

ASIA

Old maps sought to prove maritime rights

Countries look to the past for ammunition in battle over ownership of waters considered vital to trade and defence

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They are sketches by sailors and drawings by priests – lines on paper hundreds of years old that show islands and coastlines whose shapes often look decidedly different from their modern representation.

But across Asia, those centuries-old maps have become objects of modern desire as countries look to the past for ammunition in a battle over ownership rights in waters vital to trade and defence.

On Tuesday, a court in The Hague is expected to rule on a key fight over maritime ownership in the South China Sea between China and the Philippines. The decision by the little-known Permanent Court of Arbitration will form a major international test of the complex and conflicting claims that countries have laid over the region's waters, and in particular China's bid to own most of the South China Sea.

But behind the legal arguments before the arbitration tribunal, Asian nations have been engaged in a high-stakes bid to gather symbolic proof of rightful ownership, which has great value in the court of public opinion. To do that, they have turned to old maps, seeking confirmation from the fading scribbles of mariners, functionaries and scholars – and, in at least one case, a stone inscription nearly a millennium old – of who rightfully owns what.

“There has been a noticeable uptick in interest in European maps that assign certain East Asian islands to one regional group or another,” said Kevin Brown, the founder of Geographicus Rare Antique Maps in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Chinese depictions, too, have become valuable commodities, since it is Beijing's unbending imposition of its claims through the construction of hotly disputed artificial islands that has brought long-standing international arguments to a boil. The priciest map in Mr. Brown's current inventory is the earliest known print of the All-Under-Heaven Complete Map of the Everlasting Unified Qing Empire, listed at \$250,000 (U.S.).

Over the last decade, prices for rare Chinese maps have risen five and even 10 times in value, dealers say, mostly because wealthy Chinese have begun to collect.

For China, “it's about constructing a superpower. They want to show that China is big and powerful. And so every inch of territory you can claim as Chinese is awfully good,” said Timothy Brook, a historian at the University of British Columbia who specializes in China.

“They search for maps as though there's some kind of magic proof of a political claim,” he said.

The most prominent is a relatively recent one, a 1947 map published by the Republic of China – the government that later fled to Taiwan from Mao's Communists – that placed 11 long dashes in a curving U-shape encompassing virtually the entire South China Sea, a 3.5-million-square-kilometre body of water.

Modern Taiwanese leadership has said the lines (subsequently reduced to nine, then raised to 10) are only meant to show which islands are Chinese. But in 2009, Beijing told the United Nations it also claims the entire



Kevin Brown, of Geographicus Rare Antique Maps in Brooklyn, N.Y., says there is increasing interest in antique maps as people look for historical evidence of territorial or maritime claims. ERIC THAYER



The earliest known print of the All-Under-Heaven Complete Map of the Everlasting Unified Qing Empire, from 1806, is listed for sale at \$250,000 (U.S.). COURTESY GEOGRAPHICUS RARE ANTIQUE MAPS

surface and seabed contained inside its massive reach.

The race for old maps comes partly in response, as China's neighbours seek counter-evidence – “mostly because historic cartography does not support China's claims,” Mr. Brown said.

In the Philippines, a senior Supreme Court justice, Antonio Carpio, conducted a lengthy review of 60 historical maps, some of them stone and silk drawings dating to 1136. Each of the Chinese documents he amassed depicts China extending only as far south as Hainan Island, whose shores lie more than 1,500 kilometres from the farthest point of the country's nine-dashed-line, which Mr. Carpio has called “a gigantic historical fraud.”

The government of Vietnam has purchased a copy of the Postal Atlas of China from Mr. Brown. The atlas was printed for several decades in the early 20th century and shows no Chinese authority over islands in the South China Sea.

Other nations are also “looking

to buttress the arguments as to who can claim the sea as their territorial waters,” said Barry Ruderman, owner of Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps in La Jolla, Calif.

Several of his clients “are very specifically focused on defining China or its neighbours through maps,” he said. “They're definitely asking for specific groups of islands and specific concepts.”

China, meanwhile, has sought to marshal its own claims. Later this year, Chinese researchers will publish two books compiling old maps.

“People who are familiar with Chinese documents and maps will know that China had the earliest records of the Diaoyu Islands” – known as the Senkaku Islands in Japan, which also claims them – “and the islands in the South China Sea,” said Chen Jiarong, a senior consultant at the China Maritime Navigation History Research Institute, who has worked on the two books.

Still, international law has placed strict limits on the useful-

ness of maps, which “merely constitute information, and never constitute territorial titles in themselves alone,” the International Court of Justice wrote in a 1986 ruling.

That's doubly true in the China-Philippines case now before the Permanent Court of Arbitration, where “the issues do not include sovereignty over land territory [such as islands]. Thus, even official maps showing claims to islands would not be relevant,” said Paul Reichler, the lead counsel for the Philippines side, in an e-mailed response. The court will, instead, rule on the Philippines' maritime entitlements, which directly places into question the validity of China's nine-dashed line.

China has rejected the arbitration, and refused to participate. It has instead waged war on modern maps it doesn't like.

At the beginning of this year, it outlawed possession of all maps that don't match its regulations, or which could “harm national honour.” Authorities have seized globes that do not conform to

China's view of the world from foreigners leaving the country. Beijing's sway is obvious on digital mapping software from Apple and Microsoft, which include the dashed line.

But China has struggled to find support even in the most promising of historical documents. Take the Selden map, a 17th-century depiction of trading routes across the South China Sea. It was brought to England by John Selden, a prominent jurist who made the case that countries can “claim jurisdiction over the ocean – the very claim China now makes over the South China Sea,” writes Prof. Brook in Mr. Selden's *Map of China*.

The hand-drawn map, originally bought from a Chinese merchant, is “the only detailed and geographically specific Chinese depiction of these waters before the nineteenth century,” he wrote. When it was discovered in an Oxford University library in 2009, it stoked hope that it could “be the winning card in the diplomatic game China plays with its neighbours.”

In reality, it does nothing of the sort. “This is a non-political map of East Asia. The only country that's named is Korea,” he said.

The hunt for old maps, meanwhile, has left even the dealers shaking their heads.

“A lot times people come to me and they like a map because it shows this or that island belonging to this or that country. If it's a Western map, the islands are dots. And if the dots happens to be one colour, they buy it. If it happens to be another colour, they don't buy it,” said Mr. Brown.

The problem: Those maps were printed in black and white, before being sent to colourists who “weren't scholars,” he said.

“The notion that a map from 1825 that shows this island or that island belonging to China or to Japan or to Vietnam has any meaning whatsoever is utterly absurd,” Mr. Brown said.

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With a report from Yu Mei

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Labour: Despite caucus rebellion, Corbyn vows to stay on with grassroots support

But Mr. Corbyn – a staunch left-winger who remains popular with the party's wider membership – has made it clear he has no intention of stepping aside. He claimed on Sunday that he, as the incumbent, did not need a minimum level of support from his fellow MPs to win a place on the ballot in any leadership contest.

The party's National Executive Committee is expected to make a ruling on the matter, but Mr. Corbyn said on Sunday that he would take the matter to court if the NEC ruled against him.

“I would be irresponsible if I walked away from a mandate that I was given and a responsibility that I was given,” Mr. Corbyn said on Sunday. “I ask colleagues to respect that as well.”

Opinion polls of Labour's membership suggest the 67-year-old Mr. Corbyn, a long-time party

rebel who shocked the Labour establishment by winning the leadership last fall, would handily defeat Ms. Eagle in a head-to-head contest. More than 100,000 new members have joined Labour since the June 23 referendum, and many are believed to be supporters of Mr. Corbyn who signed up specifically to help fend off the challenge to his leadership.

The standoff has become so bitter that some in Labour could split the party. The MPs challenging Mr. Corbyn are mainly from the centre-left of the political spectrum and say the party is unelectable as long Mr. Corbyn is leader.

“We need a strengthened Labour Party and an opposition that can unite, so we can heal the country and unfortunately I just don't think Jeremy can do that job,” Ms. Eagle told the BBC. The 55-year-old had worked with Mr.

Corbyn as shadow business secretary until resigning her post following the EU referendum.

The Labour membership however, is now dominated by union members and left-wing activists who believe the party deserted its principles and drifted too far to the centre during the Tony Blair-Gordon Brown era that saw Labour win three consecutive general elections.

With the Conservative Party also in turmoil following the Brexit vote, British media have begun to speculate that Conservative and Labour MPs who are pro-European could create a new centrist party as the traditional parties move further to the right and left.

The race to replace David Cameron as Conservative Leader – and become the next prime minister – also took on an angrier tone on the weekend as Andrea Leadsom, one of the two

candidates still in the race, drew widespread criticism for suggesting she was better suited to the prime minister's job than her competitor Theresa May because she, unlike Ms. May, had children.

“She possibly has nieces, nephews ... but I have children who are going to have children who will directly be a part of what happens next,” Ms. Leadsom told The Times of London in an interview. Referring to the looming negotiations with the EU regarding the terms of Britain's withdrawal from the 28-country union, she added: “I have a real stake in the next year, the next two.”

The 59-year-old Ms. May, a long-time Home Secretary, recently revealed that she and her husband had unsuccessfully tried to have kids.


Ms. May and Ms. Leadsom were the two candidates selected in a vote among the Conservative

Party caucus last week, and the party's wider membership will now choose between the two women in a September ballot.

Ms. May enters the contest as the favourite, after capturing 199 votes from Conservative MPs, to 84 for Ms. Leadsom. Pundits speculated that Ms. Leadsom's controversial comments about motherhood were a clumsy family-values pitch, intended to appeal to the party's socially conservative membership.

The 53-year-old mother of three was a relative political unknown until she became one of the most prominent pro-Brexit campaigners ahead of the referendum. Ms. Leadsom apparently hopes to catch the same anti-establishment wave that carried Mr. Corbyn to his party's leadership last year.

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