What's in a Name? Imagined Territories and Sea Names in the South China Sea Conflict

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This study investigates news coverage of the South China Sea conflict from the perspective of three major Southeast Asian disputants: Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Three selected newspapers (*Saigon Times Daily*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and *Jakarta Post*) are used to identify and compare different geographic names from 2013 to 2018, with a sample of 1,737 news articles. Using the lens of mediatized conflict and national interest frames, selective names illustrate the news media acting as an engine of language and legitimization in the conflict by consciously preferring local geographic terms. Results show that these local names emerge significantly in the topic coverage and become an early indicator of how conflict is constituted by news media. This study helps capture this nuanced process via the contested names in the course of producing representations of boundaries and the social construction of borders and identities.

Keywords: mediatized conflict, South China Sea, conflict, national interest frames, name, identity

The South China Sea (SCS) conflict involves seven disputants competing over territorial claims in one body of water through which one-third of global maritime trade flows. The areas are declared to be the most dangerous waters in the world by the United Nations (Varley, Leung, Dormido, Nguyen, & Heijamans, 2020; Volgt & Robehmed, 2011), and coupled with prolonged territorial conflict among seven disputants, they are contested not only militarily but also in and through the media. The Southeast Asian disputants are given relatively lesser attention (Hu, 2021; Wijaya, 2018, p. 79), although five of the seven SCS disputants are located in this region and each disputant exercises "rights" to name the areas. This contestation of names through preferred geographic terms is absent from international news media and the existing literature. This study illustrates that the naming of areas in the SCS is highly contested and indicates how conflict is constituted by media.

The question of when sea names started to have territorial implications remains an open one. It is noteworthy to notice how the proclamation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982 delineated the 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and marked a turning point in terms of maritime territorial imagination. The concept of an EEZ extends a nation-state's special

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rights of exploration and utilization of marine resources. This also allows a nation-state to bask in the glory of its projected power over the seas.

The geographic name "South China Sea" comes from the early European interest in the waters as a trading route from Europe and South Asia to China. At that time, the name "South China Sea" bore no implication of territorial sovereignty. It was simply a geographical reference for a passage adopted for the convenience of passing traders or passages (Kang, 1994). By examining the name "South China Sea" as a category, this study illustrates naming practices in the transition from geographical references to names bearing territorial and geopolitical implications, especially when China claims most of the area in the SCS (Fong, Ponnan, & De Rycker, 2020) and refers this to nine-dash line claim.

Against this backdrop, China's nine-dash line represents the culmination of the geographical imagining of seas as exclusive territory. As such, the name "South China Sea" has territorial implications that bolster the Chinese claim over the body of water (Kang, 1994). A name indisputably projects a distinct culture, identity, and connection to a certain community. It is the most tangible marker of nation's presence on a map produced by a state agency and reproduced by media (Anderson, 2006; Kang, 1994).

Mediatized Conflict and National Interest Frames

The news media is an arena upon which contested claims to the SCS are advanced through differential naming. Conflict negotiations, contestations, risks, arbitrating roles, and relationships between press and political contexts all involve the media performing an active role in conflict. Cottle (2006), a pioneering theorist of mediatized conflict, defines mediatized conflict as "the way the media do things with conflicts (media doing)" (p. 9). Cottle's (2006) mediatized conflict shifts the view of a media as disseminator of information and ideas to media that become actively involved in conflicts.

Much of the literature pertaining to mediatized conflict focuses on conflict as part of a dispute, crisis, or war, including terrorism, oppression of a minority, or environmental conflict (Cottle, 2008; Hutchins & Lester, 2015). In the case of the SCS disputes, the conflicted parties are simultaneously involved in both constructive geopolitical cooperation and destructive militarization actions. Disputants still create positive relationships due to trade and economic cooperation in the region (Wijaya, 2018). At the same time, they also engage in military deployments and even firing on each other on the sea. Contestation over names in the SCS conflict constitutes the early process of how conflict becomes a conflict.

National news media within conflict zones are potentially powerful actors that cover conflicts in their immediate periphery. These conflict actors hold national perspectives of the conflict and shape how the suffering of one or other side in a conflict is differently framed (Wolfsfeld, Frosh, & Awabdy, 2008). By imposing narratives as nationally specific understandings of conflicts, the news media "reconstruct" and "translate" conflicts into a more understandable form for audiences (Gilboa, Jumbert, Miklian, & Robinson, 2016). The national conflict actors engage with local/national media to win hearts and minds in their own societies, thus directly or indirectly shaping how conflicts are enacted and negotiated. Therefore, media narratives are significant to the concept of mediatized conflict because they are persuasive, explanatory, and compelling, and because they enable the construction of shared meaning in relation to the past, present, and future (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2012).

During intergroup clashes like the SCS conflict, parties relate to each other not as individuals but as members of particular groups. Conflicts are often reported through "blood-stained glasses" tinted by national interests (Cottle, 2009, p. 509). The nature of the conflict and outcomes are reported in and through national news prisms and frames of reference. National news media continue to frame global conflict in ways consonant with national interests and identities—for instance, reports on fishery disputes where civilians' fishing boats display national flags and act as maritime militias who carry out national interests (Zhang & Bateman, 2017). In this case, contestation of names is projected within national interest frames—a frame in which media persuasively narrates from their immediate periphery. Previous studies on national interest frames in conflicts have been conducted by Brewer (2006), Jang (2013), and Wangen (2019). Wangen's (2019) study solidifies the argument of this study that news media plays a central role in political conflicts that later defines the meaning of national interest. Brewer (2006) and Jang (2013) provide a clear pathway to classify national interest frames as categories. Brewer (2006) identified three categories of national interest frames: common interest frames, conflict interest frames, and reciprocal exchange frames. Whereas common interest frames identify cooperation and trust in relationships, conflict interest frames emphasize the disagreements between countries. These categories are further elaborated by Jang (2013) into conflict frames, common interest frames, and confrontational/threat frames. The threat frame refers to conflict frame intensified with taken actions (e.g., threat of economic-related sanctions, joint military exercise, increased military deployment).

Name and Identity

The SCS disputants have used different names to address many overlapping parts within their EEZs. The process of place naming is inherently linked to political changes in different parts of the world. Preferred geographic terms highlight how sensitive the subject is in a country because the place names are symbols of legitimacy and are contested on the grounds of sovereignty and rights. The politics of name changes, which incorporate the politics of waterway names and surrounding islands in the SCS, cannot be separated from conflicts and tensions over political and cultural negotiation and contestation among different constituencies in this conflict.

If the aim of a name change is to hint at territorial sovereignty, this could be obtained by giving the sea a new name with another state's name in the label, as was done by the Philippines in the case of the *West Philippine Sea*. Another way is to adopt a label seemingly devoid of national connotations, such as *Biển Đông* (*East Sea*) in Vietnam, or as an extension of one's territory like *North Natuna Sea* in Indonesia. Each of these countries dropped the word "China" in their names. Within the operation of mediatized conflict, selective names illustrate media playing an active role as agents capable of performing conflict by consciously preferring the local terms rather than using preestablished international names. Raymond Williams's (1976/2014) historical-cultural-etymological recovery of keywords also allows this study to explore more streams (in conflict studies) in which language/name enables us to capture, articulate, and justify the politics and sensibilities of its sociopolitical context, which therefore becomes the site of some significant social and historical processes.

Names are no longer geographical references but project a turning point of maritime territorial imagination. Anderson (2006) also argues that maps act as an institution of power in demarcating an exclusive sovereignty wedged between competing nationalists' interests. In this regard, communities

actively build the concept of nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. Names, geographic boundaries, and maps thus shaped the "imagined" communities that make "Indonesia" and "Indonesians," "Vietnam," and "Vietnamese." This identity of politics can exacerbate public sentiments during conflicts and shape who is considered adversaries and allies, as exemplified in the Northern Ireland conflict (Anderson, 2006).

National identity is imagined and constructed through a shared experience. Shared experience can be reinforced by media and thus lead people to perceive themselves as part of a homogeneous body. Anderson (2006) observes the power of this belonging and its connection to the cohabitual consumption of media. Therefore, past conflict experiences matter due to their role in national identity formations and collective memories. In this study, historical consciousness illuminates the understanding of how past, present, and future are thought to be connected. Media plays an important role in shaping history and thinking historically.

This study aims to answer the following research questions: To what extent do the national media use their local geographic names to supplant the SCS? How might the geographic names emerge as important topics in the news coverage? How are competing geographic names used in national interest frames?

Methods

Both manual quantitative content analysis and automated topic modeling were applied in parallel. Quantitative content analysis results were processed in SPSS, and topic extraction was run in WordStat 8.0, complemented by close readings of the texts. This study used factor analysis to extract topics based on their eigenvalue. The higher the eigenvalue, the more dominant the topic found in the corpora (Al-Rawi, 2020), not because of its frequency but because of the amount of variance from the correlation matrix explained by the eigenvector.

Table 1. Codebook.

No.	Category	Descriptions	Items
1.	Period of time	When was the article published? (k = 1)	1: 2013–2015
			2: 2016–2018
2.	Portal news	Where was the article published in? (k = 1)	1: *The Jakarta Post*
			2: *Philippine Daily Inquirer*
			3: *Saigon Times Daily*
3.	Geographic terms	What name is preferred to call SCS (k = 1)	1: (North) Natuna Sea
			2: East Sea
			3: West Philippine Sea
			4: South China Sea
			5: Other (please specify)

The category of geographic terms for Table 1 was developed from Freeman (2017), whose study compares preferred geographic terms in the SCS conflict, namely South China Sea, East Sea, and West Philippine Sea. This study then adds North Natuna Sea as the preferred name in Indonesia. The name North

Natuna Sea was excluded in Freeman's (2017) study because it was newly proposed on August 18, 2016 (Suryadinata, 2017).

The category of national interest frames was deductively developed from Jang (2013). Common interest frames illustrate cooperation and trust in relationships, conflict interest frames emphasize the disagreements between countries, and threat is identified where confrontations are actioned.

Two coders (one undergraduate student and a freelance journalist) were trained to understand the guideline in the codebook and to fill the code sheet as they coded 200 samples. A simple random sampling and a random number generator (Random.org) were used to retrieve the 200 samples.

Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia were selected in this study due to their prominent roles in the conflict. Philippines was chosen because it filed a case against China to the international tribunal. Wescott (2016) elaborates on how important this ruling is to the development of the conflict. Vietnam was selected due to its continuous land constructions in the SCS area (Babones, 2016; Wei & Frndjibachian, 2020). This reason makes Vietnam one of the most vocal disputants. Meanwhile, Indonesia was included due to its "switching" role from a mediator to "potential" disputant (Weatherbee, 2016).

Data is collected from the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia news sources based on: (1) media primacy in each country, (2) the availability of newspapers in English, and (3) the availability of newspapers in news database to ensure systematic sample collection. English-language newspapers are used in part because of the researcher's language ability and the prominence of English-language media in presenting global issues to an international readership, thereby offering insights into the relationship between national interests and international citizenship.

Sample

To be selected for analysis, a newspaper had to meet at least three of the four criteria: it had to be (a) a national publication with (b) high circulation that was (c) published daily and (d) prominent in the respective countries. The study sample was drawn from newspaper articles between 2013 and 2018 from Factiva (Table 2).

Table 2. News Sample.

No.	Country	Freedom Index	Media	Type	Keyword(s)	Factiva
1	Indonesia	Partly free	*The Jakarta Post*	Private	South China Sea or North Natuna Sea or North Sea	686
2	Philippines	Partly free	*Philippine Daily Inquirer*	Private	South China Sea or West Sea	500
3	Vietnam	Not free	*The Saigon Times Daily*	State-owned	South China Sea or East Sea	551
			Total			1,737

Different Names for the South China Sea

The naming process entails the propagation of countervailing discourses of belonging and opposition and the symbolic justification of one's own action (Bathia, 2005). Naming is an exercise of power, and the name-giver must be powerful enough to have that name or definition accepted and impose the worldview it embodies.

Vietnam and the Philippines exhibit greater use of the terms "East Sea" and "West Philippine Sea," respectively (Table 3). This is mainly because Vietnam and the Philippines are the two most vocal critics of China's reclamation steps in the SCS (Marwah, 2018).

Table 3. Preferred Geographic Terms.

				Natuna Sea	East Sea	West Philippine Sea	South China Sea	Total
		Period of Time						
2013–2015	Portal News	*The Jakarta Post*	n	20	1	0	**283**	304
			%	6.6%	0.3%	0%	**93.1%**	100%
		Philippine Daily Inquirer	n	0	0	128	**134**	262
			%	0%	0.0%	48.9%	**51.1%**	100%
		Saigon Times Daily	n	0	**357**	0	2	359
			%	0%	**99.4%**	0.0%	0.6%	100%
	Total		n	20	358	128	419	925
			%	2.2%	38.7%	13.8%	45.3%	100%
2016–2018	Portal News	*The Jakarta Post*	n	38	0	0	**344**	382
			%	9.9%	0%	0%	**90.1%**	100%
		Philippine Daily Inquirer	n	0	0	93	**145**	238
			%	0%	0%	39.1%	**60.9%**	100%
		Saigon Times Daily	n	0	**190**	0	2	192
			%	0%	**99%**	0%	1%	100%
	Total		N	38	190	93	491	812
			%	4.7%	23.4%	11.5%	60.5%	100%
Total	Portal News	*The Jakarta Post*	n	58	1	0	**627**	686
			%	8.5%	0.1%	0%	**91.4%**	100%
		Philippine Daily Inquirer	n	0	0	221	**279**	500
			%	0%	0%	44.2%	**55.8%**	100%
		Saigon Times Daily	n	0	**547**	0	4	551
			%	0%	**99.3%**	0%	0.7%	100%
	Total		N	58	548	221	**910**	1737
			%	3.3%	31.5%	12.7%	**52.4%**	100%

$x^2 = 2289.961(df = 6); \rho < 0.001$

Generally, the results indicate that use of the term "South China Sea" still prevails in all countries except Vietnam. Vietnam is the claimant that prefers their local geographic term(s) the most, followed by the Philippines and then Indonesia. Throughout the six-year period of 2013–2018, Vietnam's *Saigon Times Daily* has always used "East Sea" (99.3%, *n* = 541) in lieu of "South China Sea." The Philippines almost equally balance both "South China Sea" and "West Philippine Sea." Yet in the case of the Philippines, the term "South China Sea" (55.8%, *n* = 279) emerges slightly more often than "West Philippine Sea" (44.2%, *n* = 221). In contrast with both Vietnam and the Philippines, the term "South China Sea" (91.4%, *n* = 627) is dominant, and "Natuna Sea" is rarely used. As context, Indonesia is the latest country to take action through a name change. Indonesia started to officially use "Natuna Sea" in 2017.

During the first half of 2016, Chinese fishing vessels clashed with Indonesian maritime authorities in the contested waters of the SCS. As a response to these incidents, in the following year, Indonesia officially renamed the area "(North) Natuna Sea," which is often referred to as "Natuna waters" in news reports. Indonesia was not the first country to change the name of disputed areas in the SCS. The Philippines (during Benigno Aquino III's administration) adopted the name "West Philippine Sea" in 2012. In Vietnam, this area has long been addressed as the "East Sea." Even the Chinese government has used a different term, "South Sea." It was during the era of Portuguese exploration in the 16th century that "China" was added (Connelly, 2017). Names have become a key mechanism in making claims to, and exerting ownership and control over, this body of water. The findings show the importance of the local names that only emerge in national news media. These names are barely present in international news coverage because the global news coverage is dominated by Western news media. As such, local geographic terms are not intended to be internationally contested but rather nationally invoked.

In the two periods of time (2013–2015 and 2016–2018), Vietnam's *Saigon Times Daily* used the name "East Sea" (99.4% and 99%, respectively). In Indonesia's *Jakarta Post*, there was an increase of up to 90% in using the local name in the second period (2016–2018). The terms "North Natuna Sea" or "Natuna waters" were often used in the SCS news coverage. This result indicates that there was an increasing interest in and concern about the disputed area after the incidents occurred in 2016 in the *Jakarta Post*. The key events that happened in 2016—three incidents in Natuna waters that involved fishermen, the Coast Guard, and Navy, and the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling—seemingly triggered the increased use of the local name. Meanwhile, in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, there was a slight decline to 27% in the use of the name "West Philippine Sea" in the second period of time (2016–2018). This result is unexpected because it was assumed the Philippines used the name "West Philippine Sea" more often after the PCA ruled in its favor in 2016. A closer look at the news articles suggests that instead of "West Philippine Sea," the news media preferred using the name "Panatag" Shoal (Scarborough Shoal), a hotspot of fishing disputes between China and the Philippines that triggered the Philippines' lodgment of its case with the PCA in 2013.

The orientation of the "East" in the name *East Sea*, for instance, orients Vietnam as a center. In contrast, the name *South Sea* (China calls it *South Sea/Nan Hai/南海*) orients China as the center. Simply put, it is an "East" if Vietnam acts as a center and a "South" if China acts as a center. Other claimants also put different names such as *West Philippine Sea*, which symbolizes "Philippines" to assert greater emphasis on national ownership of resources and sovereignty. Similarly, in the case of Indonesia's *North Natuna Sea*,

Natuna is recited as a geographic extension of Indonesia's Natuna islands, which are located in the northern part of Indonesia's territorial waters. These geographic names signify center-periphery implications and seek to project power over the seas. The dynamics of center-periphery relations have implications both for the understanding of competition for resources development and in the power struggle over control of this maritime area. As a result, name is not simply a geographic reference of passages but also invokes the imagination of a territorial boundary and sovereignty.

Preferred Names as Prevalent Topic Coverage

Vietnam: East Sea

The starkest evidence of the use of a preferred geographic term is in Vietnam. In Vietnam's news reports, the term "South China Sea" is barely present at all. With a total of 551 news articles, there are only four articles (0.7%) that use the term "South China Sea." Compared with the Philippines and Indonesia, Vietnam is the first country that starts to name the area as the "East Sea," and it is also the first country that engaged in a military battle with the Chinese navy in 1974. This battle is known as the Battle of the Paracel Islands. The highest proportion of the use of the "East Sea" might relate to media landscape in Vietnam because all national news outlets are owned and run by the government and controlled by the Ministry of Information and Communication (Bui, 2017). As Vujakovic (2020) argues, state/political elites play prominent roles in producing names and perpetuating geopolitical discourse. As such, contested names are used to project national interest frames. In Table 4, these contested names emerged as important topics.

Historically, in the late 1980s, the Vietnamese map began to appear with "*Biển Đông*" (East Sea) as the name for the sea off the Vietnamese coast (Murphy, 2005). The widely used term "East Sea" cannot be separated from *Đổi Mới*, Vietnam's economic reform policy in 1986. Hiep (2012) argues that *Đổi Mới* policy is part of a wider process of the Communist Party of Vietnam seeking political legitimacy. Against this backdrop, nationalism—particularly about Vietnam's territorial and maritime boundary claims in the East Sea—has been revived as an additional source of legitimacy in times of economic difficulties (Hiep, 2012). The name "East Sea" in both maps and texts was widely reproduced by Vietnamese media in the 1980s.

Table 4. Vietnam's Preferred Geographic Terms: East Sea, Truong Sa, and Hoang Sa.

No.	Topic	Keywords	Coherence	Eigenvalue	Freq.
1	**Peace and Stability**	peaceful; law; disputes; convention; international; unclos; united; nations; including; parties; international law; law of the sea; united nations; united nations convention; disputes by peaceful; parties concerned; accordance with international law; disputes in the **east sea**; peaceful measures; settle disputes; settlement of disputes;	0.608	**7.72**	1,850
2	**Oil Rig Haiyang Shiyou Standoff**	exclusive; continental; zone; haiyang; shiyou; economic; rig; oil; illegal; oil rig; economic zone; exclusive economic zone; continental shelf; haiyang shiyou; illegal placement; oil rig in vietnam; giant oil rig; escort ships; china illegally; vietnamese waters; inside vietnam; waters in the **east sea**; illegal deployment;	0.687	**6.04**	1,170
4	**Sovereignty Over Hoang Sa and Truong Sa**	sa; paracel; truong; hoang; spratly; archipelago; sovereignty; islands; sovereignty over hoang; **hoang sa** and **truong sa**; historical evidence; hoang sa archipelago; truong sa archipelago; vietnam has sufficient; legal and historical evidence; archipelago in the east sea; sovereignty over truong; truong sa archipelagoes; violates vietnam;	0.564	**4.37**	1,096

With the increased opening of Vietnam to other countries due to the economic reform of *Đổi Mới*, more media products of the country were produced in English. The early coproducers of "*Biển Đông*" were the national radio broadcaster Voice of Vietnam and news agency Vietnamplus. Each has an English version of their Internet page that designates the "South China Sea" as the "East Sea" (Dormels, 2017). These English versions have originated only since 2005. According to Dormels's (2017) search of the Vietnam News archive, this page uses only the name "East Sea." Both *Đổi Mới* policy and news media have played a major role in producing the "East Sea."

In Figure 1, the *Saigon Times Daily* exhibits greater concerns about Truong Sa in the SCS disputed areas. Located in the East Sea, the Truong Sa archipelago is large (about 38% of the total of the East Sea) and overlaps with areas claimed by other disputants. In Table 4, preferred geographic terms (East Sea, Truong Sa, and Hoang Sa) are also recorded through the keywords in the first, second, and fourth topics: Peace and Stability (*K*1), Haiyang Shiyou Oil Rig (*K*2), and Sovereignty over Hoang Sa and Truong Sa (*K*4).

Figure 1. Illustration of Truong Sa name.

The name "East Sea" is also used in both cooperative and conflict frames (Table 5), in accordance with the first and second topic vis-à-vis Peace and Stability (*K*1) and Haiyang Shiyou Oil Rig Standoff (*K*2). Sovereignty over Hoang Sa and Truong Sa (*K*4) is highly associated with conflict frames, such as the Haiyang oil rig standoff in 2014 and other skirmishes involving fishery disputes. The evidence also shows that the second topic (Haiyang Shiyou Oil Rig Standoff) and fourth topic (Sovereignty over Hoang Sa and Truong Sa) are closely related to each other with co-occurrence (0.084). By way of example, the use of Hoang Sa sheds light on the location where the Haiyang oil rig standoff occurred as the most intense conflict between Vietnam and China in the SCS territory. This incident is often called the 2014 Vietnam–China oil rig crisis in which China's state-owned oil rig cooperation "illegally" launched its deepwater drilling rig near the disputed Hoang Sa (Paracel Islands) in the SCS.

Table 5. Geographic Terms and National Interest Frames.

Geographic Terms	Frames	Topic	Coherence	Eigenvalue
East Sea	Common interest	Peace and stability **(K1)**	0.608	**7.72**
East Sea	Conflict interest	Haiyang Shiyou oil rig standoff **(K2)**	0.687	**6.04**
Truong Sa and Hoang Sa	Conflict interest	Sovereignty over Hoang Sa and Truong Sa **(K4)**	0.564	**4.37**
East Sea	Common interest	Freedom of navigation **(K6)**	0.546	**3.06**
East Sea	Common interest	Code of conduct **(K11)**	0.524	**2.45**
East Sea	Conflict interest	Illegal fishing in Vietnamese waters **(K12)**	0.420	**2.26**

In brief, *Saigon Times Daily* always uses the name East Sea in their coverage, and the name is mostly framed in common/cooperative interest. Common interest frames identify common goals and solve any conflicts with trust and cooperation, whereas conflict interest frames emphasize disagreement between disputants. In Table 6, the common interest frames of the East Sea can mostly be found in three major discussions: (1) UNCLOS ($K1$), (2) freedom of navigation ($K6$), and (3) Code of Conduct (COC) ($K11$).

Table 6. East Sea in Common Interest Frames: UNCLOS, Freedom of Navigation, Code of Conduct.

No.	Topic	Keywords	Coherence	Eigenvalue	Freq.
1	**Peace and Stability**	peaceful; law; disputes; convention; international; **unclos**; united; nations; including; parties; international law; law of the sea; **united nations**; united nations convention; disputes by peaceful; parties concerned; accordance with international law; disputes in the east sea; peaceful measures; settle disputes; settlement of disputes;	0.608	**7.72**	1,850
6	**Freedom of Navigation**	peace; stability; navigation; freedom; safety; security; maintaining; region; east; east sea; peace and stability; **freedom of navigation**; maintaining peace; freedom of navigation and overflight; region and the world; security and safety; maintaining peace and stability; maintain peace and stability; regional peace; maritime security;	0.546	**3.06**	1,472
11	**Conduct of Conduct (COC)**	conduct; declaration; parties; doc; code; east; sea; east sea; conduct of parties; law of the sea; **code of conduct**; united nations convention; parties concerned; disputes by peaceful; east sea issue; disputes in the east sea; china sea; complicate the situation; implement the declaration; binding code of conduct; east sea issues;	0.524	**2.45**	1,806

This study found *Saigon Times Daily* focused its coverage on attribution of common interest frames and conflict frames, although common interest frames emerged as the most dominant national interest frame in the coverage. Though common interests should induce trust, common goals, and cooperation, the sharing of interest is not a necessary condition for a decision to trust and cooperate another country or claimant.

The Philippines: West Philippine Sea

The Philippines is bordered by SCS to the west and is considered as the second-biggest archipelagic nation in the world after Indonesia (Pramono, Darmawan, Deffinika, & Soelistijo, 2020). As an archipelagic nation, it implies the importance of archipelagic sea-lanes. Therefore, issues related to archipelagic sea-lane passages can easily transform into national security concerns. The concept of archipelagic states means that the waterways are important in conception of national interest. For the Philippines and Indonesia, the adoption by the UNCLOS as "Archipelagic States" marks the capstone of their efforts to win international recognition for archipelagic nation, and was an important step in their political development from a colony to a sovereign state (Ku, 1991).

As one of the most vocal claimants in the disputes, Philippines does not claim the entire area of the SCS but rather limited areas near to their EEZ. Filipinos call it West Philippine Sea. The name has been used widely since 2012 to address the waters in the western part of the Philippines' EEZ, which is measured from the northernmost baseline from Luzon to Palawan Island (Pramono et al., 2020). The area is of geopolitical importance in the maintenance of the Philippines' position in the SCS.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer has used "West Philippine Sea" (48.9%, n = 128) as its preferred geographic term more often in the first period of time (2013–2015). This period signifies President Aquino III's administration. His administration was known more vocal against China and sided with the United States, overtly challenged China's nine-dash line, and finally filed the case with the international court.

However, the findings indicated that "West Philippine Sea" was not used to supplant "South China Sea" but only refers to parts of the jurisdiction of the Philippines. West Philippine Sea has been widely used since 2012 to address waters in the western part of the Philippines' EEZ, and the name is of geopolitical importance in maintaining the Philippines' position on the SCS.

The contested ownership of Panatag Shoal (Scarborough Shoal)—a rich fishing ground—has become the primary hotspot in the West Philippine Sea off Zambales province. In Table 7, Panatag Shoal emerges as the second most important topic ($K$2) in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. The names West Philippine Sea and Ayungin Shoal (Thomas Shoal) are also present in the fifth ($K$5) and 11th ($K$11) most important topic coverage.

Table 7. Philippines' Local Names: Panatag Shoal and West Philippine Sea.

No	Topic	Keywords	Coherence	Eigenvalue	Freq.
2	**Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal in Zambales**	zambales; scarborough; panatag; province; shoal; ground; rich; fishing; standoff; panatag shoal; scarborough shoal; zambales province; fishing ground; ayungin shoal; rich fishing ground; thomas shoal; china seized;	0.556	**4.90**	690
5	**EEZ: West Philippine Sea**	exclusive; zone; economic; kilometer; waters; west; sea; eez; philippine; south; west philippine sea; china sea; exclusive economic; exclusive economic zone;	0.541	**3.31**	2,988
11	**Coast Guard in Ayungin (Thomas) Shoal**	guard; coast; vessels; ayungin; ship; vessel; shoal; chinese; navy; ships; coast guard; ayungin shoal; chinese coast guard; thomas shoal; sierra madre; coast guard vessels; philippine navy; brp sierra madre;	0.461	**2.50**	820

In Table 8, the name West Philippine Sea has the closest association with reports about the ruling of PCA and the EEZ. The Philippines brought the case to tribunal in January 2013 after an incident where China seized Panatag Shoal (Scarborough Shoal), a rich fishing ground off Zambales provinces within Manila's EEZ, in June 2012. A rotated factor loading for a sample size of at least 300 would need to be at least 0.32 to be considered statistically meaningful (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Table 8. West Philippine Sea Is Closely Related to EEZ and the PCA Ruling.

Factor Loading	K5: EEZ	K3: PCA
West Philippine Sea	0.33189753	0.47311562

All local names are consistently embedded in conflict frames that have three overarching focuses: fishing standoff ($K$2: Panatag Shoal in Zambaless), EEZ ($K$5), and coast guard ($K$11: Coast Guard in Ayungin Shoal). Each topic has prioritized selective geographic terms. In $K$2, the local name Panatag Shoal (Scarborough Shoal) mainly covers fishing disputes in this rich fishing ground. In $K$5, the name West Philippine Sea is used as a clear demarcation of a maritime border in the Philippine's EEZ. Lastly, in $K$11, the local name Ayungin Shoal (Thomas Shoal) highlights that coast guard vessels and the navy are involved in the disputed area. In sum, the Philippines use their preferred geographic terms very consistently in accordance with conflict frames.

Indonesia: (North) Natuna Sea

The name "Natuna Sea" represents a very small percentage (8.5%, *n* = 58) compared with the "South China Sea" (91.4%, *n* = 627). Compared with Vietnam and the Philippines, Indonesia is the country that uses its local name the least. The result is expected because Indonesia renamed the area in 2017 and is the latest country to have taken naming action.

Although the Natuna Sea has only been officially named in 2017, the *Jakarta Post* news articles used the term "Natuna Sea" in the first period of time (2013–2015). However, during this first period, the name Natuna Sea identified the literal meaning, which is the waters around Natuna island. The name was simply a geographic reference.

The geographic term "Natuna Sea" associated with the SCS conflict has appeared only in the second period of time (2016–2018). This is a period when the name starts bearing territorial implication. It is no longer just a geographic reference but attaches to the envisioning of maritime sovereignty.

The use of the name "Natuna Sea" increased slightly in the second term (2016–2018; Table 3). In mid-July 2017, the Indonesian government officially launched a new map of Republic of Indonesia, announcing that the Natuna EEZ had been renamed as the North Natuna Sea. It lies partially within China's nine-dash line claim, which has not been recognized by Indonesia. However, Indonesia remains adamant as a nonclaimant of the SCS disputes. Contrary to this official stance, this study finds contradictions between Indonesia's official statement coverage in the *Jakarta Post*. In Table 9, the names "Natuna Sea" and "Natuna waters" are closely associated with three main topics—*K*1: *illegal fishing*, *K*1: *military defense*, and *K*5: *oil and gas exploration.*

Table 9. Topic Extraction: Indonesia's Natuna Sea.

No.	Topic	Keywords	Coherence	Eigenvalue	Freq.
1	Illegal Fishing and Military Defense	fishing; vessels; illegal; chinese; coast; boats; waters; illegal fishing; chinese fishing; coast guard; fishing vessels; chinese coast guard; natuna waters; indonesian waters; fishing boats; traditional fishing; chinese coast guard vessels; chinese fishing vessels; traditional fishing grounds; chinese fishing boat; unreported and unregulated; air; force; riau; island; base; natuna; air force; riau islands; natuna islands; riau islands province; indonesian air force; air base;	0.412	4.66	1,243

| 5 | Oil and Gas | gas; oil; block; percent; total; | 0.37 | 2.05 | 811 |
| | | oil and gas; cubic feet; east natuna; natural gas; upstream oil and gas; barrels of oil; gas field; | | | |

Illegal fishing is often accompanied by military defense moves. The clash between the Indonesian Navies/Task Force and the Chinese coast guard over fishing activities occurred within the Natuna Sea. In the topic of *Oil and Gas Exploration* (*K*5), the main highlight is East Natuna. The East Natuna is a large natural gas field developed by an Indonesian giant, the state-owned oil company Pertamina. The gas field is located in the SCS off the northern Natuna Island of Indonesia and sits within the disputed area claimed by China (*Wall Street Journal*, 2015). The Natuna gas field has reserves of 46 trillion cubic feet of gas, making it the largest gas reserve in Asia (Heriyanto, 2016).

Indonesia's *Jakarta Post* presents the (North) Natuna sea as the most important topic coverage of the SCS disputes from 2013 to 2018. "Natuna waters," "Natuna sea," and "Natuna islands" are the main keywords emerging from the first topic (*K*1) of illegal fishing and military defense.

Although Indonesia maintains its position as a nonclaimant in the SCS disputes, the 2016 clashes between the Indonesian navy and Chinese coast guard in Natuna waters indicate a high-alert situation with strong security-defense measures, particularly when Indonesian President Joko Widodo enhanced military deployment and the defense budget in the area. As shown in Table 10, the group cluster of the illegal fishing topic has a high correlation with military defense.

Table 10. Agglomeration Results of the Jakarta Post.

Node	Group 1	Group 2	Similarity
1	Permanent Court of Arbitration	United States and UNCLOS	0.069
2	Indian Ocean; Pacific Region	Southeast Asia	0.0624
3	**Illegal Fishing; Vessels**	**Military and Defense**	**0.0413**

In relation to national interest frames, the "Natuna sea" or "Natuna waters" frames are not simply about disagreement between two parties; they also reflect a deterrence approach through military and defense measures. The frames are closely attached to threat interest frames under the most prevalent topic of *illegal fishing* (*K*1). Through threat interest frames, *Jakarta Post* covers the Natuna sea incidents as primary concerns that involve at least two consequences: Indonesia and China's coast guard clashes and, shortly afterward, the increase of military deployments and the defense budget as a response to the clashes. Whereas *Saigon Times Daily* and *Philippines Daily Inquirer* use common interest frames and conflict interest frames, respectively, Indonesia's *Jakarta Post* favors threat interest frames.

Places Names: A Link to the Past

National interests derive from the shared past experience/historical consciousness and elaborate how contested names are used in national interest frames. The act of naming symbolizes an exclusive ownership on a maritime area controlled by a single power. The process of renaming places is often triggered by the history of colonialism (Guyot & Seethal, 2007).

The history of colonialism underlines the past conflict experience. For instance, Vietnam uses the Sino-Vietnamese War to strengthen the story of resistance against China and to preclude international humiliation in the future. Despite the conflict nature in the SCS disputes, the findings of national interest frames from *Saigon Times Daily* illustrate the prominence of common interest frames with the most dominant topic: peace and stability. A similar gesture is also present in Indonesia when the term "Chinese" signifies prejudice and skepticism throughout history (Setijadi, 2017), which indicates issues involving China can become a major domestic political problem in Indonesia as even small things could snowball into a big "China problem" (Mulyanto, 2020). In the Filipino nationalist imaginary, the Chinese represent an alien and exploitative merchant-capitalist class since the Spanish-American colonial era (Hau, 2014). This amplifies historical mistrust between disputants affect sentiments toward the SCS conflict nowadays.

Vietnam: Sino-Vietnamese Standoff

In this study, Vietnam is the only nation-state claimant with an authoritarian political system. Vietnam is ruled only by one party, the Communist Party of Vietnam. Media content is usually subjected to government censorship, particularly on sensitive issues such as foreign affairs (Bui, 2017).

Historically, a military clash occurred between the Chinese navy and South Vietnam in the Paracel Islands (Hoang Sa) in 1974. The event is recalled as the Battle of the Paracels Islands and is regarded as the first Sino-Vietnamese naval skirmish over the SCS isles. As a result of the battle, China established de facto control over the Paracels.

The Vietnamese citizens appear to support the Vietnamese government and military and the defense of its territory, although Bui (2017) argues that the government tries to minimize anti-China sentiment and focuses more on maintaining political stability and bilateral relations. As a result, the SCS is used to enhance national unity and support for the government and to advance country's economic interests. Despite rising maritime tensions and a deeply troubled history with China, China is still Vietnam's key trading partner and economic investor (Table 11).

Table 11. Economic Partnership (K5).

No	Topic	Keywords	Coherence	Eigenvalue	Freq.
5	**Economic Partnership**	partnership; cooperation; bilateral; strategic; comprehensive; agreed; ties; countries; leaders; trade;	0.407	**3.52**	**1,243**
		strategic partnership; bilateral trade; bilateral cooperation; comprehensive partnership; leaders agreed; trade and investment; economic cooperation; pacific partnership;			

Despite economic interests, Vietnamese citizens perceive Chinese investments suspiciously, as a way to control Vietnam. In addition to historical legacies, there is a growing fear of investments that can intervene in Vietnam's sovereignty and autonomy. This skepticism is linked to Vietnam's long history of anti-China resistance struggles since the war in 1974. Vietnam's approach to label China as a threat stemmed not only from geopolitical factor but also from the need to "reunify" an internally divided population amid the economic crisis after 1976 (Path, 2011).

Furthermore, a massive anti-China protest in 2014 was not the first anti-China protest in Vietnam about the SCS conflict. The massive protest in 2014 occurred after China placed the Haiyang Shiyou 981 oil rig in Vietnam's EEZ, near the disputed Paracel Islands. The anti-Chinese protest spiraled into a deadly riot as two Chinese workers were killed and several factories were burned.

> Regarding anti-China protest in Bin Duong and Ha Tinh provinces, Binh said people's actions to show their patriotism and determination to defend national sovereignty were natural and appropriate. But their actions should be within the law and Vietnamese authorities had arrested those inciting violence. (Duc, 2014, para. 9)

The anti-China protest is deemed natural and appropriate despite the repercussions of violence. This legitimacy is used to justify one's action against a certain social/political group. The sovereignty is further employed to highlight China's wrongdoings and identify it as a source of problem.

The Philippines: What "Archipelago" Means for Philippines

In the Philippines, the principle of archipelago has important consequences, transforming sea-lanes, waterways, and maritime areas into national interests. This process helps to establish the Philippine EEZ. Before 2012, Filipinos referred to their portion of the waters bordering the west of the country as SCS. After the tense Scarborough Shoal standoff with China in 2012, the government not only filed a case at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea but also decided to name the maritime area as West Philippine Sea.

The concept of the archipelago sheds some light on the use of the West Philippine Sea as the preferred geographic term in maps. In Table 12, the archipelago emerges as the seventh most dominant

topic (*K*7) in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and is closely associated with critics toward China regarding artificial islands and land reclamations in the disputed areas.

Table 12. Archipelago (K7).

NO	TOPIC	KEYWORDS	COHERENCE	EIGENVALUE	FREQ
7	**Artificial Islands Spratly Archipelago**	islands; artificial; spratly; reefs; archipelago; land; building; reclamation; built; artificial islands; spratly archipelago; land reclamation; spratly islands; building artificial islands;	0.448	**3.01**	**609**

Apart from past conflict experiences, the concept of archipelago also sheds light on the use of preferred geographic term of the West Philippine Sea in government maps and other form of documents. Naming the area West Philippine Sea marks a paradigm change where the name that always carried China is now dropped and substituted by Philippines. In the Philippines, this principle of archipelago has important consequences by transforming sea-lanes, waterways, and maritime areas into national geopolitical interests.

Indonesia: Freedom of Navigation

Indonesia's management of its maritime boundary is best exemplified in a historical and legal context. In a historical-legal context, the term "Freedom of Navigation" will be used as an example in signifying its change depending on national interest frames over time. The historical context particularly discusses the history of renaming places depending on two factors: colonialism and interstate conflict.

Before 1957, Indonesia consisted of large segments of territory cut off from one another by high seas over which the Indonesian state did not have jurisdiction (Butcher & Elson, 2017). Since Indonesia's independence in 1945, the Djuanda Declaration of 1957 was the first document of maritime sovereignty. This document was released after a long-drawn-out struggle to gain international recognition for the newly born country of its archipelagic state. At that time, the Djuanda Declaration faced strong opposition from major maritime states like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, which considered the proposition to be in violation of international laws on freedom of navigation (Butcher & Elson, 2017; Wisnumurti, 2014).

Discussions over the Djuanda Declaration are interrelated to the ongoing policy in dealing with the SCS conflict. Although all the earlier discussions of the Djuanda Declaration have direct connections to the SCS conflict, the articles in the first period (2013–2015) compose more neutral views about the Global Maritime Axis policy, which was designed to reinvigorate Indonesia's identity as a maritime nation, better defend its seas, and boost the maritime sector, particularly in fisheries and infrastructure development. Conversely, all articles in the second period (2016–2018) directly relate to the SCS disputes, particularly

Natuna waters. Publications from 2016 to 2018 also link the Djuanda Declaration to the SCS conflict, particularly in relation to Indonesia's concerns about its maritime borders such as Natuna (Figure 2).
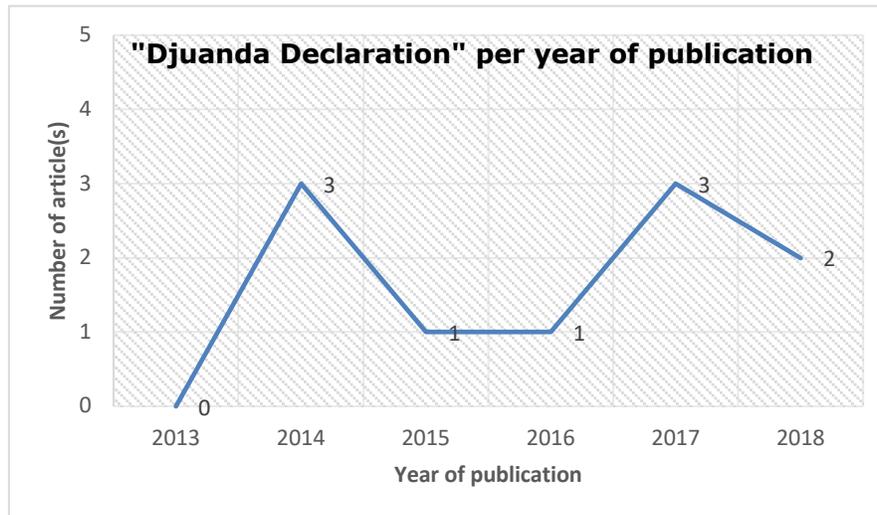

Figure 2. Mentions of Djuanda declaration (2013–2018).

The name and the new map of Natuna Sea were officially launched by Deputy Minister of Maritime Affairs Arif Havas Oegroseno on July 14, 2017. The procedure of standardization of geographical names in Indonesia is a bottom-up process, with data originating in the field and moving up the administrative hierarchy (Lauder & Lauder, 1994).

Conclusion

In this study, the act of naming symbolizes an assertion of exclusive ownership on a maritime area. Geographic names that commemorate significant events during conflict or people in a country's history can be significant expressions of national identity with strong symbolic significance. Accordingly, it diminishes a foundational principle of cooperation and heightens the competition between states in a conflict situation.

This study identifies the preferred names as a turning point of maritime territorial imagination, transitioning names from merely geographical references to names bearing territorial and geopolitical implications, exemplified by Philippines' West Philippine Sea, Vietnam's East Sea, and Indonesia's (North) Natuna Sea. Geographic name is not simply a geographic reference of passages anymore but also invokes an imagination of boundary and identity. The process of turning the SCS into a conflict has been signified by the practice of name change, and this process is imbued with collective memories from past conflict experiences. These local terms are exclusive for their own and can be discovered only in their respective national media. As such, geographic terms are made not to be internationally contested but to be nationally invoked.

This study explains that the naming of areas in the SCS is highly contested and an enduring indicator of how conflict is constituted by news media. Naming invokes imagined territorial boundaries and

territorial sovereignty, and national news media are more likely to use their own local geographic terms instead of the SCS. This finding shows the importance of the local names that emerge in national news media and identifies the distinctive feature of mediatized conflict in the SCS disputes, because these local names are not present in international news coverage. As such, geographic terms are nationally invoked for domestic audiences. The study of the history of cartography has undergone a significant transformation. Maps were once thought to be objective representations of reality. It is now recognized that a map or mapmaker is influenced by available technology and information, dispelling the notion that maps and mapmaking are neutral or value-free. Name changes on a map, for instance, reflect the importance of a country's history and the sociopolitical context in which they are produced. In the SCS disputes, name changes are used as a spatial strategy to strengthen claims and legitimize rights over disputed waterways.

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