

Opening Remarks by Jonathan Spangler at the Guest Lecture by Bill Hayton on “The Modern Origins of China’s Claims in the South China Sea” hosted by the South China Sea Think Tank

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It looks like we’ve got an excellent group with us here this afternoon. It’s inspiring to see everyone’s level of interest in learning about and engaging in dialogue on such important issues in regional and international affairs, and it is fitting that the coming together of our distinguished colleague Bill Hayton and the South China Sea Think Tank can provide the medium for such a gathering.

It is my honor to be here this afternoon and to speak on behalf of the many individuals and institutions that have come together to make this event happen. My name is Jonathan Spangler, and I have served as the Director of the South China Sea Think Tank for almost three years now. During this time, what began as an informal research group here at IIR turned into an internationally recognized, independent think tank and also the foundation of its parent non-profit organization – the Asia-Pacific Policy Research Association. The growth and accomplishments of the South China Sea Think Tank have exceeded anyone’s expectations, and I am humbled by the outpouring of support that has come from distinguished scholars from around the world as well as those here in Taiwan.

Before I say anything else, I would first like to thank all of the other institutions involved in organizing and sponsoring this event – Taiwan Center for Security Studies led by its executive director, Dr. Liu Fu-Kuo; the Institute of International Relations here at NCCU; and the Institute of Maritime Affairs and Policy led by its secretary general, Dr. Wang Kuan-Hsiung. Too many others to name have also devoted many hours of their time behind the scenes to bringing this event to life. You know who you are, and thank you on behalf of everyone for your dedication.

As many of you are well aware, South China Sea issues have risen to the forefront of public consciousness over the past few years. This is, for one, because they are controversial. Many sides with both mutually compatible and incompatible views are involved in the disputes. It is also because the disputes have the potential to affect not only claimant states but also relations between countries around the world. The South China Sea holds both great promise and potential risks that relate to resource economics, international law, global trade and shipping, human security, and the issues of national defense, security, and stability.

Yet there are two other reasons that the South China Sea has received so much attention. The first is that the multiple competing histories of the maritime claims have been written, rewritten, and adapted to serve national interests time and time again over the past hundred years, and that process continues to this day. The second is that these sovereignty issues have become an intensely emotional issue for the people of all countries involved, and much of this emotionalization has been intentional and done as the behest of policymakers and others with political interests.

Bill Hayton, who we are fortunate to have with us here today, has been a pioneer in trying to disentangle the complex web of historical reality and constructed narrative, trying to separate the fact from the fiction, and in his most recent work, taking a critical look at the role of emotion in the drumming up of popular support for countries' sovereignty claims.

Bill Hayton has an interesting background as a BBC journalist turned historian and scholar, and this shines through in all of his work. He has a remarkable ability to take complex issues – ones policymakers and even experts in the field have demonstrated that they are unable to adequately understand. He unravels these complex issues and presents them in a way that shows a respect for their nuances while also making them engaging – and even entertaining – for the reader. His 2014 book, *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia*, has become something of a gold standard for anyone interested in the history of the South China Sea, and we should all be glad that it is his book and not another that has achieved that level of recognition. He has lived in Vietnam and Myanmar and traveled to many other locations to conduct his research. Today, he also serves as an Associate Fellow with the Chatham House – or the Royal Institute of International Affairs – in London.

Before giving Bill Hayton the floor, I would like to invite Dr. Liu Fu-Kuo, the Executive Director of the Taiwan Center for Security Studies and a Research Fellow here at IIR to share some opening remarks. Dr. Liu has been an influential figure here in Taiwan for many years and an inspiration for many, including myself, so I am honored to continue our history of productive collaboration with today's event.

[Dr. Liu Fu-Kuo shares opening remarks.]

Thank you Dr. Liu. So without further ado, may we all thank Bill Hayton for taking the time to be here today and welcome him with a big round of applause.