

# Friend or Foe? Explaining the Philippines' China Policy in the South China Sea

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The nature of the Philippines' foreign policy towards China in the South China Sea is puzzling. In the same year after being sworn into office as the President of the Republic of the Philippines on 30 June 2016, Duterte not only sparked international attention with his fervent rhetoric, but also confusion when he untangled his administration from the Aquino administration's geopolitical agenda (de Castro, 2019). Departing from his predecessor's more confrontational policy (de Castro, 2017),<sup>[1]</sup> he announced the Philippines' 'military and economic separation' from the United States at the Philippine-China Trade and Investment Forum (Duterte in Beijing, 2016), and has significantly downplayed its diplomatic win at the Permanent Court of Arbitration by describing the 2016 arbitral ruling on Beijing's claims in the South China Sea as a 'piece of trash paper with four corners' (Duterte to CCTV, 2016). Yet, tighter US-Philippine military relations, in the form of bilateral defense exercises, military aid and intelligence sharing targeted at bolstering maritime security against Chinese threats (de Castro, 2017), have seemed to 'contradict Duterte's Beijing-friendly foreign policy' (Heydarian 2019). Contradictions are also apparent in other areas apart from tighter US-Philippine military relations. While Foreign Secretary Cayetano and the military filed a diplomatic protest and complaint respectively against the harassment of Philippine Navy personnel by a Chinese chopper in the Second Thomas Shoal in June 2018, Duterte claimed to assume no knowledge of the incident so as to pander to the interests of the Chinese (Elemia, 2018; Esmaguel II, 2018). China's harassment of Filipino fishermen in Scarborough Shoal was similarly attended to in a divisive manner. While the Philippine military unit responsible for the Scarborough Shoal encouraged local fisherman to 'explore and maximise the maritime resources in their immediate waters' (Fonbuena, 2018), the same incident was heavily downplayed by Duterte and his spokesperson Harry Roque as a means to prove the fruits of Sino-Philippine friendship (Ranada, 2018b). A series of contradictory attitudes within the administration have since resulted in constantly inconsistent policies which are highly puzzling.

The tension within the Philippines' 'independent' foreign policy towards China thus forms the basis for enquiry in this dissertation (Bautista, 2016; Baviera, 2016; de Castro, 2019). This dissertation is hence interested in uncovering the reasons for the Duterte administration's dual track foreign policy in the South China Sea. Through addressing this question at issue, it seeks to shed on light on the administration's anti-China policy behaviour despite its pivot to a more China-friendly position. For clarity, a pro-China attitude could be encapsulated by Duterte's pragmatic pivot to China where maritime disputes are downplayed in favour of pursuing closer economic and political ties with China. It is also often one that squares up to new political realities in the South China Sea and seeks to reflect the new strategic status quo in practice (Drysdale et al., 2017). On the contrary, an anti-China policy would refer to behaviour that does not disregard maritime disputes to preserve the budding Sino-Philippine friendship. Beyond fostering closer relations with China, other means such as reliance on the joint US-Philippine military alliance or instruments of international law would instead be preferred to address the maritime disputes in the region (Drysdale et al., 2017).

The significance of this tension can be contextualised in the ongoing maritime dispute between China and the Philippines, where there exist overlapping territorial claims on the basis of the former's arguably invalid nine-dash line and the latter's archipelagic doctrine. Over the years, increased Chinese assertiveness in the form of offshore drilling, land reclamation and militarisation activities, and harassment of foreign fishing and oil exploration ships have violated Philippine sovereignty and intensified the Philippines' desire to maintain its rights over its territorial sea and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Chang, 2014). Moreover, coupled with subpar Philippine military power and lacklustre

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American commitment to the protection of the Asia-Pacific (Esguerra and Burgonio, 2014), the Philippines under Duterte has since attempted to navigate the region with fastidious care to prevent an armed conflict or a recurrent episode like that of the 1994 Mischief Reef and 2012 Scarborough Shoal incidents (Chang, 2014).

Accounting for the Duterte administration's two-track policy therefore matters for two main reasons. First, it provides some clarification as to who dictates Philippine foreign policy. This is especially important since Duterte has been widely assumed to take the helm when it comes to foreign policy decision making (Esmaguél II, 2016; Gregorio, 2019; Reganit, 2020). This belief has been legally established on the basis of the Philippine Constitution, which dictates that the president is the chief architect of Philippine foreign policy (Executive Order No. 292, 1987; *Senator Aquilino Pimental et al v Ermita*, 2005). The increasing personalization of Duterte as a populist leader and the comparisons of him with former dictator Ferdinand Marcos further reinforce this view (Arugay, 2018; Cook, 2019b; R. Heydarian, 2019c). Albeit the differences in the extent to which they have, amongst others, 'demobilised their traditional opponents via force' (Abao, 2018; Mendiola, 2019), they share similarities in their authoritarian ways of governance (Peel, 2016; Abao, 2018). A closer study of the tension within the Duterte administration's foreign policy can perhaps shed light on the degree of influence wielded by the president vis-à-vis other cabinet members.

Second, accounting for tensions within the Duterte administration's China policy effectively fills a scholarship gap that has been left by existing studies of Philippine foreign policy. As existing scholarship on the Philippines has yet to provide sufficient insight into divergent strands of policy within a single, not least Duterte's, administration, explicating foreign policy tensions within a single administration thus serves as a unique contribution to existing Philippine foreign policy studies. Current scholarship on Philippine foreign policy during the Duterte administration can be largely classified into two distinct groups. The first group has, more generally, provided explanations for changes in Philippine foreign policy across successive presidential administrations. Meanwhile, the second group has been characterized by debates regarding the type of strategy the Duterte administration has employed in dealing with a rising China.

Expanding on existing scholarship, scholars in the first group have explored reasons for shifts in Philippine foreign policy across the Aquino and Duterte administrations through various levels of analysis. In line with Waltz's three 'images' of international relations, as outlined in his seminal work, 'Man, the State and War' (1959), scholars in this group have accounted for changes in foreign policy through the lens of the individual, the state and the international system. Adopting a systemic approach, Chiang proposes that changes in Philippine foreign policy could be attributed to the presence of asymmetric power relations with the US and China (2017). Notwithstanding the significance of systemic shifts as a possible explanation for policy changes under the Duterte administration, Heydarian and Trinidad instead posit domestic factors as the primary agency and explanatory variable responsible for these changes. Heydarian proposes that the evolution of Philippine foreign policy remains a 'function of changes in both the domestic political calculations of the ruling elite factions' as well as changes in the balance of power in the regional security environment (2017, p.221). Trinidad echoes the opinion that domestic factors were imperative in strengthening the Philippines' strategic partnership with Japan (2017). In this case, shifts in power balances were convenient reasons used to explain the trajectories of the Philippines' evolving relationships. At the individual level, Tran has stressed the importance of the president's preferences in facilitating and hindering foreign policy decisions (2018). Similarly, de Castro argues that foreign policy shifts are an extension of different perceptions and 'reference points' held by president Duterte and then-president Aquino (2019, p.21). However, despite the significance of this analytical framework in highlighting the utility of the systemic, domestic and individual as key perspectives to explain different foreign policy paths, its arguments have not been sufficiently developed to account for different paths within a single presidential administration.

On the other hand, scholars in the second group have focused their analysis entirely on the Duterte administration and, through their analysis, have to some extent alluded to the foreign policy tensions within the administration. These scholars, through invoking concepts with different meanings such as hedging (Baviera, 2016; Ba, 2017), balancing (de Castro, 2016), accommodation (Cook, 2019b), burden-sharing (Manantan, 2019), and bandwagoning (Murphy, 2017), have acknowledged both the Philippines' reorientation towards China and its enduring alliance with and reliance on the US. However, their works have likewise yet to sufficiently consider the underlying reasons for the Philippines' polycephalous foreign policy.

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This dissertation will therefore apply role theory as a theoretical framework to explain the Duterte administration's dual track foreign policy towards China in the South China Sea. As this paper hypothesizes that this tension in Philippine foreign policy can be attributed to the contesting national role conceptions held by different agencies in the Duterte administration, it proposes to analyse the role conceptions of the President, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Philippine defence establishment as independent variables to highlight the presence of horizontal intra-role contestation between the president, bureaucratic and military establishments. This approach eschews the assumption that the Philippines behaves as a unitary actor with a consensus on its China policy in the South China Sea and is thus able to unpack foreign policy behaviour within its key decision-making agents (Cantir and Kaarbo, 2016).

To demonstrate how tensions within the Duterte administration could be attributed to horizontally contested national role conceptions, this dissertation will first seek to, through an analysis of primary and secondary materials, assign national role conceptions to Duterte and the Philippine bureaucratic and military establishments. It will subsequently connect these roles to foreign policy behavior to illustrate how these contested role conceptions have manifested into the resulting tensions within the Duterte administration.

The central argument will be developed over the next five sections. The second section introduces role theory and horizontal role contestation as a theoretical framework. The third section lays out the methodology that this dissertation has adopted, while the next two sections will apply the theoretical framework to empirical evidence. The fourth section focuses on identifying role conceptions of the president and bureaucratic and military establishments while the fifth section utilises a case study example to demonstrate how tensions within the Philippines' China foreign policy could be attributed to the differing role conceptions among the decision-making political elites. The concluding section will reflect on the dissertation's methodological and empirical approach and identify areas for improvement.

## Role Theory as a Theoretical Framework

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) theories have contributed significantly to our understanding of the various factors that influence foreign policy (Allison and Halperin, 1972; Hudson, 2007; Alden, 2017). FPA theories in International Relations have focused on investigating phenomena at the individual, state and systemic level, and have established the abilities of individuals and groups to identify, determine and execute policy (Ifantis et al., 2015, p.2).

However, while scholars have used approaches such as bureaucratic politics and realist and psychological theories to explain foreign policy (Smith, 1984; Simon, 1991; Ye, 2007), role theory's ability to focus on both agency and structural factors renders it an attractive and organisationally unique framework. This is unlike traditional FPA approaches that can only provide explanations from a single level of analysis (Thies, 2009, p.3). On top of decision-maker perceptions, role theory encapsulates the impact of material capabilities such as country size and economic performance as well as ideational factors like identity, culture and history (Breuning, 2011; Cantir and Kaarbo, 2016). Its ability to transcend beyond a single level of analysis hence suggests its value in bridging the gap between agency and structure in the agent-structure divide (Breuning, 2011). Through an analysis of Danish and Dutch decision-making over its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan respectively, role theory's utility is further reflected by Kaarbo and Cantir, where they argue that the use of role theory to understand foreign policy can only connect agents and structures if it takes domestic agents and internal political processes seriously (Kaarbo and Cantir, 2013).

Moreover, role theory is attractive as it provides new insight into small-state foreign policy making. As literature concerning small-state foreign policy making has often prioritised structural factors over the perceptions of small states, viewing agents of the state as the reference point for foreign policy making hence allows analyses to shake off the yoke of disparate relational factors and power projection abilities as main determinants of small-state foreign policy making (Chong, 2010; Womack, 2016; Maass, 2017). Since structural factors alone have not provided comprehensive explanations of foreign policy dynamics between small states and great powers, role theory can perhaps better explain small state behaviour from a different perspective, with more precision. As such, this remaining section will introduce role theory as a possible theoretical framework to explain the tensions within Philippine foreign policy. While role theory's early conception adopted structural approaches and conceived the state as an unitary actor, it has since delved into psychological approaches whilst recognising the presence of role

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contestation in the domestic political arena.

## *Early Role Theory: From Systemic to Symbolic Interactionism*

Role theory is not endemic to International Relations. Originating from sociology, social psychology and anthropology, role theory has since been adapted by International Relations scholars to prove that states, like individuals in society, perform certain roles when they interact with other state and non-state actors (Holsti, 1970; Walker, 1987; Breuning, 2011; Cantir and Kaarbo, 2016). The systematic reconceptualization of role theory into FPA was pioneered by Holsti, whose seminal work on national role conceptions provided a landmark study for subsequent generations of role theory literature. His work highlighted 'role' as a central concept, where states are argued to play certain roles, as guided by expectations for appropriate behaviour, on the international stage (1970, p.246). Similar to individuals, a state's conception and interpretation of its role is also heavily influenced by material and ideational factors such as its external environment, relative power, identity, perceptions and the value and attitudes of its decision makers (Holsti, 1970, p.243; Breuning, 2018). Apart from a singular role, Holsti's study has also identified the ability for states to play dual or even multiple roles in the international system, where the roles greatly extend beyond the dichotomy of conflict or cooperation (1970).

Though his observations on the multiple roles that states play did not drive early role theory research, his work nonetheless introduced several concepts which were central to the understanding and future development of role theory. His definition of national role conceptions is an apt starting point. He defines national role conceptions as:

The policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions, suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. (1970, p.246)

Building on his definition of national role conceptions, he has further identified seventeen major roles expressed by states on the international stage. These roles include, but are not limited to regional leader, active independent, anti-imperialist agent, faithful ally and independent (Holsti, 1970, p.260-270).<sup>[2]</sup>

Though not without criticisms, his definition of national role conceptions and role typology has nonetheless accentuated the interactive dimensions of role theory, where a state's ability to enact a 'role' is contextualised in relation to its interactions with another state. Harnisch adds clarity to this interactive dimension by defining state interactions through the *self* and the *other*, where the *self* parallels the state's role conceptions while the *other* reflects the expectations that other states have with respect to the state's foreign policy behaviour (Breuning, 2011; 2011). Harnisch further uses this point to differentiate 'roles' from 'identity' (2011). Since roles are enacted in relation to expectations of the *other*, states' roles are conceived based on identities and should not be used interchangeably despite being 'closely intertwined' (Harnisch, 2011, p.9). Similarly, Le Prestre identifies national roles as a conception of national identity, where roles carry more specific prescriptions for actions despite both being ideational factors that have bearings on state behaviour (1997, p.5).

Though Holsti's seminal work has facilitated the growth of role theory literature, his findings have also faced both methodological and analytical criticisms. Methodologically, work from earlier scholars focused on enhancing the original role typology. As the existing role typology was formulated exclusively for the period during the Cold War, Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot have proposed additional role conceptions such as 'global system collaborator' and 'global leader' to accommodate changes in the post-Cold War international system (Chafetz et al., 1996). Similarly, Wish exposes the weaknesses of Holsti's typology by providing an arguably more systematic way of characterising national role conceptions (1980). Her typology proposes thirteen different national role conceptions that are based on states' motivational orientation, status perceptions and issue or substantive problem area rather than the extent of states' international involvement (Wish, 1980).

Analytical criticisms have driven the majority of role theory scholarship. Scholars have criticised its preoccupation with providing explanations for the impact of structural factors on states' national role conceptions (Holsti, 1970; Walker, 1987). While both structural role theory and symbolic interactionism recognise the significance of human

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agencies, they differ in the extent to which it forms the centre of analysis (Breuning, 2018, p.2). According to Stryker and Statham, the former prioritises social structures as the main determinant in influencing state behaviour, where individuals are subsequently socialised into existing roles (1985). Meanwhile, the latter justifies the ability of individuals to define both their roles and social structures (1985).

The dominance of structural role theories over symbolic interactionism in role theory scholarship has resulted in arguably 'un-sociological' modes of analyses (Gaupp, 1983; Holsti, 1970). Symbolic interactionist approaches thus came to the forefront of role theory literature during the post-Cold War period where there was a renewed interest in actor-specific theory in FPA and International Relations (Kaarbo, 2003; Hudson, 2005). Likewise, the growth of rationality studies in FPA have also supported the development of symbolic interactionist approaches in role theory scholarship (Breuning, 2018). Relegating the importance of structural factors to a secondary position, the extent to which agents can affect structures, and, subsequently, a state's role conception, formed the core of first generation role theory analysis.

## *Role Theory's Second Generation: Beyond the Unitary Actor Analyses*

Beyond a shift in focus from structural to symbolic interactionist modes of analyses, second generation scholarship has developed to disaggregate the unitary actor assumption embedded in first generation analyses. The move to eschew a unitary actor assumption from role theory originated from Holsti's earlier observation that states could play multiple roles that were incompatible with one another (1970). Although early scholars have disregarded this incompatibility and have assumed that states simply expressed 'different orientations towards different sets of relationships', second generation scholarship has since built on Holsti's earlier observations to conceptualise conflict between multiple roles held within a state (Holsti, 1970, p.303; Walker, 1979). Brummer and Thies define the study of inter-state conflict to represent 'an actor occupying two or more roles simultaneously that have incompatible expectations' (2015, p.279).<sup>[3]</sup> In rightly identifying the lack of domestic consensus over a state's role conception, Cantir and Kaarbo's work have looked to concepts of horizontal and vertical role contestation to investigate the cohesiveness of role conceptions within a collective entity as an empirical question instead. Horizontal role contestation, which will be applied in the subsequent sections, explores role conceptions and contestation along the intra-elite nexus, while vertical role contestation explores the same process from an elite-masses perspective (Kaarbo and Cantir, 2012, 6). In this case, the concept of *self* has thus transformed to represent a range of agents, such as individual elites, bureaucratic agencies, political parties and public opinion, with different role constellations that are driven by personal and institutional motivations.

Horizontal role contestation has henceforth been applied by scholars to explain conflicting foreign policy. Brummer and Thies have utilised horizontal role contestation to argue that the foreign policy of post-war Germany was largely a result of national role contestation between the government and opposition, instead of bureaucratic and coalition politics (2015). Brummer and Thies have also analysed role contestation within main political parties, between different branches of government, and between the government and political opposition to account for Australia's foreign policy between 1945 and 1952 (2016a). Likewise, Breuning has examined tensions between Belgium's role as a trading state and its role as a developmental partner to explain its lacklustre commitment to development cooperation during the prime ministership of Jean-Luc Dehaene (2016). Beyond the West, scholars like Hirata have analysed horizontal role contestation in Asia, between the Liberal Democratic Party and Democratic Party of Japan, to make sense of the changes and continuities in Japanese security policy (2016). Though horizontal role contestation has hardly been used to explain intra-role conflict among Southeast Asian states, Huang's recent work examining Vietnam's China policy via vertical role contestation provides some headway into role theory's applicability in Southeast Asia (2020).

As intra-role conflict and subsequent incoherent policy behaviour, like that of the Philippines in the South China Sea, can be explained using horizontal role contestation; and that evidence reflecting disagreements among the Philippine political elites over foreign policy making are relatively accessible and transparent, this dissertation therefore believes that this theoretical concept can be similarly applied to the Philippines to account for the tensions within its foreign policy towards China. The next section will explain how tensions within the Philippine's China foreign policy can be demonstrated via horizontal role contestation as a theoretical framework.

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## Methodology

Utilising horizontal role contestation as a theoretical framework to explain the tensions within the Philippines' China policy in the South China Sea comprises of two stages. The first stage involves the identification of roles for selected foreign policy decision makers, while the second stage provides an illustration of the theoretical argument through linkages between the established roles and actual foreign policy. This section will further expand on how these two stages will be established.

### *Role Identification*

To explain horizontal role contestation among key Philippine foreign policy decision makers, it is imperative to first identify the relevant foreign policy agents. This dissertation has identified the President, the DFA and the Philippine defense establishment, where the Philippine Department of National Defense (DND) exercises executive supervision over the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), as key foreign policy agents. Notwithstanding scope constraints, this distinction takes into account the given political hierarchies but falls short of assuming that ministries and the military are simply implementors of the President's foreign policy. This distinction also recognises that major institutional actors can impose their preferred roles in political processes (Wehner and Thies, 2014) and provides this dissertation with the capacity to analyse alternative opinions in the event that foreign policy implementation corresponds to Presidential advice.

These agents are selected for a variety of reasons. Apart from the availability of data and feasibility of data collection, all four agents are often involved in the making and implementation of foreign policy. The President is recognised as the 'sole organ and authority in external relations and is the chief architect of foreign policy' (Executive Order No. 292, 1987; *Senator Aquilino Pimental et al v Ermita*, 2005). This de facto position has been upheld by the Supreme Court in rulings concerning the chief executive's power to determine foreign relations and policy in relation to other state actors (*Senator Aquilino Pimental et al v Ermita*, 2005). The relevance of the DFA stems from its mandate to 'preserve and enhance national security, promote and attain economic security and protect the rights and promote the welfare and interest of Filipinos overseas' (Republic Act No. 7157, 1991). Meanwhile, the DND's legitimacy lies in its defense against 'external and internal threats to territorial integrity and sovereignty, so as to create a secure and stable environment conducive to national development' (Philippine Department of National Defense, 2019). Though the influence of the AFP has waned as it is expected to remain insulated from partisan politics since the overthrowing of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 (Baviera, 2012), its historical and enduring military relations with the US renders it an important foreign policy actor in this context.

While the dissertation does not seek to deny the significance of the Philippine legislative and judicial branches in constraining the decision making autonomy of the President and the executive body, both agencies have been omitted as it may be argued the legislative and judicial branches have increasingly little effective resistance against the executive body (Santos, 2019). Even though the Philippine Congress, which consists of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, is directly involved in foreign policy, it has been largely dominated by supporters of Duterte after the mid-term elections in 2016 and 2019. In fact, PDP-Leban and Kilusang Pagbabago representatives have won twenty seats out of the twenty-four-member Senate as well as 271 out of 300-odd seats in the lower house (Cabacungan, 2016).<sup>[4]</sup> Though the Congress has indeed been critical of and involved in making major foreign policy decisions, as exemplified by the Senate vote leading to the closure of US military facilities in 1991, and the Senate ratification of the Philippines-US Visiting Forces Agreement in 1999, it arguably remains a 'rare institution to have shown effective resistance against the president' (Santos, 2019). Duterte's liberty in shaping the composition of the Supreme Court has also consequently resulted in the lack of judicial independence, where the judiciary has often opted for restraint on significant cases – the Duterte administration's withdrawal from the International Criminal Court and its handling of the territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea are only but a couple of examples (Ibarra, 2019).

The role of public opinion is omitted because the general public is arguably relatively indifferent to international developments except for when 'the interests of certain social groups are directly involved' (Baviera, 2012, p.11). This is the case as the general public is, as Baviera argues, often not perceived to be active or knowledgeable in foreign

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policy concerns (2012). Although there are indeed certain organised networks, non-governmental organisations and other relevant stakeholders that are both vocal and knowledgeable about Philippine foreign policy in the South China Sea, their impact on foreign policy will perhaps be significantly more inconsequential when compared to other foreign policy decision makers such as the President, DFA, DND and AFP.

The identification of role conceptions for the selected foreign policy actors forms the core of role theory. However, as there is no unified database on keywords that could help identify role typologies and national role conceptions, roles can only be identified through induction based on close reading of source material (Cantir and Kaarbo, 2016). Often, scholars have analysed oral sources, parliamentary debates and utilised machine-coded content analysis or resorted to interviews and surveys to identify role conceptions (Cantir and Kaarbo, 2016).

This dissertation, although methodologically limited in its ability to code or survey, like other approaches, seeks to identify national role conceptions via induction and be explicit about the content examined and how the roles are identified. The time frame of the materials surveyed ranged from 2016, since Duterte's presidency, to 2019 and have primarily been in English and occasionally mixed with Tagalog and Bisaya. The materials surveyed includes secondary research as well as primary sources such as public statements, policy documents, transcripts and speeches. To aid the induction process, Holsti's original role typology will be utilised as a reference to assign national role conceptions. In the event that references to particular roles are not entirely consistent with its academic definitions, role conceptions can still be obtained through the interpretation of implied roles (Brummer and Cameron G., 2016, p.44).

More than 40 sources were retrieved from online archives of the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO), Radio Television Malacañang (RTVM) and the Official Gazette. The sources examined include speech transcripts from Duterte's Inaugural Address, State of the Nation Address (SONA) from 2016 to 2019, official statements following his official visits to Vietnam and Russia and media interviews held during various formal and informal events. The sources were selected for their relevance to foreign policy, the South China Sea or inter-state relations with China or the US. Other materials reviewed include the Philippines' National Security Policy (2017-2022) document and the Philippine Constitution.

A similar approach is adopted to determine the role conceptions of the DFA, DND and AFP despite publicly available information being generally less accessible. Although this dissertation is cognisant of the possible competing role conceptions within single bureaucracies, given feasibility considerations, role conceptions will instead be inferred based on representatives of each agency. The representatives include the Secretary of National Defense, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs and military leaders from the Philippine Army, Navy and Air Force, wherever applicable. The materials surveyed include official news articles, press releases and documents retrieved from government agency websites. Remarks and quotes from interviews were also retrieved from news sources such as the Philippine News Agency (PNA).

## *Link to Foreign Policy*

Role conceptions of the identified agents will be mapped to actual policy behaviour to explain the tensions within the Philippine's China policy in the South China Sea. Though scholars have achieved this through employing statistics, process tracing and case study methods have largely dominated this area of research. Within case studies, the principle of causality is applied to examine the causal mechanisms through which horizontal role contestation has affected policy behaviour. This stage should reveal the tensions which would have been difficult to observe without disaggregating the unitary state structure.

The 2019 Reed Bank Incident is used as a case study to highlight the contrasting actions taken by Duterte, the DFA, DND and the AFP. Apart from general observations suggesting role contestation, this episode, which focuses on Philippine fishing rights in the region, represents the latest and arguably the most serious incident that has affected Chinese-Philippines rapprochement under the Duterte administration. This would thus be a likely avenue where role contestation would occur.

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## Roles in the Duterte Administration

This section identifies the role conceptions of the identified foreign policy actors based on Holsti's classic typology of national role conceptions (1970, p. 260). Four competing role conceptions can be identified over the course of the timeframe examined: active independent, anti-imperialist agent, independent and faithful ally.

### *Active Independent and Anti-Imperialist Agent: Duterte*

According to Holsti, the active independent role goes beyond the mere pursuit of an 'independent' foreign policy (1970, p. 262). Instead, it emphasizes 'at once independence, self-determination, possible mediation functions, and active programs to extend diplomatic and commercial relations to diverse areas of the world' (Holsti, 1970, p.262). In the Philippines, Duterte's goal was to establish the country as an independent regional and international actor that has the ability to make decisions based on its national interests rather than act based on the interests of other states (Duterte, 2017; 2018; 2019). Given the rise of China, this would also mean independence from United States foreign policy and the flexibility to enhance diplomatic and economic relations with China. Moreover, the 'active' component of the role entails the expansion of relations with other states within and beyond Southeast Asia. The active independent role is largely supported by President Duterte.

This role is clearly reflected in state documents as well as in Duterte's SONAs from 2017 and 2018. In his 2017 SONA, Duterte expressed that the Philippines has:

Embarked on various initiatives to advance [its] national interest in the global community. [It] pursue[s] good relations with all nations anchored on an independent — on an independent foreign policy — and the basic tenets of sovereign equality, mutual respect and non-interference. As an independent nation, [it] will uphold and promote [its] national interests in the international community. [It] will strengthen and seek partnership with those who share [its] values. (2017)

In the same speech, he has also expressed his interest to cultivate 'warmer relations with China through bilateral dialogues and other mechanisms, leading to the easing of tensions between the two countries and [an] improved negotiating environment on the West Philippine Sea' (2017). His 2018 SONA similarly reflects his desire to pursue an active and independent foreign policy:

On international relations, we shall continue to assert and pursue an independent foreign policy. Our long-term national development and national security goals come first. We shall continue to reach out to all nations regardless of their prevailing political persuasions or proximity to or distance from our shores so long as these nations wish us well. (2018)

While this sentiment has not been reflected to a similar extent in his 2019 SONA, official statements following his official visits to India and the Russian Federation in October 2019 have been fairly consistent with speeches from earlier years:

Just as India is deepening its presence in our region through the 'Act East Policy', the Philippines is also expanding the boundaries of its diplomacy in pursuit of a truly independent foreign policy, as mandated by our Constitution. We are diversifying partnerships – rebalancing old ones and strengthening those that have traditionally been on the margins of our diplomacy. (2019b)

This visit generated greater momentum for Philippine-Russia relations. [This] is a key element of our thrust to rebalance Philippine foreign policy towards independence, balance, and diplomatic agility. The gains we have made in this visit bring us a step closer to our objective of a stable, comfortable, and secure life for all Filipinos. That is my vision for and bounden duty to the nation and I will do everything to achieve that. (2019a)

The National Security Policy (NSP) 2017-2022, which contains the statement of principles that establishes the strategic policy goals and objectives of the Duterte administration, has also emphasized the importance of an



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independent foreign policy anchored on international law so as to achieve national security in the context of an expansive global community (NSP, 2017). The National Security Strategy (NSS) 2018 further complements the NSP 2017-2022, where Duterte has expressed his desire to bolster the Philippines' position 'in the community of nations by strengthening diplomatic relations with [its] traditional allies, engaging non-traditional partners and pursuing an independent foreign policy that gives primacy to [its] national interest' (NSS, 2018). Further evidence highlighting Duterte's active independent role is also evident through his statement after his 2016 visit to Vietnam, his speech during his 2016 meeting with the Filipino community and his media interview following the oath taking ceremony of newly appointed government officials in 2019 (2016a, 2016b, 2019c).

It is clear that beyond the emphasis of a rebalancing towards an independent foreign policy, Duterte's active independent role is showcased via his desire to expand and enhance the Philippines' engagements with other countries. Under Duterte, the Philippines has expanded its political and economic relations with notably China, Russia and Japan, where the Philippine-Japan strategic partnership has reached its 'golden age' in recent years (Trinidad, 2017; Heydarian, 2019). The active choice to broaden its non-traditional engagements with other states provides Duterte with more flexibility when engaging with its traditional American ally and therefore enables Duterte to undertake policies which he believes are most sensible for the Philippines on the international stage.

Concomitant with the active independent role, Duterte also, to some extent, exemplifies that of an anti-imperialist agent. Holsti describes an anti-imperialist agent as one who perceives imperialism as a serious threat (1970, 264). Though his work largely referred to communist states viewing themselves as agents of struggle against American imperialism during the Cold War, his analysis does not limit itself to communist states or the Cold War (1970, 264). In the case of Duterte, although the Philippines no longer remains an American colony since 1946, he arguably remains uncomfortable with the vestiges of American colonialism.

This role was perhaps most strongly expressed in the earlier years of Duterte's presidential term. While directed more to domestic policy than foreign policy, his 2016 SONA alluded to his anti-imperialist sentiments with regard to the exploitation of Mindanao:

[I]t's an imperialism thing. There's a historical injustice committed against the Moro people. We have to correct it. But it is well possible now . . . lyong nakuha ng mga Amerikano [you get American], Español [Spanish], pati yung mga Pilipino [as well as Filipino], mga kapitalista [capitalists], those who exploited Mindanao with that thing sloganeering go to Mindanao because it is a land of promise. (2016a)

His anti-imperialist sentiment is also evident in his 2017 SONA, where he made reference to the American seizure of the Balangiga Church bells. He emphasised that the bells represented Philippine national heritage and the heroism of those who resisted the American colonisers and demanded for the bells to be rightfully returned to the Filipinos (2017). His speech commemorating National Heroes' Day in 2016 is also testament to his discomfort with the revival of the Philippines' imperial past:

I do not say "Malacañan," I just say, "The People's Palace." Sometimes, they call it "Malacañan." The word "Malacañan" is one of the vestiges of imperialism. I'm not comfortable with it, actually and they should understand when I say I do not ever mention "Malacañan," I just say it's the "People's Palace." It is the People's Palace, actually. (2016b)

Stronger references to US imperialism can be found in examples such as his Departure Speech at Davao International Airport in 2016, where he criticises Filipino columnists for their loyalty to the US and emphasises his accountability to the Filipino people:

You know, the Philippines is not a vassal state. We have long ceased to be a colony of the United States. . . . [the columnists] look upon Obama and the United States as if we are the lap dogs of this country. I do not respond to anybody but to the people of the Republic of the Philippines. . . . I am not beholden to anybody. . . . I am a President of a sovereign state, and we have long ceased to be a colony. I do not have any master, except the Filipino people, nobody but nobody. (2016a)

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Analysing Duterte's keynote speeches would therefore reveal his desire to dissociate the Philippines from its colonial past so that it could act independently to pursue its best interests. However, while Duterte has instigated threats and anti-US rhetoric (which he has often dismissed as 'jokes') alongside support for changes to Philippine foreign policy (Ranada, 2018a), it would be inaccurate to claim that Duterte is against the US or the West. It is important to note that while he remains inconsistent with his hyperbole and exaggeration, he has nonetheless acknowledged the Philippines' deep ties with the US and clarified his support for American liberalism as the 'best pathway to a just and fair society' (2019c).

## *Faithful Allies: Philippine Armed Forces*

The faithful ally role conception involves the entering of alliance commitments whereby a more powerful state 'makes a specific commitment to support the policies' and provide external security guarantees to a less powerful state (Holsti 1970, p.267). Apart from the formation of alliance relationships, Holsti also stresses the importance of reciprocity, which requires the less powerful state to be supportive of the guarantor state (1970, p.267). In the Philippines, the AFP would most likely play the role of a faithful ally. A sharp contrast between role conceptions held by Duterte and the AFP is also notable at this stage. While Duterte has been fairly critical and sought to detach itself from its security ally, the US-Philippines alliance was often positively emphasised by AFP representatives.

The resilience of the US-Philippine alliance, until 2019, was characterised by the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), the 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). The core of the alliance is Article V of the MDT, which dictates that both nations would support each other if either the Philippines or the US are attacked by an external party (MDT, 1951). The arrangements have arguably led to a 'substantial degree of tactical synchronisation and interoperability' between the AFP and its American counterparts, which has long been embedded in the Philippine defense architecture (Tran, 2018). This relationship was even confirmed by Duterte himself, who during a media interview in Cagayan de Oro City, admitted 'pro-American talaga ang mga sundalo natin [our soldiers are pro-American], that I cannot deny' (Ranada, 2017). As such, the Americanised AFP remains close to its traditional security ally despite adjustments to the military alliance and recent attempts to enhance its relations with other non-traditional allies.

Though research findings seem to suggest that the AFP does not often overtly express its opinions of the US, AFP representatives have managed to, through interviews, express their preference for the military alliance. US-Philippine military dynamics were revealed by Vice Admiral Alexander Lopez, who acknowledged US assistance and its role in 'being a big brother' in light of the Philippines' 'less capable armed forces in the region' (Orendain, 2016). Lieutenant-General Edgar R. Fallorina also expressed his belief that the US 'will always be at the service of [it's] aspiration to build a vibrant, peaceful and progressive Filipino nation' during the C-130T aircraft acceptance ceremony at Colonel Jesus Villamor Air Base (Philippine Air Force, 2018).

Brigadier-General Restituto Padilla's statement after Duterte's call for the withdrawal of US special forces in South Philippines is another example of how such views are often illuminated after a President-initiated alternation to bilateral military relations. He expressed that 'the recent pronouncement will affect only a token number of American servicemen who are confined mainly in Zamboanga City . . . [and] assure[d] our people and allies that US-Philippine defence relations remain rock solid' (The Straits Times, 2016). Former AFP Chief Eduardo Oban Jr. has similarly conveyed his preference for US-Philippine military exchanges following Duterte's decision to terminate Balikatan 2017:

Perhaps the President may reconsider to allow the holding of non-traditional exercises like humanitarian assistance and disaster response, counter-terrorism, and other transnational crimes like drug trafficking . . . , it is important to proceed with these exercises even if war games such as joint patrols and live fire exercises are discontinued . . . . Developing the same interoperability with a new ally will take time. (Fonbuena, 2016)

Commentaries on joint exercises further reveals their shared spirit of unity and the AFP's support for the US in its diplomatic and military objectives. Brigadier-General Edgard Arevalo saw the Balikatan exercises as a fitting tribute to 'Filipino and American soldier-patriots as they fought side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder, against seemingly

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insurmountable odds' in World War II (Nepomuceno, 2019b). He has further acknowledged that the 'friendship and fight continues alongside one another' even in the face of contemporary challenges (2019). AFP Chief-of-Staff General Benjamin Madrigal Jr. likewise highlights the camaraderie fostered by the 'enduring defense partnership', where 'troops train[ing] together and hurd[ling] developed scenarios' have 'relieve[d] the times when Filipinos and American soldiers fought side by side in defense of peace, freedom and democracy' (Nepomuceno, 2019c). He has also stressed his desire for both militaries to 'shoulder the load together' to amplify the alliance and enhance its interoperability in order to combat security threats (Nepomuceno, 2019a). Arevalo and Madrigal's views were also consistent with that of AFP Chief-of-Staff General Carlito Galvez (Nepomuceno, 2018d, 2018e), Lieutenant-General Emanuel Salamat (Nepomuceno, 2018a), and Vice-Commander Major-General Reynaldo M. Aquino (Philippine Army, 2019) who deem the US-Philippine partnership as an exceptional opportunity for both parties.

## *Independents: Department of National Defense and Foreign Affairs*

An independent role conception is deduced through statements affirming commitment to making policy decisions according to the state's own interests rather than for the objectives of other states (Holsti 1970, p.268). Unlike the active independent role that requires actors to actively expand relations with other states, independents often stress the element of self-determination (Holsti, 1970, p.268). The DND and the DFA arguably embody the independent role conception. The DND and DFA's roles are largely deduced from the views of National Defense Secretary and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs respectively.<sup>[5]</sup> Though both departments have individual bureaucratic interests, both are similar in that that, unlike Duterte, they respect time-honoured protocols and are more deliberate and measured in their policies (Gloria, 2017).

Analysing sources from the DND and DFA suggests, to an extent, some alignment with Duterte's independent foreign policy (Lorenzana, 2016; Nepomuceno, 2018c). The DND's desire to maintain an independent foreign policy is exemplified by Lorenzana's critical review of the MDT, where he suggested to either 'maintain [the MDT], strengthen it, or scrap it' (Amador, 2019; Cook, 2019a). His comment during a press briefing at Malacañang Palace further encapsulates his desire to eschew US-led conflict in the South China Sea:

It is being involved in a war that we do not seek and do not want. The Philippines is not in a conflict with anyone and will not be at war with anyone in the future. But the United States, with the increased and frequent passage of its naval vessels in the West Philippine Sea, is more likely to be involved in a shooting war. In such a case and on the basis of the MDT, the Philippines will be automatically involved. (Santos, 2018)

Similarly, The DFA's commitment to an independent foreign policy has been emphasised by foreign affairs secretaries throughout the years. Locsin reinterprets Philippine foreign policy as being 'friends to friends, enemy to enemies, and a worse enemy to false friends' (2019), and is one that involves 'getting off your knees, on your feet to stand up for [one's] country' rather than 'switch the master [it is] kneeling before' (2018). Locsin's independent approach can also be deduced from his welcome remarks at the Global Conference of Heads of Posts:

All our presidents have wanted an independent foreign policy; some waited for what could not happen given the representative democracy we adopted at our birth and in successive rebirths. . . it remains a constant of Philippine politics that the vast majority of its people across all generations are intensely pro-American. . . . Our national interest can never be the same interest as that of a foreign power. And I've always been wary of pursuing projects for mutual benefit between weak countries and big powers. The terms of endearment may seem fair but the nature of the relationship is ultimately one-sided and detrimental to the weaker party. Let them get close enough to caress you and they're too close for comfort because they can as easily strangle you. (2019a)

However, evidence does reveal the DND and DFA's moderate position on Philippine foreign policy. While the DND recognises that its most advantageous course was to 'always be prepared to act alone' despite the maintenance of shared interests with the US against common threats (Lorenzana, 2016; Nepomuceno, 2018c), it nonetheless recognises the value of the longstanding relations between both countries (Gutierrez, 2017; Nepomuceno, 2018f, 2019d). In fact, Lorenzana has acknowledged that both countries will 'continue to stand together as friends, as partners and as allies' in the face of 'many adversities through the years of [their] long, close friendship and security

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alliance (Nepomuceno, 2018b; U.S. Embassy in the Philippines, 2019).

The DFA has also placed emphasis on the US-Philippine friendship in a similar measure (2017, 2019, 2019). Locsin has described the Philippines as the US's 'true friend in challenging times' and expressed that both countries share 'one true friendship' and are viewed 'as images of one another' as both 'like freedom and hate subservience to other countries' (2019; Vibar, 2019). Cayetano has further justified Philippine independence as a move that could prop the Philippines up as a strong ally so that it could eventually be 'of more use to the [US] and the American people' (2017). He has also compared US-Philippine relations to a parent-child relationship, suggesting that its existing 'love' and 'respect' for the US should not be seen as mutually exclusive, despite its pursuit of its own interests (2017). As the DND and DFA have adopted more measured approaches, both agencies could therefore be argued to embody independent role conceptions.

These different roles hence indicate some contrast between that of the President, the AFP, DND and DFA. Duterte's interpretation of 'active independence' and 'anti-imperialism', which underscores a defiance against the US and its imperialist baggage, seems to project a pro-China slant, rather than a neutral and principled stance. On the other hand, the AFP appears to be the most anti-China, while the 'independence' of the DND and DFA presents a more nuanced, reconciliatory and neutral middle ground. These role conceptions will subsequently be studied in the context of the 2019 Reed Bank Incident to demonstrate that horizontal role contestation can account for the tensions within the Philippine's China policy in the South China Sea.

## Tensions in Foreign Policy: 2019 Reed Bank Incident

This section provides an illustration of the theoretical argument by mapping the identified role conceptions to Philippine responses during the 2019 Reed Bank incident. Although the incident was heavily downplayed by Duterte and eventually did not escalate into a military confrontation or trigger the US-Philippine security alliance, horizontal role contestation was arguably present in the debate leading up to its resolution.

The Reed Bank incident occurred from 9 to 22 June as a result of a collision between an anchored Filipino fishing boat, the *F/B Gem-Ver*, and a suspected Chinese militia vessel, the *Yuemaobinyu 42212*. The accident took place in Reed Bank within the Philippines' EEZ and China's contested nine-dash line in the South China Sea. The Philippine vessel that sank left its 22 crew members abandoned and subsequently rescued by a Vietnamese fishing vessel. In the handling of the crisis, tensions within the Duterte administration surfaced across two main areas, where parties involved were unable to reach a consensus on, firstly, the nature of the incident and, secondly, the Philippines' position on the joint investigation proposed by China.

The nature of the incident was disputed by the Duterte, the DFA and the Philippine defense establishment. While the latter two saw the incident as a deliberate act, Duterte sought to trivialise the allision. Shortly after the incident occurred, Duterte immediately laid low to avoid a diplomatic spat with Beijing (Heydarian, 2019a). Like China, who assured that it was counterproductive to make political interpretations out of the 'accidental collision' which would affect the China-Philippines friendship (Chinese Embassy Manila, 2019), he likened the 'little maritime accident' to a road crash that should not be interpreted as 'a confrontation of armed men and machine or ships' (Heydarian, 2019a). He further denounced the incident's impact on Philippine sovereignty and China-Philippine bilateral relations, continued to allow the Chinese to fish in the Philippines' EEZ and insisted that the Philippine Navy not start a war with China over the incident (2019b; Heydarian, 2019a).

On the other hand, Lorenzana was the first to denounce the *Yuemaobinyu 42212* for 'abandoning the 22 Filipino crewmen to the mercy of the elements' (Maitem, 2019). Locsin took his cue from Lorenzana and filed a diplomatic protest over the incident to investigate if the collision was a mere allision or a case of ramming (Esmaguel II, 2019), and criticised China for its lack of 'moral and possibly legal' imperatives and violation of Article 33 of the UNCLOS (Rocamora, 2019a). Philippine Navy Chief Robert Empedrad similarly insisted that 'the ship was rammed' and disputed the incident as a 'normal maritime incident' given that the *F/B Gem-Ver* was stationary when the collision occurred (Maitem, 2019). Locsin has also refuted Malacañang's statement that suggested an acceptance of China's apology, arguing that presidential spokesperson Panelo merely 'expressed satisfaction with the Chinese apology and

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the offer of compensation and nothing more' (Pazzibugan, 2019).

The Philippines' position on China's joint investigation proposition reveals similar dynamics between Duterte and his administration. While Duterte was consistent in his support for China and as such welcomed China's offer to conduct a joint investigation that could satisfactorily conclude the episode (Mendez, 2019; Gonzalez, 2019), Locsin insisted on separate investigations on the basis that a joint investigation would intrude into the sovereignty of both countries (2019d). Even though the investigation by the Philippine Coast Guard and Maritime Industry Authority have violated the UNCLOS and the SOLAS within the Philippines' EEZ (Rocamora, 2019a), Duterte has yet to respond in an objective manner that could potentially disadvantage Sino-Philippine relations.

Different national role conceptions held by Duterte and his administration can be used to explain the contradicting policy choices in the Reed Bank. Duterte's active independent role conception played out clearly from his sustained pursuit of a supposedly biased 'independent foreign policy' that steered the Philippines away from the American orbit. He has also remained fairly silent while standing in favour of China in order to preserve the budding China-Philippine friendship, as he believes this could help deescalate situation in the South China Sea. To a lesser extent, Duterte's anti-imperialist role was indirectly demonstrated by his unpopular decision to eschew the invocation of the MDT – a move which was widely supported by oppositionists, independent senators and even his allies who favoured a tougher Philippine position in the contested waters (Heydarian, 2019a).

In contrast, the DFA and DND were strong advocates of an independent approach that upheld the Philippines' interests. Both agencies justified their positions through a strong, neutral and principled stance based on principles of international maritime law. Apart from contesting Chinese fishing rights in the Philippine EEZ, Locsin and Lorenzana condemned China on its failure to render assistance to distressed mariners and to protect life at sea (Rocamora, 2019b). The independent role conception is further accentuated by Locsin's decision to conduct investigations independently, via investigations by the joint Philippine Coast Guard-Maritime Industry and the Maritime Safety Committee (2019). Both departments have also restrained from supporting US military intervention despite US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo and US Ambassador to the Philippines, Kim Sung, overtly floating the MDT as a viable solution (Ramos, 2019).

Even though the AFP's faithful ally role was not apparent during the debate, its role is perhaps heavily featured after the incident took place. As the collision reinforced the threat of Chinese militarisation and provided the Philippines with evidence of China's expansionism in contested waters, the crisis, to some extent, heightened the AFP's push for closer cooperation with the US against China (Heydarian, 2019d). This is evident from Lieutenant-General Macairog Alberto and the US Army Pacific Command's decision to expand Exercise Salaknib in preparation for 'bigger joint exercises with the presence of more American troops' to address large-scale conflicts under the provisions of the MDT (Mangosing, 2019). The defence establishment has also welcomed Washington's growing strategic clarity in the region. Apart from more clarity surrounding the US's alliance commitments in 'the Pacific', revised MDT guidelines have also enhanced the alliance's ability to respond to 'grey zone' aggression from Chinese militia forces (Lorenzana, 2019), thus enabling both countries to introduce new operational guidelines that can specifically target emerging threats in the South China Sea.

The Reed Bank incident has therefore demonstrated the impact of horizontal role contestation on the Philippines' China policy in the South China Sea. In dealing with the nature of the incident and the Philippines' position on China's joint investigation proposal, the differing roles held by Duterte and his administration have resulted in contradictory pro-China and anti-China policies that cannot be explained via a single role conception. Given the contrasting roles within the administration, the Philippines' eventual adoption of an anti or pro-China policy in response to developments in the South China Sea would perhaps then rest on the ability of the administration to temper Duterte's pro-China tendencies. In the event where multiple roles dominate, horizontal role contestation within the Duterte administration could thus possibly provide some explanation for the consistent inconsistencies towards China in the South China Sea.

## Conclusion

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In using horizontal role contestation as a theoretical framework, this dissertation has attempted to use role theory to account for the Duterte Administration's polycephalous pro and anti-China foreign policies in the South China Sea. Using the 2019 Reed Bank incident as a case study to illustrate the theoretical argument, contrasting roles held by Duterte, the DFA and the Philippine defense establishment have alluded to inconsistencies within the administration, which this dissertation argues to be a microcosm of Philippine foreign policy towards China in the South China Sea.

Through an analysis of the role conceptions held by Duterte, the DFA, DND and AFP, the Philippines' pro-China attitudes could largely be attributed to Duterte's 'active independence' from the long-standing US-Philippine bilateral relations. Though relevant, 'anti-imperialism' played an ancillary role that sought to reinforce Duterte's anti-US and conversely, pro-China attitudes. Meanwhile, the 'independent' roles of the DFA and DND have highlighted that sentiments towards China and the US are non-binary. More importantly, the 'independence' of both departments is key in the recalibration of Philippine foreign policy based on their perceived national interests and is as such, likely responsible for suppressing unwarranted anti-US or pro-China sentiments during policy formulation. In the area of military cooperation, the loyalty of the AFP towards the US could perhaps account for the solid and ever-deepening ties despite changes to their terms of collaboration.

While some insight could be gained from the application of role theory and horizontal role contestation, this dissertation is clearly aware of its methodological and analytical shortcomings. Methodologically, its inability to conduct proper content analysis has limited its ability to accurately infer role conceptions of Duterte and his administration. While it has sought to compensate for this by expanding its data collection process, the quality of results would be compromised nonetheless. Moreover, the inability to determine role conceptions through code has also resulted in heavy reliance on Holsti's original role typology, which despite being a good starting point, has been subjected to refinements and criticisms over the course of role theory scholarship. Given research constraints, the lack of focus on the Philippine legislative and judicial branches as well as public opinion would also suggest that more sophisticated analyses can be achieved if both horizontal and vertical role contestation frameworks are applied more rigorously.

Research constraints have also resulted in analytical inadequacies. By conveniently assuming homogeneity across departments and within departments, the dissertation has overlooked the nuances of the DFA, DND and AFP. As there were multiple foreign affairs secretaries and military leaders, each with their own distinct interests, from 2016 to 2019, a deeper analysis of each individual is required in order to generate more precise role conceptions. Moreover, since defense and foreign affairs representatives may have had former links to military, the effect of dual role conceptions by an individual on a department's role remains unexplored.

Although this dissertation is certainly not the first to utilise International Relations concepts to explain the Duterte administration's China policy in the South China Sea, it ultimately seeks to contribute to the subject by deconstructing the Philippines from within. Given the Philippines' recent decision to terminate the VFA in February 2020, more definitely needs to be done in order to better determine if the Philippines is indeed a friend or foe to China.

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## Notes

[1] The Aquino administration is often interpreted by scholars as one that actively seeks to challenge China's expansionism in the South China Sea. Examples commonly cited include the tightening of US-Philippine military relations via the signing of the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, and its prosecution of China in the

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Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016.

[2] Holsti's complete 17-role typology: Regional-subsystem collaborator, independent, liberator-supporter, faithful ally, mediator-integrator, internal development, developer, anti-imperialist agent, active independent, defender of the faith, bastion of the revolution, liberator, regional protector, isolate, regional leader, bridge, protectee and other.

[3] This should not be confused with intra-role conflict, which is defined by Brummer and Thies in the same article as 'incompatible expectations held either by the actor or others regarding a single role.

[4] Kilusang Pagbabago refers to the multi-party umbrella coalition headed by PDP-Leban and formed by supporters of Duterte and the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Philippines.

[5] The DND is represented by Defense Secretary Delfin N. Lorenzana. There has also been four different Foreign Secretary appointments since Duterte's inauguration: Perfecto Yasay Jr. as an ad interim, Undersecretary Enrique Manalo as acting secretary, Alan Peter Cayetano and incumbent Teodoro Locsin Jr.

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