

How Does Language and Culture Form One Unique National Identity? A Case Study of Renaming the South China Sea to North Natuna Sea in Indonesia's Foreign Policy Since 2016

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the use of language and historical legacy in forming one national identity, which is thus used as a political stand of foreign policy. The primary analysis of this article uses the concept of "imagined communities," which distinguishes one's perception of themselves toward others. The methodology of "nationalizing the past" was adopted to amplify a more substantial justification toward what has been believed to be one's belonging. The shift in Indonesia's foreign policy toward the South China Sea disputes, reflected in renaming the northern side of Indonesia's Natuna Islands as the North Natuna Sea, was selected as a case study. This article argues that language serves not only as a means to define national identity but also as a vital tool in safeguarding the national assets inherited across generations that are an integral part of their identity.

Keywords: *language, imagined communities, South China Sea, territorial conflict, Indonesia, foreign policy, North Natuna Sea*

Artikel ini membahas penggunaan bahasa dan warisan sejarah dalam membentuk sebuah identitas nasional yang kemudian digunakan sebagai sikap politik terhadap kebijakan luar negeri. Analisis utama artikel ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan konsep 'komunitas yang dibayangkan' (imagined communities), yang membedakan persepsi sebuah kelompok atas dirinya terhadap yang lain. Metodologi 'menasionalisasi masa lalu' (nationalising the past) lantas digunakan untuk memperkuat pembenaran terhadap apa yang diyakini sebagai milik sebuah negara. Pergeseran kebijakan luar negeri Indonesia terhadap sengketa Laut Tiongkok Selatan dengan menamai sisi utara Kepulauan Natuna sebagai Laut Natuna Utara diambil sebagai studi kasus. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa bahasa tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai cara untuk mendefinisikan identitas nasional, tetapi juga sebagai alat penting untuk mempertahankan aset-aset nasional yang diturunkan dari generasi ke generasi sebagai bagian penting dari identitas.

Kata-kata kunci: *bahasa, imagined communities, Laut Tiongkok Selatan, konflik teritorial, Indonesia, kebijakan luar negeri, Laut Natuna Utara*

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The background idea that underlies this study is twofold. Firstly, the majority of the works on nationalism, particularly those utilizing the notion of “imagined community” conceptualized by Anderson (2006), link the concept of nationalism or sub-nationalism with its impact on war and conflict. Meanwhile, little has been done to uncover the generality of the role language and culture play in forming national identity (Anderson 2020). Secondly, the discussion of territorial disputes in the study of International Relations, specifically disputes in Southeast Asia, has predominantly discussed the issue in the context of high politics, mainly politics and security, and low politics, such as economics consideration. Meanwhile, the interconnection between culture and national identity has not received proportionate attention.

This study explains the relationship between culture, particularly language, and national identity through a case study of the use of the term “North Natuna Sea” instead of the “South China Sea” to emphasize Indonesia’s northernmost boundary. Indonesia is known as a mediator in the South China Sea conflict. However, since the Yudhoyono administration, Indonesia has made a series of diplomatic protests against China over the nine-dash line claim that overlaps with Indonesia’s sovereign territory. The diplomatic protests reached momentum in 2016. In 2016, the Tribunal won the Philippines’ lawsuit over the sea area claimed by China in the South China Sea arbitration. Following the event, Indonesia made an important move in its foreign policy by renaming its sea territory bordering the South China Sea as the North Natuna Sea and updating the official map. China responded with an official statement that the name change did not mean anything to China.

In the developing discourse, there is a strengthening indication regarding the critical role of language in conflict, primarily when the discourse is understood within Anderson’s (2006) concept of imagined community. The discourse of knowledge and power over the renaming of the South China Sea indicates that a meaning-making process is an important event that should get more attention when trying to understand the relationship between conflict and nationalism. With the case study of the renaming of the South China Sea, this study argues that language plays a vital role in defining a country’s national identity and a significant influence in defending a country’s assets that have been passed down from generation to generation.

This article is divided into several sections to further explain

the relationship between language and conflict. The first section explains the development of academic discussion regarding the concepts of nationalism and conflict. Secondly, it will discuss the methodology utilized in this study, mainly how this study collects data, analyses, and concludes the critical role language and historical heritage play in a territorial conflict. The analysis results are explained in the discussion section, divided into several parts. Starting with a brief introduction to the conflict in the South China Sea, the discussion section then elaborates on the history of the Natuna Islands from the Srivijaya period. The discussion is continued by analyzing how the existing historical data is used to build a narrative of Indonesian identity in Natuna and how the name change confirms Indonesia's attitude and commitment to territorial sovereignty. Finally, the article concludes the finding by reemphasizing the arguments and significance of this study.

Academic discussion on the concept of Nationalism and Conflict

The discussion of nationalism has been commonly debated in the context of power struggles between groups, where nationalism is seen as either the driving factor or the end result of such power struggles. The debate can be understood from two sides: modernists and anti-modernists. First, the modernists, such as Wimmer (2002a, 2002b, 2012) and Cederman et al. (2010), underline the story of conflict as a result of the emergence of the sovereign state principle, the importance of nationalism, political identity, and inclusion as products of modernization (Ayres 2014). Within this modernist framework, Wimmer (2012) emphasizes that nationalism increases the likelihood of war (Lebow 2013). Meanwhile, anti-modernist scholars such as Storm (2022) see conflict as the reason that drives the nation-state model. He argues that the nation-state model, which emerged in the Age of Revolutions, was not the result of a glorious national rebellion or of an ancient national consciousness but rather a conflict over political legitimacy caused by a weak monarchical regime overwhelmed by the imperial crisis and the spread of Enlightenment political ideals (Storm 2022).

Bridging the two sides of classic debates on nationalism, Schlichte (2007) argues that cultural differences are not the root cause of contemporary wars. In recent decades, competition for access

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to economic resources and the marginalization of one group by another are more decisive factors in generating violent conflict. The author also argues that boundaries between ethnic groups are not always as rigid and fixed as believed and that other conditions and motivations beyond cultural or ethnic differences are more decisive factors in generating violent conflict (Schlichte 2007). In this view, group identity is neither a cause nor an effect of conflict but rather a worldview shared and felt by every group member. Therefore, such identity should be understood as a structural cause that must be considered when discussing the relationship between nationalism and conflict.

Although some of the studies above make important contributions in examining the concepts of nationalism by explaining whether nationalism is an effect or cause of a conflict, the role of cultural products in forming conceptions of nationalism is still rarely studied by scholars (Anderson 2020). The formation process of nationalism is even less explored in the case of the renaming of Indonesia's northern sea boundary as the North Natuna Sea. In a recent publication, Ilmi and Rosyidin (2020) examined the North Natuna Sea issue in the context of policy outcomes, where it was discovered that both Indonesia and China agreed to strengthen their diplomatic relationship by bolstering each other's military capacity and to avoid conflicts over regional sovereignty that could disrupt bilateral investment and trade relations. Meanwhile, in contrast to the existing studies, this study aims to fill the dearth of discussion by focusing on the input side of the policy, namely what the change of terms means to Indonesia and how to justify those meanings as part of Indonesia's national identity. The analysis of this study is done by combining the concept of "imagined communities" conceptualized by Anderson (2006) with the methodology of "nationalizing the past" formulated by Berger and Lorenz (2016).

**Understanding "Imagined Communities"
by "Nationalizing the Past"**

This study re-utilizes a discourse analysis method used by Yao (2022) that combine the concept of "imagined communities" by Anderson (2006) and the methodology of "nationalizing the past" by Berger and Lorenz (2016). Imagined communities can be understood as groups of people who share a common identity or

sense of belonging, even though they may not have direct contact. They are held together by shared beliefs, values, and a sense of collective purpose (Anderson 2006 & 2020). Language, culture, religion, shared history, shared values, shared experiences, and the structure of printed media and its relations with the market are several factors that determine imagined communities. These elements create a sense of belonging and identity that unites people within a nation and allows them to imagine themselves as part of a larger community.

The concept of imagined communities can be used to understand how certain archaeological remains may have been used to create a sense of nationalism or to express a collective identity (Munasinghe 2006; Anderson 2020). By examining how artifacts have been used to create shared memories, we can better understand how people have used the past to create a sense of belonging and unity. By delving into the stories and histories that the artifacts tell, we can better understand the identities and relationships between different communities, past and present.

For the purpose of understanding how imagined communities are formed, this research uses the methodology of “nationalizing the past,” which underlines the narrative framing of national histories (Berger & Lorenz 2016). Just as China’s claim to the South China Sea is based on its historical claim to the 1947 nine-dash line map, the Indonesian government’s bold move to rename the South China Sea as the North Natuna Sea is a process of meaning-making that represents the dynamics of knowledge and power in archaeological remains’ interpretation. The link between the concept of “imagined communities” and the methodology of “nationalizing the past” used in this research is based on the assumption that historical narratives play an important role in building and strengthening a sense of national identity and providing a framework for understanding the past. Historical narratives can be used to create a shared narrative of national history, promote shared values, create a sense of shared purpose, and become a source of inspiration and motivation. Historical narratives may also create a sense of national pride or promote particular political agenda.

A Brief Background of the North Natuna Sea Disputes

The North Natuna Sea has been the center of several disputes for decades. The North Natuna Sea is the Natuna archipelago's northern boundary and Indonesia's outer boundary (Simangunsong & Hutasoit 2018). Since the 1970s, this maritime area has been the center of several disputes among Southeast Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei (Kipgen 2018; Hu 2021). The maritime region is contested for its natural resource potential and strategic position in defense and international trade (Hall 1985d; Buszynski 2012; Kipgen 2018; Kusuma et al. 2021).

China claims everything within the nine-dash line area, which accounts for 70-75% of the South China Sea, as an area where it may exercise sovereignty (Kipgen, 2018). China's claim to the nine-dash line is based on historical claims that can be drawn back to ancient times during the Eastern Han Dynasty (23-220 AD) with rule during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD) (Wang 2015). However, most non-Chinese scholars conclude that China's historical claims are weak due to a lack of solid records (Wang, 2015). In addition, the international community has rejected the nine-dash line, including the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which ruled in 2016 that China's claims in the South China Sea were inconsistent with the UNCLOS (Phan & Nguyen 2018). UNCLOS itself regulates the boundaries of maritime sovereignty between countries in the concept of exclusive economic zones (EEZs), which are 200 miles from the outer border of the territorial sea, and China ratified the UNCLOS in 1996 (Jinming & Dexia 2003).

China, which does not recognize the international court's ruling, has warned that it will do everything in its power to protect its sovereignty in the South China Sea (Sakamoto 2021). China has used diplomatic measures, naval patrols, and training exercises to protect and promote its commercial activities in the South China Sea (Kipgen 2018). China has also sought to maintain the upper hand in the South China Sea dispute through substantial investment and regional integration to prevent escalation (Kipgen 2018).

A new round of conflict occurred in 2016 when the Philippines formally filed a lawsuit against China's claim to a portion of Paracels Island, which fell within Philippine maritime territory in 2013 (Love 2016). The lawsuit was granted in 2016 and has since become a new chapter in the discussion of disputes in the

South China Sea. Two of the most recent developments are China's growing interest in the code of conduct and Indonesia's position in the conflict. Indonesia's position on the conflict in the South China Sea has been as a non-claimant state. The non-claimant stance is vital for Indonesia to support its diplomatic role in mediating the dispute (Parameswaran 2016).

Despite its relatively neutral position, Indonesia also has interests in the South China Sea, especially when China's nine-dashes line claim overlaps with Indonesia's EEZ sovereignty at the northern boundary of the Natuna Islands. Indonesia responded to the sovereignty of the South China Sea by renaming the South China Sea as the North Natuna Sea in 2016 and changing the map of Indonesia in 2017. Indonesia's position on territorial disputes in the South China Sea remained unchanged until 2016, which later has been addressed by scholars as a "delicate equilibrium" or "Indonesia's South China Sea dilemma" (Supriyanto 2012; Parameswaran 2016). However, since 2016, there has been a signal of change in Indonesia's stance regarding its foreign policy that gave a clear message of rejection of China's nine-dash line claim over its sovereign sea territory in the north Natuna islands (Agusman & Fatihah 2020; Parameswaran 2017).

A Brief History of Natuna: From the Era of Srivijaya to Its Incorporation into Indonesia

As the dispute in the South China Sea revolves, understanding the stance and interest of each party in the dispute becomes crucial. In that light, Indonesia's stance and interest in the South China Sea dispute as a non-claimant state is best understood by delving into the history of Indonesia's sovereignty over the Natuna Sea. Hence, this section examines the history of Natuna, which traces back to the 7th century A.D., when it became an important vassal region of the Srivijaya Empire. The discussion then examines the process of Natuna's incorporation into the territory of contemporary Indonesia from the pre-independence to the independence eras.

Natuna Islands in the Era of the Srivijaya Kingdom

Before Natuna islands became part of Indonesia, it was one of the vassal areas under the control of Srivijaya Kingdom maritime power. The word Natuna derives from *Nan Dao* or *Nan Tao*, a

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name that originated from a historical account by a Chinese priest named I-Tsing when he described his voyage to Srivijaya and his visit to a large island in the south (Mursitama et al. 2021). The so-called *Nan Dao* is located in the Riau archipelago (Northeast coast of Sumatera), one of the zones in the Srivijaya kingdom (Hall 1985e). The Srivijaya Kingdom was one of the most influential empires in Southeast Asia. It was located on the island of Sumatra in the modern nation of Indonesia and was founded around the seventh century (Hall 1985c). This kingdom played a significant role in the region's trade and commerce, not only due to its strategic location, which allowed it to control the Malacca Straits, the busiest trade route at the time but also due to its strong base of maritime and military power (Hall, 1985e; Utama, 2021).

Malacca Straits was a strategic location in the Southeast Asian archipelago, connecting the pre-modern maritime route between East and West. This strategic location on the world trade route enabled interaction between Southeast Asian communities and foreign cultures (Hall, 1985b) both from the West (Romans) and the East (India and China) (Hall 1985a). During its heyday, which lasted from about the 7th to 11th centuries A.D., the kingdom's control over trade routes allowed it to control most of western Southeast Asia (Oliver William Wolters & Wolters 1970).

The kingdom's diplomatic relations with China under the Song Dynasty began in the 7th century when both kingdoms sent their respective diplomatic envoys (Utama 2021; Wade 2009). Specifically, Srivijaya sent 20 and 8 trade missions to the Song Court during 960-1087 and 1087-1200, respectively (Wade 2009). Srivijaya was perceived as an ideal trading partner for the Chinese because of its convenient ports as a commercial hub and its security assurances, as it effectively protected the international commercial route from piracy (Hall, 1985b). The significance of the relationship between these two empires led to the establishment of diplomatic relations. The Chinese, for example, gave Srivijaya preferential trade status as a sign of respect for Srivijaya's power, which suggested that those who utilized Srivijaya's ports were given preferential treatment when entering Chinese ports (Hall 1985b).

Ceramics were one of the commodities that Srivijaya and China exchanged. Ceramics made in China began to be shipped out of the country in significant quantities sometime between the 8th and 10th centuries and were shipped to countries worldwide,

including Southeast Asia, East Africa, and Madagascar (Manguin 1993). Archaeological evidence, such as ceramics, has also been utilized to trace the influence of inter-kingdom trade (Roxas-Lim 1987; Taim 2020). Thus, archaeologists dubbed the routes of this archaeological evidence “ceramic road” (Manguin 1993). Tracing back to the relationship between Srivijaya and China, Taim (2020) discovered that the discovery of archaeological evidence in the form of ceramics in the Sumatra region of the South China Sea supports the notion that Srivijaya and China have not only had international trade but also close relations.

Around the 14th century, Srivijaya’s significance in safeguarding and promoting regional trade activities declined (Manguin 2022). This decline may have been induced by Indian Empire under the Cola Dynasty attacks toward the Malacca ports in 1025, as has been noted by Hall (1985e) that “Srivijaya never regained its old prosperity and control after the Cola raid.” There was also a developing power competition between the maritime networks of India and China at that time, which disrupted the regional power balance (Manguin 2022). This shift in trade patterns may have led to Srivijaya’s decline in power as Srivijaya’s maritime hegemony was primarily fueled by its economic activities and control over international trade routes as well as its control over peripheral vassals (Kee-Long 1998; Wade 2009; Razzaq et al. 2017). The weakening of Srivijaya’s control and influence in Southeast Asia worsened following the attacks by Javanese kingdoms, such as Singosari and Majapahit (Utama 2021).

The restructuring of maritime trade patterns in Southeast Asia has resulted in the establishment of several new ports, including those on the northern and eastern coasts of Java and the southern coast of Vietnam, which are closer to China (Hall 1985b). The presence of a new hegemon, the Majapahit Kingdom, continued to enhance commercial activity in Southeast Asia, which eventually indicates the perpetuation of the “age of commerce” during the 900-1300s and lasted to the 17th centuries (Reid 1988; Wade 2009). Since the collapse of the Malacca Strait after the Portuguese came in 1511, several kingdoms in the region of Southeast Asia have fought against colonization.

The Integration of Natuna Island into Indonesia

Today, the Natuna Islands are widely known as a group of islands in the South China Sea. Nonetheless, in terms of historical heritage,

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no archaeological evidence was found to suggest Natuna's position during colonialism, whether under British or Dutch control (Susilowati et al. 2016). Still, it is said that there is a possibility that Natuna's decision to join Indonesia was based on cultural ties, as Natuna had previously resided in the Sultanate of Riau (Setiawan 2020). Following Indonesia's declaration of independence in 1945, a delegation from the Sultanate of Riau turned over its authority to the Republic of Indonesia (Tampi 2017).

The integration of the Natuna islands into Indonesia's sovereign territory began in 1956 when Indonesia officially registered Natuna with the United Nations (Tampi 2017). Nevertheless, several neighboring nations, including China, have disputed Indonesia's possession of the islands.¹ At the time, Indonesia still struggled to assert its authority over its vast archipelago, and the Natuna Islands represented an important step in this process. By formally declaring the islands' incorporation into its territory, Indonesia was sending a message to its neighbors that it was a sovereign nation with the ability to defend its borders. Beyond the early days of independence, similar disputes also happened in the past few years, particularly in the context of China's rise, which began to show China's aggressiveness in the Southeast Asian region (The Economist 2023).

Although from a regional context, the northern waters of the Natuna islands are contested territory by several neighboring countries, the nationalism of Natuna residents who define themselves as part of Indonesia is different and incontestable. Studies found that despite the challenges present there, most residents prefer to define themselves as Indonesian (Setiawan 2020; Susilowati et al. 2016). These challenges could be in the form of Jakarta's lack of attention to the development of Indonesia's outer islands or access to economic centers closer to neighboring countries (Susilowati et al. 2016; Setiawan 2020). Their interpretation of national identity makes Natuna's residents part of a larger "imagined political society" called Indonesia.

¹ Malaysia also claimed Natuna as its territory. However, they let it go in order to avoid further conflict after the confrontation era of the 1960s (see Tampi (2017)).

Nationalizing the Past: Natuna's Identity as An Integral Part of Indonesian Sovereignty

Since the Srivijaya era, Natuna has served as an important international trade hub. Archaeological remains, especially ceramics, are historical evidence that reinforces the previous opinion (Adhityatama & Sulistyarto 2018; Dillenia & Troa 2016; Wibisono 2014). Interestingly, the trade activity by the Chinese government is used as a narrative that explains China's presence in the region and proves China's control in the South China Sea (Wang 2015). However, scholars are skeptical of such claims due to the absence of solid evidence that shows the truth (Wang 2015). On the other hand, long before the concept of sovereignty was created and upheld, people were used to trade and interact without worrying about sovereignty matters (Wang 2015). Additionally, in the modern era, namely after 2016, the international community has highlighted the claim and believes that the nine-dash line is not in accordance with UNCLOS as the primary reference for upholding sovereignty in the sea area (Phan & Nguyen, 2018; Strating 2022).

From the Indonesian side, archaeological evidence such as ceramics shows Natuna's trade activities with the outside world, such as Europe, China, and India (Adhityatama & Sulistyarto 2018). For example, this argument can be based on the results of historical analyses conducted by Antony Reid (1988) and Manguin (1993), which show the central role of trade activities in the region's development. Manguin (1993) also mentions explicitly the role of Srivijaya as the largest archipelago kingdom that began in the 7th century. Srivijaya's control over sea areas in Southeast Asia and its interaction with the Chinese Dynasty became the beginning of the age of commerce in the region (Wolters 1967; Wade 2009; Manguin 2022). The reciprocal activities of trade can hardly be summarized as the control of one actor over another.

Following the Srivijaya's heyday, historical relics also show the continuation of trading activities carried out by Natuna during the Majapahit kingdom (CNN Indonesia 2021a). Evidence of historical relics in the form of ceramics has been found in Natuna waters. Residents even make the ceramic finding activity as a treasure hunt, and the ceramics have been stored in the local museum to preserve and maintain Natuna's trade history with the outside world (Agus 2021). Historians of world history used Chinese ceramics, particularly porcelains, as evidence to discuss the

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development of the history of international trade (Pierson 2012). The presence of archaeological evidence in the form of ceramics shows the trading activities carried out by Natuna and the Chinese dynasty and not the other way around (Wibisono 2014).

Another thing that proves Natuna's historical heritage as an inseparable part of Indonesia is the ethnic diversity in Natuna. Ethnic diversity in Natuna Islands was also a product of trade activities and not the other way round. Initially, the ethnic origin in the Natuna islands was Malay, making up approximately 85% of the total population (KOMPAS 2020). Natuna's long history from being a vassal area of the Srivijaya kingdom to being under the Riau Sultanate makes the argument about the presence of ethnic Malays as the majority ethnicity logically acceptable. The ethnic diversity in the Natuna islands was possible because of Natuna's interaction with its trading partners, who were not only from around the Southeast Asian region (CNN Indonesia 2021b). Chinese ethnicity itself developed through trade interactions between Srivijaya and the Chinese Dynasty that began in the 7th century (Utama 2021; Wade 2009).

Despite being a latecomer, Chinese ethnicity is multiplying in the Natuna Islands region. The rapid development of Chinese ethnicity has even reached a dark period where ethnicity riots have occurred in the Natuna archipelago (KOMPAS 2020). Nevertheless, Natuna today is one of the portraits of the success of ethnic diversity living side by side. In Natuna, it is possible to build praying places for different religions next to each other, such as Mushola Al Mukarramah for Muslims, which stands next to Kelenteng Pu Tek Chi for Confucianists (see Figure 1). The diversity is possible because of Natuna's interaction with the outside world, which can even be traced back to the Age of Commerce in the Southeast Asian region.

Figure 1
A Portrait of Religious Harmony in Penagi, Natuna Islands



Source: CNN Indonesia (2021)

The Use of Language to Strengthen Evidence Of Sovereignty Over Territory

In addition to the historical heritage that makes the Natuna region part of the Indonesian sovereignty, the reinterpretation of meaning carried out by the Indonesian government in its foreign policy towards the Natuna marine territory is also shown by making adjustments to the naming of the sea boundary of the northern region of the Natuna archipelago. “Nationalizing the past” is reinforced by changing the name of the South China Sea to the North Natuna Sea.

The naming of contested territories in the context of the languages used by each adversarial state is a topic that frequently comes up in conversations between practitioners and academics. For example, Spratly Island, a contested region between multiple countries, has distinct names according to each claimant. The Philippines, for example, calls the Spratly Islands “Lagos,” Vietnam calls them “Dao Troung Sa,” and China calls them “Nanwei Dao” (Song 2009). The conflict between China and Japan in the East China Sea is another example of that discussion. China claimed ownership of the islands under “Diaoyu,” while Japan called them “Senkaku.” Scholars have also debated various issues, from historical claims to each party’s sense of threats as a manifestation of their understanding

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of sovereignty boundaries (Kim 2021; Suganuma 2001; Nakano 2015). The discourse demonstrates how names convey a different impression, connect to the notion of ownership, and are based on historical stories in which they believe.

In the context of renaming the South China Sea as the North Natuna Sea, the name change creates a different perception of proof of ownership to legitimize territorial sovereignty. Although the Chinese government stated that changing the name of the sea territory would not affect ownership claims, as Sutara explains (2017), China's denial response, as well as their determination to rely on the nine-dash line argument, gives a different impression of the role of language in strengthening a basis for sovereignty. Furthermore, researchers have emphasized China's attention to detail when it comes to language uses that undermine the image of China's peaceful rise (Brazys & Dukalskis 2019; King et al. 2017). National image is essential not only because it relates to how a country represents itself in international relations (Buhmann 2016; Wang 2006) but also because, in the context of China's rise, maintaining its stability is critical and relevant (Dukalskis 2021; Peijuan et al. 2009; Wang 2006; Zhang & Cameron 2003).

Brazys (2019) specifically mentions that China carries out grassroots image management through its cultural institutions to maintain a friendly image of China's rise. In order to maintain this image, King (2017) explains that the Chinese government has used systematic steps to fabricate news through social media, as many as 448 million comments per year for strategic distraction from sensitive or controversial matters. As national image management is done by designing how knowledge is disseminated and displayed to the public, changing the name of a sovereign territory into a language that symbolizes the sovereignty of another party directly shows disagreement with the status quo of pre-existing knowledge. Presenting another form of truth over the pre-existing relative truth can be understood as a threat to the control of knowledge.

Similar to what China does, image management is what the Indonesian government has done by renaming the South China Sea to the North Natuna Sea in 2016. As language by Foucault (1997) represents a form of power, by changing the name of Indonesia's northern sea boundary to the North Natuna Sea, Indonesia asserts its position over the sovereignty of its territorial boundaries. Looking back to the concept formulated by Anderson (1983), the renaming process can be interpreted as a depiction of

an “imagined political identity.” Similarities in culture, language, and history make Natuna and its northern boundaries an integral part of Indonesia.

The construction of meaning from the use of distinctive language is a critical stage that contributes to the strength of national identity. As a result, the use of language that is identified with the characteristics of a particular identity sends a clear message that Nanwei Do belongs to China or Lugos Island belongs to the Philippines in the Spratly Islands conflict and also the South China Sea belongs to China while the North Natuna Sea belongs to Indonesia. As expressed by Gal (1998) that “not only communities but also languages must be imagined before their unity can be socially accomplished.” In the context of building nationalism in Taiwan, for example, both historical artifacts in the framework of nationalizing the past and the usage of Mandarin as the national language are utilized to construct the national identity of Taiwanese (Chun 1994; Yao 2022). The construction of language as a marker of national identity, according to Suleiman (2006), can be explained by giving a specific name that distinguishes one imagined community from another. In addition, the urgency of giving specific labels or names becomes more necessary in the context of conflict (Suleiman 2004 & 2006).

Even though the government of Indonesia has repeatedly affirmed Indonesia’s position as a non-claimant state in territorial disputes in the North Natuna Sea area, the policy is a firm step to affirm the sovereignty of the Natuna territory, both land and sea. Professor of International Law at the University of Indonesia, Hikmahanto Juwana, in an interview conducted by CNN Indonesia, argued that China should not have the right to protest against the foreign policy issued by the Indonesian government because the name change was carried out on the Indonesian contingent shelf (Sutara 2017). This policy indirectly shows Indonesia’s stance that rejects China’s nine-dash line claim and strengthens the sovereign status of the Natunaislands’ marine territory. The choice of language in the foreign policy of renaming the North Natuna Sea is a way for the Indonesian government to emphasize the meaning of nationalism itself.

Conclusion

Through this study, cultural products such as language and archaeological remains are found to be important in the discourse on conflict and its relation to national identity. By nationalizing the past, archaeological remains such as ceramics can be used to construct narratives of national identity. In this study, the many Chinese ceramics found in Natuna waters are framed in a historical narrative that puts forward the idea of trade activities carried out by the kingdoms of the archipelago with outsiders, including China. China's presence in the archipelago's waters with the methodology of nationalizing the past can be narrated as diplomacy and trade activities between dynasties/kingdoms that characterize the age of commerce in Southeast Asia.

This historical narrative in the imagined community frame is then reinforced by the use of language in Indonesia's foreign policy which was done by renaming the South China Sea as the North Natuna Sea and updating the official map of Indonesia's sovereign territory. By doing these two things, this study has encouraged an expanded horizon of discussion on the South China Sea conflict in the context of high and low politics and

This study also provides a new way of understanding the conflict in the North Natuna Sea. Territorial disputes cannot be defined solely in high politics (encompassing security and politics) and low politics (economic consequences and concerns). However, a more in-depth examination of how the environment shapes the behavior of actors in the conflict is required. This study demonstrates that the actors' environment, in terms of language, historical, and archaeological artifacts, is an essential factor to consider to better understand the conflict's origins. This perspective on language use in the study of international relations, especially in the study case of territorial disputes, could be a significant research area for many scholars. Disputes may arise as a result of each actor's differing understanding of the truth in which they believe. Therefore, the solution could be to discover a point of convergence to equalize viewpoints, seeking intersections of each version of the believed truth.

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