

## Chapter 2

# The Small Powers in World Politics: Outline of a Theory of African-Asian Critical Realism

**Abstract** This chapter aims to conceptualize a framework of for better understanding the challenges, actions and rationales of the African and Asian small powers in the post-1989 global order. It will be divided into three parts. First, it will review the literature on small power/state studies. Second, following a critique of the major approaches in small power studies, I will argue for the need for a theory of critical realism to better capture the relationships between domestic politics and foreign relations of the small power in Africa and Asia. Third, using Liberia and the Philippines as case studies, against the comparative trajectories in which the USA has attained global hegemony after 1991 and China has gradually become a great power after 2000, in the light of the recent US containment policy shift towards China, which has stirred up versatile dynamics of East Asian small power politics, in favor of a global multipolarity, I will highlight the foundation of this critical realism theory as a practice of statecraft for building the strong small powers in terms of two main aspects of economic nationalism: resource-focused and sovereignty-asserting.

**Keywords** African and Asian politics • African-Asian critical realism • Hegemony and multipolarity • International relations • Liberia • The Philippines • Small power politics • USA–China relations

## 2.1 Introduction

Pressured by internal public demand, the early 1990s witnessed the Philippine state's successes in negotiating for the withdrawal of the US military bases from its territories. On the US side, the disintegration of the Soviet bloc in 1991 and that China's Deng Xiaoping reverted Mao Zedong's foreign policy not to export communist revolution but chose to engage the post-1978 China with the global capitalist economy would be regarded as a significant success in US containment of communism and therefore partially justified the withdrawal of US troops from the Philippines and other neighboring countries in the Pacific Rim. The following two

decades witnessed burgeoning economic relationships between Southeast Asian countries and China. However, in January 2012, troubled by continued territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea where oil and fishery resources were perceived to be abundant, and in view of the US policy in returning to Asia, the Philippines offered the USA for reopening its military base.<sup>1</sup>

Such move immediately put China into a diplomatic test. Instead of immediately launching economic sanction against the Philippines, the analysis indicated that China would first attempt to lobby for Philippine sectoral supports through pouring in more resources. Hence, the Philippines was capable of ‘cashing in’ from the great powers’ competition.<sup>2</sup> Despite the perception that the Philippines’ is a small power in comparison with the USA and China, the above episode shows the astuteness of an Asian small power in maneuvering and gaining benefits from the great powers. Against the post-millennial context where USA and China engaged in global competition, the Philippines’ flexible diplomatic maneuvering also called for the need to reconsider the nature and possibilities of small power politics in the developing countries of post-colonial Asia and Africa. In line with this call, I will answer the following questions in the following pages:

- (1) How could we account for the root causes and developmental trajectories leading to the emergence of the present US–China global competition?
- (2) How could we contextually account for the interests, rationales and actions of the African-Asian small powers vis-à-vis the great powers?
- (3) How could we account for the prospects of small power politics?

These questions warrant a more comprehensive, if not better, theoretical framework which should be grounded in Asian and African empirical realities. To begin with, a critique of the existing paradigms of the small power politics will follow.

## 2.2 Small Power Politics: Theoretical Issues

### 2.2.1 *Major Paradigms of Small Power Politics*

Contemporary small power politics may be categorized into three major paradigms of international relations; realism, constructivism and dependency theory. In the first place, realism defines interests in terms of power thus reduce state rationales and actions to the will to dominate (Morgenthau, 1962). Realism has mainly two roots in German social and political thoughts (Williams, 2004). First, influenced by

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<sup>1</sup>Sources: (1) ‘US Could Increase Pacific Presence with the Return to the Philippines’. *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 January 2012. (2) ‘US Opens Talks to Establish Foothold’. *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 January 2012.

<sup>2</sup>Source: ‘China Infuriated by US-Philippines Defense Plans’. *Russia Today TV*, 31 January 2012.

Weber's (1948) theorization of the state as a human community that inevitably monopolizes physical violence, realism proposes a power politics perspective for which states are constantly engaging in violent struggles for its survival and domination, both domestically and internationally. The second is legal exceptionalism. Schmitt's (2005[1922]) theorization of the sovereignty is realized through exception; a volatile zone where the state's enemies are negated, therefore qualifying the sovereign state's exceptional measures by acting outside the usual juridical and civic realms. Although civil conflict and inter-state war constitute the core of realist thinking, the state is conceived to be a functioning unit within the international anarchy whereby state rationales and actions are driven by power.

Morgenthau (1962: 29) therefore suggested that the state's political power is actually consolidated in 'psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised'. As a result, in parallel with the development of objective criteria attempting to define the small power/state (e.g., population, territorial size and other socio-economic indicators), various definitions of the small power are consistent with the small power's own perception or evaluation of its material and security relations with the other states (Hey, 2003a: 3; Keohane, 1969: 296; Rothstein, 1968: 29; Vital, 1967: 7). Equally important, the small power's subjective evaluation should be informed and guided by certain external structural properties embedded in the hierarchical international system. Privileging external variables over domestic factors, realist policy-making requires the 'small states to recognize the importance of geopolitical factors for small-state security' in six counts (Knudsen, 1996: 8–9): (1) the geostrategic significance of the small power's location; (2) the stage of power cycle in which the nearest great power finds itself; (3) the degree of rivalry of the great powers; (4) the history of relations with the nearest great power; (5) the policy towards the small power of other, rivaling great power; (6) the existence of multilateral frameworks of security cooperation, which might help to compensate the power disparity between the small power and great power.

Although the second paradigm, constructivism, also tends to conceive the small power in relations to the great powers, at odds with the realists' 'interest = power' formulation, constructivists conceive the state's primary interests lie in generating rules, norms, identity and institutions as binding instruments for constructing international politics (Wendt, 1994, 1995). Moreover, influenced by the sociology of agency-structure dualism (Giddens, 1979; Wendt, 1987), instead of emphasizing how external structural properties can determine state actions, constructivists argue for the possibilities that the state is an agent who could alter and reshape structures through creating institutions and devising rules/norms for governing the international conducts of the self and others (Wendt, 1999). Although the more recent debate on 'state personhood' indicated that there may be durable personality traits and deep-seated strategic repertoires crystallized in the state formation processes, which should be able to inform state actions (Lomas, 2005; Wendt, 2004, 2005), such *security identity* differences among, for example, the small European states, would suggest that there are rooms whereby institutions and rules may be coconstructed by and governing the small/great powers (Goetschel, 1998a: 27–31;

Hänggi, 1998). Scholars of ‘small power-hood’ have recently argued for the presence of the small powers’ strategies in maximizing their influences and binding the great powers by mainly through the platform of supranational institutions such as the European Union (Melakopides, 2010; Pantev, 2010; Rood, 2010; Steinmetz & Wivel, 2010a; Wivel, 2010).

At odds with the constructivist paradigm, the third paradigm is the dependency theory, which provides a neo-Marxist structuralist perspective in understanding international politics. Instead of looking into how structural properties may be constructed by the states, this paradigm suggests that state action is largely determined by the relations of economic productions between two groups of states: the metropolis/core states and the satellite/peripheral states, which constitute a constellation of pyramidal structural complexes of core-periphery relations (Frank, 1969). The core-periphery relations between the great power minority and the small power majority are structured around the themes capital accumulation, commodity-market expansion and resources predation as well as capital-driven military conquests (Amin, 1974). Conceivably vulnerable, the small powers are forced to engage in a structurally dependent relationship with the great powers by engaging in unfair and exploitative trade relations to the great powers. The great powers used foreign policy means such as aids and military protections as well as international institutions such as the World Bank to perpetuate the small powers’ political-economic dependency over them. In partial alignment with the realist ‘interest = power’ formulation, dependency theory would add that economic power precedes political power when defining interest and explaining state action. In view of the small powers’ dependency over the great powers (Doerner, 1983; Payne, 1987; Sieber, 1983; Wickham, 1983), constructivism-informed counter-strategies against dependency would include actively establishing multilateral international framework such as the European Economic Community (EEC) for the small powers to bind the great powers and negotiate for more influence (Rotter, 1983).

### ***2.2.2 Towards an African-Asian Critical Realism***

Realism, constructivism and dependency theory as well as the literature of small power politics have provided some important insights for developing a critical realist, if not better, an approach for studying international politics in the contemporary global contexts. These insights are being elaborated in the following paragraphs.

In the first place, in contrast to the neoliberal paradigm in international relations for which non-state actors such as transnational/supranational organizations (e.g. World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund) ‘help states coordinate their activities by allowing for repeated interactions, during which trust can grow’, ‘reduce transaction costs’ and enhance cooperation constituting a ‘complex interdependence’ (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Mansbach & Taylor, 2012: 16), the three paradigms in small power politics have commonly suggested that the international

society is mainly constituted by the state as the central unit of analysis. Nevertheless, such notion of state-centrism does not necessarily downplay the roles and functions that non-state actors may perform in international affairs. Non-state and transnational actors can be regarded as the forces who struggle for state power (Migdal, 2001). It therefore warrants us to conceive the state into a dynamic crucible whereby arrays of multiple internal and external forces compete and collaborate (Kieh, 2008; Lumumba-Kasongo, 1994).

Second, while realism and dependency theory rightfully portray the international society into a hierarchy of states who maintain asymmetric political, security and economic relations among themselves, in contrast to neo-realism in international relations for which state actions and foreign policy choices are largely determined and limited by structural constraints (Lamy, 2001: 185), realism and constructivism remind that there is certain degree of freedom for maneuvering on the part of the small powers to neutralize security threats, renegotiate unfavorable terms/conditions by accurately assessing one's geostrategic significances, adopting active foreign policies to enhance international influences, and establishing multi-lateral international institutions through regional integration to increase bargaining chips (Olafsson, 1998: 153–155; Vital, 1971: 9).

Third, although realism stresses that political power is the end of state actions whereas dependency theory precedes economic power to political power as the ultimate end of state actions, in the light of the neo-realist position that power is the means for the state to enhance its capabilities to achieve any designated ends (Lamy, 2001: 185), a better integrated approach should be able to portray the intricate means-ends interplays between political power and economic power in actual operation. Such dimension would lead us to see how economic wealth may well be translated into political control and how political control could lead to further economic gains.

Fourth, while realism and dependency theory stress on how external relations with the great powers may impinge upon the domestic politics of the small power, constructivism proposes an inside out dimension by seeking the normative measures and institutional strategies for the small power to neutralize security threats, increase influence and even bind the great powers. All of the three paradigms seem to agree that there should be an empirical reality and analytical space wherein foreign relations and domestic politics are interconnected.

Methodologically, global case studies of the small powers suggest that there are regional variations, especially between the relatively developed countries in Europe and developing countries in the Global South such as Africa and Asia. European case studies suggested that because of the presence of regional institutions (especially the European Union), the European small powers have been able to turn challenges into opportunities (Goetschel, 1998b; Steinmetz & Wivel, 2010b). For instance, given the favorable historical geography, efficient bureaucracy and an educated population, the wealthy Western European small power Luxemburg serves as an exemplar, which 'does not suffer so many of the problems that plague most of the world's small countries' such as those in Africa (Hey, 2003b: 93; Hughes, 1987; Lemon, 1987). For example, the conflict-ridden and underdeveloped

Western African small power Liberia has remained vulnerable to the pressures and manipulations of the external powers (Kieh, 1992; Wong, 2012b).

Hence, in the light of the ‘global-historical-structuralist’ methodological turn (Kieh, 1992: 5; Wong, 2012b: 69–71) and habitus-based practice of statecraft (Bourdieu, 1977), a critical-realist comparative analysis should therefore examine several aspects:

- (1) The internal deep-seated political-economic structural workings of the small power;
- (2) The external historical-structural linkages between the small power and the great powers;
- (3) The intricate nexus and relationship between the collaborative classes in the small powers and the ruling classes in the great powers;
- (4) The consequences of the conduct of the foreign policies of small powers.

However, since the majority of the studies were done in relatively developed Europe and little has been done after the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, there is a knowledge gap for understanding the nature and development of small power politics in post-Cold War Africa and Asia.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (2013: 46–47), although the Global South is not taking the same paths as those of the former colonial powers to greatness or to development, the growing figures in South–South trade (especially with China) have surpassed South–North and North–North trades, and, increasing foreign investment flows into the Global South since the 1990s would necessitate an African-Asian critical-realist definition of small power politics for us to examine how the small states in the Global South will not only survive, but also thrive.

### 2.2.3 *Definition of Small Power Politics*

Based on the above expositions of an African-Asian critical realism, we may define *small power politics* in terms of the following four components:

- The qualification of a small power entails its state-insider’s subjective evaluation of the concerned state’s psychological, political, material and security relations with another state, which qualifies the concerned state’s ‘small power-hood’ vis-à-vis the other state’s perceivably great power status against the hierarchy of states in the often unstable and exploitative global capitalist structure.
- *Small power-hood* entails two essences. First, it entails the honest and objective self-account of the small power’s geopolitical location and sensitivity, the actual sizes of all tangible and intangible resources as its assets, and demographics of the state represents. Second, it entails the continuous strategic calculations and impermanent situational analyses, which requires the small power’s security

policy-makers to deduct the often-minor and delicate changes in domestic and international affairs into an array of falsifiable contingency measures.

- When implementing these measures, these must be directed towards the goal of economic nationalism of the small power. As a development principle, small power economic nationalist ideology aims to accurately identify and unambiguously secure the sovereign control of the state's natural, human and artificial resources, by mobilizing either the relevant state apparatuses or the representing societal sectors.
- Small power politics therefore entails the historically structured and often habitus-rooted, deep-seated repertoire of practices and creative strategies for the small power to adjust the development pathway, strengthen state capacity and uplift international status. Depending on the internal and external situations and the foreign state that it is interacting with, these practices and creative strategies are often selectively deployed. However, such strategic flexibility would vary from the situation to situation and depend on who the foreign state is.

## 2.3 African and Asian Small Power Politics in Global Context: Empirical Issues

### 2.3.1 *Different Trajectories Towards the Great Power-Hood: USA and China*

#### 2.3.1.1 The Making of the Post-cold War US Global Hegemony

To better understand the global context where the African and Asian small powers are situated in after the disintegration of the Soviet bloc in 1991 marked an end to the Soviet-US bipolarity, a comparative analysis of the emergence of the post-Cold War US global hegemony and the gradual rise of China as a post-millennial world power would be instructive.

From the nineteenth to early twentieth century, decades of scrambles for concessions in non-European lands, in parallel with the surge of nationalist struggles among the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, while the European imperial powers started to find themselves struggling hard in maintaining the global colonial status quo through arduously repressing indigenous resistance and dealing with nationalist upheavals, the resource-rich and territorially vast USA gradually consolidated its present global superpower status through three major ways (Huang, 1997; Krauthammer, 2002; Wallerstein, 1983; Wolf, 1997).

First, instead of occupying the strings of many overseas big and small colonies that her European counterparts committed to competing for, USA did not join the competition but selectively installed only a few small colonies, but of great geostrategic significance. Major examples would include Puerto Rico in Central America, Liberia in West Africa and the Philippines in Southeast Asia. These

satellite/client states served as the overseas stations for monitoring and intervening foreign affairs. This actually saved USA from pouring in substantial financial resources and military manpower in the overseas and facilitated its mercantile class to develop a global capitalist economy by using these small overseas satellites to protect and further USA and her allies' interests in ensuring free trade, exploring new resources, and extending trade routes and commodity markets to the new worlds. Since then, US leadership among the Western powers has hinged on a mixture of commercial, cultural, diplomatic, intelligence and military neocolonial measures that she managed to know and protect the Western allies' foreign interests (Wong, 2012b).

Second, as the escalated consequences of intense colonial competition, while Europe was troubled by the two world wars when the rise of the Nazi Germany forced the well-educated and wealthy Jewish population to flee, the relatively peaceful and prosperous USA was able to further absorb substantial Jewish capitals and technologies for her own advancement. These consisted of strategic and military sciences such as nuclear technologies. Without fully plunging herself into the world wars, USA managed to survive the great recession in the 1930s and continue to develop amidst the post-war world rubbles. Whereas post-Second World War European powers were busy in rebuilding themselves, the Bretton Woods System and its global institutions (e.g. International Monetary Fund and World Bank) had granted the gold-rich USA to make US dollars pegged with the international gold trade and therefore become the official currency for international transactions such as giving loans to the developing countries. In the 1970s, a significant USA further advancement towards the global superpower status was largely due to the US dollars' formal delinking from the gold-pegged Bretton Woods System but shifted to peg with crude oil, endorsed by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). As a necessary commodity fueling many developed and developing states' daily operations and industrialization programs, oil was strategically pegged with US dollars rendering the international oil trades must be transacted in US dollars. As a result, for the purposes of purchasing oil and financial security, many governments determined that US dollar to be the major state reserve currency. This provided the necessary global material and security conditions for the USA to establish her unipolar hegemony in the post-Cold War era after her bipolar arch-rival Soviet Union was disintegrated in 1991 (Yue & Wong, 2012). How could the Soviet Union be disintegrated? The third point will explain.

Third, from the 1950s to 1960s, US military capability might not be capable of defeating the well-equipped Soviet Union army, how did the USA manage to win over the Soviet Union? By both might and wits. In terms of might, since the US dollar has attained its hegemony as the global currency in the 1950s, US government could infinitely print banknotes through 'quantitative easing (QE)' measures, which also ensure increasing US military spending despite the recession. Given that US dollar has been the global currency; QE measures are able to siphon US financial risks and economic losses to other countries, who took US dollar as the state reserve currency. By printing more US dollar notes, these foreign countries'



US dollar reserves would naturally depreciate, which then cause local currency devaluation and inflation.

In contrast, because the Soviet Union ruble could not be freely convertible and did not peg with any strategic commodity, Soviet Union was not able to print as much ruble as they wished. As a result, the planned Soviet economy could not siphon its financial risks and economic losses to the satellite states in Eastern Europe and other continents but tended to rely so much on military might and totalitarian control, which were not just costly but also increasingly burdensome. In terms of wits, starting in the early 1980s, USA launched the surreal ‘star war’ aeronautic programs. Having miscalculated the complex international and domestic situations, the Soviet Union engaged in the very expensive aerospace armament race with USA and gradually over-stretched and exhausted her own economic capacity, serving as a major cause for the eventual fall of the Soviet Union (Yue & Wong, 2012). With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the USA has become the global hegemon, for which the rise of the socialist China is perceived to pose significant challenges in the post-millennial era.

### 2.3.1.2 The Rise of the Post-millennial China as a ‘Great Power’

Given the geoeconomic disparity, crime, corruption, poverty, unrests and other many social problems, Chinese state and society remain skeptical if China should be qualified to be a ‘great power’. Even it is, China has to redefine ‘greatness’. For example, in his infamous international relations theory of the ‘three worlds’, Deng Xiaoping made it clear that China should only identify and unite with the oppressed people and nations, especially in the third world countries (National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China, 1978: 130). Such position has been kept in line with the most updated 2004 version of the Chinese constitution.

Moreover, according to the other official versions of the Chinese constitution (National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China, 1954, 1975, 1978, 1982, 2004), China consistently projects herself that she will not be a superpower, always opposes hegemonism, colonialism and imperialism, and stands for world peace. After the 1955 African-Asian conference held in Bandung, Indonesia (Lee, 2010), in particular, China’s foreign policies have then been redefined more explicitly and consistently in accordance with the five principles: (1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, (2) mutual non-aggression, (3) non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, (4) equality and mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful coexistence.

However, it is realistic that the African and Asian small powers would not always take China as the ways that she projects herself. It is because as whether a state is a great or small power depends on the subjective evaluation of the other related states, given its large territorial size, populous population, continued economic growths, growing military expenses, and increasingly frequent overseas activities in the political, economic, diplomatic and security domains, being the second largest economy in the world now, China has been widely perceived by

various scholars as a great power of significant weights, reminiscent of the features that some of the developmental stages that the Western and Japanese colonial and neocolonial powers had experienced (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2011). China's rise is strongly related with its economic development agenda since Deng Xiaoping took power and adopted the economic reform and open door policy in 1978. Since then, economic development has become the main strategy for the Chinese Communist Party's domestic and international legitimacy engineering, however, sidelining the inner demands for political reform.

On the one hand, as a single-party socialist state, China's continued economic development reflects the Chinese people's common expectation to aspire to be a modernized nation and to elevate China's status in the international hierarchy. On the other hand, while China's peaceful rise would be perceived by the developing countries as an alternative source to obtain foreign aids, loans, investments and technologies as well as political supports, it also poses worries and concerns regarding China's different attitude towards the US-centric global order. Widely known as the Washington consensus, US foreign policy holds that aids and loans should go with the conditions of instituting neoliberal measures and liberal-democratic values. Instead, China's foreign policy has been largely characterized by the Beijing Consensus, for which aids and loans are often offered relatively condition-free and with the agenda to facilitating self-determined alternative models of the developing countries. In contrast to the Washington Consensus, neoliberalist measures and democratization are therefore not mandatory in the Beijing Consensus (Yue & Wong, 2011).

In the light of the five foreign policy principles explicated in the post-Mao versions of Chinese constitution (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 1978, 1982, 2004), two stages of development may be roughly used for categorizing China's post-1978 development. First is from 1978 to 2000. In these two decades, because of lack of capitals and technologies for economic development, in view of the rapid development of the neighboring and foreign capitalist economies, China opened 'special economic zone (SEZs)' in south China to attract foreign companies to invest. As doing businesses in SEZs would receive policy concessions such as lower-tax rates, plus other favorable business conditions such as cheap labor costs, foreign companies were attracted to invest and forge joint ventures with the Chinese state-owned enterprises (Howell, 2000). Through these measures, China was able to absorb substantial capitals and new technologies from these foreign investors and gradually opened up the entire country for development (Wong, 2002).

The second stage is from 2000 to the present. Only absorbing foreign capitals and technologies would not lead to sustainable economic development. The sustainable economic development would only be possible when a national economy has evolved to a stage that necessitates the exportation of capitals and technologies to foreign destinations in order to construct its own global investment circles (including financial institutions) and global supply-demand chains (markets) (Bao, 1991: Chap. 9). With these transnational financial and market platforms, China would be able to upgrade its own commodity standards and institutionalize its

global supply-demand chains so as to increase its products' competitiveness. Roughly starting from 2000, in order to further uplift its modernization and industrialization programs, China started to export its own capitals and technologies for securitizing overseas supplies of natural resources such as oil, minerals and food, on the one hand. On the other hand, China also engaged with foreign governments and non-governmental actors to identify the suitable market niches for Chinese-made products. Starting from the low-end to mid-range commodities such as garments and electronics in the 1980s and 1990s, the 2000s and 2010s then witnessed China manufactured and exported more high-tech and heavy-industry products, e.g. computers, smartphones and cars.

Because of her increasingly active presence in the overseas context, the post-millennial China has been engaged with and therefore involved in the complex political-economic dynamics in the developing world. To just name a few examples: Chinese oil companies were alleged of supporting the genocide movement in the oil-rich Darfur region in southern Sudan and the counter-insurgency of the Gaddafi regime in Libya (Holslag, 2008),<sup>3</sup> Chinese mining companies received severe local resistance in the northern Philippines rendering operations to be halted (Wong, Aquino, Lara-De Leon, & So, 2013), Chinese business migrants from Yunnan province were reportedly driving away the local Burmese businesses away from the central business district of Myanmar's second largest city, Mandalay, which aroused local anti-Chinese sentiments.<sup>4</sup> As a result, considering China has increasingly engaged with the domestic politics of the developing countries where the USA has ever been doing, in 2009, alongside with the listed targets of Iran, North Korea and Russia, the US state intelligence specified China's 'resource-focused diplomacy' and overseas political-economic activities as the major tasks for global intelligence collection (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2009: 3). Approaching from an African-Asian critical-realist perspective, I argue that USA has adopted a different, if not neocolonial, containment strategy towards a resource-seeking China in the post-Cold War era in order to maintain US global hegemony.

### 2.3.1.3 USA Post-cold War Containment Strategy Towards China

Although the post-1978 China has been gradually absorbed into the global capitalist economy, the fact that it is being ruled by the Chinese Communist Party would lead to a critical-realist argument that the single-party communist state has been generating and maintaining a mirage of peaceful capitalistic transformation and buying their time in waiting for the right moment for launching a new round of global

<sup>3</sup>Sources: (1) 'China Sought to Sell Arms to Gaddafi, Documents Suggest'. *New York Times*. 4 September, 2011. (2) 'Libya: Chinese Arms Firms Offered to Sell Weapons to Gaddafi'. *The Telegraph*. 5 September, 2011.

<sup>4</sup>Source: 'Dangerous Anti-Chinese Discontent Growing in Mandalay'. *The Irrawaddy*. Friday 8 July 2011.

communist revolution. Critics have been assessing China's consistent efforts in pushing for international multipolarity (Amin, 2006; Cheng, 1999), which would not necessarily mean giving up communist ideology, may it be in its original form or revisionist manner. It would be natural for the USA to continue to contain a resource-seeking China in the post-Cold War era (Gaddis, 1982; Spykman, 2007). In continuation of US foreign policy towards the Orient, neocolonial containment of China in the post-Cold War era is largely resource-focused. In other words, by maintaining its control over the world's oil supply and trade, the US dollar-oil peg and guarding the major oil-shipping geopolitical choke points, the USA would have been able to control the essentials of the African and Asian developing countries through exercising exceptionalism in three intervention curves (Wong, 2012c).

The first curve centers on the Israel–Palestine peace process for which the USA has meddled since the 1960s (Vital, 1971: Chap. 3). The USA–Israel alliance enables the US military power to have a reliable offshore security outpost in the Near East, monitoring the choke points of the Suez Canal and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, which connect the major oil-producing African and Asian countries along the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. The second curve consists of the Islamic democratic state-building projects in the post-2001 Iraq and Afghanistan, where US troops have been present. The military operations in the Middle East provide the US additional strategic rooms for guarding the geopolitical choke points of the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman. These choke points also enable the USA to monitor and intervene in the state affairs of the major oil-producing countries along the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and in Central Asia.

The third curve consists of the East and Southeast Asian countries in the Far East region. Because from the 1990s to 2000s, the USA was occupied by the wars in the Middle East and the global wars against terrorism, and the consideration that China was gradually absorbed by the global capitalist economy, USA therefore chose to strengthen economic and trade ties with the countries in the Far East. Many Asian countries therefore took the opportunity to absorb US investments and technologies and became the major manufacturers and markets of US commodities. In continuation of the containment of the communist China policy during the Cold War period, although the USA gradually withdrew the military bases from her Far Eastern allies, she continued to enjoy military agreements and conduct joint exercises with the countries that control the oil-shipping choke points of the Malacca Strait and the Pacific entrance points around the territorially disputed South China Sea and East Sea. Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Korea and Japan are the examples. The presence and activities also provide US additional strategic mileage in monitoring the state affairs of the oil-consuming and industrializing countries in the Far East (Yue & Wong, 2011).

Viewing from the above three US intervention curves towards Africa and Asia, the US military has been effectively guarding literally all the oil-shipping and geopolitical choke points in the Near East, Middle East and the Far East. To maintain the US global neocolonial hegemony, post-Cold War US geostrategy must therefore be material-based. Resource-focused geo-strategy is capable of controlling the essentials of the development of the Far Eastern countries. In particular,

China has been one of the largest buyers of oil-producing countries who earned the ire of USA, e.g. Iran and Libya. Because of the recent fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya, analysis held that Iran has therefore supplied China's one-third annual oil consumption (Wong, 2012c).

In early January 2012, it is henceforth unsurprising for the USA to issue a new global military strategy. The new strategy temporarily dropped North Korea and Russia from the 2009 list (which consisted of Iran, North Korea, Russia and China) but concentrated on China and Iran as the two potential targets for armed conflict (Kwong, 2012).<sup>5</sup> Being the largest oil-supplier and largest oil-consumer of each other, solely targeting Iran and China may be the most cost-effective strategy attempting to shoot two birds with one stone. It is because the Chinese and Iranian national securities may be undermined by interfering and threatening to blockade the geopolitical choke points spanning from the Near East to the Far East, where Iran is well positioned. Undermining Iran's political stability would naturally undermine China's energy security.

From this perspective, China has been contained by USA at two geostrategic fronts in the post-Cold War era. First, US military presence and active diplomatic interventions in the East and Southeast Asian countries and their international institutions (e.g. Association of Southeast Asian Nations) continued to complicate China's sovereignty claims in territorial disputed hotspots such as the South China Sea. Because US sides with several Southeast Asian small powers who then forge joint oil-exploration deals with USA, Japanese and Indian oil companies and asked for US military protection, US interventions in these China-related disputes also stirred up political mistrusts and therefore weaken China's diplomatic ties with neighboring countries, especially Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam. China has been therefore contained by the foreign relations impermanence, political intrigues and false diplomatic friendship, competition, resource-related disputes, military threats and territorial conflicts with the neighboring small powers (Wong & Yue, 2011). Second, as China's continued development largely relies on foreign supplies of energy and natural resources, US military presence in the major geopolitical choke points and interventions in the African and Asian oil-producing countries' state affairs would naturally pose significant psychological interferences and security concerns to China. China's resource-led development and national interests are therefore constantly checked, restricted and even sabotaged by these interferences and military might.

The above discussion on the recent development of USA–China relations has provided the necessary contextual backdrop for which an African-Asian critical realism could be applied to two small powers: Liberia and the Philippines. The two countries are selected for inter-regional comparative analysis because of two empirical commonalities. First, they were among the few countries in the world that

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<sup>5</sup>Sources: (1) 'China Syndrome Dictated Obama's Asia-Pacific Strategy'. *The Guardian*. 6 January 2012. (2) 'New U.S. Military Strategy Reflects Concerns about Rise of China'. *Tehran Times*. 15 January 2012.

had experienced US colonialism. Although Liberia and the Philippines gained flag independence from US colonial rule in 1847 and 1946, respectively, they continued to maintain strong political-economic ties with USA. Examining them would enhance our understanding on how the US Empire extends across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to Africa and Asia. Second, comparing the Liberian and Philippine small power politics would enhance our understanding of how US neocolonialism interacts with the African and Asian body politics, on the one hand. On the other hand, it may tell us the difference of local receptions of neocolonialism between a non-China-neighbored country (i.e. Liberia) and a China-neighbored one (i.e. Philippines).

### ***2.3.2 African and Asian Small Power Politics: Liberia and the Philippines***

#### **2.3.2.1 Behind the Nobel Peace Prize: Liberian Pathway of Underdevelopment**

The 2011 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf before she ran for re-election for the Liberian presidency. Apart from being the first African female president, Sirleaf was the first Liberian president who succeeded to finish the first six-year term and be successfully re-elected since the Liberian civil war ended in 2003. Behind the Nobel Peace Prize, what developmental pathway Liberia has gone through?

If we would accept that USA's 'tutelary colonialism' in Puerto Rico and the Philippines have common essences (De La Costa, 1965: Chap. XV; Go, 2008: 1), US colonial rule in Liberia would be of comparative significance. In Puerto Rico and the Philippines, USA chose to collaborate with the local elites who had ties with USA. These collaborative agents had lived or studied in USA. They could gain US political trust and the local population's recognition simultaneously. As the double-faced agent, to remain in power, the local elites tended to use leverage politics to balance Liberian domestic politics and foreign relations.

Pressurized by the rapid population growth of the black slavery, in early eighteenth-century USA, the white ruling class decided to repatriate the black slaves to Africa through the American Colonization Society, which was established in 1816. West African coastal locales such as nowadays Liberia became the usual landing point. However, the seemingly familiar America-hailed black repatriates were not welcome by the local tribal populations. As the black repatriates' descendants were also socialized in their parents' Christian culture, their double-identity qualified them to be the delegated agents of colonial state's 'plantation economy' structure. Top colonial officials were American whites, mid-level bureaucrats were mulattoes (white-black mixed blood), the lower level was constituted by black repatriates and the co-opted tribes (Kieh, 2008).

USA provided military and other supports for the colonial authority to extend into the interior. On one hand, the colonial state gradually posited Liberia to be a periphery of the global capitalist system. On the other hand, using divide-and-rule tactics to conquer the warring tribes, the Commonwealth of Liberia was established in 1839. Although the repatriates were delegated as the governing agents, the American Colonization Society still had the final authority to assess legislation and interpret the constitution. Such move institutionalized the agricultural trade between Liberia and Western countries, and formalized the oligarchic status of the black repatriates and their descendants, who are known as the 'Americo-Liberians' (Kieh, 2008).

Although as early as the mid-1800s Liberia gained flag independence, its constitution was modified from USA. Only colonial officials and the repatriates were regarded as citizens, enjoying private property rights and voting rights. Possessors of the property would therefore become the ruling class, controlling the state apparatus. The post-independence Liberian state is therefore neocolonial in nature. What does it mean?

It means that Liberian post-colonial sovereignty has not escaped from 'coloniality of power' (Mignolo, 2010; Quijano, 2000). Post-colonial Liberian coloniality of power refers to the West-hailed capitalistic form of power that the Liberian post-colonial state and society continue to inherit from the colonial state architecture. The post-colonial Liberian state remains as the instrument for the Western powers and their Liberian collaborators to preserve their own sectoral interests and the neocolonial state structures in Liberian domestic and foreign politics mainly through means of exploitation and coercion. Bluntly put, neocolonialism refers to the historical-structural fact that the post-colonial Liberian sovereignty has been shaped to largely aim to plunder the precious state resources and exploit the Liberian peoples for the benefits of their former colonial masters and their Liberian compradors.

Due to continued conflicts with the interior tribes, Liberian Frontier Force was established in 1907, responsible for collecting taxes, counter-insurgency and border guarding. When the interior region was mostly pacified, in 1926, USA substantially invested and set up Firestone Plantation Company, making Liberia be a major rubber-producing country (Kromah, 2008). Afterwards, Liberia also made use of its rich reserves of gold, iron ores, diamond, oil and timber to exchange for US capitals, and used the capitals to extend state power into the tribal frontiers. Gradually, its economy was mortgaged to USA and USA also used her voluminous capitals and international influences to maintain her core-periphery relationship with Liberia (Kieh, 2008).

In terms of foreign relations, USA mobilized international institutions such as the World Bank to implement 'Structural Adjustment Program' to maintain the core-periphery relations. Major policies included local currency devaluation, a decrease of public expenditures, minimization of market intervention and trade liberalization. In terms of regional security, Liberia provided an African base for US intelligence agency to monitor the situations in Arabic-African countries, contain communism in Angola and Mozambique, and neutralize self-determining



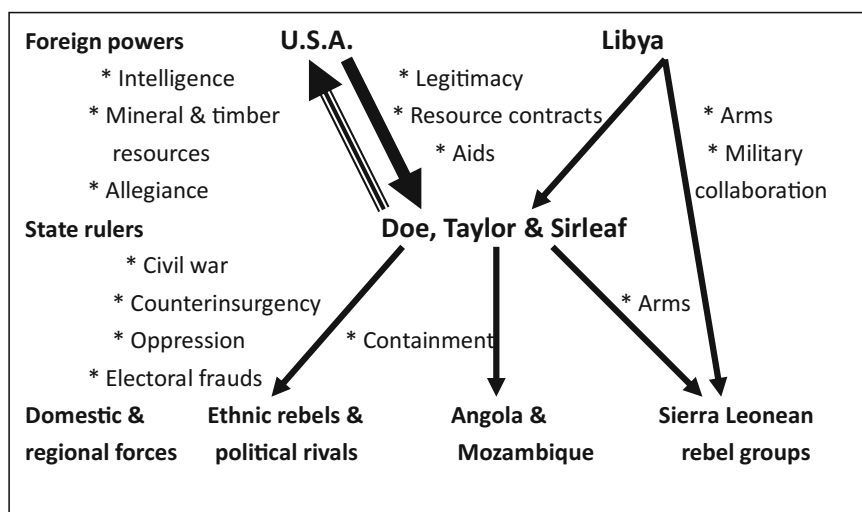
nationalist movements in Africa. Although many African countries gained flag independence, they still embraced neocolonialism by perpetuating colonial political-economic structures, which led to the crises resultant of prolonged underdevelopment (Kieh, 2008).

In the early 1980s, accumulated socio-economic problems resultant of neo-colonialism led to a coup. Although military strongman Master Sergeant Samuel Doe announced to change the fate of Liberia, because of the short-circuiting structure between domestic and foreign politics, Doe had to return to the orbit of neocolonialism. The end of the 1980s witnessed the Soviet dissolution caused drastic US foreign aids. The aggrieving population of the underdeveloped economy eventually spun into civil war. Americo-Liberian warlord Charles Taylor armed the tribes and launched a coup against the Doe regime. Taylor announced to uplift Liberia to become the 'Hong Kong of West Africa'; a semi-peripheral agent in brokering between the Western metropolitan-core states and the African peripheral states. However, the situation continued to remain anarchic. Caught in continued violent civil conflicts, predating for rich diamond resources in the neighboring Sierra Leone, Taylor took an adventurist position by participating in the Sierra Leonean civil war and received supports from Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya (Wong, 2012b). By doing these, Taylor earned the ire of US Taylor was elected as the president in 1997 but the civil war only ended in 2003. Taylor was then charged war crime and trialed by the international court. During the civil war, Sirleaf once supported and fund raised for Taylor, therefore she also faced war crime accusations but was not trialed (Wong, 2012a).

Regarding the international society's different attitude towards Sirleaf and Taylor, in view of the evidence that Sirleaf received US supports to run for the presidency, Kieh warned that the Peace Prize award may distort the normal development of the Liberian democracy and rule of law (Wong, 2012a). In the past, Sirleaf was criticized for nepotism for nominating her own family members to the key state positions. For example, her brother was the Minister of Internal Affairs from 2006 to 2010. Economically, the opposition candidate economics professor Dew Mayson criticized Sirleaf for having Liberia returned to the colonial structure of plantation economy (Zaza, 2010). Despite Sirleaf was successfully re-elected in 2011, Liberia has not gone out of the neocolonial darkness (Fig. 2.1).

To conclude, since the colonial time, US neocolonialism has sunk its roots into the Liberian political economy. When post-Cold War Liberia faced the drastic decline of US foreign aids, acute socio-economic problems resultant of prolonged underdevelopment burst into violent civil conflicts. Liberian small power politics, hence, provides a variety for which relative homogenous political-economic pegging with the US metropolis-superpower rendered it very little flexibility and fewer choices in ensuring its survival and advancing its interests. On the contrary, the Philippines would serve as a different example for which the Asian small power has managed to hedge more than one great power.





**Fig. 2.1** Neocolonial circulatory structures between domestic politics and foreign relations in post-colonial Liberia

### 2.3.2.2 Hedging Great Powers: Repertoire of Philippine Versatile Diplomacy

China, Taiwan and the Southeast Asian small powers of the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei have had competing claims over the South China Sea. Given the seabed's perceivably rich deposits of oil resources, during the administration of President Gloria Arroyo (2002–2010), the Philippines and China agreed to put aside disagreements and opted for joint-exploration ventures.<sup>6</sup> China and the Philippines also extended bilateral cooperation into other domains especially trade and infrastructure. Following the end of the Arroyo regime, the administration of President Benigno S. Aquino III (2010–2016) was pressured to revert Arroyo's position to be more assertive in her sovereignty claims over the South China Sea and demonstrating stronger position to nationalize the involved oil and maritime resources.<sup>7</sup>

In line with Philippine economic nationalism, such foreign policy agenda would require astute maneuvering in positing the Philippines at the middle of the two competing great powers: China and USA Since 2010, China–Philippines maritime

<sup>6</sup>Source: 'RP, China Approve Joint Oil Exploration in Spratlys'. *The Philippine Star*. 2 September 2004.

<sup>7</sup>Sources: (1) 'PNoy: PHL will not Abandon Claim on Disputed Spratlys'. *GMA News*. 22 June 2011. (2) 'Philippines' Aquino to Press China on UN Role on Spratly Island Row'. *The China Post*. 16 July 2011. (3) 'Oil Deal with China will Destroy Spratlys'. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 6 September 2011. (4) 'President Reiterates Peaceful Approach to Spratlys'. *Sun Star*. 12 October 2011.

disputes and vessel conflicts over the Spratly islands in the South China Sea had signified the newly installed Aquino regime would take a stronger position on the issue. Despite China insisted on resolving the dispute bilaterally, as a small power, to increase its bargaining chips, the Philippines invited US presence and intervention. For example, having gained the support of Vietnam and USA, the Philippines proposed to discuss the South China Sea disputes multilaterally in the East Asian Summit and ASEAN meeting in Indonesia in late 2011.<sup>8</sup> Although the proposal did not push through, this move realized the Asian small powers' capability in hedging the great and small powers for binding a neighboring but threatening great power—China. Such astute maneuvering repertoire is worthwhile for unpacking. Redefining the post-colonial sovereignty of the Philippines in the light of neocolonialism and a subsequent case study of the Aquino-Cojuangco clan of the Philippines would help to illustrate.

To start, it is important to state that post-colonial Philippine sovereignty is neocolonial in nature because it has not totally escaped from the 'coloniality of power' that the Philippine post-colonial state has inherited from her colonial masters (Mignolo, 2010; Quijano, 2000). Such Philippine post-colonial specifics of coloniality can be elaborated in the following aspects (Sison & De Lima, 1998: 89–99):

- USA continues to dominate the Philippines through her military bases. Even after the USA withdrew her military bases in the 1990s, regular joint USA–Philippines military exercises provide the USA inroads to control the Philippine military because the latter has become dependent on the former's strategic planning, intelligence, training and military supplies.
- So long as the postcolonial Philippine state serves US interests, the USA allows the collaborating classes of Philippine landlords and capitalists to make use of the Philippine coercive state apparatuses to suppress the peasants' and workers' pursuits for justice. In exchange, USA gives loans to the Philippine government, rendering the post-colonial state debt-dependent on USA.
- During the Marcos martial law regime, the post-colonial state elites intensified their collaboration with US imperialism to suppress and pacify armed revolution of the oppressed Filipino peasantry, mainly through counter-insurgency and land reform.
- In the post-Marcos period, the introduction of electoral politics came into effect as a pseudodemocratic pacifying measure in which vote-buying, vote-rigging and electoral violence feature in neutralizing and dividing the unity of the oppressed Filipino majority.

Benigno Aquino III's father is the late Benigno Aquino Jr. As an opposition leader against the Marcos martial law regime, he was imprisoned and exiled to USA.

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<sup>8</sup>Sources: (1) 'South China Sea to Overshadow ASEAN Summit'. *Taipei Times*. 20 July 2011. (2) 'Aquino to Discuss Spratlys Issue in ASEAN Summit'. *Sun Star*. 9 November 2011. (3) 'Why Philippines again Churns up South China Sea?' *Xinhua News*. 15 November 2011.

When he returned to Manila in 1983, he was assassinated in the airport. This triggered the People Power Revolution, which caused the downfall of the Marcos regime in 1986. His wife Corazon Cojuangco Aquino then became the first president of the democratic era. The resilience of the Aquino-Cojuangco family would warrant some explanations.

The Aquino-Cojuangco clan is from Tarlac province of central Luzon. Since World War II, the majority of Philippine presidents hailed from the provinces, instead of the national capital. They used the provinces as the primary power base by being the major economic stakeholders and local government officials. Then, when circumstances allowed, they extended into the national state offices (Wong, 2006). Western colonialism expanded into Asia rendered the sixteenth-century Philippines to be absorbed into the global capitalist system. Spain used the Philippines as the Asia-Pacific outpost to buy silks, porcelains and other commodities from China to Europe. To finance the galleon trade, tons of silver were shipped from Europe to Mexico, then to China (Frank, 1998). Spain co-opted the Philippine landed elites (*caciques*) for the indirect rule (de Jesus, 1980).

In the late nineteenth century, USA took the Philippines from Spain. The Philippines served as an important outpost for the USA to maintain the smooth operation of the global capitalist economy in the Asia-Pacific. The Philippine *caciques* continued to be the collaborative agents of the US colonial authority (Paredes, 1988). During that period, the grandfather of President Benigno Aquino III, Benigno Aquino Sr. was the Secretary of Agriculture and Commerce from 1938 to 1941. When the Philippines gained flag independence from USA, the Aquino family made an important decision to let Benigno Aquino Jr. marrying Corazon Cojuangco, a daughter of a major Chinese–Filipino landed-cum-business family in Tarlac province. Forging the political-economic power of the lands and capitals together, the Aquino-Cojuangco alliance constituted an oligarchy in Tarlac Province (Anderson, 1988).

The Cojuangco clan owned the 4,000-ha Hacienda Luisita. Decades of patron-client bondage with the peasantry was adversely affected by the leftist movement and the land reform program. The peasants therefore petitioned for their landownership rights and redistribution. A rebellion broke out in 2004 but was dissolved by the military.<sup>9</sup> Apart from being a landlord, the Cojuangco family is also a commercial conglomerate. An uncle of President Benigno Aquino III, Eduardo Cojuangco owns and operates the San Miguel Corporation (Parreno, 2003). Apart from liquor and beverage business, San Miguel has extended into other business domains such as food, packaging, property, banking, telecommunication, shipping, infrastructure construction and energy resources as well as agribusiness. In particular, San Miguel bought the formerly public oil company;

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<sup>9</sup>Sources: (1) 'A Year after the Hacienda Luisita Massacre in the Philippines—No One Charged'. *World Socialist Web Site*. 18 January 2006. (2) 'Hacienda Luisita's Past Haunts Noyonoy's Future'. *GMA News*. 18 January 2010. (3) 'For a Philippine Family in Politics, Land Issues Hit Home'. *New York Times*. 14 March 2010.

Petron Corporation.<sup>10</sup> Petron has been responsible for oil drilling, refinery and distribution for the Philippines. As the Spratly islands are believed to be rich in oil, it would not be surprising for the Aquino-Cojuangco family to take a stronger position over the South China Sea territorial claim by seeking an alliance with USA and Vietnam on the issue.

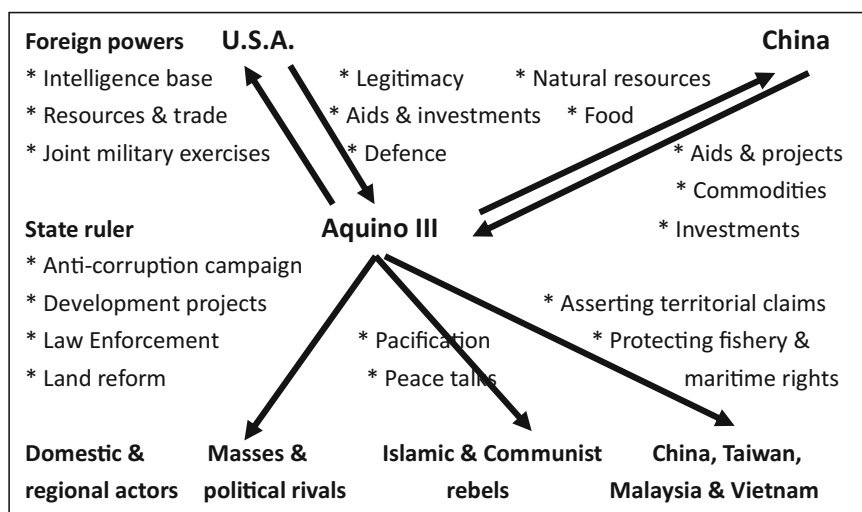
Relatively disadvantaged in national military and political-economic resources and powers, there are two relevant Philippine political wisdoms to inform the repertoire of the practices and strategies of versatile diplomacy, which facilitates the Philippines to hedge the great powers in order to maximize her own interests: bamboo politics (Filipino: *kawayan politika*) and star-fruit diplomacy (Filipino: *balimbing diplomasya*). Bamboo politics signifies the ways that the Philippine small power is able to bend towards where the great powers go, reminiscent of the ways that the Filipinos manage to survive frequent typhoons, because of their flexible and adaptable traits. Through bending towards the great powers, the Philippines would be able to share their capitals and technologies, reminiscent of the way that the bamboo siphons water through its hollow body (Wong, 2011).

Star-fruit diplomacy refers to the manipulation of the Philippine multicultural identity to speak, act and behave differently in accordance with the practical situational needs. Filipino cultural hybridism is consolidated through decades of colonialism and external influence from historical great powers such as Spain, USA and China. An astute star-fruit diplomat is able to seek sympathy, common identification and personal recognition in negotiation. President Benigno Aquino III's mother, the former president Corazon Cojuangco Aquino would be an exemplar (Wong, 2009: 58–59). After she stepped up as the president in 1986, to rescue the bankrupting governmental coffer, she ran to the Federation of the Filipino–Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Manila to seek for supports. In the round-table meeting, she deliberately mentioned that her very poor great-grandfather actually hailed from the Chinese province of Fujian, who faced and resolved many difficulties when doing business in Luzon as a migrant. By doing this, she illuminated her Chinese ethnicity, which won her many sympathies and eventual supports from the Chinese–Filipino tycoons. When Corazon Aquino visited China, she also visited the village where her great-grandfather hailed from. As a result, when President Benigno Aquino III visited China in August 2011, he followed his mother's footprint in visiting his great-great-grandfather's village and conducted ancestral worship (Wong, 2011).<sup>11</sup>

Although bamboo politics and star-fruit diplomacy seek for the counterpart's recognition, sympathy and identification, the actor is governed by the collective interests that she or he represents. As a result, after visiting China where he successfully signed major bilateral agreements to ensure incoming Chinese investments, once President Benigno Aquino III returned to the Philippines, he then

<sup>10</sup>Source: 'San Miguel Acquires Majority of Petron'. *Reuters*. 16 December 2010.

<sup>11</sup>Source: 'Fujian Village Prepares for Return of One of their Own'. *China Daily*. 3 September 2011.



**Fig. 2.2** Hedging the great powers in the post-colonial Philippines

sought supports from USA and other concerned small powers to reassert the claims in the South China Sea in the following East Asia Summit and ASEAN Summit in November 2011. Despite the Chinese public opinions protested, the Chinese government did not change its foreign policy direction towards the Philippines.

In contrast to the Liberian small power politics, Philippine small power politics is more versatile because of the emerging USA–China bipolarity in Southeast Asia. The Philippines has been able to hedge the two great powers in order to cash in from them, marked a historic 33% annual increase in the Manila stock market in 2012.<sup>12</sup> And more importantly, the Philippines has been consistent in defending its sovereignty claims and attempting to secure control over its resources (Fig. 2.2).

## 2.4 Conclusion: Small Power Politics as Practice of Statecraft

In the foregoing pages, I have reviewed the major paradigms in small power/state studies and constructed an African-Asian critical-realist perspective for a new approach for small power politics. Against the larger global-historical-structural backdrop and comparative analysis of USA as a hegemonic superpower and China's rise as a great power in the post-Cold War era, a comparison of Liberia and

<sup>12</sup>Sources: (1) 'The Philippine Stock Market Boom'. *Philippine Star*. 9 January 2013. (2) 'Philippine Growth Underpinned by Revitalised Manufacturing Sector'. *Financial Times*. 30 May 2013.

the Philippines have identified two different repertoires of small power politics. While the small Liberian power case study suggests its relatively homogenous pegging with the US superpower renders its political-economic development continues to be tarnished by neocolonialism, the Philippine small power case study points out that with the presence of China as an emerging great power in the Asia-Pacific region, the Philippines has been able to cash in from hedging the US–China competition. If we tend to accept that the Philippine case has provided an instructive example for Asian and African small power politics, then the small powers' foreign policy agenda for pushing for global multipolarity should be prioritized and stressed by the small powers' security policy-makers.

Hereunder are a few policy implications for practicing small power politics in statecraft:

- Small power policy-makers should support global multi-polarity because the presence of such world order will provide more hedging opportunities for the small powers to benefit from. They may form their own supranational organizations by inviting different great powers to sit in.
- In defending disputed territorial claims with a great power, it is advisable for the small power to neutralize the disputed great power's apparent military capability by inviting another great power to come in. They may make use of the supranational/regional organizations to neutralize the conflicting claims of the concerned great power.
- In enhancing the small power's national economic growth, it is advisable for the small powers to diversify venues to cash in from the great powers. These consist of trade, finance and manufacturing sectors. In order not to be overly dependent on the great powers, the small powers should continue to intensify South–South trades with other emerging great and small powers, including South Africa, India and Brazil.
- In principle, small power policy-makers should uphold the ideologies of economic nationalism and national sovereignty. By securing firm controls over the state's natural, maritime and human resources for which the great powers desire, policy-makers should also not be hesitated to educate their countrymen the values and practice of these principles. Countrymen should also be educated about the state's rich and diverse resources and why the great powers desire them.

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