly been considered to be an invaluable partner for their economic growth (Pham 2010: 430-432), ASEAN countries have rather avoided taking any substantial steps that would undermine the 'ASEAN' way, but stressed the treaty principle of 'amity and cooperation', instead, justifying the Chinese position that external interference in its domestic affairs has to be resisted (Weber 2013: 347). A similar commitment has also been observed from the ARF. As it is the only security-related organization in the region, which brings together all the countries with a direct interest in Asia, and while it has dealt with a wide range of regional security issues, the expectation of the ARF's role has also grown over time, and this was marked by the US's recent acknowledgement of its complementary roles for long-term peace (Europe Asia Security Forum 2012). Even so, the failure of the 45<sup>th</sup> ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting (AMM) in Phnom Penh in 2012 demonstrated the ambivalent position of some of the member states which failed to act in accordance with their self-identity as small state in this context, because unlike the convention view that small states prefer a multilateral forum in address intra-state territorial disputes, they would rather act in an opposite way, dismissing their own identity. Specifically, for example, issuing the usual end-of-meeting communiqué, the AMM once had to witness a crack in ASEAN's unity for the first time in its 45-year history due to discrepancies among the members about the ways to deal with the South China Sea. Thus Cambodia, the then Chair country of the AMM, refused to include the Philippine and Vietnamese positions on the disputes (CSCAP Regional Security Outlook 2013, 6), and this was largely ascribed to the possible economic costs Cambodia had to bear.<sup>1</sup>

## **5. Changing context of interaction**

### ***Economic Context***

With the passage of time, and with particularly the increase of the Chinese self-confidence, there has been a change in terms of the Chinese attitude for a number of reasons. This change does take place in the economic context where China sees itself gradually identifying

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<sup>1</sup> The Chinese government prompted its domestic firms to make \$8.2 billion worth of investment to Cambodia in 2006 alone and also there has been billion-dollar worth of aids and soft loans for Hun Sen's government with no strings attached (Hunt 2012).

itself as a new, but also important, economic powerhouse. Since the late 1990s, in particular, the economic independence between China and other claimant countries has rapidly increased, and affected China's discursive practices of its own identity, as well as the ways it deals with other claimant countries. Although the littoral countries are competitor in security terms, they are also economic partner with which it has cooperate. As of 2013, for example, China has become ASEAN's largest trading partner, whereas ASEAN was ranked as China's third-largest trading partner.<sup>2</sup> As economic interdependence intensifies, so has been corresponding move to embed the mutual economic relationship with the institutionalized framework. The agreement of a full-scale FTA between ASEAN and China can be understood in this regard.

When China's economic relationships with other claimant countries has grown significant, and when China has subsequently sought to reposition itself as a regional economic hegemon, it has also gradually been called on to act like a hegemon. Acknowledging its newly acquired self-identity, it begins to act to be accountable for the regional stability and prosperity. Some of the prime examples can be found in its commitments to provide economic aids to other neighboring countries: for instance, China has displayed an attitude to help Laos with some economic aids and incentives<sup>3</sup>; it has also helped Indonesia and even the Philippines (particularly when the latter's relationship with China has not always been amicable), providing almost double the amount of aid that America supplied to Indonesia, and to the Philippines as roughly three times as America gave at the year of 2003.

The increasing interaction with other countries has thus further encouraged and obliged China to be more cautious in foreign policy, leading to develop an alternative self-narrative to be more inclusive in terms of its attitude. Compared to its hitherto narrative as a Central Kingdom that denies any undue interference of external forces, an alternative narrative that has socially been constructed has led China and other parties in conflict to reconsider the security issue in relation to, and in the context of, the growing economic interdependence. Of note at this juncture is that China, instead of remaining in the status of "self-imposed isolation" in the international system, has been geared up for its gradual integration into it (Wu and Lansdowne 2008), because it finds it appropriate and effective, particularly, in winning trust from other claimant countries (Weissmann, 2012: 108; Song 2013: 473-474).

### ***Political Context***

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<sup>2</sup>Cited from [www.asean.org/resources/2012-02-10-08-47-55](http://www.asean.org/resources/2012-02-10-08-47-55).

<sup>3</sup> They include grants, low-interest loans, high profile development projects, technical assistance, and foreign investment; China was the second largest aid donor between the years 2001 to 2002.

While China initially preferred a bilateral approach, other littoral countries whose positions are relatively weak do rather consider it even more appropriate to deal with it within institutionalized regional arrangements where their voices could be more fairly heard than would otherwise be the case. With the passage of time, however, when China has become more confident about itself, it has become more inclined to accept that the degree of tension could be attenuated by the continued interaction and dialogues facilitated by the institutional frameworks of regional cooperation. China, among others, sees accepting more institutionalized dialogues and contacts as appropriate and congruent with its self-narrative as a regional power that not only has to take the leadership, but also makes a new rule by which regional conflicts can be addressed.

As a result, there are some efforts to embed the issue within regional settings, allowing them to transform “a passive object [in]to an active subject capable of articulating the transnational interests” (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000: 461). Some of the first examples was the Chinese decision to sign the 2002 Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC). In its wake, there follows a-ASEAN agreement on the Implementation of Guidelines for the Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea in July 2011, a joint-statement to hold “official consultations” on a proposed Code of Conduct (COC) to govern the South China Sea “naval actions” (MFA China 2013), and regular official consultations and to work towards the conclusion of the COC.<sup>4</sup> Given all the recent changes in terms of its attitude on the part of China and that of others (to a lesser extent), there is an increasing possibility of adopting binding international rules and regimes, such as the COC (Interview IISS-CASS 2015). For China, underpinning a rule-based approach would not only signify the renovation of its image as a reliable and accountable partner for interaction (Chen 2013), but also enhance its self-identity as an honorable member of the international society (Huang and Cong 2014; Wang 2015).

What is also noteworthy here is that the ways such a political institutionalization proceeds is not what used to be seen so far. Instead of accommodating the existing frameworks of multilateralism that tend to be dominated by West-dominated ideologies or discourse, China started to suggest its own way. Its initiatives in the establishment of Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the hosting of Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in 2014, Shanghai, and ‘One Belt One Road (一帶一路)’ (OBOR) strategy are some of the prime examples. By taking initiatives of creating such frameworks of regional cooperation, China appears to make efforts to renovate its self-identity as a regional hegemon that seeks to position itself as a new rule maker and that also cares about

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<sup>4</sup> ASEAN and China also held the 8th ASEAN-China SOM on DOC and the 12th JWG on DOC in Bangkok, Thailand, October 2014.

regional stability and prosperity (李 2013). Such an intention is well demonstrated, particularly given that the main strategy of the OBOR is to boost both the economic and political co-prosperity in the region, as opposed to the current regional and international order dominated by the US that stress its military dominance and influence (Ratner and Kumar 2016).

It follows that the changes in China's attitudes has to some extent altered the nature and the context of interaction. By changing context of interaction with the provision of new formal and informal rules, institutional structure of regional integration is able to bring about – and local actors willingness to accept – change in the conflict context (Diez et al. 2013). Without the adoption of the underpinning rules and regulations, the behavior of actors is unlikely to be legally bound to the extent that the formerly conflictive nature of actions can be altered, and that desecuritizing moves which would otherwise be de-legitimate can be adopted as feasible.

## **5. Conclusion**

The South China Sea case illustrates that the current frameworks of regional cooperation at first seems to display its inherent limitations in coping with regional security threats. At stake is how self-identity of actors concerned – particularly China in this case – is reflexively represented in accommodating the current context of regional cooperation frameworks. That is, the observed skirmishes and confrontations persisted between China and other belligerent claimant countries, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, should not necessarily be understood in terms of their security or strategic interests, but also from the perspective of their ontological security needs. When identity politics is operating behind the scene, interestingly, it is translated into the Chinese attitudes, among others, shedding a new light on the question of whether to embed the territorial disputes issue within the current template of regional approaches or to take it in a broader view, emphasizing a win-and-win game. As a result, the very decision of China to take the initiatives in creating and supporting alternative forms of regional cooperation has been observed, not least when it seeks to rearticulate itself as a regional hegemon that is required to make a rules by which regional issues, even including the territorial disputes, can be dealt with differently.

It is through such discursive practices of identity formation that China seems to sever its former image of isolated regional power preoccupied with its past trauma caused, and intensified, by Western imperialists. While the self-narratives of China as a novel kind of hegemon has a critical impact, those of other stakeholders do, but with some differences in terms of the nature of impact, and its degree. As for China, the US has surely been a

significant other, against which its own identity needs to be articulated. It is this antagonistic position that first obliged it to adhere to its rather exclusive way of dealing with the territorial disputes, but also has later opened a new possibility of reconsidering its extant approaches and to experiment with new ones. Against the backdrop in which China and the US are entrapped in the other process, other claimant countries, albeit their stakes are not that high, have rather shown ambiguous signs of whether their self-identity should play any substantial role in the ways in which they approach this issue. Despite a variation in terms of actual impact of their identity politics, nonetheless, what still draws our attention is that the fortunes of regionalism aiming at conflict transformation can be understood more systematically only if the identity question of actors concerned is taken into proper account.

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