

# *South China Sea Policies of ASEAN Claimant States: A Corpus-based Study*

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**Abstract:** The South China Sea (SCS) issue has evolved to gain global attention and has serious economic and geo-political implications. This study analyzes the SCS policies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) claimant states based on the self-build corpus. Combined with the facts and statistical results, the study shows that different claimants adopted different policies to address disputes, especially regarding the response to China's activities in the region. Vietnam does its utmost to promote the internationalization of SCS on every occasion and Philippines' confrontational policies have changed considerably under President Duterte's administration. Along with the responsibilities of being a regional leader, Indonesia persists in its honest broker role and emphasizes that the resolution of the SCS issue should be based on the unity and agreement of all the ASEAN members. Pragmatic and low-profile policies are Malaysia's long-term keynote and it does not want to sacrifice its economy at the threat of confrontation with its close ally, China. The results also show that the corpus-based method has the potential to be a useful quantitative complement to future relative research, but the language sources are a limitation that need consideration in future studies.

## 1. Introduction

Since its emergence in the 1970s and after decades of evolution, the South China Sea (SCS) issue has not only become a hot-spot in the Asia-Pacific but also attracted international attention. In addition to the original claimants, a few outside powers—the US, Japan, India, Australia, and others—are involved. This leads to increasing uncertainties and potential conflicts. Owing to the so-called Chinese assertiveness in the area and in consideration of its national power, economy, security defense, and their relationship with China, the claimant states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted different SCS policies to address the maritime dispute. Most existing research analyzes the claimant states' SCS policies using qualitative methods.

In the long-running dispute, Vietnam and the Philippines are known as the stronger sides reacting to China's actions and activities. Most Chinese scholars argue that Vietnam is constantly internationalizing the SCS issue to balance China in the international arena, although it keeps a close economic tie with its neighbor.[1-4] Vietnam scholar Doan proposes that Vietnam should mobilize ASEAN countries to conduct 'collective diplomacy', and at the same time should mobilize

international organizations and international judicial bodies to participate in the response mechanism.[2] According to Katherine TSENG Hui-Yi, starting from the stage of post-2009, Vietnam has not only brought up the issue at ASEAN summits in an attempt to forge a united front against China but has also invited non-regional powers to balance China's leverage. [5] As for the Philippines, there is a fairly unified view that its SCS is in the midst of a transition since Duterte came to power. Under the Aquino administration, the Philippines has strengthened its military cooperation and ties with Washington and evoked a legal-based legitimation strategy to counter China.[6] The Filipinos deem the arbitration case against China over the SCS a legal and moral victory, however, their president Duterte's emphasis on 'no-taunt, no-flaunt' policy contrasts sharply with his predecessor's bellicose stance.[7] Nguyen and Li believe that peaceful dialogue and cooperation have become Duterte's basic principle in dealing with the SCS issue.[8,9] The Philippines will improve bilateral relations with China on the premise of upholding the arbitration results. Indonesia is not a direct territorial claimant in the SCS islands, but it is directly involved in the dispute due to its national interests, strategic capabilities, and core actors' positioning. Moreover, Indonesia's SCS policy has remained stable regardless of regime changes.[10] Arguably, the role of a mediator is one that the Indonesian government has always insisted on in the maritime dispute.[11-15] Consequently, Indonesia organizes a series of informal workshops to improve dialogue, confidence, and cooperation among the interested parties, which has made a certain contribution to the settlement of the SCS issue. As one friendly and close claimant country with China, a low-key manner is always Malaysia's typical approach to the dispute.[16-18] Some Chinese scholars describe Malaysia's policy as pragmatic that it tries to avoid military conflict and confrontation with China, instead choosing political and diplomatic tools to safeguard its vested interests.[19] As can be seen from the above studies, many scholars have made important and innovative contributions to the researches of claimants' SCS policies from different academic perspectives. This paper will test and verify the above viewpoints based on quantitative methods.

To ensure that the clarity, accuracy, and persuasiveness of the research is elevated, this study aims to approach the issue using a combined quantitative and qualitative method by utilizing corpus tool AntConc version 3.5.7. According to the statistical representation of results through the functions of keyword list, collocates, and concordance, the study focuses on the listed question: based on quantitative data and concrete text, what are the SCS policies of the ASEAN claimant states? This article is structured in the following order. The first section introduces the corpus methodology, which includes Corpus Linguistics (CL), and the major functions of corpus software. The second section concentrates on the data and method, including research sample selection, data collection, and research steps. The third section reports the statistical results and discusses the SCS policies adopted by different ASEAN claimant states. The final section concludes and contains the policies, methodological potential, and associated limitations.

## 2. Corpus Methodology

CL is a computer-aided analysis on the large scale of linguistic data taken from the examples of real-life language use.[20,21] Some scholars regard CL as an independent discipline with its unique theoretical system and operating methods, while others simply classify it as a research method. As McEnery and Hardie point, CL is 'not a monolithic, consensually agreed set of methods and procedures for the exploration of language'.[21] In essence, CL is an empirical method that uses a large scale of authentic text data as research material. Now, CL has been widely employed in various fields of language research. In recent years, a considerable amount of literature has been published on CL. These studies focus on the intrinsic meaning of discourse by using corpus technology.[22-25] The researchers from Lancaster University are especially prominent and published a large volume of

studies based on CL. In their interesting analysis, large-scale media discourse and political discourse are research focus, for example, they talk about refugees, asylum seekers, Islamist extremists, and even violent jihadists. In general, CL could facilitate the efficient implementation of discourse analysis,[26,27] and it also enables large-scale discourse analysis and ensures the accuracy and repeatability of the analysis process.

Corpus-based analysis is realized by the CL application software. Keyword lists, word lists, collocates, and concordance are core technologies of a corpus-based study. Many conventional studies from Lancaster University adopt the above functions. AntConc and WordSmith represent common corpus tools. Word list is one of the most common procedures for exploring word frequency, which can help people grasp the main idea of a discourse content in circumstances where there are no definite retrieve targets. Thus, it is a widely applied method in the field of corpus. Compared with word lists, keyword lists are always used to find the markedly different vocabulary in two contrastive corpora (the observed corpus and reference corpus). Analysis for a certain number of keywords is not only a well-established approach in uncovering discourse theme, but also an efficient revelation for social and cultural connotations. Xu points out that the major advantage of the above two functions is not a subjective factor that affects the operational process.[28] However, there are certain drawbacks associated with the results. For instance, there may be isolated words or phrases without contextual meaning. As a complement to the aforementioned issue, the functions of collocates and concordance are emphasized. Occasionally, the words for concordance are often determined by study questions, which means that people can choose related words to serve a specific purpose. In addition, considering that there could be thousands of rows from concordance, the collocates could be used here to help establish a clearer, definite, and data-based demonstration for the results. Combined with such an analytic approach, the discourse phenomenon could be revealed effectively.

In general, therefore, it seems that exploring the SCS policies based on corpus technology is a new potential attempt in the field of international relations and politics. The statistical representation of the entire data will be revealed through the process of keyword lists, concordance, and collocates. Moreover, a qualitative analysis is performed on selected news of the SCS issue, which could complement the data-based discussion process and study results. In conclusion, this is a unique method employed in the analysis of SCS policy and could be applied to other administrative policies.

### 3. Data and Method

Given the influence and power of media, news text is a good choice for corpus-based analysis as it can provide extensive data for correlational studies. As a leading figure in communication research, Harold D. Lasswell has organized a project named ‘the study of War-time Communications’ with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. They adopted publicly published German newspapers as the study object and not only examined the basic situation of German society but also extracted significant military intelligence.[29] Taking newspaper reports of Malaysia’s official media as research samples, Su attempts to analyze Malaysia’s policies on the SCS.[30] Based on the foregoing discussion, we propose the following hypothesis—combining with the social context, the government’s policies could be explored and interpreted from some specific news texts. Consequently, for the study of the SCS policies, news reports could be better target texts. The mainstream media reports on the SCS issue from the ASEAN claimant states are the targeted study texts that will be used to build corpus.

For hundreds of years, with the global expansion of and colonization by the British Empire, English language and culture has spread to every corner of the world and influences the politics, economy, and world culture deeply. Today, mass media based on English has increasingly penetrated every aspect of social life. The linguistic and cultural ‘hegemony’ of English has become increasingly

evident on a global scale. English news dominates world opinion, and even manipulates people's ideology.[31] Moreover, to present their own view, many countries attempt to bridge the gap by broadcasting discourse from their perspective on global or domestic events. Prominent examples are the growing number of channels that are competing for English-speaking audiences by offering English-language alternatives that provide information about internal events and domesticated perspectives on international affairs.[32] Consequently, English-language news reports from native countries also represent the viewpoints that their governments want to convey to the world. In this respect, at least, English-language news from the target countries can be used as study samples.

The AntConc corpus software is designed by Professor Laurence Anthony of Waseda University, Japan. This tool is now widely employed in linguistics analysis and updated regularly; the version 3.5.7 is applied in our study. The biggest advantage of AntConc when compared with WordSmith, is that it is free for all users, and at the same time, its interface is much cleaner.[33]

Based on the above considerations and for establishing a self-built SCS corpus, data are collected from the online official English news websites of the four ASEAN claimant states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Philippines. All the media we have chosen from the target countries are widespread and influential newspapers (in each country) with a long history. Thus, their viewpoints can serve as a proxy for their government's stance. All the collected articles contain at least one mention of 'South China Sea,' 'East Sea,' or 'West Philippine Sea' from four nationally recognized local mainstream newspapers, Nhandan Online (NDO), The Manila Times (MT), The Jakarta Post (JP), and New Straits Times (NST), published in three consecutive years from 2017 to 2019. After the irrelevant texts and contents are removed, the search results consist of four self-built corpora named SCS-Vietnam (811 items; 107706 word tokens; 4321 word types), SCS-Philippines (1569 items; 714942 word tokens; 20203 word types), SCS-Indonesia (103 items; 57336 word tokens; 5881 word types), and SCS-Malaysia (215 items; 76833 word tokens; 6937 word types).

Our study will follow the standard corpus analysis procedures, the purpose of the study will be achieved through two steps. The first step in this process is to identify the specific keywords with the help of word frequency. Here, the SCS issue from the ASEAN claimants can be emphasized, calculated, and demonstrated. Following the analysis of the keywords list, concordance and collocates are targeted in the second step. The concrete construction of SCS policies will be examined during this process.

## 4. Results and Discussions

The keywords in the texts are passed from the corpora through the AntConc version 3.5.7 to identify the SCS issue focuses of the news reports from the four claimant states. For the requirements of the study, function words such as 'the,' 'in,' and 'of,' as well as the words used to express SCS such as 'south,' 'sea,' and 'waters,' are removed from the results of the keywords list. As shown in Table 1, the keywords ranked by frequency and criticality show different traits in different corpus.

### 4.1. Vietnam's SCS Policy

Interestingly, compared to the other three claimants, Vietnam has a very different typical trait that is closely connected with its SCS policies. The keyword result of the SCS-Vietnam corpus shows that Vietnam is attempting to internationalize the SCS issue, which is considerably different from China's insisted solution. China has determined to resolve the SCS dispute on a bilateral basis and openly refused the interference of some other extra-regional powers. Considering the imbalance in national power, Vietnam seeks to draw on external forces to balance and confine China on the SCS issue.

First, whenever possible (especially on diplomatic occasions and international situations), Vietnam claims its peaceful stand with 'peace' policy rhetoric. It states that the goal of 'peace' is

‘security’ and ‘stability’ for the SCS region. For example, AntConc was used to calculate the collocates of ‘disputes’ within a span from 5L (Left) to 5R (Right). As shown in Table 2, the collocates required by both MI score ( $\geq 4$ ) and T-score ( $\geq 4$ ) are chosen. One thing that we need to make clear here is that MI score and T-score are calculated to measure the collocational strength. Hunston (2002) and Salama (2011) admit that if the collocation word satisfies both MI score ( $\geq 3$ ) and T-score ( $\geq 2$ ), this means that there is a statistically significant collocation between the two words.[34,35] Based on this principle, we try to select high MI score and T score that can meet the research requirements when acquiring data. The statistical results display that Vietnam always preaches the settlement of the SCS (East Sea) disputes by peaceful means. Its purpose is to seize the international moral high ground. In fact, Vietnam is also one of the major players in the SCS that has posed a problem.[36] Vietnam not only controls the most islands and reefs in the SCS,[37] but has also reclaimed the largest share of the coastal sea, amounting to 1586 km<sup>2</sup>.[38]

Table 1: Keywords of the SCS corpora (Top 30).

Rank	SCS-Vietnam	SCS-Philippines	SCS-Indonesia	SCS-Malaysia
1	Vietnam	China	China	China
2	law	Philippines	ASEAN	Malaysia
3	international	US	Indonesia	US
4	ASEAN	Chinese	Chinese	ASEAN
5	conduct	Philippine	US	Beijing
6	peace	Duterte	military	Vietnam
7	security	president	Beijing	maritime
8	disputes	Beijing	foreign	Chinese
9	including	military	Islands	claims
10	stability	ASEAN	maritime	military
11	parties	islands	Philippines	Philippines
12	peaceful	foreign	Vietnam	islands
13	China	country	international	states
14	convention	International	states	countries
15	cooperation	Manila	region	region
16	COC	against	countries	international
17	UNCLOS	war	claims	foreign
18	countries	claims	Malaysia	security
19	code	United	area	united
20	regional	government	Jakarta	year
21	issue	economic	economic	disputed
22	two	defense	security	southeast
23	nations	countries	minister	nations
24	freedom	disputed	Indonesian	defence
25	region	maritime	united	Duterte
26	issues	states	disputed	Asian
27	safety	island	president	Taiwan
28	declaration	shoal	regional	president
29	PM	ruling	year	trade
30	navigation	nations	conduct	including

Table 2: Collocates of ‘disputes’ in the SCS-Vietnam corpus (Top 5).

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	MI $\geq$ 4	T-score $\geq$ 4
1	peaceful	333	6.84438	18.08948
2	Sea	264	4.12979	15.31994
3	East	199	4.23411	13.35713
4	settlement	195	7.04987	13.85885
5	means	113	6.70976	10.52859

Second, Vietnam emphasizes its respect for ‘international law,’ especially including the 1982 United Nations Convention On The Law Of The Sea (UNCLOS). In reality, Vietnam wants to use international jurisdiction to serve its claimed territorial and sovereign rights in the SCS area. This strategy is a smart move that not only pushes internationalizing the SCS issue in the international judicial field, but also resists China’s historical claims and the stance of the Nine-Dash Line (NDL). In the early 21st century, Vietnam partnered with Malaysia to file its own claim to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). The claim, which advocated Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly islands, requested CLCS to stipulate China’s actions in line with the relevant clauses of UNCLOS.[39] In 2013, Philippines unilaterally filed a suit to the Permanent Court of Arbitration against China’s historical rights in SCS. Subsequently, Vietnam expressed its support and the then Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung even considered legal action against China over disputed waters and called for the preparation of a lawsuit.[40,41] On July 12, 2016, the tribunal constituted under Annex VII issued an arbitration that was unquestionably beneficial to the Philippines. In response, the Vietnamese foreign ministry’s spokesperson stated unequivocally, ‘Vietnam welcomes the arbitration tribunal’s issuance of the final ruling on July 12 and will issue a statement on the ruling’s content’.[42] In general, the result shows that Vietnam has taken advantage of international judicial policy to pressure China.

Third, Vietnam is making all possible efforts to discuss the SCS issue, including utilizing international organizations and regional forums. ASEAN is a significant link for Vietnam’s internationalization of the SCS issue. As can be seen from Table 3, the collocates of ‘ASEAN’ are shown within a span from 5L to 5R by both MI score ( $\geq 2$ ) and T-score ( $\geq 4$ ). The data present show that Vietnam attempts to bring up the SCS issue at various occasions related to ASEAN, which would contribute to the internationalization of the SCS issue within the framework of ASEAN cooperation. With the help of concordance, we can view the ‘meeting’ and ‘summit’ occasions, which include ASEAN Chiefs of Defense Forces Informal Meeting (ACDFIM), ASEAN-AIPA leaders’ meeting, ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM), ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+), ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM), ASEAN-US Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, ASEAN-Japan Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, ASEAN-China Senior Officials’ Meeting, ASEAN Summit, ASEAN-Australia Special Summit, ASEAN-China Summit, ASEAN-Japan Summit, ASEAN-US Summit and ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit. When the SCS issue is involved in these talks, Vietnam inclines to emphasize ASEAN’s (central) ‘role’ and binds its ‘stance’ with that of ASEAN. The concordance in Table 4 and Table 5 below illustrate this. In brief, Vietnam wants to completely use the unified power of ASEAN to contain China. This involves efforts with ASEAN to promote the efficient implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS (DOC) and adopt a Code of Conduct in the SCS (COC).

Table 3: Collocates of ‘ASEAN’ in the SCS-Vietnam corpus (Top 10).

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	MI $\geq$ 3	T-score $\geq$ 4
1	China	168	5.27287	12.62624
2	Vietnam	108	4.12979	9.19009
3	meeting	81	5.72090	8.82936
4	ministers	77	5.87332	8.62569
5	role	76	5.55455	8.53231
6	summit	73	6.17219	8.42558
7	stance	67	5.08175	7.94365
8	cooperation	64	3.98954	7.49636

Table 4: Concordance of ‘role’ in the SCS-Vietnam corpus.

Rank	Kwic		
1	consultation and close collaboration on building a united ASEAN and promoting the central	role	of ASEAN in
2	a need to continue strengthening the unity of ASEAN and upholding its central	role.	He announced that
3	dium-sized countries in the regional security architecture. ASEAN has played a vital	role	in shaping the
4	regional and international issues, Minh stressed the central	role	of ASEAN and the importance of cooperation between
5	deepening relations with other partners to affirm the	role	of ASEAN as the driving force for dialogues,
6	2020, aiming to maintain solidarity, unity and the central	role	of ASEAN. As for the East Sea issue,
7	cooperate to strengthen their solidarity and the central	role	of ASEAN in major matters relating to security
8	need to strengthen solidarity and maintain the central	role	of ASEAN in the regional security architecture and
9	and regional issues, the ministers affirmed the central	role	of ASEAN in the region, and agreed to
10	coordinating in standpoint, consolidating the solidarity and	role	of ASEAN in the East Sea issue in

Finally, Vietnam seeks cooperation with the major countries outside the region to counter China in the SCS. In recent years, Vietnam has strengthened its cooperation with Japan, the USA, and Australia on economy and maritime defense. It repeatedly stressed the importance of increasing cooperation in maintaining freedom of navigation and aviation in the disputed waters. The collocates of ‘Vietnam’ were examined within a span from 5L to 5R by both MI score ( $\geq 4$ ) and T-score ( $\geq 4$ ), and the results are shown in Table 6. To ask China to end ‘illegal’ activities in the areas of ‘Hoang Sa’ (Paracel) and ‘Truong Sa’ (Spratly) archipelagos and respect the country’s sovereignty over the archipelagos, Vietnam is attempting to seek the support from outside powers for its stance on SCS issue. Considering all factors, Japan and the USA are good choices. Because of the political, economic and security interests in SCS, Japan is strengthening its bilateral ties with ASEAN claimant states by nurturing strong diplomatic relations and conducting maritime capacity-building programs.[43] The concordance in Table 7 shows that Vietnam and Japan have enhanced partnerships based on sharing many strategic interests, especially in the SCS region. The USA is neither a claimant nor a country ratified in the UNCLOS, but considering its interests, particularly with regard to ‘freedom of navigation,’ it has adopted the policies from Obama’s pivot to Asia to Trump’s continuing of Freedom of Navigation Operations. Based on the consideration of counterbalancing China, Vietnam enhanced ties with the USA on many aspects and Table 8 confirms this cooperation.



Table 5: Concordance of ‘stance’ in the SCS-Vietnam corpus.

Rank	Kwic		
1	key member of G7 and G20, for supporting ASEAN and Vietnam’s	stance	in the East Sea
2	will continue the strong voice and support for ASEAN and Vietnam’s	stance	on this regard. He
3	capacity as an EU member, to back the	stance	of ASEAN and Vietnam on the settlement of
4	between the two countries’ localities while supporting the	stance	of ASEAN and Vietnam on the East Sea
5	on the basis of international law. Repeating the	stance	of Vietnam and other ASEAN members on the
6	reaffirmed his country’s position of supporting the	stance	of Vietnam and ASEAN in settling East Sea
7	Vietnam welcomes the RoK’s support for the	stance	of Vietnam and ASEAN concerning the East Sea
8	the Turkish PM affirmed his support of the	stance	of Vietnam and ASEAN countries on settling East
9	East Sea in particular, as well as the	stance	of Vietnam and ASEAN countries on settling disputes
10	ual concern, the Vietnamese official affirmed the principle	stance	of Vietnam and ASEAN is to resolve disputes

Table 6: Collocates of ‘Vietnam’ in the SCS-Vietnam corpus (Top 16).

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	MI $\geq$ 4	T-score $\geq$ 4
1	China	161	5.70418	12.20182
2	stance	116	5.36635	10.50924
3	Sa	81	5.19674	8.75460
4	sovereignty	69	4.92407	8.03301
5	support	64	4.51497	7.65010
6	ties	62	5.14989	7.65223
7	partnership	51	5.01306	6.92027
8	over	51	4.15468	6.74047
9	relations	49	4.88664	6.76337
10	joint	49	5.23965	6.81473
11	strategic	43	4.96795	6.34792
12	statement	43	5.08006	6.36358
13	Japan	41	4.82053	6.17652
14	archipelago	41	5.75806	6.28481
15	affirmed	41	4.15689	6.04417
16	US	39	4.08474	5.87695

Table 7: Concordance of ‘Japan’ in the SCS-Vietnam corpus.

Rank	Kwic		
1	highly of Vietnam’s role in the region,	Japan	affirmed support to Vietnam’s stance on
2	of mutual concern, including the East Sea matter, Vietnam and	Japan	agreed to uphold the ensuring of
3	Vietnam and	Japan	have sought concrete orientations and measures
4	Regarding the East Sea issue, PM Phuc said Vietnam and	Japan	reiterated the significance of ensuring peace,
5	Besides, Vietnam and	Japan	share many strategic interests in regional
6	seriously threatening peace and stability in the region, Vietnam and	Japan	should further boost bilateral cooperation, the



7		Japan	and Vietnam always support each other at multilateral
8	the East Sea in line with international law. Vietnam highly values	Japan	's role and contributions to
9	Vietnam,	Japan	agree to advance extensive strategic partnership
10	Vietnam,	Japan	agree to enhance exchanges between parliamentarians

Table 8: Concordance of 'US' in the SCS-Vietnam corpus.

Rank	Kwic		
1	and supports the peaceful settlement of disputes. The	US	also appreciates Vietnam's support for President Trump'
2	Vietnam also welcomed the	US	's support for ASEAN'
3	while noting that the comprehensive partnership between Vietnam and the	US	is enjoying development at all
4	region. The guest once again affirmed that the	US	supports Vietnam and ASEAN's stance on the
5	Quang Vinh has expressed his belief that the Vietnam-	US	comprehensive partnership will continue to thrive for
6	cooperation as one of the foundations for the Vietnam-	US	relationship that contributes to maintaining peace and
7	PM Phuc, President Trump talk ways to advance Vietnam-	US	ties
8	Vietnam,	US	to augment ties in economy-trade- investment,
9	and international issues. The letter also said the	US	wants to work with Vietnam and other nations
10	contain risks of conflict, President Quang stressed that Vietnam welcomes the	US	's increasing cooperation with regional

#### 4.2. Philippines' SCS Policy

Philippines has one of the most intense reactions against China's perceived 'assertive and provocative' actions in the semi-enclosed sea. It not only seeks intervention from its ally, the USA, but also resorts to international judicial proceedings. The government under the Benigno Aquino III administration unprecedentedly initiated arbitration proceedings against China in 2013, although China solemnly declared that it neither accepted nor participated in the arbitration. However, since Rodrigo Duterte took office in 2016, changes to the SCS policy have taken place in his administration. Compared to Aquino's radical outlook on the SCS issue, Duterte has tended to be moderate and soft. Traces of this can be found in the statistical results of the SCS-Philippines corpus.

First, Philippines did not use the favorable arbitration result as a powerful weapon to pressure China to obey the tribunal ruling. Hence, 'arbitration' is not in the top positions of keywords and only 'ruling' is in the top 30. With the help of concordance for 'arbitration' and 'Duterte,' as Table 9 shows, the Duterte administration insisted that the arbitration against China was a victory indicating that they would not give up the result easily in the future. However, he also expressed his hope for talking with China by setting aside the arbitration ruling. In fact, they also know that the Hague tribunal has no enforcement capacity with respect to making China leave the disputed waters. The Philippines under the Duterte administration even attempted to conduct bilateral talks and joint exploration with China in the disputed area.[44,45]

Table 9: Concordance of ‘arbitration’ and ‘Duterte’ in the SCS-Philippines corpus.

Rank	Kwic		
1	victory before the United Nations-backed Permanent Court of	Arbitration	against China if the Duterte administration pursued joint exploration
2	under the ruling of the Permanent Court of	Arbitration	at the Hague. Duterte policy on the wrong track
3	Benigno Aquino 3rd, whose administration filed and won the	arbitration	case against China. Duterte, however, refused to invoke the
4	Sea and for not tackling the decision on the	arbitration	Duterte’s approach is in line with Asian
5	Shoal bluff and its eventual downsizing to the PCA	Arbitration	case. With Duterte’s intransigence in pursuing his bilateral,
6	The Hague would be discussed at a later time. Duterte claimed the	arbitration	tribunal did not cover China’s
7	China Sea,” he said. ‘China construction not covered by	arbitration’	Duterte said he would continue talking to China, but
8	during the Belt and Road economic forum. Duterte had set aside the	arbitration	ruling in favor of
9	dispute to the United Nations-backed Permanent Court of	Arbitration	in 2013. Duterte said: “Aquino filed the arbitration case, and
10	this week. In a news conference in Malacañang, Duterte stressed that Manila’s	arbitration	victory against China was a non-issue

Second, although the SCS issue is a big obstacle which has jeopardized the relationship between Philippines and China during Aquino’s time, to Duterte, it is no longer a shackle of the normalization of Sino-Philippines relations. For example, use of ‘economic’ as a keyword shows that the two countries have some other common interests. In addition to the emphasis of the economic ‘exclusive zone,’ the positive collocates of ‘economic’ within a span from 5L to 5R by both MI score ( $\geq 4$ ) and T-score ( $\geq 3$ ) can be seen in Table 10. The results reveal that Philippines is attempting to enhance bilateral economic and trade cooperation with China, hoping to stimulate domestic development with the economic investment and financial grants from China. In fact, China and Philippines have a long history of friendship and, though the serious maritime disputes have divided the two countries, the relationship has remarkably improved since President Duterte’s state visit to China in October 2016. As Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr. pointed, the SCS dispute was not going to negate or prevent Philippines from pursuing other aspects of Sino-Philippines relationship, insofar as strengthening trade relationship, cultural ties, people-to-people connectivity, and even infrastructure development.[46] As a result, China has now become the largest trading partner, largest import market, and fourth largest export destination for the Philippines.[47] The above data proves that the relationship between China and Philippines cannot be only confined to the SCS issue under the Duterte administration.

Table 10: Positive collocates of ‘economic’ in the SCS-Philippines corpus (Top 6).

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	MI $\geq 4$	T-score $\geq 3$
1	cooperation	52	5.97347	7.09634
2	ties	40	6.28933	6.24369
3	development	34	6.11813	6.07567
4	trade	25	5.16060	4.86021
5	integration	16	8.57884	3.98954
6	benefits	16	7.42683	3.97675

Third, ‘war’ is a dreaded word in the keywords list, but that does not mean Philippines will go to war against China over the SCS issue. Conversely, President Duterte openly expressed his views for the war, stating ‘We avoid violence and we avoid war because frankly we cannot afford it and China

cannot afford it also at this time’.[48] He further stated ‘we cannot go to war because we cannot afford it’,[49] ‘why will I go to war (and fight) a battle I cannot win? That would make me a fool’.[50] These statements reveal that war is not first choice to solve the dispute. The collocation of ‘war’ (span: 5L to 5R, MI $\geq$ 3, T-score $\geq$ 4) in Table 11 also indicates the point. One collocation of ‘no’ explains the reason—the military of Philippines has no ‘capability’ to confront China.[51] The analysis reveals this and so does Duterte.

Table 11: Collocates of ‘war’ in the SCS-Philippines corpus (Top 3).

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	MI $\geq$ 3	T-score $\geq$ 4
1	China	296	3.75360	15.92910
2	go	124	7.70928	11.08232
3	not	120	4.37687	10.42720

At last, equilibrium strategy among big powers is still a good choice for Philippines. Compared to Aquino’s complete pro-American policy, Duterte took a different approach. He advocated independent foreign policy and decided to restore the relationship with China. Some commentators even stated that Duterte pivoted towards China and away from the US. Moreover, Duterte responded with strong words to America’s criticism of the way he handled certain human rights issues. But the above does not mean that Philippines will stay away from the US. The US is still Philippines’ traditional and important ally in the SCS issue. The collocates of ‘US’ (span: 5L to 5R, MI $\geq$ 4, T-score $\geq$ 4) in Table 12 illustrate the point. Philippines still hopes that the US will provide military intervention when they quarrel or erupt into conflict with China over the SCS disputes. Therefore, the concordance of ‘military’ shows that US military ‘aid,’ ‘alliance,’ ‘assistance,’ ‘bases,’ ‘cooperation,’ ‘exercises,’ ‘intervention,’ ‘deployment,’ and ‘might’ are significant to Philippines and can come to the defense of the Philippines in case of an armed attack in the SCS. The concordance of ‘defense’ located in the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) delivers information such as if China starts a shooting war in the SCS, the MDT with the US will be triggered into operation. The US ‘Navy,’ Defense ‘Secretary’ and ‘Secretary’ of State describe the US’ maritime and military conducts or operation in the SCS region. Thus, Duterte’s argument with the US and pro-China actions are not anti-American per se, especially in regard to the SCS issue.

Table 12: Collocates of ‘US’ in the SCS-Philippines corpus (Top 4).

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	MI $\geq$ 4	T-score $\geq$ 4
1	military	221	4.55662	14.23436
2	defense	199	5.09456	13.65942
3	navy	143	5.63591	11.71777
4	secretary	134	4.79541	11.15898

### 4.3. Indonesia’s SCS Policy

Although Indonesia reiterates that it is not a claimant country, it plays an important role in the SCS issue and it also adopts some policies to reinforce its presence in the region. As the biggest country in Southeast Asia, Indonesia holds itself responsible for the unity of ASEAN and playing a leading role in the regional affairs. In addition, Indonesia is at odds with China over rights to the exclusive economic zone in the SCS which eventually lead to the area being renamed the North Natuna Sea (unilaterally by Indonesia). Given the great interests, strategic considerations, and specific claims in SCS area, to some extent, Indonesia could be regarded as a moderate claimant.[52]

First, combining the facts with the statistical results of keywords has proved Indonesia’s role as the mediator. The top concordance ‘not’ of ‘Indonesia’ demonstrates that the country shows itself to be neutral at all times and in all places, which can be seen in Table 13. Over the past quarter century,

from the former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to the incumbent president Joko Widodo, Indonesia always adheres to the role of an honest broker in the SCS disputes. Yet the country has long endeavored to coordinate the claimants, host workshops on technical issues and lower barriers to cooperation and facilitate negotiations over COC. For instance, since 1990, Indonesia initiated and then hosted the workshops on managing potential conflicts in the SCS. Frankly, such rhetoric and efforts have increased Indonesia's regional leadership and international influence. Though, in recent years, Indonesia adopted a tough stance by reinforcing the base, seizing foreign fishing vessels, renaming the water, updating the map, quickening resource exploitation, and seeking economic development to assert sovereign rights in the overlapping waters.

Second, traces of 'Aseanization' by Indonesia over the SCS issue could be inferred. Being the largest ASEAN member, some Indonesian analysts believe that Indonesia must take a greater role in guiding ASEAN members toward fostering cooperation, particularly regarding security. This includes forming a powerful bulwark against the increasingly militaristic and aggressive China.[53] By contrast, 'ASEAN' occupied a higher ranking in the corpus which means Indonesia placed more emphasis on ASEAN's role in solving the disputes, especially based on unity. From the collocates of 'ASEAN' (span: 5L to 5R, MI $\geq$ 4, T-score $\geq$ 4) in Table 14 we can see that Indonesia tends to more focused on ASEAN unity, and it calls on all the ASEAN member states or members to come together to solve SCS disputes. Indonesia deems the SCS conundrum to be the single biggest threat to ASEAN unity and security,[54] so the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting and other summits have become the main occasions for discussing the SCS issue. Indonesia also insisted on the formulation of a legally binding COC which should be primarily based on the agreement of all ASEAN members, and pushed for a unified front to negotiate with China. It is widely known that the latter is seen in the direct bilateral negotiations with the relevant claimants.[16] Such actions display the collective unilateralism and raise the elusiveness and uncertainty on problem-solving.

Table 13: Concordance 'not' of 'Indonesia' in the SCS-Indonesia corpus.

Rank	Kwic		
1	of the South China Sea. The ministry asserted that Indonesia did	not	have overlapping jurisdiction with China and Indonesia
2	the outermost point of its outermost islands. Although Indonesia does	not	formally claim any of the disputed islands
3	said that while Indonesia lies considerably near the SCS, Indonesia does	not	have direct interests in the SCS. However,
4	why this duty should fall to them. After all, Indonesia is	not	a claimant like Vietnam, Malaysia and the
5	considered it a traditional Chinese fishing ground. Although Indonesia is	not	a claimant in the SCS dispute with
6	assets and exploit resources in the South China Sea. Indonesia is	not	a claimant in the dispute but is
7	which an international tribunal ruling invalidated in 2016. Indonesia is	not	a party to any territorial disputes, but
8	countries asserting sovereignty over the disputed waters. Indonesia is	not	a party to any major territorial disputes,
9	continues to flout the rules by citing historical precedent. Indonesia is	not	involved in any territorial disputes, but China'
10	around the Indo-Pacific flashpoints and, at present, luckily, Indonesia is	not	one. It could, though, through size and

Table 14: Collocates of ‘ASEAN’ in the SCS-Indonesia corpus (Top 8).

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	MI $\geq$ 4	T-score $\geq$ 4
1	member	41	6.61558	6.33783
2	states	34	5.14695	5.66638
3	summit	31	6.61940	5.51113
4	members	22	6.22194	4.62758
5	foreign	21	4.16323	4.32680
6	all	21	4.73.560	4.41057
7	unity	20	6.81026	4.43229
8	ministers	20	6.18877	4.41083

Lastly, Indonesia shows caution for the intervention from non-regional powers. On the one hand, Indonesia fears that such intervention would dilute its regional leadership, and on the other hand, it is also worried about China’s increasing power and militarization. The ‘US’ of the keyword list revealed Indonesia’s concern. With the help of collocates and concordance, the US ‘military presence’ or ‘presence’ is distinguished from the other collocates which can be seen in Table 15 (span: 5L to 5R, MI $\geq$ 4, T-score $\geq$ 3). Some Indonesian policymakers remain suspicious of the US presence in the region, Indonesian Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu has suggested that ‘if regional countries can manage the SCS on their own, there is no need to involve others.’ The coordinating minister for political, legal and security affairs, Luhut Pandjaitan once criticized both the US and China ‘we don’t like any power projection’.[55] However, Indonesia also invited outside powers like the US, India, Japan, and Australia to discuss the SCS issue in forums. In conclusion, Indonesia is also discreetly searching for the balance between powers.

Table 15: Collocates of ‘US’ in the SCS-Indonesia corpus (Top 5).

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	MI $\geq$ 4	T-score $\geq$ 3
1	military	22	4.96480	4.54022
2	secretary	14	6.73034	3.70642
3	defense	14	5.57422	3.66312
4	presence	12	6.38930	3.42278
5	warship	10	7.20427	3.14083

#### 4.4. Malaysia’s SCS Policy

Malaysia has close and friendly relations with China, although the latter is its biggest and most powerful rival claimant in the SCS disputes. In sharp contrast to the strong reactions of Vietnam and Philippines, Malaysia adopts a more cautious but pragmatic approach.[16] The statistical results of corpus will provide evidence to verify the above viewpoints.

In the first place, the collocates of ‘Malaysia’ are examined in Table 16 (span: 5L to 5R, MI $\geq$ 3, T-score $\geq$ 3). Interestingly, the top collocates observed are countries and regions’ names. Restoring these collocates to specific sentences and texts with the aid of concordance and file view, we find that Malaysia always clubs these claimants together with it to criticize China’s claim or emphasize their own claims over the SCS. The expression method conveys the following information: Malaysia does not want to push itself forward, especially the opposition of China which may affect its economic benefits. Malaysia also hopes that its fellow claimants could work together to negotiate the disputes with China. Scanning the concordance of ‘Malaysia’ and ‘China,’ aside from the SCS disputes, Malaysia also shows its conciliatory attitude and friendliness to China. In 2019, the former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad openly said that Malaysia did not want to adopt a confrontational stance towards China over the disputed SCS. In September of the same year, both of them agreed to

set up a joint dialogue mechanism for the SCS.[56] Some analysts pointed out that Malaysia’s non-provoking policy based on its increasing reliance on China’s trade and investment.[16] In reality, China pumped in billions of dollars for infrastructure projects and has become the debt-heavy Malaysia’s biggest trade partner.[57] The above-mentioned shows that a direct confrontation with China is not Malaysia’s first choice and economic prosperity is still a preference.

Table 16: Collocates of ‘Malaysia’ in the SCS-Malaysia corpus (Top 5).

Rank	Collocates	Frequency	MI $\geq$ 3	T-score $\geq$ 3
1	China	86	3.03285	8.14051
2	Vietnam	84	5.69701	8.98848
3	Brunei	76	7.28623	8.66195
4	Philippines	66	5.69518	7.96724
5	Taiwan	57	6.36672	7.45835

In the second place, Malaysia is neither the country to exclaim its national interests with a hardened stance, nor the country to trade maritime sovereignty for economic profits. The low-profile approach does not mean being completely passive. Malaysia still has its own considerations for the solution of waters disputes. The collocates and concordance of the ‘US’ were examined, and the 396 results of concordance were carefully read. The key points were the ‘US’ and ‘Malaysia,’ which appeared on the same line. On examining the file view through concordance, the results showed that Malaysia hoped to avoid having too many battleships and warships in the SCS—‘Warships create tension’.[58] Malaysia also asked the US and China to respect its stand to maintain SCS as safe zone[59] but it also allowed the US Navy to visit Sabah while conducting freedom of navigation operations in the SCS.[60] Under the Mahathir Doctrine, ‘Malaysia is choosing to maintain an equal distance’ from the powers (the US and China) in the crisis.[61] These facts illustrate that Malaysia does not welcome the outside powers’ excessive interference, but it is willing to enjoy the benefits of the balance between the superpowers. ‘ASEAN,’ one of the keywords, is another power that Malaysia could depend on. Malaysia spares no effort to promote ASEAN and hopes it will sign the COC with China. On examining the collocates of ‘ASEAN,’ ‘China’ emerges as the top collocating noun. The 94 concordances of ‘China’ and ‘ASEAN’ are then read carefully. On eliminating 17 irrelevant results in the South ‘China’ Sea concordance, about 26% concordance concerned with COC remain. The results indicate that Malaysia hopes that the implementation of COC with ASEAN could constrain China’s expansion in the SCS.

Furthermore, to protect Malaysia’s maritime rights and security, it is important to address matters relating to the SCS through peaceful means and international law sounds like a good option. The top collocating noun of keyword ‘international’ is ‘law,’ and all 34 concordance results for ‘law’ focus on three aspects: the US will continue free navigation wherever international law allows, China is urged to be consistent with international law and its nine-dash line claim has no basis in international law, and the SCS disputes should be resolved in accordance with international law. It is clear that these countries are using international law to serve their own benefits.

## 5. Conclusion

This article attempts to explore the SCS policy of the four ASEAN claimant states from quantitative and qualitative aspects based on the corpus. The statistical results provide another perspective to probe innovative views or verify some previous standpoints in social, political or other fields. With the assistance of AntConc using the functions of keyword list, collocates and concordance, the study has shown that each ASEAN claimant state adopts a different set of policies in dealing with the SCS issue particularly in reaction to China’s activities and behaviors in the SCS.

Vietnam’s absolutely different keywords distinguish it from the other three countries and show its



extreme efforts for the internationalization of the SCS issue. Vietnam grasps every opportunity to discuss the SCS and convey its respect for the peaceful resolution and international law, while also always referring cryptically to the fact that its stance has won most countries' understanding and support. ASEAN, the US, Japan, and other powers have become Vietnam's main cooperative targets to confine its socialist partner in the SCS disputes. Great changes have taken place in the Philippines' SCS policies since Duterte came to power in 2016; hence, 'Duterte' is a symbolic word in the keyword list. Although Philippines gained the victory in the international tribunal, Duterte could employ the beneficial arbitration to counter or irritate its powerful rival in the SCS issue. To avoid a losing war and improve domestic economic development, Duterte decided to enhance cooperation with China in every aspect. However, the superficial nearness and closeness is not reflective of total estrangement with the US. The world's largest power is still Philippines' ally, which may provide the latter protection at a critical time even though they occasionally have disagreements. Indonesia is a 'neutral' state whenever it stresses such a role in the SCS issue, though some analysts view it as a 'moderate' claimant. Being the biggest ASEAN member with a consistently growing economy, Indonesia is sufficiently confident to take responsibility for the unity of ASEAN in dealing with SCS disputes. In the past, Indonesia held an unwelcoming attitude to the interference from outside powers with worries of diminished leadership in the region. However, because of the continued internal disunity of ASEAN and the rising 'assertiveness' of China, Indonesia discreetly attempts to leverage external forces to offset such imbalance. As China's biggest trade partner in ASEAN, Malaysia's economic considerations always outweigh the disputes in the SCS which leads to its adoption of a low-profile and pragmatic policies to avoid jeopardizing the close relationship with China. Such a non-confrontational stance, however, completely contradicts Malaysia's compromise and retreat over the disputes to date. Malaysia still firmly occupies the maritime islands and reefs that it has seized. The US, ASEAN, COC and international law are also in Malaysia's favor and could be used to hamper China in the SCS issue.

In general, this study is a new attempt based on the viewable statistical results to analyze or verify the SCS policies with the help of corpus. The corpus-based approach can be a helpful complement to some relevant studies. Being limited to the English-language sources however, this study may only explore the policies that the target countries want the world to know. For the four claimants, only Philippines use English as one of their official languages now; and all other countries have their own native languages that they use as their official language, although English is widely accepted and used in these countries. We could reasonably doubt that the claimants may convey different information in their native language to their people for public support, after all, the single English-language source cannot take all details into account. In the future, we could consider other language sources as comparative samples to build corpora for the study complementation. In addition, given the limitation in technology, the corpus software could not be directly used to analyze all language sources, especially some minority languages. Researchers have to consider such points and employ other tools or methods to achieve study objectives.

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