Peace through Joint Marine and Cruise Tourism in the South China Sea: A Potential Spotlight in Regional Cooperation?

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Peace through Marine & Cruise Tourism

• Open and sustainable tourism is often recognized for its ability to drive peace, security and understanding.

• As people gain exposure to other countries’ maritime claims and rights to use the waters of disputed areas through travel and tourism, their tolerance, and acknowledgement, of the rights of others should increase.

• An open and sustainable tourism sector means a higher level of positive peace and that countries with a more open and sustainable tourism sector tend to be more peaceful.
Two Examples of Peace through Tourism

• The Disputed Machias Seal Island in the Gulf of Maine between the United States and Canada.

• The Swallow Reef in the disputed Spratly Islands of the SCS between/among China, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam.
Machias Seal Island
Machias Seal Island is one of the boundary lines under dispute between Canada and the United States. The two countries have territorial disputes over the island.
The American and Canadian bird-watching businesses share the trade by landing **bird-watching tourists on the disputed island** by turns and paying taxes to their respective governments. **Sea Watch Tours** is the only company in Canada with access to Machias Seal Island. American **Bold Coast Charter Company’s** price for the approximately 5 hour seabird watching tour between Cutler Harbor of Maine to Machias Seal Island is around US$150.
In 1989 the governors and premiers of the five Gulf jurisdictions – Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia – established *the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment* as a Canadian-American regional partnership that provides collaborative leadership on cross-border issues such as ecosystem conditions, water quality, and climate change within the Gulf of Maine watershed.
Action Plan of the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment

• The Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment Action Plan 2012–2017, the Council’s 5th Action Plan, presented the goals, outcomes, and activities that the Council pursued in the 5-year period.

• The Action Plan addressed issues that require regional collaboration.
Layang Layang (Swallow Reef) Diving Resort was built in 1991. The land feature is disputed between China, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam in the Spratly area.
This is the only land feature in the Spratly Islands that is open to international tourists.

In 2018, a 6-day 5-night scuba-diving tour costs US$1,500 during regular season and US$1,650 during high season.

Cooperation in Marine & Cruise Tourism in the Disputed SCS Islands. Is this desirable and possible?
A window of opportunity is opening for the establishment of a joint marine & cruise tourism cooperation mechanism in the SCS as a result of several recent developments, including:

• The release of the document titled “Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative” by China in June 2017;

• The issue of the Joint Statement between ASEAN and China on Tourism Cooperation at the 20th ASEAN-China Summit in November 2017;

• The agreement reached between China’s and ASEAN countries’ governors and mayors in April 2018 to establish a “21st Century Maritime Silk Road Cruise Tourism City Alliance”; and

Cruise Tourism along the 21st Century MSR

• A number of marine & cruise tourist routes have been established in the SCS since 2013.

• In 3/2018, Xiamen Port Holding Group, China International Travel Service and Costa Cruises announced a cruise route passing Brunei, Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam – the 6 countries along the Maritime Silk Road. The 15-day tour departed from Xiamen, east China’s Fujian Province with 1,800 passengers on board.
ASEAN Cruise Tourism Plan in the SCS

- The 2001 ASEAN tourism development plan includes two cruise corridors passing through the SCS:

1. **Western Side of the SCS** and the Malacca Strait and
The Year 2017 marked the ASEAN-China Year of Tourism Cooperation.

The 2 sides agreed to establish a high-level cooperation mechanism between relevant tourism authorities, to be convened on a regular basis, and to cooperate in facilitating travel and tourist visits, and sharing of data and tourism statistics.
China’s Hainan Province plays a very important role in the development of joint marine & cruise tourism cooperation in the SCS

• In January 2018, Hainan released *"Hainan Tourism Development Master Plan (2017-2030)"*, proposing that from 2017 to 2020, it is necessary
  -- to basically build an international tourist island,
  -- to build Hainan into a pilot zone for the reform and innovation of China's tourism industry, and
  -- to establish a model regional tourism demonstration province.

• By 2025, Hainan province will be built into a world-class resort island resort. It will become a world-class international tourist destination in 2030.
Important Role Played by Hainan Province in the Development of Joint Marine and Cruise Tourism Cooperation in the SCS

• Under Chapter 4, Article 14 of the Master Plan, Hainan Province will actively develop uninhabited island tourism in the Paracel archipelago.

• It will rapidly develop Hainan Island’s cruise tourism, open up the transnational cruise routes between the countries along the MSR and a “pan-SCS” cruise route.

• In addition, the province plans to extend the Paracel cruise tourism to the Spratly Islands.
Challenges to the Implementation of the MSR Initiative

• China intends to implement the MSR initiative based on the Silk Road spirit of peace, cooperation, and mutual benefits.

• The SCS issue, however, has the potential to affect overall friendly cooperation between China and ASEAN and the future development of the MSR initiative.

• Vietnam protested against China’s “patriotic tourism” in the Paracel Islands, asking China to stop the tourism.

• What if China extends marine & cruise tourism to the Spratly Islands?
Marine & Cruise Tourism in the SCS

• China, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam all have interests in developing marine & cruise tourism in the disputed SCS islands, but not jointly with other claimants.

• China opened the Paracel Islands to marine and cruise tourism in 4/2013.

• The cruise route, departing from Hainan Province’s Haikou to the 3 non-military land features of the Paracel Islands, namely Yinyu (Silver Islet, also known as Observation Bank), Quanfu Island and Yagong Island, was operated by Hanian Strait Shipping Co. with a single cruise ship, the Coconut Princess (Yexiang Gongzhu).
The Chinese cruise liners that sail from Hainan to the Paracel Islands.
China’s Cruise route from Sanya to three land features (no military installations) in the Paracel Islands
Four-day Marine & Cruise Tourist Trip to Xisha (Paracel Islands): Costs depending on accommodations, ranging between US$5,000 – US$800 per person

Cruise ship *Princess Changle*

Only Chinese nationals are allowed to join the trips. Tourists from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, and foreigners cannot take part.
Four-day Marine & Cruise Tourist Trip to Xisha (Paracel Islands): Costs depending on accommodations, ranging between US$5,000 – US$800 per person

Cruise ship Nanhai Zhi Meng (the Dream of the SCS)

Only Chinese nationals are allowed to join the trips. Tourists from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, and foreigners cannot take part.
A Potential Source of Tension in the SCS?

- China’s marine & cruise tourism developed in the Paracel and Spratly Islands could be challenged as a contradiction between words and actions.

- On the one hand, China has continuously advocated the idea of transforming the SCS into “a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation”.

- On the other, China continues its “patriotic” marine & cruise tourism in the Paracel Islands and has plans to open up tourism in the disputed Spratly Islands perhaps in two or three years from now.

- It is likely to trigger strong reactions from the Philippines and Vietnam and thus escalate tension in the SCS.
Peace through Joint Marine & Cruise Tourism in the disputed SCS islands

- The State practice in the Gulf of Maine (US & Canada);

- The State practice in the Spratly Islands (both joint marine scientific research and scuba diving tourism) (China/the Philippines/Vietnam; Malaysia);

- Can the countries bordering the SCS learn from the previous and existing State practices?

- Is it possible for the government tourism authorities or national tourism associations of the countries bordering the SCS (& the Gulf of Thailand) to sign a multiple agreement for the purpose of developing a joint marine and cruise tourism cooperation mechanism in this very important East Asian semi-enclosed sea?
Relevant Proposals for Promoting Tourism Cooperation in the SCS

- The development of a network of MPAs (McManus, Chircop, and others);
- The establishment of the Greater Spratly Islands Peace Park, including Scarborough Reef (McManus, Shao, and others);
- The establishment of a common market for the development of SCS cruise industry (Sun);
- The establishment of a cooperation organization for the promotion of SCS cruise tourism (Sun);
- The establishment of a Pan-SCS cruise route (Hainan Province);
- The establishment of a Pan-SCS Tourism Economic Cooperation Rim (Hainan Province).
Peace commitments made by China and ASEAN countries should not be treated as lip service

• In February 2018, at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Retreat in Singapore, the participating ministers recognized the benefits of having the SCS as “a sea of peace, stability and prosperity.”

• This is the SCS policy goal shared by China and the ASEAN.

• In early March 2018, at a press conference held by the First Session of the 13th National People's Congress in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that

“In the year ahead, China will work with ASEAN countries to seize the opportunity, broaden cooperation, prevent interference and overcome challenges.

Cherishing what we have worked so hard to achieve, China and ASEAN countries will speed up the COC consultation, actively explore a mechanism of cooperation among the coastal states, and promote peace and cooperation in the South China Sea.”
Peace commitment made by China and ASEAN countries

• Last month, when meeting with the Philippine President Duterte at the Boao Asia Forum, President Xi stated that “[w]e should continue to properly handle SCS issue, and discuss joint exploration, development and cooperation . . . thus making the [SCS] a sea of cooperation and friendship.”

• Also last month, the Heads of State/Government of ASEAN Member States met in Singapore for the 32nd ASEAN Summit, where, again, they “recognized the benefits of having the SCS as a sea of peace, stability and prosperity” and welcomed practical measures that could reduce tensions in the area.
How to turn the idea of regional tourism cooperation into reality?

- After a careful overall assessment of costs and benefits, a conclusion could possibly be made in support of the idea of promoting regional tourism cooperation in the SCS.

- If political willingness is achieved, could the idea be sent to the Joint Working Group and Senior Official Meetings under the 2002 DOC for further discussion?

- Could the proposal be submitted to the ASEAN Tourism Working Group and China-ASEAN dialogue meetings for deliberation?

- Could it also be presented to Boao Asia Forum for further discussion?
How to turn the idea of regional tourism cooperation into reality?

- If the proposal is considered positively, a study group consisting of experts and official representatives from China and ASEAN countries could be established, which is asked to address all of the issues in relation to the joint marine and cruise tourism cooperation mechanism, including the term of the agreement, appropriate name for the mechanism such as a council, alliance, or federation, the nature and objective of the mechanism, participating cruise ports, selected disputed islands and areas, possible cruise routes, participation of public and private sectors involving marine and cruise tourism, financing, decision-making, etc. and then prepare a final report and official recommendation to be further discussed by the governments concerned.
Possible Political Benefits

(1) The cooperation mechanism could serve as a concrete implementation of the 2002 DOC;
(2) It could help implement the 21st Century MSR initiative;
(3) It could help further promote tourism & economic development cooperation between China and the ASEAN countries;
(4) It has the potential to prevent the escalation of conflict between China and the U.S. in the disputed SCS area; and
(5) It could help move forward the stated policy goal of ASEAN and China to transform the SCS from a sea of conflict into “a sea of peace, stability, friendship, cooperation, and prosperity.”
Challenges Ahead

1. The claimant states’ sovereignty and security concerns;
2. Resistance mainly from the military;
3. Relevant law enforcement issues;
4. Environmental protection problems;
5. The concern about its small contribution to the overall economy;
6. The tourist industries’ interest and willingness to invest;
7. Lack of facilities in the disputed islands; and
8. The problem of “Patriotic tourism”.
PEACE BOAT IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development
in Marine & Cruise Tourism
Thank you very much for your attention!