



CHINA ACTION IN WATERS AROUND NATUNA, A CHALLENGE TO INDONESIA’S BLUE ECONOMY SOVEREIGNTY

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ABSTRACT

Southeast Asia nations have experienced several confrontations with China in waters around “South China Sea”. In 2020, Indonesia lodged a protest to the United Nations regarding China’s action of placing dozens of Chinese fishing vessels with coast guard on waters near Natuna Island. China claimed the location as its sovereignty using a traditional “Nine Dash Line” argument. Indonesia then countered with placing warships and F-16 fighter to patrol the region. This article analyses the event using politico-historical approach to understand the characteristic of China’s behavior. China had developed into modern country with strong confident nature. Its strong economic development compared to those of the Southeast Asia nations allegedly played role in policing the action. China’s Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) project which collaborated with around 120 countries made it stronger in its global influence. With this superiority, China could be thinking that Southeast Asia nations will weaken its stance if facing a conflict with the country. However, in the incident in the waters around Natuna in 2020, Indonesia took a “no compromise” stance – different from that of other neighbouring Southeast Asian country had taken - clearly marked the balancing strategy. This action can be said as a sturdy effort to secure Indonesia’s Blue Economy plan.

Keywords: *Natuna Island, South China Sea, China, Indonesia, Hedging strategy.*

1. Introduction

Early 2020 after Indonesian Joko Widodo (Jokowi)’s second term presidency, tension between China and Indonesia raised up. China was reported to place its coast guards along with their fishermen ships around Natuna island, South China Sea. Indonesia claimed it’s illegal and a mean challenge to its sovereignty. Jokowi’s first term Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Susi Pudjiastuty, had punished many illegal vessels illegally entered Indonesian waters. This provocation is a kind like repeating the 2016 incident when Kway Fey motor boat entered the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Indonesian sea in March 19, 2016. For the latest action, Indonesia lodged a protest using the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, which gives Indonesia exclusive right to utilize the resources located in the location. The Law governs international sea affairs i.e. the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone, and the continental shelf (Caruana, 2023). China should respect that since it has also been UNCLOS participant since 1996. In response, Indonesia placed its military fleet.

Chinese action recently has troubled Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam on Spratly and Paracel islands. Those Southeast Asian countries were also basing their claims on UNCLOS 1982 while China used the traditional Nine Dash Lines arguments. Why China repeated the provocative action to her neighborhood countries? This article tries to explain the background of this behavior historically. While this seems to criticize China, it should be read in a friendly spirit. As the progress in the following years had showed a closer collaboration between two countries as witnessed by Indonesia’s first High-Speed Rail Project (The Whoosh) and the ongoing IKN

giant project, the moving of the Indonesian capital city from Jakarta in Java Island to East Kalimantan which had invited many Chinese investors in the construction.

The organization of the article is as follows. Next section will be Literature review focusing on the short review on international relation, continued with research method and research findings. The ‘findings’ will consist of historical perspective to understand Mainland China’s culture, a discussion on characteristic which plays important role to the action and eventually on the dispute with Indonesia in Natuna Waters. The article will close with a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

In the study of international relation, two concepts of alignment politics most widely studied are alliance and the balance of power (Walt,1987; Claude Jr,1989; Snyder, 1997; Paul et al. 2004; Nexon 2009). Meanwhile, a certain alignment or behavior of a certain country towards another has been discussed using a milestone work of Kenneth Waltz’s 1979 book and by works of other scholars related topics in 1980’s and 1990 (Kuik 2016: 1). It shifted from the early Cold War era to post-cold war era. During the cold war, much of the literature concentrated on alliance and the opposite choices of neutralism, neutrality and non-alignment (Martin, 1962; Lyon, 1968). The post-cold war era, the discourse of alignment focused on two extreme polarization: the ‘balancing versus bandwagoning’ and several ranges in between namely the “hedging” strategy (Soong 2021). Several literatures have expanded the analysis of alignment behavior into several categories such as engagement, binding, buck-passing, soft balancing and, hedging and limited-alignment. The hedging is necessarily a ‘middle’ position situated between two polar of the balancing–bandwagoning spectrum (see Figure 1 of Kuik 2016). Kuik developed the range of hedging by the degrees of rejection and acceptance. The two extreme behaviors were modified into “full-fledged balancing” as the highest degree of power rejection and at the other side is the “full-scale bandwagoning” representing a full power acceptance.

Further Kuik developed the other attributes of hedging that is not only a middle position, but also an opposite position. There are two other sets of mutually counteracting policies: the ‘returns-maximizing’ and ‘risk-contingency’ options (Kuik 2016: 505). The first option is chosen to maximize economic, diplomatic and political benefits from a positive relationship with a rising power when all is well, whereas second option is designed to minimize and mitigate risks if things go awry.

Theoretically speaking only strong states may lead or determine the direction of the bandwagon in the relationship between two countries. In the relationship between China and Southeast Asian countries, China can be assumed to be stronger at least in two key aspect: population and the economy. Even though it is difficult to get the exact information about China’s military power, one may assume that with its economy today China can build its military power better than during the past years. Based on above fact, China has potential to lead the direction of the relationship with Southeast Asian countries.

In relation with the collaboration between China and ASEAN countries during the OBOR and BRI scheme, Jenn-Jaw Soong created a further model (Soong 2021) developing the scheme from the spectrum between balancing and bandwagoning. In the special issue of Chinese Economy journal, scholars from the ASEAN countries analyses this relationship. This effort is worthy noted since its special characteristics: the relationships was seen from the viewpoint of Southeast Asian. Until the second decades of the 21st century, Southeast Asian tend to be pragmatic in the relation (e.g. see Pelkmans, 2019). Southeast Asian after releasing the ASEAN Economic Community in 2003 had become the third largest economy after the EU and the US, in term of population.

There was a range of hedging strategy of the Southeast Asian in response to China’s BRI project. Chosen from the representative countries it shows picture of Southeast Asian views toward the giant’s offer: The Philippines under the Duterte administration had adopted a positive attitude towards China and tended to bandwagon. However, due to China’s behavior in the South China Sea, the Filipino was cautious towards the collaboration (Chao 2021). Malaysia under Najib and Mahathir 2.0. administration showed a supportive stance towards China’s offer (Chin 2021). Vietnam’s response towards China’s initiatives was not easy to understand. (Vu et al. 2021) mentions that Vietnam’s strategies towards China’s BRI are a mixture of contradictory policies between support (bandwagoning strategy) or denials (balancing strategies). Thailand also in this point not yet showed a clear long term strategy towards China. Even though it has signed project in transportation network, public in Thailand still cautious toward China due to the country’s past images. They feared that China’s BRI was a kind of plan to dominate Thailand (Punyaratabandhu & Swaspitchayaskun, 2021). Myanmar showed a strong relationship with China especially with the initiation of three big projects. However, in the middle of collaboration, some of them were corrected unilaterally by Myanmar showing somewhat ‘balancing’ (Soong & Aung, 2021). However, it is quite difficult to determine Myanmar stance toward China to this end.

Indonesia as mentioned in the beginning, while maintaining close collaboration with China, the country showed a clear balancing strategy as evidenced by its sturdy position during the Natuna Waters incident early in 2020. Mursitama & Ying (2021) posited that Indonesia had implemented a “hedging strategy with a sense of balance rather than joining in with China via bandwagoning”. However, Indonesia was keeping its international policy to be ‘friendly with all country’ as expressed with its term “*bebas aktif*”, collaboration in projects with China keep going up to present days (see Anwar, 2024, and Iksan and Soong, 2022).

3. Research Methods

This study is historical in analyzing certain event (Torou et al. 2010) using an approach of Archival Research (Briere 2021: p.9). This kind of research studies the variety of repositories including manuscripts, letters, photographs, images and sound materials, artwork, books, diaries, artefact and so on. This study uses both primary sources: sources created by persons directly involved in the events, reflecting their point of view (Briere 2021: p.10) and mostly secondary sources, sources not based on a direct observation of an event or on evidence directly associated with the subject, thus relying on pre-existing primary sources (Briere 2021: p.10).

In historical research, verification of sources is important. Two types of verification were used in this study, namely checking the authenticity and the credibility (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 77-78). Authenticity is the utmost important particularly in determining the primary source to be used in the research. The authenticity of the secondary source can be determined for example by checking the publisher or parties which released the documents. Next step is to determine the credibility of the documents (or sources). Determining the credibility may involve various activities such as cross-checking all aspects of the information presented in the document (or expressed by research sources), for example: the places, event in the picture (photograph), the actor mentioned in the document, etc. Sources in this study were mostly secondary and had been passing through the process of verification for their authenticity and credibility.

The sources of this study have been chosen based on sound academic consideration. For the history of China, seminal book written by June Teufel Dreyer, “China’s Political System – Modernization and Tradition” was chosen. The book was one of text book in the China Political System Course in the Graduate Program of Political Economy NCKU conducted by Professor Chin-fu Hung, a respectable China analyst from Taiwan. References about politics were recommended by ASEAN specialist from the same institution, Professor Jenn-jaw Soong,

while news about the event (incident) in Natuna in 2020 were taken from reputable sources such as The Diplomat, The World Politics Review and University of Indonesia web page.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Research Findings

4.1.1 Mainland China's Culture: A Historical background

China has a long history of civilization. Emperors and dynasties have pictured China for thousands of years. When the western came to China in 19th century for trading, the culture was mixed. Hence, intrusion of western tradition and culture was rejected. The Opium War (1839-1842) signalled a strong confident for China to stand on her own feet. However, in practice China used both of its own tradition with western culture particularly in technology, for example in military technique. Dreyer (2019) in her book "China's Political System – Modernization and Tradition" mentioned six major events that picture China's history. The first is imperial government that ruled China since around 2000 BC (see Dreyer 2019: p. 27). The long history of imperialism by various dynasties had shaped China's culture. Bringing a high degree of culture, particularly the Chinese letter and other technology undoubtedly had given the people basic underlying confidence almost towards everything.

The second major event was the overthrowing of the Qing dynasty in China which can be divided into 2 parts: first is that by the Nationalist and second is that by the Communist. The new generation at the end of 19 century, however, emerged with confidence by rejecting their own Confucianism tradition. For "the sake" of Modernization of China, Dr Sun Yat Sen introduced an idea of Three Principle of the people: People's Nationalism, People's Democracy and People's livelihood. The imperialism in China was ended in 1911 and Sun Yat Sen was said to play important role in this collapse. Later the KMT took control over China but the government was run by Sun's successor, Chiang-Kai Sek (because Sun died in 1925). Sun founded a Chinese Nationalist Party: The Kuomintang (KMT) - but had never seen the advancement. His successor play role in leading the party: Chiang Kai-shek. He lead the nation and almost successful in uniting many elements in the country. It seems that the ideology: Confucianism was in acceptance among the people. However, with the ideology, China remain poor and weak (eg toward the western and Japan). In a view decade, the KMT government fall resulted from a combination of internal weaknesses, war with Japan and the insurgency of communist (see Dreyer 2019: 2).

A new history emerged in China after it held basic level election in 1953 which gave the "unpredicted victory" to the China's Communist Party (CCP). The Constitution was then being ratified in 1954. Anomaly of implementing the democratic government based on their own argument happened in China. There were two parallel hierarchies in the Country: the party and the Government with interlocking memberships (Dreyer 2019: 80). There is an overlap leadership position (and this is the very different dynamics from the western concept) aiming to the superiority of the ruling party. In choosing the personnel to certain position, a democratic centralism was practiced: individuals are chosen rather than elected in free competition.

Ideology indoctrination was to be implemented to the common people. It drew average individual into party process e.g. by founding many mass organizations such as a communist youth league, a trade union federation, a women organization, and a medical association. To reach the participation on personal level there were study group managed by the *dunwei* (work unit) in urban areas and broken down into *xiaozu* (the small groups of 8-15 people). However, after several years running, due to the boredom of the people, much fake participation was generally to occur.

In Mao's era, China was declared as a Democratic Dictatorship with four classes: workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie (tradesmen, peddlers, small shops owners), and national bourgeoisie (adoption of parliamentary forms during China's bourgeoisie-democratic phase

during the revolution). During the time, it suppressed the “lackeys of imperialism” which are landlords, bureaucratic capitalist and KMT reactionaries (Dreyer 2019:77). During these early years of administration, he launched several mass campaigns to build enthusiasm among the people. At the same time, it declared the National Language which was the Common Mandarin to be used in official documents (see Dreyer 2019: 4).

4.1.2 *The Great Leap Forward (1958-1961)*

The third major event was Great Leap Forward was the effort of Mao to modernize China using the local advantage of the abundance of work power (human resources, because of high number of population) and certain traditional techniques. The Great Leap Forward’s message is radically egalitarian (Dreyer 2019: 4). It tried to implement Marx’s teaching of communism “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need”. The movement was preceded by Mao’s speech in February 1957 as a second effort to encourage freedom of speech which brought consequences such as external periodicals entered the country and let the citizen become open minded and become bolder to the government. Several events believed to be impacted by this attempt such as students in Beida University China criticized the government with posters. In Tianjin, engineers stated that the party had promised China with a revolution but actually no more than a change of dynasty. Other critics came from a journalist who mentioned that the party had been estranged from the masses and the members were “flatterers, sycophants and yes-man” (Dreyer 2019: 86-87). From intellectuals, a professor mentioned the CCP leaders were somewhat as people with petty bureaucratic mind. The professor further stated that Marx and Lenin would be unhappy to realize that their doctrine was applied so rigidly by CCP leaders in China. From countryside, the peasants complained about the cooperatives and demand their land back. In urban areas, workers complained about the wage system and stated it was irrational. Some other people even opined that they had been better off under KMT government and in further region; some ethnic minorities advocated splitting off from China.

The Great Leap Forward was made in an attempt to implement communism in a way compatible with Chinese condition. The Chinese copy the implementation of Marx theory from Russia. At the same time Russia sent a number of advisers to China to help increase the economics and ethnology. However, PRC leader was aware that the condition of China was different from Russia, called for a reinterpretation to China’s context. In attempting this, Mao wanted to reduce differences between the city and countryside. By this way, Mao tended to enhance the equality among the people. He contended that the county’s problem could not be solved just by upgrading the cooperatives and the villages, but also by growing the bureaucracy. Mao had a very much concern with the urban-rural gap since he was a product of rural upbringing. That’s why he emphasized equality during his leaderships. Mao contented that it should not be a dichotomy between the ideologically pure (the communist) and the technocrats (the bourgeois). He exerted that China needed people who were both “red and expert” (Dreyer 2019: 88).

During the Great Leap Forward, several initiatives were conducted. In infrastructure sector, there were initiative to collaborate the cooperatives in China in building the dam and other water control work. The idea of the project was to rely on local people and resources to help the country. The communes (combining several cooperatives) was started in 1958 later made large scale changes in term of economic, politic and sociology. In industry sector, Mao put a very confidence slogan to enhance the production such as (to) “overtake England in steel industry in 15 years” and “More, better, faster and cheaper”. There was also “the walk on two legs” slogan used as a new way of production: combining heavy industry which was capital intensive and labor intensive for traditional industry (for example in textile and medicine industry). In the education sector: there was a *xiaxiang* or “sent down” program. It was a

program of sending young scholars to villages to educate peasants while let them learn agricultural techniques to enhance production for the country. In agricultural sector there were new agricultural techniques applied such as: the double-wheeled, double-bladed plow, a closer and deeper seed planting (Dreyer 2019: 91).

The evaluation made by the party published in “The Red Flag” journal November 1958 concluded that they had not yet reached communism thus need to modify the practice of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his work”. It was reported that most people reacted to the formula by not working hard, some other by passively resisting, engaged in active sabotage by destroying property and killing their animals rather than collected them to the state (Dreyer 2019: 91). The result was not as intended and was disastrous for Chinese society. People were not being motivated to work hard and many were found to work as minimum as possible to get as much as possible.

4.1.3 The Cultural Revolution

The fourth major event was happened around 1966. Mao unleashed the revolution to purge the country of Soviet, other western countries and traditional influences. It wanted to purify the country of both foreign and decadent old influences (Dreyer 2019: 4). It started with Upheaval Phase (1966-1969) attacking young party’s official of Shanghai Yao Wenyuan and to two historian-playwright, Wu Han and Deng Tuo. It marked the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in November 1965. At that time cult of Mao became escalating and everything contra-Mao was perceived as negative. During Cultural Revolution, both western and traditional Chinese became suspect for its bourgeois/ feudal content. It was reported that books other than the works of Mao disappeared from bookstores.

In August 1966 Mao called out the Red Guards, young people from five pure classes which are: workers, poor and lower middle peasants, soldiers, party officials and revolutionary martyrs to enforce revolutionary purity by attacking the “four old”: old ideas, culture, habits and customs (Dreyer 2019: 97). The guard also ransacked museum and religious institution and destroying their contents. At elite level there was a power shift from party organization to a group called “The cultural Revolution Small Group” with Yao Wenyuan, other Shanghai radicals and Mao’s wife Jiang Qing as prominent members. The Cultural Revolution was militantly egalitarian: anyone who had had authority over anyone else could be accused of being a corrupt power holder. Many people were tortured or driven to suicide. Unexpectedly, among the victim was Deng Xiaoping at that time served as party secretary general.

In February 1967 Premier Zhou Enlai convinced Mao to opt for a moderate policy. A new body called revolutionary committee was ordered but there were many disputes and rivalry among the elite groups. The effect of Cultural Revolution to China’s culture was devastating. Among these consequences included: Long serving leaders were being replaced with new leaders whose experience were limited; the relationships of authority were destroyed or weakened; the party and ministries ceased to function; the role of military had been greatly enhanced; the production declined and there were drastic effect on educational system; both foreign and traditional influences in culture were dropped sharply; and a large number of lives and careers damaged.

4.1.4 The modernization by Deng Xiaoping

In December 1978 Deng introduced Four Modernization Program which considered as the fifth major event. It aimed to bring the PRC to be ranked among the more developed countries by 2000. The focus of the modernization was truly economic advancement, by which had enormous sociopolitical effect. Deng abandoned Mao’s emphasis on class struggle and social revolution for creating prosperity. The definition of socialism was seemed to be shifted. In the era of Deng it was acceptable to the people to be rich as long as it was the result of hard

work, not by inheriting wealth. Even though there is still a note of the statement: “... but it is not necessary all people to be rich at the same time” but it was acceptable for some people to be richer before others (Dreyer 2019: 107).

During Deng’s administration the “iron rice bowl” come to end. There was no guarantee for all people to get the job, only those who perform will. The “redness” was no longer more important than expertise. The class label as capitalist and landlord which was hereditary were removed. Deng also announced the “open door” to the advanced countries in the world to modernize China. In politics, Deng offer a more democratic elections, including reviving the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) as a united front that had disappeared during the Cultural Revolution.

Deng tended to select the best of the west and east tradition and mixed them together. The Open Door policy enabled student to study abroad (mainly to the west) to get knowledge that later would be implanted in country after they are back. Deng’s policy was more market oriented and the prosperity was the aim. Deng seems to be more liberalist. This give more confident to China’s government as well as to the people. Dreyer (2019) asserted, however, the leader mentioned that Western concept such as separation of powers, the theory of check and balances and human right were not appropriate to China. This shape the culture on how China interacts with other country in future years.

4.1.5 *The Tiananment Incident in 1989*

The sixth major event was the Tiananment Incident in 1989. Since 1987 demonstrations had been escalating in Beijing by the student demanding the greater democratization and the return of the “four freedom” clause in the constitution that had been deleted in 1980. By then the leftist group got a ‘proof’ that granting freedom to people would lead to chaos and disruption. The group started a campaign against the bourgeois liberalism. In the executive level, Deng sounded the restoration of party’s tradition of democratic centralism. April 1987 the tide turned to reformist: Deng told foreign visitor that the leftist tendency in the party was jeopardizing the Chinese economic reforms. Zhao Ziyang an elite of the party delivered speech with liberal overtones (Dreyer 2019: 118). In November 1987, the Thirteen Party Congress confirmed Zhao as general secretary and first vice chair of the CMC. Deng, together with Li Xiannian and Cheng Yun resigned from the politburo due to the advanced age and enter the Central Advisory Commision. The new standing committee of the Politburo had a 3-2 leftist edge in the politburo.

The Seventh National People’s Congress in March-April 1988 appointed two elderly leftist with military background: Yang Shangkun and Wang Zhen as president and vice president of the PRC and Li Peng as premier. At that time there was a high inflation rate 18.5 % official figure but analyst estimated up to 50%, the worst since 1949 in China. At the Thirteenth Central Committee’s Third Plenum in September 1988 it was decided that price reform (as had been proposed by Zhao) were postponed indefinitely. Other solution seemed to be favored by leftist: cutting back on capital construction, recentralize the decision making, and rectify the ideology (Dreyer 2019: 119). Zhao’s activities in the economy diminished while leftist like Li Peng became more active. Deng worried about the consequences of his own reform program. Anti-Deng attitude became publicly common. Intellectual called for greater freedom and release of political prisoners. In one occasion, students spoke openly during the commemoration the seventieth anniversary of the May fourth movements in 1919.

In April 26, 1989 the the Renmin Ribao published editorial prohibiting the protest which were counterrevolutionary, and stated that troops would be sent in to quell the “chaotic disturbances” (Dreyer 2019: 120). The students who generally considered themselves as patriotic remonstrator were insulted with the editorial and held a march of 100,000 students into Tiananmen Square. They were supported by 1 million Beijing citizen who many marched

with them. Party and government leader were not pleased. Leaders were criticized by name including Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping. Zhao Ziyang attempted to intermediate the protestors and the party's hardliners but rejected by the politburo.

On the other location, Li Peng chaired a meeting of several thousand party, government and military officials announcing the implementation of Article 89 of the country's constitution and declared a martial law in most of Beijing. Zhao was the only standing committee of politburo not present in the platform which was nationally televised. It signed that Zhao's place was occupied by PRC president and party CMC general secretary Yang Shangkun. Sunday, June 4, troops attacked the demonstrator. Government reported 300 people were killed but foreign and dissident Chinese estimated more (Dreyer 2019: 6). The message for the Chinese Communist Party was clear: the people were dissatisfied with Deng's plan to build socialism a la Chinese Characteristic. After the demonstration eased, China government made a number of adjustments to economic policy in an attempt to deal with people's grievances.

4.1.6 General overview on the major events had pictured Chinese Culture

Communist ideology appealed many people in the country as a solution of their problem. Even though it is western idea, Mao Zedong had discussed and made explanations on it thoroughly (see Foreign Language Press, 1961) so he convinced the people that the ideology will be successfully implemented in China. Mao was hardly struggling to adopt the ideology. During his early years in office, Mao seemed to embrace all countries' components including its "enemy", the KMT as the implementation of Mao's creative adaptation towards Marx called "On the New Democracy". Different from that during the KMT era which the form of parliament was an alliance between KMT and CCP, in Mao's era it was composed of several different classes.

The series of campaign held functioned as gathering many Chinese components which were tend to loyal more to clan, village and province than to the nation. It was a clever strategy of Mao to build a sense of nationalism by explicitly mentioned its external threat. The term of "unity and patriotism" was the concrete form to the society as Sun Yat Sen described it as "a sheet of loose sand" (Dreyer 2019: 78). The fourth campaign was seen by new observers as the internal problem that the party could't solve. The series of campaign meant to purify the party as well as its organ from non-communist true believers.

The implementation of Marx in the production seemed to over emphasized on the man/women as a means of production, and less considering them as a human being e.g. people ate at mess hall for the sake of saving time from cooking and reduce the waste; married workers lived in dormitories segregated by sex (See Dreyer 2019: p.91). The approach taken by the Chinese government was sometimes too strict that tend to breach (break) the human rights. The motivation was not to build from inside (the people) but from outside (the government, rule). It would not motivate the people to do the program sincerely.

Regarding to the Cultural Revolution, western analysts tended to comment it negatively, however, there is at least scholar regards it as somewhat positively. It was understood that during the campaign the Red Guards were taking over the public space in China, creating a sense of chaos. Baum (1971:3) acknowledged an anarchy but not totally anarchy. Commenting on Mao's action in putting down many Chinese Communist Party (CCP) personnel alleged as his "enemies", Baum mentioned that it was not liquidating those persons but should be seen as a kind of 'educating' those cadre in order to improve his/ her understanding on his teaching. It could be true, since, after some time they were 'liberated' and restored to favor on a probationary basis (Baum 1971: 3).

Mao passed away in 1976 and his successor Deng Xiaoping abandoned his emphasis on class struggle and social revolution for creating prosperity. The difference from the previous leader is that the first tend to select the best of west and east tradition, while the latter

implemented an Open Door policy to the west. In short, the leadership orientation of Mao was in favor of equality while Deng in prosperity. Deng implemented the policy that was more market oriented. By this practice, the prosperity did come to reality. Business people and farmers gained advantage for they can set the price (to keep up with cost production). Deng seems to be more liberalist. However the 1989 demonstration was a sign that many people in PRC dissatisfied with his policy. After the demonstration there were adjustment to accommodate what people wanted. Surprisingly the leader said that Western concept such as separation of powers, the theory of check and balances and human right were not appropriate to China.

Tiananment incidents raised attention to public because there is a change in China. People, especially the student became more brave to criticize the government. The government, on the other hand exhibited its power by sending troops and repressed the people. The movement made by the students considered failed because they forget the major supporter of the government, the peasants, to join the action. The significant of the incident lies in its symbolism. The failure of the Tiananment demonstrators to achieve their goals weighed heavily on the survivors and their sympathizers. The existence of factionalism among the demonstrators also play role: the peasants were not approached to join the protest movement

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 The Confidence Stance of China

All China's actions are actually reflecting a confident stance. Since its early history, many events have been reflecting this stance. This paper will focus on the history after Mao's period. Disagreement with Stalin, Mao identified himself as philosopher and a poet (Beja 2018: 232) and claimed his political ideas as the correct interpretation of Marxist philosophy. It was a confident claim. People could ask about this credential, for example about his degree in philosophy, or the effectiveness of his strategy in applying the Marxism considering unsatisfactory result of his agricultural project during the mass campaign: e.g. many discrepancies occurred after the Pre Great Leap Forward stage (Dreyer 2019: 4). A close friend in the party, Liu Shaoqi did not get satisfactory explanation when asking this, but detainment.

Mao Zedong in other occasion “teach a lesson” to artist and intellectuals (writers) mentioning that they should fight petty bourgeois ideology, go to the grassroots and learn from the workers and peasants to study official interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. It is a little bit ‘strange’ since he talked to intellectuals who had devoutly learnt theories and undoubtedly know more about politics but they should learn Marxism from the peasant. During the Great Leap Forward in 1958-1961 Mao Zedong confidently use a new approach of using its ideology to build huge projects. The slogan of doing the project “by the people”, the workers were like batteries of ants building the project. With the facts that not all of the workers were skilled to do the construction works, it seemed that he was neglecting technical standard. It resulted with early damage of the building because it was poorly built by unskilled people which then caused flood in some areas (Dreyer 2019: 93). People can say that the new ideology was still in experimental phase. Dreyer (2019: 93) commented that “survival, rather than ideological orthodoxy...was the imperative of the time”.

This confident stance resonance to his inner circle, the family. During the Cultural Revolution 1966 the leader prohibited traditional music performance and let western culture performance intruded. At that time, the traditional Chinese opera allowed to perform after being “reworked” using western style musical instrument: the piano. At a certain occasion when asked about this, Madame Mao commented, “We have liberated the piano”. It was quite confident statement since we all know that the piano comes from western.

In the 21st century era, Dickson (2016) asserted that the international financial crisis in 2007 had made China leaders more confident seeing the country's ability to survive from

hardships and recession. Since that time on, China was less willing to accommodate Western advice on economic policy, to be more assertive in foreign policy and more repressive in maintaining domestic order and stability.

4.2.2 *A Repressive Culture?*

After tension and stress resulted from 1955 campaign, Mao launched “The Hundred Flowers” campaign to ease the tension of the China’s people (Dreyer 2019: 86). In his speech in May 1956 he mentioned “let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend”. Certain actions were conducted to everyone perceived as counterrevolutionaries or the anti-communist group. Dreyer (2019: 79) noted that during the campaigns there were more than 800,000 executions (other sources mentioned more than 10 million). In 1951, the government launched The *Sanfan* campaign or fighting the “three antis”: anti-corruption, anti-waste, and anti-bureaucracy. This campaign was targeting the cadres identified as opportunist particularly those who joined the party with a motivation of profiting themselves rather than sincerely believed in party’s goal. Another campaign was The *Wufan* in 1952. Again, it was fighting the five antis: bribery, tax evasion, fraud, theft of government property, and theft of state economic secrets. It was particularly targeting the bourgeoisie as the result from the *Sanfan* campaign because during the previous campaign it had been revealed that the corruption dealt with economic matters tying to them (Dreyer 2019: 79).

During the Hundreds Flower Campaign, another action demonstrated by the government. After the leader speech in February 1957 titled “On the correct handling of Contradictions among the People”, cadres encouraged everyone to speak out, insisting that words could not be considered as criminal to support this urging. At first people were not enthusiastic but later a number of intellectuals begin to criticize. Most of the critics were targeting the absence of the freedom of thought, the freedom of expression, and the freedom of publication. Also participating were students and artists. In June 1957, Mao wrote in editorial of People’s Daily accusing a “handful of counter-revolutionary rightist” of having used the freedom granted by the party to launch attack on socialism. The campaign then uncovered the rightist which labeling about 500,000 people as “rightist” and were subject to criticism session in their work units and denounced in the official press. Others were sent to labor camp, to jail or to the countryside to be “re-educated by the poor and the lower poor peasant”. The most devastating effect was that their children were also discriminated for two decades, were barred from entering universities or from good jobs in the cities.

A local analyst Hu Feng wrote long letter to the leader, about 300,000 words of opinion and was also published in the supplement of “Literary Gazette” (*Wenyi bao*) in 1954. The writing was actually a refutation of the talks at the Yan-an forum. It then was strongly rebuked by Mao himself in People’s Daily editorial at which he was labeled as “counter-revolutionaries”. Beja (2018) asserted that the latent objective of the campaign was actually to get rid of Mao’s political rival including Liu Shaoqi. It was also targeted other intellectuals and writers such as journalist Deng Tuo, playwright Wu Han and writer Liao Mosha. It was also extended to most professors, educators, teachers and writers who were accused to stick to the bourgeois world outlook. Using his charisma, Mao called university and high school students to organize themselves into Red Guards and launch movement to criticize their teacher, school administrator or other intellectuals. Cultural Revolution was directed against intellectuals who threat the hegemony of Mao Zedong’s power. As an effect, universities were closed in 1966 which partially reopened in 1972. The students were selected based on their knowledge of the ruling ideology. By an order for writers and artist to follow the “literary theory” imposed by the high leader or in the name of “serving the people”, it discouraged freedom of speech and freedom of thinking.

In Deng’s era hard treatment to intellectuals took a different way. The government treated this group like a ‘rubber’ tight and loose. When they are needed, they will be heard (the party relaxed the control), but when they say loud things, for example criticizing the party, they would be repressed. Actually, as a victim of Cultural Revolution, Deng extended a friendly hand to the intellectuals and thinkers who had been the main target of the campaign. This “Bourgeois liberalization” in 1980, however, is climaxed with” June Fourth Massacre” or Tiananment Incident, a tragic repression towards university students.

During the leadership of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao intellectuals who questioned party’s leaderships also became target, often followed by long jail sentences. Since 1976 the party has never allowed everything include ideological controversies to distract the focus toward economic development. Noted that during Hu Jintao and Wen Jiaobao, references to Mao had become rather rare.

The era of Xi Jinping since the late 2012 has been “orchestrating the return to Maoism” (Beja 2018: 245). There has been limited freedom of expression of the intelligentsia. Xi, repeating Mao emphasizes the importance of ideology. Control over public sphere through various “central leading group” where he chairs becomes common. There is a “Historical nihilism” by attacking any ideas (usually those expressed in articles) that criticize the party’s through academic reflection. The repressive actions were the closed down of a contemporary history journal *Yanhuang Chunqiu* (founded by liberal party’s elders) in 2016. Sad to learn that it practically disabled people from reflecting to their humanistic tragedy of the Cultural Revolution which they should have had commemorated its 50th years anniversary in 2016. A very popular intellectual website “Consensus” (*Gongshi wang*) was also closed down.

Minorities such as the Uighur also have a limited space. Dissatisfaction of imbalance development with other region (the east), triggered many uprising in Xinjiang Province. Serious social eruption since February 1996 has been occurring since Deng’s era. Three bombs exploded simultaneously in Urumqi in the day of the Deng’s speech February 25. The “strike hard campaign” was launched in 1997 firstly intended to fight corruption and crime but the campaign actually restrict religious practice leading to 190 execution of Uyghur (Amnesty International 1999). Intellectuals such as Rebiya Kadeer, Uyghur’s businesswoman was arrested of “revealing state’s secret” in August 11, 1999. Other scholars, Ilham Tohti, a China Minzu University economist was detained as “separatist” for his class lectures and websites. The government seems to take “hard action” to all things contra with their line. They make little distinction between separatist, terrorist, and civil right activist – whether they are Uyghurs, Tibetans, Taiwanese or Falun Gong Buddhist (Gladney 2018: 321).

China analyst, Dickson (2016) asserted that repression had been inherent in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since early 1940 (Mao’s Yan’an). It is considered served as a “toolkit” to assert the party c.q the government’ policy demonstrated by the way the government maintained the Tiananment incident. The government also saw any peaceful protest as “turmoil”. Dickson noted that there is no large-scale social movement since 1989.

4.2.3 *Encounters with Indonesia in Natuna Waters*

China has made several confrontations with Indonesia and other Southeast Asian in what is so called the “South China Sea”. In Indonesia territory, Chinese fishing vessels accompanied with coast guard escort were present in waters around Natuna Island at the end of 2019, chasing away local-traditional fishermen (Grossman, 2020). It was surely blocked the blue economy of the country. Indonesian then summoned China’s ambassador to lodge a protest on December 30, 2019. It was then followed by placing warships and F-16 fighter jets to patrol the region (Grossman, 2020). At first Beijing refused to back down. Jakarta responded by mobilizing its local vessels to keep staying there and continue fishing activities competed with Chinese fishermen. Two days later, the President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo (Jokowi) visited Natuna

Islands and declared there would be “no compromise” on “our nation’s territorial sovereignty” (Grossman, 2020). Tensions subsided and Chinese ships had been pushed further out to the edge of Indonesia’s exclusive economic zone. The action - different from that of other neighbouring Southeast Asian country - clearly showed a balancing strategy. This action can be said as a sturdy effort to secure Indonesia’s blue economy plan.

China’s action in the waters around Natuna Island is a typical assertive characteristic of the government. Confident stance was clearly demonstrated. China’s stronger economic basis compared to Indonesia allegedly played role in policing the action. It would be stronger if associated with the BRI project (see e.g. Soong 2021), where China invests on several Indonesian national projects in Java and Kalimantan. With this superior bargaining position, China was thinking that Indonesia will weaken its stance to the conflict in the waters around Natuna. However, Indonesia showed the dignity bravely by “balancing” the action. The Indonesian government encouragement to the fishermen to keep staying in the location together with the placement of warships and F-16 fighter in the Natuna waters is a clear sign that Indonesia was taking a "balancing" strategy against China’s provocation.

Considering China’s long history of its confidence stance, the actions could not be justified, however. There is an international consensus agreed by member countries of the United Nations (UN) the UNCLOS 1982. Every dispute in waters or sea should consult with the rule. The use of their own argument of “The Nine Dash Line” would meant the neglect of the UNCLOS. Another confident -unilateral taste - was demonstrated when they still used the argument of the Nine Dash Line to reject international arbitrage in Den Haag of any disputes. This stance has actually been demonstrated since Mao’s era. Mao implemented communism based on his own understanding. Application of a concept should have been considering the context. However, a thorough understanding of concept (theory) itself is paramount. A new theory should be discussed thoroughly with many people. It will be best done by inviting scholars during the process. What happened in Yan-an, -other sources mentions as Yanan (Brandt et al (1952) - during the long march showed that there were no equal or free discussion among the participants. The discussions lead by party cadres in small group with participants of young scholars from cities like Beijing. However, what happened was far from the hope of the youngsters. Party cadre implemented a hard line during the discussion and imposing their own understanding of Marxism.

The hard fist approach was demonstrated by the authorities of China since 1949. It targeted whoever perceived as “enemy” challenging the party’s ideology, including party cadre who endanger the dominance of the leader. Minorities were not excluded as target: students in Tiananment 1989, the Falun Gong, the Tibetan and Uyghurs are just example.

5. Conclusion

There are six major events that had pictured China’s history. First, the imperial government which had ruled China since around 2000 BC; second, the overthrowing of the Qing dynasty and the building of the New Era: first pictured by Sun Yat Sen (The Nationalist) and then continued by Mao Zedong which had quite different stance: The Communist. The third major event was The Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) during Mao Zedong’s administration. The fourth was The Cultural Revolution (1966), still in Mao’s era. The two last major events were under the second and more modernized regime: The modernization by Deng Xiaoping (1978) and The Tiananment Incident in (1989).

All of abovementioned events had certainly made China to possess a strong confident stance. In economic terms, development and modernization made by Deng Xiapoing during the last three decades of the 20th century found its testing ground in the beginning of the 21st century which made this stance even stronger. The international financial crisis in 2007 had proven the country’s survival ability which made its leaders to be more confident in the

international sphere. Since that time on, China was less willing to accommodate Western advice on economic policy, be more assertive in foreign policy and continued its “repressive nuance” in keeping its domestic order and stability. This (repressive) nuance, if traced back historically, had been used as a “toolkit” by the Chinese Communist Party since early 1940 during Mao’s Yan’an era. It had been used by the leader to assert government’s policies. Since the Tiananmen incident - seen by outside observer as a peaceful protest but as “turmoil” by the government - there has been no large-scale social movement since 1989.

What exercised by China by demonstrating their assertive actions in waters around Natuna Island is a reflection of a confident culture, which has been built up since the Mao’s era. This confident attitude is highly contributed by their success in economy which has been growing rapidly since the Deng’s era with the foundation laid by Mao’s Great Leap Forward. It should be acknowledged that China has developed tremendously in the economy. What China has demonstrated was a clear reflection of this. China’s argument using their “Nine Dash Line” is unilateral and is unacceptable internationally. Indonesia’s strong attitude by placing military power in the disputed area and using the UNCLOS argument in the international arbitrary showed a balancing strategy. It keeps the international order and secure the country’s blue economy.

Only “strong man” can lead the bandwagon and China, having been developing confident culture in the government since the fall of the Qing Dynasty, tend to combine it with hard fist in maintaining internal affairs. China was quite assertive in international relation. What demonstrated by Indonesia under Jokowi’s administration in 2020 showed a confident stance. As a leader of the ASEAN countries, at least in term of the population and area, Indonesia has to present itself as a role model. What Indonesia had presented demonstrating a balancing strategy, showing a dignity and determining that Indonesia has equal right with giant China in the international relation. This paper is focusing in China’s history to demonstrate the development of the process of acquiring the confidence culture. This article does not show the development of this culture in Indonesia since it is not within the coverage of this paper.

In interacting with other countries, spirit of international cooperation should be put forward with respect. The one-way approach historically applied in the past can not be implemented today when “international residents”, neighboring countries have the same right to maintain and develop their blue economy in their territory.

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