

Using Cases in Teaching the Geography of Asia

By Jerry Pitzl

The Harvard case method of instruction is an eminently suitable pedagogy for discussing controversial issues in the political geography and geopolitics of Asia.¹ The region is, of course, not unique in experiencing territorial disputes and contested boundaries; yet in recent years the number of incidents that have occurred within the region is noteworthy. Territorial disputes and boundary issues are valid domain for the political geographer, and

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since the controversies in many instances have yet to be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties involved, they provide an ideal context for analyzing the inherent problems and determining reasoned courses of action.

A case is a narrative that provides the reader with a basic introduction to the controversy: the who, what, when, and where. But the case will not include a detailed analysis of the problem. In this respect a case differs from the widely used and

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familiar "case study." Nor will the case suggest any recommended courses of action aimed at resolving the issue. The analysis and courses of action then become the responsibility of the facilitator and discussion participants as they engage the problem and work toward a resolution. As may be inferred at this point, a case is an exercise that both demands and develops the important skills of critical thinking, decision-making, and risk taking. Involvement in case discussions encourages student responsibility for learning, and it emphasizes the importance of questioning, listening and responding.²

The emphasis on questions is key to the well-developed case discussion. In fact, many prominent educators stress that questions are at the heart of the education process—not just questions posed by the instructor, but much more importantly, questions raised by students. Paolo Freire, the noted Brazilian scholar, was emphatic on this point. He expressed concern that educators work primarily within a "pedagogy of answers" and that less emphasis is placed on questions. Students are bombarded with answers before they have the questions on which these answers are based.³ The case method of instruction places paramount importance on questions. In fact, case discussion may very well end with more questions than answers to the issues addressed.

A case, then, takes up where content-based instruction ends. The case discussion moves the topic into the realm of relevance through the analysis of imbedded issues to decisions about what to do next. Doing cases puts students "in the shoes" of those responsible for grappling with the issues and coming up with decisions. The best cases are those for which

resolution has not yet been reached; and there are a number of them that are suitable for inclusion in a course on Asian geography. One of these cases centers on Chinese and Filipino claims to islands in the South China Sea and is reviewed in detail in this article. Another seemingly unresolvable issue takes up the enduring stalemate between Japan and Russia over territorial claims to four islands north of Hokkaidō which have been occupied by the Russians since the waning days of World War II.⁴ Japan insists that the islands are theirs. These two adversaries have been unable to resolve this issue, and a peace treaty officially ending their involvement in World War II has yet to be signed.

Other published cases deal with the Russo-Japanese Alliance of 1916, considerations on the future of Hong Kong, the Beijing Summit of May 1989 to normalize Sino-Soviet relations, and an ongoing series focused on recent Chinese economic development and its environmental impact. There are three primary sources for published cases:

Harvard Business School
Publishing
Customer Services Department
60 Harvard Way
Boston, MA 02163
Case Program Sales Office
Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
79 JFK Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
Institute for the Study of Diplomacy
Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service
Georgetown University
Washington, DC 20057

Complete catalogs of available cases may be obtained from these sources.

A CASE COMMENTARY CHINESE VENTURES IN THE SPRATLY ISLANDS

While space in this article does not permit the printing of an entire case narrative, it would nonetheless be instructive to review the salient aspects of a case that deals with a potentially explosive geopolitical situation in the South China Sea involving China and the Philippines directly, and possibly all of the ASEAN nations indirectly. The case was recently published in a source book about teaching international affairs through cases.⁵ The protagonist in the case is Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Roberto Romulo who is shocked, along with all his countrymen, to realize that the Chinese had not only occupied Mischief Reef in the Spratlys in 1995 but had constructed what appeared to be a concrete structure on the reef.

The major diplomatic problem facing Romulo and the Philippine government stemmed from the fact that both the Philippines and China claimed Mischief Reef as their territory. To many Filipinos, occupation of the reef was just another in a series of provocative acts that signaled continued territorial expansion by the Chinese into the region. There was little doubt in the Philippines that once the United States had decreased its presence in the region that the Chinese would quickly begin to take advantage of the power vacuum created. To the Filipino leadership the move was not a surprising one, although they were embarrassed that the Chinese had managed to not only occupy Mischief Reef but to build a structure without their knowing about it.

To the Chinese, on the other hand, the occupation of Mischief Reef was no injustice whatsoever. Indeed, from the Chinese perspective, Mischief

Reef and all of the South China Sea was Chinese territory and had been for centuries. In addition, the view from Beijing holds that a more assertive policy on their part within the South China Sea region is fully justified. China is intent on righting the wrongs suffered during the long Cold War which had recently ended. Romulo was well aware that further moves by the Chinese into the South China Sea could be troublesome. Although the ASEAN member nations had gotten Chinese guarantees in 1992 that territorial disputes in the region would be solved in non-aggressive ways, there was always a chance that a more militant China could use force if they felt that their territory was being illegally occupied. If the Chinese are truly in an expansive mode, the non-aggression pact could be severely tested.

To complicate matters even further, no fewer than six countries in the region lay claim to all or part of the South China Sea. Not surprisingly, Taiwan makes the same claim as the Beijing government to all of the South China Sea. Perhaps the most provocative factor influencing national policy in the region is the discovery of economically significant reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the South China Sea. The attraction of an extensive energy source could be compelling for China, especially in the country's current efforts to industrialize and expand its economic base.

For Romulo, the situation is difficult. With an ASEAN meeting coming soon, he will be required to make recommendations on Filipino responses to the Chinese moves, to do so with the larger ASEAN commitments in mind, and with his best judgment on China's future intentions. Will China opt for

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internal development of its industrial and agricultural base and not move toward further territorial expansion in the South China Sea? Or will the more militant and expansionist voices in Beijing hold sway? In the end, the basic question is this: what are China's intentions regarding their claim that the South China Sea is theirs? Romulo and other diplomats hope that the non-aggression pact is maintained. The case narrative ends with Romulo recalling the words of an Indonesian diplomat who wisely suggested that in any international dispute "talk talk is better than shoot shoot."⁶

WHY USE A CASE TO DEAL WITH THIS ISSUE?

The issue surrounding territorial claims in the South China Sea generally, and the dilemma faced by the Philippines over Mischief Reef in particular, are far from being completely resolved. For this reason the case format is ideal. Case narratives will not include full analysis of the issue. The case discussion serves this purpose. Instead of presenting the situation in a lecture mode, students are forced to deal with the complexities of the problem and come up with reasoned recommendations for resolving the problems as though they were participants in the ongoing situation.

In the case of Mischief Reef, it would be useful to have

groups of students represent Chinese and Filipino officials who come together to discuss the territorial dispute. One student may play the role of Romulo while others act as representatives of ASEAN. The point is that case discussion can take the treatment of geopolitical issues into new areas of relevance where the question of "what difference does it make?" is directly addressed. The student groups are engaged in what advocates of collaborative education identify as "discretionary tasks," efforts aimed at deriving a decision for which there is no predetermined right or wrong answer.⁷ The group work is an exercise in "shared inquiry" in which the facilitator and students work together in the analysis of the issue and formulating recommended resolutions.⁸

With the recent and continuing emphasis at all levels of education on active learning, cases provide an ideal context for enlivening classrooms, developing collaborative skills, and honing analytical prowess. Alfred North Whitehead characterized active learning as "knowledge united with action." Using cases insures that students are intimately involved with the materials at hand in a way that insures significant engagement with the issues and not merely as passive receptacles for dispensed wisdom. ■

NOTES

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4. Pitzl, Jerry. "The 'Northern Territories' Controversy: A Four-Decade Stalemate Between Japan and Russia." Case No. 364-94-N. Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 1994.
5. Pitzl, Jerry. "Mischief on Mischief Reef: Chinese Adventures in the Spratly Islands," in Karen A. Mingst and Katsuhiko Mori, eds., *Teaching International Affairs with Cases: Cross-National Perspectives*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997: 175-180.
6. Gao, Zhiguo. "The South China Sea: From Conflict to Cooperation?" *Ocean Development and International Law*, vol. 25 (July-September, 1994): 356.
7. Hertz-Lazarowitz, Rachel, Valerie Benveniste Kirkus, and Norman Miller. "Implications of Current Research on Cooperative Interaction for Classroom Application." In Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz and Norman Miller, eds., *Interaction in Cooperative Groups: The Theoretical Anatomy of Group Learning*. New York: The Cambridge University Press, 1992: 253-280.
8. Cranton, Patricia. "Types of Group Learning." In Susan Imel, ed., *Learning in Groups: Exploring Fundamental Principles, New Uses, and Emerging Opportunities*. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 71. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996: 25-32.

Indian Politics on the Internet A Resource Guide

By Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. and Stanley A. Kochanek

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The Internet, opening vast amounts of information and providing immediate access to unfolding events, is increasingly important for research in the study of politics in South Asia. Internet sites supplement traditional "hard copy" sources in a variety of ways, but they also provide bibliographic access to "hard copy" sources. We may now access on-line library catalogues throughout the world, enabling us to locate a book or track down an elusive title or reference. Where once we dug into the volumes of various guides to periodical literature, we may now search for articles published in journals and periodicals by such on-line sources as Public Affairs Information Service International (PAIS International) and Social Sciences Abstracts. These, however, are "proprietary" Internet services, available only through subscribing libraries.

More general on-line bibliographic indices, using key words to zero in on topics relating to Indian politics, remain essential, but the annual *Bibliography of Asian Studies*, published by the Association for Asian Studies since 1956, is a superb resource for books and scholarly articles on India and

is now available on-line in subscribing libraries (URL below).

Major on-line full-text sources for newspaper articles on India and South Asia more generally include LEXIS-NEXIS Academic Universe, JSTOR, and Dow Jones Interactive, and an increasing number of newspapers, periodicals, and journals throughout the world are on-line with full text. Readers should check with their libraries for availability.

India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation was first published in 1970. In the first five editions, it included a "Research Guide," with extensive lists of bibliographies, reference works, journals, newspapers, and political party periodicals. Rapidly changing information technology, the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web, and availability of on-line indices and Internet search engines have enormously expanded research capabilities and access to sources. Thus, Hardgrave and Kochanek, in preparing the sixth edition, decided to provide, in place of the earlier "Research Guide," a new feature for the text, a guide to Internet sources for the study of Indian politics.