

Dual and multiple naming in the South China Sea: The cases of the Pratas Islands and Scarborough Shoal

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This paper mainly discusses the naming of islets, rocks and shoals in the South China Sea by looking at the cases of the Pratas Islands and Scarborough Shoal. The naming of places in the South China Sea has been a symbolic extension of territorial claims of the neighboring countries that have displayed great interest in the said areas. The Pratas Islands are currently under the jurisdiction of Taiwan but are claimed both by China and Taiwan. China and Taiwan name the Pratas Island as *Dongsha Qundao* and *Tungsha Islands* respectively. Both nomenclatures share the same literal meaning, “eastern sandy archipelago”, but in different Romanized spellings. Scarborough Shoal is presently under Chinese military occupation, but is claimed by China, the Philippines, and Taiwan, which named it *Huangyan Dao* (meaning “Yellow Rock Island”), *Kulumpol ng Panatag* (meaning “Panatag Shoal”), and *Minzhu Reef* (meaning “Democracy Reef”) respectively. The paper explores both the history of naming and the usage of nomenclatures of the aforementioned cases in the international arena.

INTRODUCTION

Both the Pratas Islands and Scarborough Shoal are two named geographical features in the South China Sea.

The Pratas Islands are located about 310 km southeast of Hong Kong with coordinates of 20°43' N 116°42' E. The Islands consist of three atolls, namely, Pratas Atoll, North Vereker Atoll and South Vereker Atoll. Pratas Atoll is circular in shape, and Pratas Island is in the west of the atoll. The North Vereker Bank and South Vereker Bank are adjacent to each other and are about 74 km to the northwest of the Pratas Atoll. Pratas Island is the only area above sea level. Both North and South Vereker Banks are below sea level.

Scarborough Shoal is about 198 km west of Subic Bay with coordinates of 15°11' N 117°46' E. Scarborough Shoal is a triangle-shaped chain of reefs and rocks. The highest point of the shoal, South Rock, is about 1.8 m above sea-level at high tide.

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The Pratas Islands are currently under the jurisdiction of Taiwan but are claimed both by China and Taiwan under different Romanized spellings. Scarborough Shoal is presently under Chinese military occupation, but is claimed by China, the Philippines, and Taiwan with various nomenclatures. This paper explores both the history of naming and the usage of nomenclatures of the aforementioned cases in the international arena.

THE NAMING OF THE PRATAS ISLANDS

The name Pratas Islands derives from the Portuguese *Ilhas das Pratas*, meaning “Silver Plate Islands”, in the 16th century. The name derives from the round shape of the islands, and gained popularity among contemporary European seafarers, even though they were competitors. For instance, the Dutch recorded a yacht named Utrecht that sailed from Batavia (today’s Jakarta) to Formosa (today’s Taiwan) in 1654 but was shipwrecked near *Ilha da Prata* in June. The crew and passengers survived on sea turtles, sea birds and local root crops and were finally rescued in August of the same year (Blussé, Milde and Ts’ao 1996: 379, 406).

The Cantonese fishermen may have also named Pratas Island as they frequented the islands long ago and erected a temple there, but the exact local name is unknown to us. It is suspected that the name *Shānhú zhōu* 珊瑚洲, meaning “coral shoal” in the Chinese sources called *Guǎngzhōu jì* 廣州記, literally meaning “Cantonese Record”, compiled between 265 and 420 AD, could be the Pratas Islands.

At the turn of 20th century, Nishizawa Yoshizi 西澤吉次, a Japanese businessman established a guano collecting station on Pratas Island and renamed it as *Nishizawa Island* in 1908. However, Nishizawa Yoshizi later withdrew from “his” island after a diplomatic protest and confrontation with the Manchu Empire of China.

During World War Two, the Japanese naval forces occupied Pratas Island. Near the end of war, the US submarine USS Bluegill sent personnel to land on Pratas Island and named it *Bluegill Island*, after the Japanese occupants had withdrawn.

The Pratas Islands are now under the jurisdiction of Taiwan, and the official name is *Tungsha Islands*, meaning “eastern sandy archipelago”. Pratas Island and Prata Atoll are also called *Tungsha Island* and *Tungsha Atoll* respectively, whereas North Vereker Bank and South Vereker Bank are named *Baiwei Bank* 北衛灘 (meaning “northern guard bank”) and *Nanwei Bank* 南衛灘 (“southern guard bank”), respectively.

China (the People’s Republic of China), which claims the sovereignty right over the Pratas Islands, names it as *Dongsha Qundao*, whose meaning is as the same as *Tungsha Islands*, but in different Hanyu spelling system.

THE NAMING OF SCARBOROUGH SHOAL

The name Scarborough Shoal is from the name of the English ship *Scarborough*, which grounded on one of the rocks of the Shoal in the year of 1748 during its voyage to China. The Captain of the *Scarborough*, Philip D'Auvergne, named the shoal after his ship (Bonnet 2012: 8).

Before Scarborough Shoal had gained its current coinage, the Spanish in the Philippines had called it the *Maroona Shoal*, and later the *Bajo de Masingloc*, meaning "under Masingloc" (Hayton 2014: 272n17). After decolonization, the Philippines had named the Scarborough Shoal as *Kulumpol ng Panatag*, meaning "Panatag Shoal".

The Chinese government in 1935 (then the Republic of China or ROC) grouped Scarborough Shoal as part of today's *Chungsha Islands*, meaning "central sandy archipelago" (Zou 1999: 71). No official name was given to Scarborough Shoal, but afterward the literal translation of the highest point, South Rock, of the shoal, *Nánshí* 南石, was employed to represent the entire geographical feature on the map of East Indies or *Nányáng qúndǎo* 南洋群島 (literally meaning "archipelago of the southern ocean"). The said Chinese government named Scarborough Shoal *Mínzhǔ jiāo* 民主礁, literally meaning "Democracy Reef", in 1947 to commemorate the formulation of the first Chinese constitution in the same year. The ROC was later overrun by the communists, who proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), in 1949, while the Nationalists fled to Taiwan to form a government-in-exile under US patronage.¹ Since then, "Democracy Reef" has become the official name for Scarborough Shoal in Taiwan.

In 1983, the People's Republic of China renamed "Democracy Reef" as Huangyan Dao 黄岩岛, meaning "Yellow Rock Island".

THE CENTRAL SANDY ARCHIPELAGO AND THE ADDITION OF SOUTH ROCK

The *Chungsha Islands* or "central sandy archipelago" was part of the cardinal naming practices in the South China Sea. Thus, the Chinese authorities in the 1940s had *Tungsha Islands* (literally meaning "eastern sandy archipelago") for the Pratas Islands, *Shisha Islands* (literally meaning "western sandy archipelago") for the Parcel Islands, and *Nansha Islands* (literally meaning "southern sandy archipelago") for the Spratly Islands. The *Chungsha Islands* or "central sandy archipelago" was the name for Macclesfield Bank. However, the "central sandy archipelago" is a work of geographical fiction. According to the official Chinese parlance, the "central sandy archipelago" contains the Macclesfield Bank and several underwater geographical features between Helen Shoal in the north and Dreyer Shoal in the south. None of them are above the water's surface, leading to the claim that the word "archipelago" was problematic and merely superficial. The adding of Scarborough Shoal to the east into the "central sandy archipelago" simply provides the aforementioned group with

¹ After the end of World War Two, the Chinese Nationalist Forces of the ROC, under the authorization of Douglas MacArthur's General Order No. 1, represented the victorious Allied forces in receiving the official surrender of the Japanese 10th Area Army in Formosa (today's Taiwan) in 1945, in the same way as the Chinese Nationalist Force did in North Vietnam for the surrender of the Japanese 1st Army Group. The defeat of Nationalist Forces in the Chinese civil war in 1949 ultimately led to the government-in-exile fleeing to Taiwan, which did not obtain US support for its legitimacy on the island until the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, as part of the US geopolitics of the coming Cold War.

its only geographical feature, namely South Rock, that protrudes above the water's surface (Hayton 2014: 117). However, the Scarborough Shoal is an entirely separate geological feature, not at all contiguous with Macclesfield Bank. It is the grouping and the collective naming as “central sandy archipelago” that together generate an impression of an entity and “islands”.

There is no doubt that the naming of four “sandy archipelagoes” in the South China Sea enhanced the territorial claims within the so-called nine-dash line asserted by the Chinese authorities. All the four “sandy archipelagoes” are the claimed land features within the nine-dash line. The nine-dash line claimed by the PRC is a legacy from the eleven-dash line declared by the ROC in 1947. Nevertheless, the grouping and naming of geographical features in the South China Sea by eastern, western, central, and southern labels is inherited from the previous somewhat similar grouping but with dissimilar naming. The aforementioned map of the East Indies or *Nányáng qúndǎo* 南洋群島, drawn and released immediately after World War II, had the “southern sandy archipelago” for Macclesfield Bank, and treated these two as dual names on the map. The term *Tuansha Islands* 團沙群島 (literally meaning “mass of sandy archipelago”) was assigned for the Spratly Islands instead. The name “central sandy archipelago” did not exist on the map. The map also showed no sign of the “eastern sandy archipelago”, but simply the “eastern sandy island 東沙島” instead. Only the “western sandy archipelago” was there co-existing with “Parcel Is. and Reefs” as dual naming. There was also no so-called eleven-dash line that would hint at such a territorial leap of imagination on that map. It is apparent that the map-makers might consider that the southern limit of geographical features in the South China Sea only reaches to the Macclesfield Bank, while the Scarborough Shoal, which was only represented by the name South Rock, was not part of any “sandy archipelagoes”. Table 1 compares the aforementioned Chinese naming of sandy archipelagoes in the South China Sea between the Map of the East Indies and the names in popular usage nowadays.



Figure 1. Map of the East Indies

Table 1. The evolution of the naming of sandy archipelagoes

	<i>Nányáng qúndǎo</i> 南洋群島圖 (Map of the East Indies)	Today's Name
Pratas Islands	“eastern sandy island” 東沙島	“eastern sandy archipelago” 東沙群島
Parcel Islands	“western sandy archipelago” 西沙群島	“western sandy archipelago” 西沙群島
Macclesfield Bank	“southern sandy archipelago” 南沙群島	“central sandy archipelago” 中沙群島
Scarborough Shoal (*South Rock)	South Rock 南石	
Spratly Islands	“mass of sandy archipelago” 團沙群島	“southern sandy archipelago” 南沙群島

A close examination of the naming of geographical features of the Spratly Islands in the *Map of the East Indies* also demonstrates the limited geographical information on what was then referred to as the “mass of sandy archipelago”. Among the 12 geographical names, 9 were roughly products of the phonetic borrowing from the English into the Chinese appellations, whereas the remaining 3 were the literal translation into Chinese toponyms, in contrast to the current Chinese naming which is predominately unrelated to the original nomenclatures in English. Table 2 displays the naming of geographical features of the Spratly Islands in the *Map of the East Indies*.

Table 2. Naming of geographical features of the Spratly Islands

	<i>Nányáng qúndǎo</i> 南洋群島圖 (Map of the East Indies)	Chinese Name Today
Itu Aba Island	Y•d• •b• Island 伊都阿巴島	Taiping Island 太平島
Spratly Island	S•b•l•tu• Island 斯巴拉脫島	Nanwei Island 南威島
Thitu Island	Dìd• Island 帝都島	Zhongye Island 中業島
Riflemen Bank	Láifúmén Bank 來福門灘	Nanwei Bank 南薇灘
Namyit Island	Nány• Island 南伊島	Hongxiu Island 鴻麻島

Loai-ta Island	Luów•n Island 羅灣島	Nanyao Island 南鑰島
James Shoal	Zh•nm• Shoal 詹姆沙	Zengmu Shoal 曾母暗沙
Amboyna Clay	• nb•nà Reef 安波那暗礁	Anbo Sand 安波沙洲
N. Luconia Shoal	North Lúk•ngní Beach 北盧康尼亞灘	Běik•ng Shoal 北康暗沙
Investigator Shoal	Investigation Reef 調查礁	Haikou Shoal 海口暗沙
North Danger Reef	North Danger Reef 北險礁	Shuangzi Reefs 雙子礁群
Fiery Cross (Reef)	Cross Fire Reef 十字火礁	Yongshu Reef 永暑礁

- Notes: 1. Those in *Italics* stand for literal translations for place names in Chinese
2. Those in **blue** stand for phonetic borrowing in Chinese place naming
3. Those in **red** stand for altogether different meanings in Chinese place naming

A further examination of the “Map of China’s National Humiliation (Zh•ngguó guóch•dītú)” 中國國恥地圖, released in 1927 by Chung Hwa Book Co., Ltd. (Zh•nghuá sh•jú) 中華書局 in Shanghai, also illustrates the Chinese perspective towards Macclesfield Bank, Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands. There are two concentric circles on the map; the red inner ring for the national boundary in the 1920s, and the blue outer ring for the “old national boundary”. The latter is an extraordinarily expansive imperial domain, stretching even beyond that of the Manchu Empire of East Asia, which was overrun in 1911. The red inner ring only reached as far as the Macclesfield Bank in the South China Sea, and left the Spratly Islands out of its range. The blue outer ring further encircled the Kuril Islands, Korea, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Sulu Islands, northern Borneo (Brunei, Sabah, Sarawak, and Labuan), the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the entire mainland Southeast Asia, referring to these as “the lost territories” (Callahan 2009: 154-155). Nevertheless, neither the inner nor the outer rings encompassed the Scarborough Shoal.

It is apparent that by the end of World War Two, most of the Chinese, even the Chinese expansionists, only extended their territorial scope to the Macclesfield Bank and paid no attention to the Scarborough Shoal.

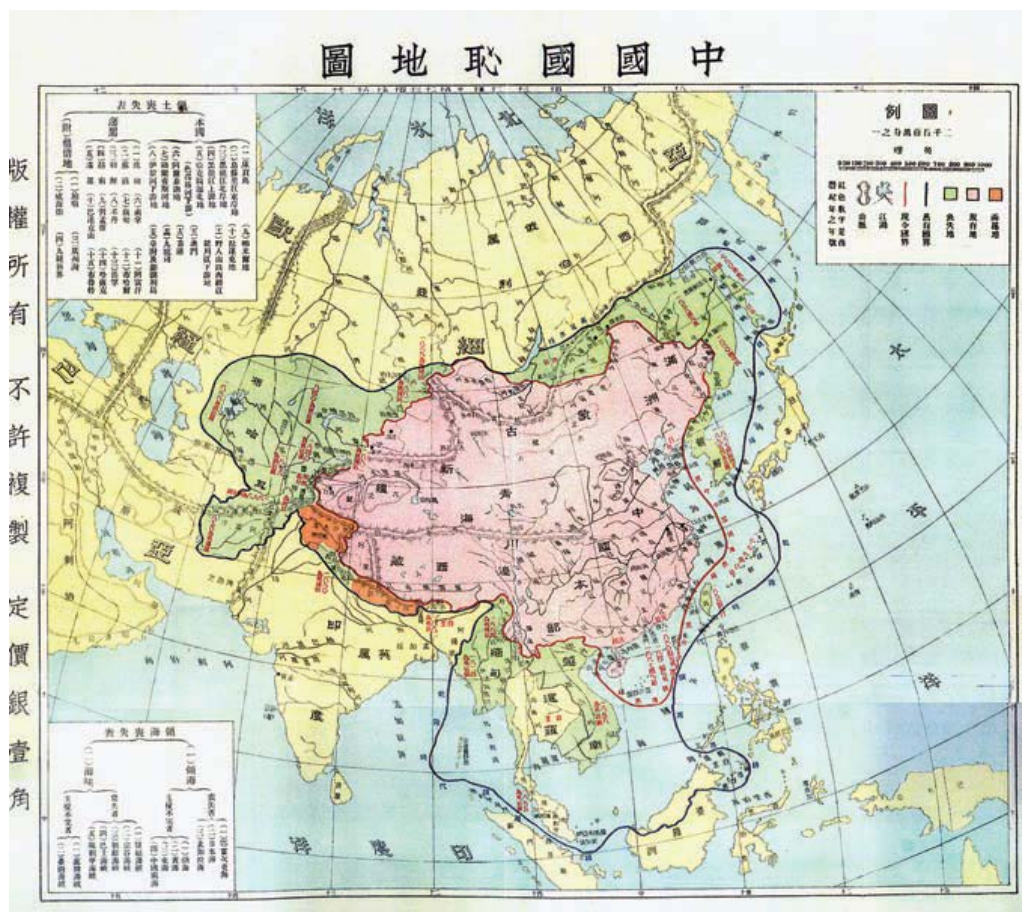


Figure 2. Map of China's National Humiliation

INTERNATIONAL USAGE OF NAMES ON PRATAS ISLANDS AND SCARBOROUGH SHOAL

Despite the fact of different names given by the neighboring countries for the Pratas Islands and Scarborough Shoal, the international world mostly follows the aforementioned two nomenclatures. A good example is from the usage of place names in the books and articles discussing these two geographical features in the South China Sea.

The South China Sea: the struggle for power in Asia, published by Yale University Press, and written by Bill Hayton, provides a good review and insightful analysis on the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. If we look at the entries in the index, both Pratas and Scarborough are treated as main entries with page numbers, whereas the entries for both Dongsha and Huangyan are referred to as Pratas and Scarborough, respectively. No page numbers are provided for either Dongsha or Huangyan. The rest of the nomenclatures do not appear in the index (Hayton 2014: 289-298).

Nevertheless, most of the scholarly works may use different names for *Pratas* and *Scarborough* in different contexts, especially when a certain country is claiming for sovereignty. For instance, the Scarborough Shoal has been a hot issue of territorial dispute since the 2012 standoff. The major players here are the Philippines and China. China would officially use the name Huangyan Island rather than Scarborough Shoal, whereas the Philippines accept the international common usage of Scarborough Shoal. Thus, one expression is to have Scarborough Shoal as the main entry. After the main entry, we have Huangyan Island within parentheses and specify it as the usage in China (Green 2016: 3, 4, 36). In this case, even Taiwan claims to have the sovereignty over Scarborough Shoal, almost no works use the nomenclature “Democracy Reef” since Taiwan was not a substantial player in the Scarborough Shoal standoff in the year of 2012.

As a matter of fact, even Taiwanese scholars do not call Scarborough Shoal Democracy Reef in their works. For instance, Song Yann-Huei 宋燕輝 of Academia Sinica from Taiwan is his 1999 book, *Managing potential conflicts in the South China Sea: Taiwan's perspective* [underline by current paper], only uses the term Scarborough Shoal. He mentions *Huangyan Dao* as an alternative name in Chinese once, and has it within parentheses (Song 1999: 10-11). Nevertheless, there is no “Democracy Reef” throughout his book, even though he has *Hoang Sa* in Vietnamese in parentheses to stand for the Paracel Islands, and both *Nansha* in Chinese and *Truong Sa* in Vietnamese in parentheses to indicate the Spratly Islands (Song 1999: 3, 10).

As for the case of the *Pratas*, which is currently under the jurisdiction of Taiwan, the popular expression is the *Prata Islands*, with *Dongsha Islands* then mentioned within parentheses (Truong and Knio 2016: 44). Few scholarly works would use the official spellings designated by Taiwan, namely *Tungsha*, but would employ those of China instead. Bill Hayton's book in 2014 also provides the same conclusion but in a more sophisticated context, in which he uses the literal translation of the Chinese place name for the *Pratas*, namely *eastern sands*, and then has the official spelling in Chinese and *Pratas* within parentheses. Thus, it becomes *eastern sands (Dongsha or Pratas)* when he illuminates the motivation behind the grouping and naming by Chinese in the South China Sea during the 1940s (Hayton 2014: 117). *Dongsha* is preferred to *Tungsha* here.

CHANGING TRENDS OF OFFICIAL NAMING IN TAIWAN

There is one factor leading to the disappearance of official nomenclatures of Taiwan internationally. The case of the *Pratas Islands*, namely *Tungsha* vs. *Dongsha*, is the result of the change of Romanization system from the Wade-Giles to the Hanyu spelling, especially when the Chinese Nationalist Party or Kuomintang (KMT) regained political power in 2008. After that, President Ma Ying-jeou of the Chinese Nationalist Party adopted a pro-China policy. The place names in Taiwan were standardized to the pinyin spellings in the first year of his regime (2008 – 2016), except a few internationally well-known usages such as Taipei, Kaohsiung, and Hsinchu, whose pinyin spelling are supposed to be Taibei, Gaoxiong, and Xinzhu, respectively. Thus, the Department of Land Administration, Ministry of Interior, which

is in charge of the management of geographical names, officially used *Dongsha* instead of *Tungsha* in its data sheet concerning the location of Islands in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, there is still an inconsistency in Romanized spellings for official usage. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) released a book entitled *Peace in the South China Sea, national territory secure forever: position paper on ROC South China Sea Policy* in 2016. Here the Pratas Islands are referred to as *Tungsha Islands* (Lee 2016: 13). However, when Taiwan proclaimed the Pratas Islands an Atoll National Park in 2007, it was named *Dongsha Atoll National Park*, and the name is still in use today.²

If we treat the official nomenclatures as an extended symbolic issue of national sovereignty, then we may see how the changing trends of official naming in Taiwan for Scarborough Shoal reflect the marginalized role of Taiwan, since the case of Scarborough Shoal for Taiwan is more than a choice of Romanized spelling systems. The nomenclature of *Democracy Island* is semantically different from that of *Huangyan Island*.

In 1999, the MFA of Taiwan issued a statement protesting the Philippines for the latter's demarcating of Scarborough Shoal into its territory, in which the Scarborough Shoal is referred to as Huangyan Island.³ In 2009, the MFA again protested against the legalization of Scarborough Shoal by the Philippines government into its own national territory. The declaration also used the name Huangyan Island.⁴ Democracy Island did not show up in the two announcements in both years. Only the memorandum for the South China Sea Policy by MFA in 2016 uses Democracy Island, with Huangyan Island being mentioned as an alias.⁵

There is a news article in the year of 2012 summarizing the inconsistency of official usage for Scarborough Shoal. The article reports that only the Ministry of National Defense (MND) uses the name "Democracy Reef", whereas MFA the name "Huangyan Island", after the Chinese authorities (PRC), for a press conference on the 20th of April, 2012. "Democracy Reef" was no longer there. In addition, the Ministry of Interior used either only "Huangyan Island" or "Huangyan Island (Democracy Reef)" on its official website for the Scarborough Shoal.⁶

Nevertheless, the inconsistency of usage of names has not reached an end yet. MND is said to prefer the name "Democracy Reef". For instance, the *Defense Strategy and Assessment Journal* 戰略與評估 (ISSN 2223-9413), a journal released by MND, published an article in 2016 on the PRC's expansionism in South China Sea. The expression for Scarborough Shoal is "Huangyan Island (Democracy Reef)", a dual-

² Marine National Park Headquarters (Last Updated: April 11, 2018)

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement 外交部聲明, July 13, 1999.

⁴ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Latest News 最新消,, February 4, 2009.

⁵ The memorandum of the Republic of China's South China Sea Policy 中華民國南海政策說帖 March 21, 2016.

⁶ See *Newtalk* 新頭殼, September 6, 2013, "Mínzhǔ jiāo? Huángyán dǎo? Wǒ zhèngfǔ lián míngchēng dōu bùtóng diào 民主礁? 黃岩島? 我政府連名稱都不同調 (Democracy Reef? Huangyan Island? Our government has different names)".

naming that de-emphasizes its own official nomenclature. We may also find an article in 2016 published by the Navy Command Headquarters, MND, in *Navy Professional Journal* 海軍學術雙月刊 (ISSN 2076-9067), which uses the name “Huangyan Island” for Scarborough Shoal. In 2017, the *Army Bimonthly* 陸軍學術雙月刊 (ISSN 1995-1758), a journal issued by the Army Command Headquarters, MND, published an article on the issue of the geopolitics of Asia-Pacific Area, also chooses the name “Huangyan Island”. None of them utilize the name “Democracy Reef” in their articles.

Another ironic case comes from the same Song Yann-Huei, who once published a book in 1999 without mentioning the term “Democracy Reef” in his work, wrote a news comment for a pro-China newspaper in 2018, after the USS Hopper (DDG-70) performed a freedom of navigation cruise by sailing within 12 nautical miles of the disputed Scarborough Shoal in January 2018. Song used the name “Democracy Reef” for the title of his news comment to challenge the silence of the Tsai administration of the Democratic Progressive Party (2016 onwards) for their failing in defending the territorial sovereignty of the Scarborough Shoal. However, “Democracy Reef” is only for the title of his news comment. The rest of his article retained the name “Huangyan Island”, except putting “Democracy Reef” in parentheses as a note for “Huangyan Island” when the latter appears for the first time.⁷

The inconsistency of name usage even exists in the same official document released by the government. The aforementioned *Peace in the South China Sea, national territory secure forever*, released in 2016 by the MFA, finally persists in the official usage by having the introduction of the Scarborough Reef as “Mingzhu Reef, also known as Huangyan Island or Scarborough Reef”. When a subtitle refers to Macclesfield Bank, it also preserves the traditional usage by having it as “Chungsha (Macclesfield Bank) Islands”. Nevertheless, the book suddenly turns to the name *Zhongsha* instead of Chungsha when it discusses the topic related to the Shisa (Paracel) Islands (Lee 2016: 13).

CONCLUSION

The dual or multiple naming of both the Pratas Islands and the Scarborough Shoal in South China Sea is a result of territorial disputes among the claimant countries. The common usage since or before the 19th century, namely the Pratas Islands and the Scarborough Shoal, are mostly treated as the main expression in the international arena. Dual or multiple naming may exist, and those names when proclaimed by a claimant country are usually not treated as the main nomenclature by either being placed after the main nomenclature or by being placed within parentheses.

Not all the nomenclatures designated by a claimant country may appear as one of the dual or multiple names. The case of the Tungsha Islands and Democracy Reef by Taiwan best illustrates this point. The case of Democracy Reef reflects the fact that Taiwan plays a less significant role in the issue of the said territorial dispute. Moreover, both cases also result from the failing of Taiwan in utilizing its own official

⁷ See *China Times* 中國時報, February 13, 2018, “Fàngqì mínzhǔ jiāo zhǔquán? 放棄民主礁主權? (Giving up the sovereignty of the democratic reef?)”.

nomenclatures, but in favor of that of China, even though the Pratas Islands are currently under its *de facto* jurisdiction.

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