

China's "Frontiers": Issues Concerning Territorial Claims at Sea – Security Implications in the East China Sea and the South China Sea (Part II)

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Abstract

The last issue of Eurasia Border Review featured Part One of a special review of China's sea "frontiers." The second half of this review continues with a discussion of the territorial issues at stake in the South China Sea and an analysis of the capability of the People's Liberation Army Navy. The article is set against the background of the sea-trial of China's first aircraft carrier in August 2011 and a spate of recent incidents over disputed maritime territory in the South China Sea. It discusses the response of China's neighbours in the region to its increased naval activity and also the role of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations). It also presents perspectives on how dialogue and confidence-building measures can help reduce tensions in the region.

South China Sea

The South China Sea Islands are composed of four groups. The Paracel Islands are divided into two groups, namely the Amphitrite Islands Group (Xuande Islands) and the Crescent Islands Group (Yongle Islands). Woody Island (Yongxing Island, 1.85 square kilometers) of the Amphitrite Islands Group, the largest feature in the Paracels, which was occupied by China (the People's Republic of China: PRC) in 1950, and the Crescent Islands Group, which was occupied by the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).¹ In January 1974, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and RVN Navy clashed over the Paracel Islands, and currently all the islands are occupied by the PRC.

The Pratas Islands were occupied by Taiwan (ROC) in 1946, though the reefs of Macclesfield Bank are all sunken reefs with the exception of the five rocks of the Scarborough Shoal, which were once occupied by the Philippine Armed Forces.² No member country of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) claims the Macclesfield Bank other than Scarborough Shoal.³

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¹ M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2008), 267-299.

² Ikuo Kayahara, ed., *Zhugoku Gunji Yogo Jiten [Encyclopedia of Chinese Military Affairs]* (Sososha: Tokyo, 2006), 338; Tatsuo Urano, *Nankai Shoto Kokusai Funso Shi [History of the International Conflicts over the South China Sea Islands]* (Tosui Shobo Publishing: Tokyo, 1997), 31-32; Noel M. Novicio, *The South China Sea Dispute in Philippine Foreign Policy, IDSS Monograph, No. 5* (Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies: Singapore, 2003), 14; *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 26 April, 2012.

³ The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines,

The focal point is the territorial dispute over the Spratly Islands. According to Chinese sources, the sea area of the Spratly Islands is around 800,000 square kilometers, or 38% of the total sea area of the South China Sea; the area includes 230 islands, reefs and cays.⁴ All the islands, reefs, and cays are claimed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, and some part of the islands and reefs are claimed by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei.⁵

The sea area of the Spratly Islands is believed to be rich in oil and fishery resources, though no oil detection has yet been successful.⁶ Regarding the natural resources of the sea bed in the South China Sea, some oil fields and natural gas deposits were found, mainly in the sedimentary basins of the coastal areas of Vietnam, Sabah and Sarawak of East Malaysia, and the Natuna Islands of Indonesia, but no resources were found in the sea area surrounding the Spratly Islands, which is located in the central deep sea area of the South China Sea.⁷

Recent Chinese statistics suggest that fishery resources in the South China Sea were about 11.5 million tons in 2001 (China: 3.4 million tons, Indonesia: 2.9 million tons, Thailand: 1.9 million tons, Vietnam: 1.5 million tons, the Philippines: 0.9 million tons, Malaysia: 0.7 million tons.⁸)

Four claimants to the Spratlys – Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam – are members of ASEAN. Currently, it is said that China occupies 7, Taiwan occupies 1, Vietnam occupies 21, Malaysia occupies 5, and the Philippines occupy 8 (total 42), though most of them are rocks, low-tide elevations, sunken reefs, cays and banks. Almost all of the claimants except Brunei have built artificial islands and emplacements to station troops. Some have even built airstrips on them (Figure 1). The biggest island is Itu Aba Island (Taiping Island is the Chinese name, with fresh water

Singapore, and Thailand in 1967. It has contributed to regional cooperation among the member countries (Brunei (joined ASEAN in 1984), Cambodia (joined ASEAN in 1999), Indonesia, Laos (joined ASEAN in 1997), Malaysia, Myanmar (joined ASEAN in 1997), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (joined ASEAN in 1995)) and with external dialogue partners including Japan, the US, and China.

⁴ Ji Guoxing, *The Spratlys: Disputes and Prospects for Settlement* (Institute of Strategic and International Studies [ISIS]: Malaysia, 1992), 1.

⁵ Regarding the Vietnamese claim, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam acknowledged Chinese sovereignty on the Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands before unification, though it is important to recognise the difficulties of the Vietnamese people in those days. A Chinese scholar wrote, “In April 1975, before the fall of Saigon, Hanoi dispatched troops to occupy the six islands in the Spratly group that had been seized by South Vietnam the year before. In late 1975, a new territorial map of the reunited Vietnam for the first time included the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands” (Ji, *The Spratlys*, 9).

⁶ Japanese specialists are pessimistic about oil and gas production in the South China Sea: *Asahi Shinbun*, June 1, 2010; Akira Ishi and Kazuhiko Fuji, *Sekai wo Ugokasu Sekiyu Senryaku [World Oil Strategy]* (Chikuma Publishing, 2003), 136-140.

⁷ China’s Ministry of Land Resources has optimistically claimed that the South China Sea might hold 23-40 billion tons of oil reserves (168-220 billion barrels), and more than 2,000 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of natural gas reserves, though a 1993/4 US geological survey puts the oil reserves at 28 billion barrels, and the US Energy Information Administration listed proven oil reserves at just 7 billion barrels, see Ralf Emmers, “Geopolitics and Maritime Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea: From Competition to Collaboration?” in *Realising Safe and Secure Seas for All*, ed. Joshua Ho (Select Publishing, 2009), 147.

⁸ Guo Wenlu and Huang Shuolin, *Nanhai Zhengduan Yu Nanhai Yuye Ziyuan Quyu Hezuo Guanli Yanjiu [Research of the South China Sea Conflict and the Cooperative Management of South China Sea Fishery Resources]* (Beijing: Haijun Chubanshe, 2007), 91-104.

resources, and an area of 0.49 square kilometers), and is occupied by Taiwan.⁹

Before World War II, the ROC, the French Colony of Indochina, and Japan competed for sovereignty over the Spratly Islands, and the Imperial Japanese government incorporated the Spratly Islands into Japan's territory as a part of Taiwan, and called them the Shinnan Islands in 1938.¹⁰ Japan was forced to renounce all its foreign territories after World War II. The ROC declared that all the islands were a part of Chinese territory in 1947, and stationed troops in Itu Aba Island.¹¹



Figure 1: Artificial Island of Swallow Reef (Koichi Sato)

Just before the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan, the then PRC's prime minister and foreign minister, Zhou Enlai also declared Chinese sovereignty over the whole Spratly Islands in August 1951 though no troops were dispatched for occupation.¹²

The Philippine Maritime Institute director Tomas Cloma explored a part of the Spratly Islands, and named them Kalayaan (Freedomland in Tagalog) Islands in May 1956, and later claimed these islands as Philippine territories, while the Republic of Vietnam's government (RVN) issued a communiqué on June 1, 1956, claiming ownership of all the Spratly Islands.¹³ Malaysia claimed a part of the Spratly Islands in 1978, and Brunei claimed Louisa Reef as a part of its territory in 1982.¹⁴

China's claim on the Spratly Islands is very weak as is their claim to the Senkaku Islands, because it is not based on historical inhabitation by the Chinese nation. The four ASEAN countries' claims are also not so persuasive for the same reason. Regarding the Spratly issues, China began actual occupation in 1988 (i.e. troops stationed there), the Vietnamese in 1974, the Philippines in 1956, Malaysia in 1978, and Taiwan in 1947.¹⁵

Further, China asserts that old Chinese coins and broken pieces of pottery found on the South China Sea Islands are evidence of pre-modern Chinese economic life in these islands. They are not found in the Spratly Islands, but are found in the Paracel Islands. They seem to be the relics of

⁹ Another island which contains fresh water resources is Thitu Island (Pag-asa Island in the Philippines, Zhongyedao] in Chinese) which was occupied by the Philippines (You Sakushu, *Funso Nansa Shoto [The Spratly Islands Conflict]* (Tokyo: Shinhyoron, 1994), 32).

¹⁰ Urano, *Nankai Shoto*, 321-323.

¹¹ You Sakushu. *Funso Nansa*, 143.

¹² Han Zhenhua [Zhubian], *Woguo Nanhai Zhudao Shiliao Huibian [Collection of the Materials of Our Nation's South China Sea Islands]* (Xiamen: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1985), 444.

¹³ BA Hamzah, *The Spratlies: What Can Be Done to Enhance Confidence* (Institute of Strategic and International Studies [ISIS]: Malaysia, 1990), 5-6.

¹⁴ Urano, *Nankai Shoto*, 1143; BA Hamzah, *The Spratlies*, 7; Lee Lai To, *China and the South China Sea Dialogues* (Praeger, 1999), 126.

¹⁵ Urano, *Nankai Shoto*, 1106-1175.

drifters and the crews of wrecked ships.¹⁶ The Vietnamese archeologist group also suggested that their discovery of broken pieces of pottery in the Spratly Islands is evidence of pre-modern Vietnamese economic life in these islands (*Sankei Shinbun*, May 26 1994).

An established Japanese scholar said that no claimant can show definite evidence of an effective occupation of the Spratly Islands in pre-modern history, and every claimant has the right to join in negotiation of a settlement of the territorial issues (Hidekuni Takeshita, *Minami Shinakai Funsou no Keii to Ryouyuuken Mondai* [The History of the South China Sea Conflicts and the territorial Issues], the second volume, *Ajiatorend*, 1992, IV, p. 91).

Another ASEAN point at issue is the Chinese broken U-shaped line on the map of the South China Sea (Figure 2). There are many aspects to the Chinese broken U-shaped line, namely, the boundary of historic waters, the southern parallel to the Great Wall in the north; symbol of the southernmost territory, an exclusive economic zone; the line which signifies ownership by both Taipei and Beijing of the living and non-living resources within it, the boundary of the “Chinese Lake”; something akin to internal waters and the representation of the Chinese claim on the South China Sea Islands.¹⁷

But Chinese diplomats only asserted “historical rights” to the four groups of islands and

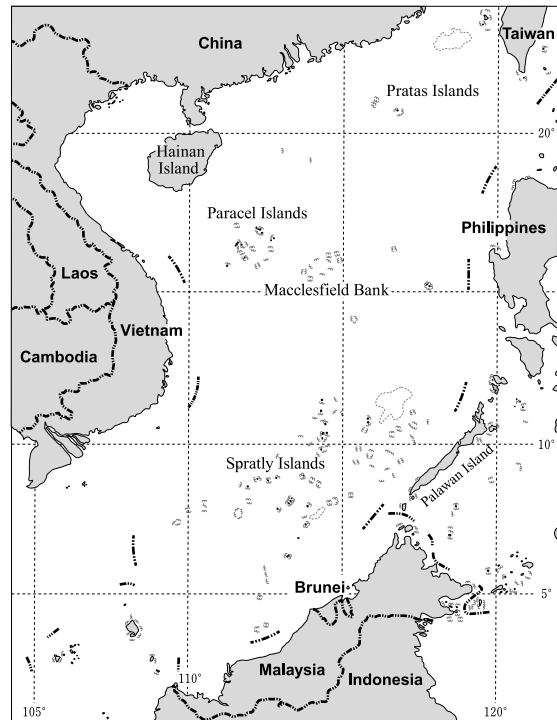


Figure 2: South China Sea

¹⁶ Han Zhenhua [Zhubian], *Woguo Nanhai*, 103-122. Han’s book also asserted that there are ancient small shrines in the Spratly Islands, though the existence of Chinese economic life on uninhabited islands cannot be confirmed.

¹⁷ Kuen-chen Fu, *Nan[Zhongguo]hai Falu Diwei Zhi Yanjiu* (Taipei: 123zixun, 1995), 201-210; Peter Kien-Hong Yu, “The Chinese [Broken] U-shaped Line in the South China Sea: Points, Lines, and Zones,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 25:3 (2003): 405-430; Peter A. Dutton, “Through a Chinese Lens,” *U. S. Naval Institute proceedings*, April (2010): 24-29; Li Guoqiang, “Zhongguo Yu Zhoubian Guojia De Haishang Bianjiewenti [The Maritime Frontier Issue between China and its Neighboring Countries].” Paper Presented at Japan Association for Asian Studies, East Japan Annual Meeting, May 22, 2010, 3-4. Peter A. Dutton’s recent classification of Chinese aspects of the broken U-shaped line is fine, though most of the Chinese aspects which he quoted from the PRC sources also appeared in the above-mentioned ROC sources in the past. There is also an aspect that may be relevant to the broken U-shaped line, “the soft frontier” and “the strategic frontier” which were suggested by the PLA officers to extend the territorial claims at sea (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 13, 1995, 28; *Jiefangjunbao*, April 3, 1987).

waters covered by this line, and the PLA Navy dispatched gunboats to those sea areas.¹⁸ In the first place, the broken U-shaped line was not drawn by the PRC. The line was unofficially drawn on the map of the ROC by Hu Jinjie in 1914, and it was officially drawn on the map of the ROC by Bai Meichu in 1947 to indicate the sphere of historic waters, and on the map of the PRC in 1953.¹⁹ It is unclear as to whether Mr. Bai had full knowledge of international maritime law (international law of the sea) at the time he drew the line.²⁰

The Chinese logic of historic waters does not conform to the general definition of the international law of the sea. Soji Yamamoto, a former judge of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) explained that “historic waters have geographically special features, such as an inland sea (e.g. the Japan’s Seto Inland Sea [*Setonaikai*]), which a coastal country has treated as territorial water by custom. It controls the sea area effectively, and no country lodges an objection against the practice.”²¹ Therefore a scholar in the ROC said that the broken U-shaped line never showed the sphere of internal waters or territorial waters; rather, it shows the special historic waters, and the sphere of a semi-enclosed sea.²²

The Chinese ministry of foreign affairs never disclosed the legal significance of the broken U-shaped line officially, though the Chinese map drawer changed this same line into a solid line when he used it as a land border line.²³ Further, the map drawer used the same line for the territorial waters as the broken line between the Philippines and Malaysia. The broken U-shaped line also seemed to indicate that a part of the Natuna Islands of Indonesia belonged to China. The sea area surrounding the Natuna Islands is rich in natural gas.

Therefore not only Malaysia but also Indonesia keep their eyes on China’s territorial claims on the South China Sea. A Malaysian scholar suspected that the Chinese had ambition to enclose the South China Sea.²⁴ The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has maintained its silence. If they admit that the broken line represents the boundary of territorial waters (or historic waters), they will be in a difficult position in international society, but if they deny that the broken line represents the boundary of territorial waters (or historic waters) they will be denounced as traitors by the Chinese nationalists at home.

¹⁸ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 23, 1995, 14-16; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 27, 1995, 28.

¹⁹ Kien-Hong Yu, “The Chinese [Broken] U-shaped Line,” 407; Kuen-chen Fu, *Nan[Zhongguo]hai Falu*, 4; Li Guoqiang, “Zhongguo Yu,” 8; Han Zhenhua [Zhubian], *Woguo Nanhai*, 360.

²⁰ Kien-Hong Yu, “The Chinese [Broken] U-shaped Line,” 407.

²¹ Soji Yamamoto, *The Law of the Sea* (Tokyo: Sanseido Publishing, 1992), 45.

²² Kuen-chen Fu, *Nan[Zhongguo]hai Falu*, 40-42.

²³ If we closely check the broken U-shaped lines of the ROC and the PRC, they are not equivalent. The ROC’s broken U-shaped line is drawn using 11 dots and its location seems to be a little north in comparison with the PRC’s line drawn using 9 dots, see *Zhonghua Minguo Fenshengtu* (Taipei: Shengli Chubanshe, 1981), 4; *Hainansheng Ditu* (Xinhua Shidian, Beijing: Zhongguo Ditu Chubanshe, April 1988). This author gets the impression that a part of James Shoal is not covered by the ROC’s line, and the line is not close to the Indonesian EEZs of Natuna Islands. The PRC’s line covers the James Shoal, and seems to overlap with the Indonesian EEZs.

²⁴ BA Hamzah, “China’s strategy,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 13, 1992, 22.

The PLA began to occupy some of the Spratly Islands in 1988.²⁵ PLA Navy ships²⁶ attacked Vietnamese troopships in the sea area surrounding Johnson Reef of the Spratly Islands in March 1988, sinking two Vietnamese ships and wrecking one.²⁷ Further, Chinese relations with Vietnam and the Philippines have been aggravated for some time, because the PLA Navy has dispatched gunboats to the sea area of the Spratly Islands.

China was able to expand its territory because it had military superiority over Vietnam and the Philippines. But the strategic significance of China's occupation seems to be limited, because their occupied features are not suitable to develop airstrips or ports, because most of them are small reefs and rocks with the exception of Mischief Reef.²⁸ Most of the islands or big reefs that can be categorized as such under the international law of the sea were occupied by other claimants such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Taiwan.

The PLA Navy built a territorial marker at Gaven Reef in July 1992,²⁹ and built some military posts for stationing troops on Mischief Reef, which was also claimed by Vietnam and the Philippines, in February 1995, and expanding them in October 1998.³⁰ The Philippine government lodged an objection over the Mischief Reef incident with the Chinese Embassy in Manila in 1995, and they were deeply shocked, because the Chinese Embassy had no information on the PLA Navy's actions in the South China Sea.³¹

Philippine President Fidel Ramos disclosed the Chinese official explanation on February 15, 1995. He told that Chinese local (Hainan province) officials arbitrarily ordered the PLA Navy to occupy Mischief Reef.³² It may be the third circumstantial piece of evidence concerning the pluralized decision making process of Chinese foreign policy.³³ The Chinese foreign ministry may

²⁵ It was said that China had occupied 8 Reefs, namely, Fiery Cross Reef (Yongshu Jiao) and Johnson Reef / Gac Ma Reef (Chigua Jiao) in 1988, Cuarteron Reefs (Huayang Jiao), Subi Reef (Zhubi Jiao), Hugh's Reef (Dongmen Jiao), and Loaita Bank and Reefs (Daoming Qunjaio) in 1989, Gaven Reef (Nanxun Jiao) in 1992, and Mischief Reef (Meiji Jiao) in 1995 (Urano, *Nankai Shoto*, 20-28; 1113-1131). But not all of them seemed to be permanently occupied, because only 7 Reefs were counted as being occupied by China in Baker's book, and only 6 reefs were counted as being occupied by China in Li's article (John C. Baker and David G. Wiencek, eds., *Cooperative Monitoring in the South China Sea* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 4; Li Guoqiang, "Zhongguo Yu," 6).

²⁶ The PLA Navy dispatched small *Jaingdong* class destroyers (displacement 2000 tons) and other gunboats, Shao Yongling, *Haiyang Zhanguoce [The Chinese Naval War Strategy]* (Shiyong Gongyue Chubanshe, 2010), 165.

²⁷ *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 28, 1988, 1072.

²⁸ If China can develop some big artificial islands with airstrips and ports on these reefs and rocks, the PLA's strategic calculation may be changed. Because the airstrips and ports will expand the PLA Navy's capability in the sea area of the Spratly Islands. The PLA could not do it in 22 years, so it may be technologically difficult.

²⁹ *New Straits Times*, July 10, 1992.

³⁰ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 23, 1995, 14-16; *Straits Times*, November 11, 1998.

³¹ Author's interview with a senior researcher of the Institute for Strategic and development Studies, the Philippines, on November 12, 1995.

³² *Tonan Ajia Geppo [Monthly Report on Southeast Asia]* February, 1995; *Tonan Ajia Chosakai*, February, 1995, 89. According to the PRC map, the four South China Sea Islands Groups belong to Hainan Province (*Hainansheng Ditu*, [Xinhua Shudian, Beijing: Zhongguo Ditu Chubanshe, April 1988]).

³³ Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox pointed out that the PLA sometimes did not inform their activities to the

not know the details of the PLA's activities, and they cannot interfere in military actions.³⁴

The ASEAN countries are all small and weak in comparison with China. They cannot depend on military power (See Table 1). That is why they attach importance to conference diplomacy based on consensus and collective negotiation with dialogue partners.³⁵ The ASEAN foreign ministers discussed the issues of the South China Sea, and expressed several times their serious concern over Chinese military actions that have affected the peace and stability of the South China Sea at ASEAN Ministerial Meetings (AMM).³⁶

The ASEAN leaders tried to settle the South China Sea conflict peacefully at the ASEAN-China Summit Meetings in 1997. It is safe to say that China had been rather positive about attending ASEAN's conferences at the beginning of the post-Cold War era because ASEAN's consensus based decision making procedure, chaired by small countries, was comfortable in comparison with the initiative of major powers.³⁷

The ASEAN leaders agreed on the treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) in 1995 (*Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone*, Bangkok, December 15, 1995). They requested that the Chinese president sign the protocol of the SEANWFZ treaty, which defined most of the sea areas of the Spratly Islands as belonging to ASEAN countries, because

Chinese foreign ministry. Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, *Zhugoku no Atarashii Taigai Seisaku*, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2011) [The Japanese Translation of: Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China*, SIPRI Policy Paper No. 26, (2010): 25-32].

³⁴ There is some other illustration. In November 2004, a Chinese Han class nuclear submarine violated Japanese territorial waters off the coast of Okinawa Island, *Nihon no Bouei [Defense White paper of Japan] 2005* (Tokyo: Japan Defense Agency, 2005), 164-167. This author once lodged an objection to Chinese diplomats on this territorial violation at an international conference in 2007. While the diplomats gave no response, they took notes of his comments closely. It was likely that they had no detailed information about the incident.

³⁵ ASEAN ministers call their principle of conferences the "ASEAN Way," though it is rather vague as rules of conferences. Therefore this author has organized an "ASEAN Way" of conference diplomacy along a set of six features. First, decision-making procedures are based on consensus; second, the maintenance of dialogue takes priority over the settlement of conflicts among conference attendees; third, ASEAN promotes collective negotiation with external dialogue partners; fourth, ASEAN holds new conferences according to changes in the international environment; fifth, ASEAN reserves all or part of the right to sponsor and chair these conferences; sixth, ASEAN establishes informal meetings including ministerial retreats. These six features of ASEAN's conference diplomacy constitute a set of rules that this author calls the "ASEAN Regime." If this author follows the logic of the theorists of international politics, this is an example of "soft regimes". Koichi Sato, "The ASEAN Regime: Its Implications for East Asian Cooperation: A Japanese View," in *The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Tamio Nakamura (Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo, 2007), 19-30; Koichi Sato, "Internal and Intra-ASEAN Relations: Implications for the Japan-US Strategic Agenda." Paper presented at the CSIS-JIIA Strategic Dialogue on Southeast Asia, Washington DC, December 7-8, 2010: 1-10.

³⁶ *ASEAN declaration on the South China Sea*, Manila, July 22, 1992; *Statement by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers on the Recent Developments in the South China Sea*, Singapore, March 18, 1995.

³⁷ Tatsumi Okabe, ed., *Post Reisen no Ajia Taiheiyō [Asia Pacific Region in the Post-Cold War Era]* (Tokyo: Japan Institute of International Affairs, 1995), 12-15. Constructivists support this merit, and contend that the ASEAN countries and China may construct cooperative relations (Alice D. Ba, "Who's socializing whom? Complex engagement in Sino-ASEAN relations," *Pacific Review*, 19:2, June (2006): 157-179).

the treaty was based on claims made by the ASEAN countries. The ASEAN leaders also planned the Regional Code of Conduct for the South China Sea to check Chinese claims in the South China Sea.³⁸ They negotiated with their Chinese counterparts for some years, and finally agreed on the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea on November 4, 2002 (*Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea*, Phnom Penh, November 4, 2002).

Further, the Malaysian government stationed navy troops on a reef of the Spratly Islands (Swallow Reef in English, Terumbu Layang Layang in Malay, Danwan Jiao in Chinese, da Hoa Lau in Vietnamese).³⁹ They built an airstrip and developed an artificial island near a diving resort (Figure 1 and Figure 3). Fish such as hammerhead sharks, manta rays, and whale sharks abound in the sea area surrounding Swallow Reef, and the artificial island has become a colony for sea birds.⁴⁰ The Malaysian Navy held repeated naval exercises in the sea area surrounding the reef, and invited an American manager and Japanese divers to a hotel on the artificial island.⁴¹ It made naval operations more difficult for China.

As far as the Natuna Islands are concerned, the Indonesian government requested the Chinese government explain the implication of the broken U-shaped line in 1994 and again in 1995.⁴² The Indonesian Armed Forces conducted military exercises at the Natuna Islands in August 1996 to check Chinese territorial ambitions.⁴³ The Chinese government denied having territorial claims on the Natuna Islands, though they refused to explain in detail the meaning of the broken line.

It can be said that ASEAN's conference diplomacy had been successful until the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea in 2002, but the Chinese government's attitude changed. They preferred bilateral negotiations and have tried to avoid conference diplomacy. The Chinese Ambassador to ASEAN said that "ASEAN never utilized its own conflict solution mechanism, the High Council in Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), for internal ASEAN disputes, and has always negotiated issues bilaterally. Given this, we should adopt bilateral negotiations for the Spratly issues, too. It is unfair that ASEAN leaders insist on multilateral



Figure 3: Artificial Island of Swallow Reef (Koich Sato)

³⁸ *Straits Times*, July 21, 1999.

³⁹ This author visited Swallow Reef on August 7-8 1998, and has some guesses on its various names. The shape of the reef appearing on the surface of the sea look like a bullet (*Danwan*) from far out in the sea, so the Chinese seamen named it Danwan Jiao. There is a swallow colony on the reef, so the Malay fishermen who landed on the reef named it Terumbu Layang Layang: Swallow Reef in Malay.

⁴⁰ Author's interview with the dive centre staff of the Layang Layang Diving Resort, and this author's observations at the artificial island on August 7-8, 1998.

⁴¹ *New Straits Times*, May 25, 1996; *Tonan Ajia Geppo*, August, 1996, 88; and author's interview with the manager of the Layang Layang Diving Resort on August 7-8, 1998.

⁴² *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 11, 1994, 18; *Straits Times*, July 22, 1995.

⁴³ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 19, 1996, 17.

negotiations with China.”⁴⁴ Further, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited Jakarta in May 2011, and said, “We should solve the (South China Sea) dispute bilaterally.”⁴⁵

One Chinese senior official also claimed the South China Sea as their core interest to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the Strategic and Economic Dialogue in May 2010,⁴⁶ and a big patrol vessel belonging to the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture confronted small Indonesian Navy patrol boats in the sea area of the Natuna Islands over poaching by Chinese fishery boats in June 2010.⁴⁷

Some Japanese China watchers such as Akio Takahara said that China’s foreign policy had shifted from low-profile “*Tao Guang Yang Hui You Suo Zuo Wei*” policy to the active “*Jianchi Tao Guang Yang Hui Jiji You Suo Zuo Wei*” (Maintain the stance of “Keep a low profile, hide your nails, concentrate your effort to domestic issues,” and “Develop your power” more actively) at the Ambassadorial Meeting in the Chinese foreign ministry in July 2009.⁴⁸ It shows that China is in a transition period for foreign policy and it is possible that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and PLA will adopt more aggressive policies in relation to “China’s core interest.”⁴⁹ If China claims the South China Sea as “China’s core interest,” where is its border? Chinese diplomats gave no comment, though it may be the broken U-shaped line.

Regarding the Chinese maritime security agencies, at least five agencies (the State Oceanic



Figure 4: A Patrol Vessel of the Chinese Ministry of Transport (Japan Coast Guard)

⁴⁴ Xue Hanqin, “China-ASEAN Cooperation: A Model of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation.” Paper Presented at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, November 19, 2009; author’s interview with a Singaporean researcher, September 3, 2010.

⁴⁵ *Jakarta Post*, May 1, 2011.

⁴⁶ This was the second occasion that Chinese government officials claimed the South China Sea as their core interest after the April meeting (*New York Times*, April 23, 2010); “Interview with Greg Sheridan of *The Australian*,” *Mainichi Shinbun*, July 27, 2010. Accessed May 6, 2011. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/11/150671.htm>. Secretary Clinton claimed in the interview, the comment was made by Dai Bingguo, though the Chinese representative at the ARF meeting was the foreign minister Yan Jiechi; Ian Storey, “China’s Missteps in Southeast Asia: Less Charm, More Offensive.” Accessed May 23, 2012. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37294

⁴⁷ *Mainich Sinbun*, July 27, 2010.

⁴⁸ Akio Takahara, “Senkakuoki Gyosen Dahojiken to Kongo no Nichibeichu Kankei [The Capture Incident of the Chinese Fishing Boat and the Future of Japan-U.S.-China Relations],” *Nihon Kisha Kurabu [Japan Press Club]*, October 22, 2010, 3-4. Accessed April 29, 2011. <http://www.jnpc.or.jp/files/2010/10/b0cd1e08c67c4abc748c385415a10081.pdf>

⁴⁹ Carlyle A. Thayer, “Recent Developments in the South China Sea: Grounds for Cautious Optimism?” *RSIS Working Paper*, [S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore] No.220, December 14 (2010); Aki Mori, “‘Tokoyokai’ no Owari” [End of the low-profile in Chinese Foreign Policy], *Toa (East Asia)*, 521, November (2010): 92-102.

Administration of the Ministry of Land and Resources, the China Coast Guard of the Ministry of Public Security, the Fishery Patrol Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Transport (Figure 4), and the Chinese Customs House) have their own patrol vessels and boats, though no linkage and cooperation among them have been confirmed by foreign observers.⁵⁰

The Chinese maritime deployments do not conform to freedom of navigation, and the Chinese territorial claims remind us of the maritime policy of the Soviet Union in the Cold War days, where the Sea of Okhotsk was made into an enclosed sea.⁵¹ All of their assertions were backed by Russian naval power.

The Reality of Chinese Naval Strategy and Its Capability

China's interpretation of the international law of the sea supports Chinese territorial expansion at sea, and it does not conform to the usual interpretation of the international law of the sea that supports freedom of navigation. The PLA Navy seems to have their way by force. If so, what is the reality of the Chinese naval strategy and its capability?

Firstly, as the *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2006* by the U.S. Department of Defense indicated, the PLA Navy extended the broken U-shaped line from the South China Sea to Japan's Kagoshima Prefecture in the map, as the first island chain (it covers Taiwan and the Ryukyu Islands), and they extend the line from the Philippine Archipelago and Guam Island to Japan's Boso Peninsula as the second island chain.

It signifies a two-step defense strategy to control the islands and the sea lines of communication (SLOC) surrounding China, after which the PLA Navy will move forward the defence line from the first island chain to the second island chain when their capability is sufficiently developed.

This two-step defense strategy was said to be initiated by Senior Admiral Liu Huaqing at the PLA Navy Communist Party Committee with an enlarged membership in January 1986.⁵² Admiral Liu stressed the "near seas defense" in Chinese naval strategy. He said that the PLA Navy would remain in the first island chain for the long period, and they would move forward the defense line to the second island chain in accordance with the development of the Chinese economy, technology, and the PLA Navy's capability. At that time, the PLA Navy would practice active defense.

⁵⁰ In addition, the Ocean University of China has oceanographic research ships. The Search and Rescue Centre and other relevant agencies also have similar patrol boats. The *Lianhe Zaobao* (Singapore) reported that China has 11 maritime security agencies (*Lianhe Zaobao*, April 24, 2012. Accessed May 8 2012. <http://www.zaobao.com/special/china/southchinasea/pages/southchinasea12042a.shtml>). The Chinese government dispatched a delegation to the Fourth Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting in October 2008, though the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Transport sent their leaders separately. We can infer some sectionalism among the Chinese maritime security agencies from this episode. *Press Release*, Japan Coast Guard, October 9, 2008; author's interview with an official from the Japanese government, March 4, 2009; Eiichi Fukami, "Chugoku Daini, Daisan No Kaiyouseiryoku (China's Second and Third Maritime Forces)," Accessed October 23, 2010. http://www.sof.or.jp/jpnews/201-250/219_3.php

⁵¹ Yasunobu Somura, *Umi No Seijigaku [Sea Power Politics]* (Tokyo: Chuko Shinsho, 1988), 123-135.

⁵² Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu [Memoirs of Liu Huaqing]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 2005), 436-437.

A PLA officer admitted the existence of the island chain-defense strategy.⁵³ But the actual shape of the lines are not confirmed, because the shape of the first island chain in the figure of Huang's article in 1994 was a bit different from that of the Annual Report to Congress: the line never included Taiwan.⁵⁴ It was said that Huang's figure attached importance to the Chinese strategic aspect of the Straits of Malacca, and the figure in the Annual Report to Congress attached importance to Chinese territorial claims.⁵⁵

Secondly, Chinese claims on offshore islands and maritime deployments always occur at transitional periods of regional power relations. The Chinese claim on the Senkaku Islands in December 1970 came just after the publication of "Okinawa Return" at the Japan-U.S. Summit meeting between Prime Minister Eisaku Sato and President Richard Nixon in November 1969, and the publication of the United Nations investigation of the natural resources under the sea bed of the East China Sea in May 1969, as mentioned above. The Chinese occupation of the Paracel Islands in January 1974 took place only after the withdrawal of the U.S. Army from Vietnam in 1973.

The period from the Sino-Vietnam naval engagement in March 1988 to the Mischief incident in February 1995 was the transitional period from the final stage of the Cold War to the Soviet and U.S. military withdrawal from Southeast Asia. We can understand some trends of the PLA naval strategy from these two facts. In short, the PLA Navy has a two-step defense strategy to control the islands and a part of the SLOC surrounding China, and deploys their fleet in accordance with the development of their capability and changes in the regional power balance.⁵⁶ They aim at recognition from neighboring countries for the expansion of Chinese territorial waters, the EEZ, and historic waters.

The question is how has the PLA Navy developed their weapons and seamanship? Shao



Figure 5:

Source: *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2006*, the U.S. Department of Defense, Washington, p. 15.

⁵³ Shao Haiyang Zhanguo, 166.

⁵⁴ Alexander Chieh-Cheng Huang, "The Chinese Navy's Offshore Active Defense Strategy," *Naval War College Review*, Summer (1994): 21, cited by Iuo Kayahara, *Zhugoku Gunji*, 446.

⁵⁵ Author's interview with a retired U.S. Navy officer.

⁵⁶ Rizal Sukma, an Indonesian China watcher, mentioned the same impression on the Chinese attitude towards the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands in 1991: Rizal Sukma, "South China Sea Conflict: A Challenge to Indonesia's Active Foreign Policy," *Indonesian Quarterly* XIX:4 (1991): 303-309.

Yongling⁵⁷ divides the development of the PLA Navy into three stages, namely, the establishment of the PLA Navy and the coastal defense stage (1950-1960), the offshore defense stage (1970-1980), and the blue water defense stage (1990-present).⁵⁸ In her book, Shao wrote that the PLA Navy received technical assistance for warship construction from Russia at first, and then they copied the Russian warships. She also made public that PLA warships, especially the surface ships, seldom navigated in the Pacific Ocean in the 1980s.⁵⁹

The first occasion for a PLA fleet to traverse the Pacific Ocean was from February 1997 to May 1997. They visited Hawaii and some South American countries for a friendship visit. The first naval exercise of the PLA Navy in foreign waters extended from November 2005 to December 2005. They practiced search and rescue exercises with the navies of Pakistan, India, and Thailand.⁶⁰

The PLA Navy made public the plan to construct two aircraft carriers (displacement 50,000 tons) on December 23, 2008, carriers that will be launched by 2015.⁶¹ They also dispatched a PLA fleet to the Gulf of Aden off Somalia to defend merchant ships from piracy. Their deployment to blue waters and the build-up plan of warships seem to be very rapid.

What is the real capability of the PLA Navy? Table 1 is a comparison of the main warships of the U.S. Navy, the East Asian navies, and the PLA Navy. Only 9.2% of Chinese warships have adopted gas-turbine engines; most of their warships still use old diesel engines, which take 4 hours to stoke up (the gas-turbine engines only take 90 minutes to stoke up), and their change-over of propellers from forward to reverse is very slow. The PLA Navy has 54 submarines, including two newly developed Shang class nuclear submarines (displacement 6,000 tons), two Yuan class diesel submarines (said to be equipped with the Stirling AIP (air independent propulsion) system,

Table 1: Comparison of the Main Warships

	Crew (10,000)	Submarine	Aircraft-Carrier	Cruiser	Destroyer	Frigate	% of total	total
U.S.A.	32.7	71	11	22	56	30	100%	190
Japan	4.6	16			45	8	75.5%	69
China	24	54	(1)		27	49	9.2%	131
Taiwan	3.15	4			4	22	46.1%	30
ROK	3.5	14			10	9	52.6%	33
India	5.1	16	1		8	13	52.3%	38
AUS	1.3	6				12	100%	18
Indonesia	3.7	2				7	-	9
Malaysia	1.9	2				2	-	4
Philippines	2.2					1	-	1
Singapore	0.45	4				6	0%	10
Thailand	6.3		1			9	-	10
Vietnam	1.3	(2)					-	7

Source: *Sekai No Kaigun 2010-2011 [World Navies 2010-2011]* (Tokyo: Kaijinsha Publishing, 2010).

The Vietnamese submarines are small *Yugo* class submarines, and they entered into contract with Russia to purchase 6 *Kilo* class submarines in 2009.

⁵⁷ Shao Yongling is a professor of the Second Artillery Division Academic Institute, and a PLA senior colonel.

⁵⁸ Shao, *Haiyang Zhanguoce*, 160-174.

⁵⁹ This fact was also confirmed by an official from the Japan Defense Agency. Author's interview with an official from the Japan Defense Agency on December 18, 1989.

⁶⁰ *Dangdai Haijun [Modern Navy]*, February, 2006, 4-13.

⁶¹ Shao, *Haiyang Zhanguoce*, 173 and 223-227.

displacement 3,000 tons), and twelve Russian-made *Kilo* class diesel submarines (Figure 6, displacement 3,076 tons), though five nuclear submarines and nineteen Ming class diesel submarines have noisy old engines.⁶²

The total number of these warships is two times that of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), and the number of seamen is 5.2 times the JMSDF. We know that China doesn't have many big warships like the U.S. Navy's cruisers (displacement more than 8,000 tons), so the PLA Navy is oversupplied with crew.

The PLA Navy held an international fleet review to celebrate its 60th anniversary of the founding of the PLA in April 2009, though the Chinese Navy left the reviewed warships at anchor.⁶³ They could not practice a mobile style fleet review like the JMSDF's. Coordination of the warships is not an easy job, and even a skillful blue water navy such as the JMSDF or the U.S. Navy sometimes has minor collisions among their ships.⁶⁴ Therefore, the PLA Navy's capability to orchestrate many warships is not that of a full-fledged blue water navy. Further, the PLA Navy's RAS (replenishment at sea) capability is limited, because the number of the PLA Navy's tankers is five – it is equivalent to the JMSDF, though less than the U. S. Navy's 18 tankers.

How does such an inexperienced navy rapidly deploy their fleet to blue waters? It seems that the PLA Navy has dispatched elite fleets and skillful crew repeatedly.⁶⁵ Examples are the PLA Navy fleet friendship visit to Europe from August to November 2001, the PLA Navy's first joint naval exercises with foreign countries (Pakistan, India, and Thailand) from November to December 2005, the PLA Navy fleet friendship visit to Japan at the end of November 2007, and the second dispatch of a PLA fleet to the Gulf of Aden for an anti-piracy operation. In all these cases the PLA Navy dispatched the same warship, the *Luhai* class destroyer *Shenzhen* (displacement 6,000 tons).

Further, the PLA has always dispatched the same tanker, the second *Fuchi* class tanker *Weishanhu* (displacement 21,750 tons). The *Weishanhu* accompanied the PLA Navy fleet on the



Figure 6: PLA Navy's Kilo Class Diesel Submarine (Joint staff office, JSDF)

⁶² The first Yuan class diesel submarine was commissioned in 2008, and the PLA Navy launched a new type of diesel submarine in September 2010, though the details are unknown (*Sekai no Kaigun [World Navies]* [kaijinsha, Tokyo, 2011], 30, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, September 22, 2010, 16). The frequent model changes of submarines within a short term may be evidence of the technological defects of old submarine models.

⁶³ *Dangdai Haijun*, June 2009, 38-39.

⁶⁴ *Yomiuri Shinbun*, December 4, 2009; Collisions or accidents of the PLA Navy are not often disclosed, although those that have been disclosed were very serious. For example, there was the accident involving a Ming class diesel submarine in May 2003 which killed 70 personnel (*Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 7, 2003, 1; *Renmin Ribao*, May 4, 2003). In the case of JMSDF fleet reviews, the reviewer's fleet and the reviewed fleet pass each other at intervals of 350 meters, with the front warship and the rear warship separated by about 1000 meters distance. Warships moving in rows, or passing each other, have a tendency to draw nearer to each other, making collisions more likely, and the movement of the rear warship is disturbed by the front warship's wake.

⁶⁵ Accessed October 7, 2010. <http://www.china-embassy.or.jp/jpn/zt/hijapanr/t388405.htm>; Shao, *Haiyang Zhanguoce*, 169-174.

above visits. RAS is technically very difficult, which is the reason the PLA Navy utilized the same tanker and the same crew repeatedly. These ocean navigations seem to have been very tough missions for the PLA Navy.

Now let us examine the Chinese plan of aircraft carrier construction. First of all, if we define warships with a flight deck as aircraft carriers, they are not rare in East Asia. The U.S. Navy has eleven large carriers, which are different from the run-of-the-mill. The Thai Navy commissioned the *Chakri Naruebet* (the smallest Vertical/Short/Take-Off and Landing or V/STOL carrier in the world, displacement 11,485 tons) in 1997. The Korean Navy commissioned the *Dokdo* (displacement 19,000 tons) in 2007, and the JMSDF commissioned the *Hyuga* (Figure 7, Helicopter-escort ship, displacement 19,000 tons) in 2009.⁶⁶ Therefore it is not necessary for us to stress the threat from Chinese carriers; however, we should keep track of the capabilities of the Chinese carriers and the purpose of the PLA Navy.

The first proposer of the aircraft carrier in China was also Admiral Liu. Admiral Liu visited the United States in May 1980 and inspected the U.S.S. Kitty Hawk. He was deeply impressed by the Kitty Hawk, and proposed the construction of aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines to the PLA General Headquarters on March 31, 1987.⁶⁷ Admiral Liu stressed the necessity of aircraft carriers to defend PLA warships against air raids in case of a naval engagement for the liberation of Taiwan.

Senior Colonel Shao also stressed the importance of aircraft carriers to “retake” the islands of the East China Sea and the South China Sea (*Haiyang Guotu / Lanse Guotu*: maritime territories) which were “illegally deprived by foreign countries.”⁶⁸ It seems that China’s desire to possess aircraft carriers was also strengthened by the Taiwan Strait Crisis in March 1996. At that time, the PLA practiced missile launch exercises in the Taiwan Strait, disrupting the Taiwanese presidential election. The U.S. Navy dispatched two aircraft carrier battle groups to stop their interference with the democratic election. China could do nothing at that time, so it is natural that they want their own aircraft carriers to cope with the U.S. Navy.⁶⁹

China imported foreign aircraft carriers for research purposes, namely the Melbourne (displacement 14,224 tons) from Australia in 1985, the Minsk (displacement 42,000 tons) and the Kiev (displacement 42,000 tons) from Russia in 2000, and



Figure 7: JMSDF’s Helicopter - escort ship, Hyuga (Koichi Sato)

⁶⁶ The JMSDF never uses the word “aircraft carriers,” calling them instead helicopter-escort ships.

⁶⁷ Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu*, 477-481.

⁶⁸ Shao, *Haiyang Zhanguoce*, 224.

⁶⁹ This author does not think the PLA Navy can confront the U.S. Navy, even if they possess aircraft carriers. It is the issue of desire. It seems that the possession of carriers is a symbol of major naval power for the Chinese. PLA Navy Vice Political Commissar, Wu Hua, admitted this point at a press conference, when he said: “The aircraft carriers are a symbol of the major power status for China” on March 9, 2009 (Shao, *Haiyang Zhanguoce*, 223-224).

the *Varyag* (displacement 58,500 tons) from Ukraine⁷⁰ in 1998. All of them except the *Varyag* were scraps.⁷¹

The length of the *Varyag* is 304.5 meters, and the size of the flight deck is almost equivalent to a Nimitz class U.S. carrier (length 332.9 meters), though none of the carriers purchased by China were equipped with steam catapults (Figure 8). The Russian Navy, the PLA's teacher, has not developed steam catapults yet, because its development is technically very difficult. The payload of aircraft on a carrier without steam catapults is limited; therefore, they cannot load heavy weapons such as big bombers and missiles.

No one has confirmed whether the PLA Navy has the technology to develop steam catapults or not. But we should keep in mind the fact that even the technologically advanced French Navy imported U.S. steam catapults for the construction of the Charles de Gaulle.⁷² Further, an aircraft carrier battle group needs three carriers for one operation: a carrier for the actual operation, a carrier for the landing and take-off training of pilots, and a carrier for maintenance in the dock. China will have three carriers, two planned carriers and the *Varyag*. If so, the PLA Navy only can utilize one carrier for an operation.

In addition, the PLA Navy has no experience in the operation of aircraft carriers. The take-off and landing of the carrier's aircraft is a very difficult and dangerous job because the operation is always influenced by strong winds at sea. Even the skillful U.S. Navy has lost some pilots in the past.⁷³ As I mentioned above, the capability of the PLA Navy to orchestrate many warships is not that of a full-fledged blue water navy. The PLA Navy is at their beginning stage as a blue water navy. It will take a long time for them to operate a standard aircraft carrier battle group which can orchestrate warships, aircraft and submarines for oceanic surface, air, and underwater defense of the aircraft



Figure 8: Steam Catapults of the USS Independence (Koichi Sato)

⁷⁰ When the *Varyag* was transferred from Ukraine to China, it was still under construction and its engine was not yet installed. So the PLA Navy had it in tow from the Black Sea to the South China Sea, through the Bosphorus Strait, the Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal, and the Indian Ocean (Author's interview with an official from the Ministry of Defense on May 29, 2007; Ikuo Kayahara, "Chugoku no Kokubo Kindaika wo Meguru Tenkanten: Kaigunsenryoku to Kubo Hoyu" [A Turning Point of China's National Defense Modernization: Naval Strategy and Aircraft Carrier], *Kokusaimondai*, January-February (2008): 53). Then they moored it in Dalian Harbor. The *Varyag*'s long journey shows the PLA's strong desire for possessing an aircraft carrier. According to unconfirmed information, China also has changed the name from *Varyag* to *Shilang* (the name of an admiral of the Qing dynasty who retook Taiwan), though it officially named Liaoning, and rigging it up (*Sekai No Kaigun 2010-2011* (Tokyo: Kaijinsha Publishing, 2010), 31).

⁷¹ Lee Jae-Hyung, "China's Expanding Maritime Ambitions in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 24:3, December (2002): 549-568; *Kokubokan Zenshi [History of the Aircraft Carriers]* (Tokyo: Kaijinsha publishing, 2008); *Higashijia Senryaku Gaikan 2008 [East Asian Strategic Review]* (Tokyo: The National Institute for Defense Studies, Ministry of Defense, 2008), 92-95.

⁷² Displacement 42,000 tons, *Sekai no Kubo [World Aircraft Carriers]* (Kaijinsha Publishing, 2004), 55.

⁷³ Author's interview with an official from the Japanese Ministry of Defense.

carrier. The Chinese aircraft carriers do not matter much for the time being.

In the meantime, however, the PLA Navy has to cope with U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups with submarines and mines.⁷⁴ The PLA Navy mobilized two destroyers, three frigates, two submarines, a tanker, a submarine rescue vessel, and a tug boat, and practiced naval exercises in the second island chain sea area in April 2010.⁷⁵ A retired JMSDF admiral, Hideaki Kaneda said, “It was possible that the PLA Navy likened a tanker and a submarine rescue vessel to the aircraft carriers, and practiced anti-aircraft carrier exercises.”⁷⁶

How to Respond to Chinese Maritime Deployments: Security Implications for the Japan-U.S. Alliance and East Asian Countries

In conclusion, Japan and the United States should watch Chinese maritime deployments carefully, though we need not regard China as an enemy from the outset. The Chinese government is now in a transition period for foreign and defense policies, and the PLA Navy as a whole is not ready for blue water operations, and it is safe to say that their capability is insufficient to control the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

We should urge China to accept the regime of the international law of the sea which secures freedom of navigation through ASEAN’s conference diplomacy. If our persuasion is fruitless, and China tries to expand their maritime territories using the PLA Navy, or utilizes their plural maritime security agencies to threaten the coastal countries of the East China Sea and the South China Sea, we should consider countermeasures.

We can point to cases of recent behavior of the Chinese maritime security agencies.⁷⁷ The

⁷⁴ Lyle Goldstein and William Murray, “Undersea Dragons,” *International Security*, 28:4 (Spring 2004): 161-196.

⁷⁵ *Asagumo Shinbun*, April 29, 2010.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ In this article, I have not discussed the activities of the Chinese oceanographic research ships in the East China Sea. Table 2 shows statistics indicating their activities in territorial waters and the EEZ of Japan.

Table 2: Statistics Pertaining to Activities of the Foreign Oceanographic Research Ships in the Territorial Waters and the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) of Japan

Year	All Foreign ships	Chinese ships	Year	All Foreign ships	Chinese ships
1994	24	no data	2003	no data	11(9)
1995	12	7 (3)	2004	no data	15(15)
1996	22	15(15)	2005	no data	2(0)
1997	10	4(4)	2006	no data	19(7)
1998	19	16(14)	2007	21	11(1)
1999	38	33(30)	2008	21	8(2)
2000	no data	24(20)	2009	28	11(1)
2001	no data	13(5)	2010	38	22(3)
2002	no data	12(4)	2011	33	19(8)

Note: The figures in parentheses are the number of suspicious research activities such as the investigation of sea water temperature and seabed geographic surveys. The purpose of these research activities seems to be to make a survey of submarine navigation routes.

Source: “Kaijo Hoan Hakusho [White Paper of Japan Coast Guard, annual issue], Kaijo Hoan Repoto [Japan Coast Guard Report, Annual Issue],” *Sankei shinbun*, October 20, 2010.

State Oceanic Administration of the Ministry of Land and Resources of the PRC dispatched their patrol vessels to the sea area surrounding the Senkaku Islands in 2008 and the Japanese EEZ in the East China Sea in 2010.⁷⁸

Further, a big fishery patrol vessel of the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture dispersed Indonesian Navy patrol boats after the Indonesian Navy had captured a Chinese fishing boat for poaching off the coast of the Natuna Islands in June 2010. In addition, a Vietnamese fishing boat was captured by Chinese authorities off the coast of the Paracel Islands in September 2010.⁷⁹ The Chinese Ministry of Agriculture also dispatched fishery patrol vessels to the sea area surrounding the Senkaku Islands in October 2010.⁸⁰

Some of these vessels were said to be PLA Navy gunboats at the beginning, and were repainted from grey to white. If so, it is possible that the PLA Navy shifted some excess gunboats and crew to the other ministries, just as excess PLA land troops were shifted to the People's Armed Police of the Ministry of Public Security.⁸¹

We could anticipate what the PLA Navy and the Chinese maritime security agencies will do in the East China Sea and the South China Sea based on past behavior. China has enforced the law for marine preserves and set up a closed season for fishing, and has practiced dangerous naval exercises in parts of the South China Sea from 1999 to 2007.⁸²

China's Coast Guard and the Chinese Customs House practiced illegal boarding and capturing of foreign vessels to prevent smuggling on the high seas of the East China Sea in 1993.⁸³ If China controls the East China Sea and the South China Sea, the Chinese government and the PLA Navy may enforce these activities arbitrarily.

The Japan-U.S. Alliance should work as insurance for the regional countries against Chinese maritime disturbances. Firstly, Japan and the United States should promote soft and flexible multilateral cooperation with the coastal countries of the South China Sea. The U.S. Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard suggested a cooperative strategy among them to cope with the non-traditional security issues in October 2007.⁸⁴ We should promote such an idea, and extend the network to regional navies and maritime security agencies through bilateral and multilateral exercises like Ex. Carat and Ex. Cobra Gold.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ *Kaijo Hoan Repoto 2009*, [Japan Coast Guard Report], 2009, 61; *Asahi Shinbun*, September 11, 2010.

⁷⁹ *Mainichi Shinbun*, July 27, 2010. Accessed October 10, 2010. <http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/nr04087104143/nr040807105039/ns10100618017/new>

⁸⁰ *Asahi Shinbun*, October 21, 2010. Accessed October 23, 2010. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/gxh/tyb/fyrbt/t763155.htm>

⁸¹ Eiichi Fukami, "Chugoku Daini," *Jakarta Post*, March 3, 1996.

⁸² *Tonanajia Geppo* (Tokyo: Tonanajia Chosakai, 1999), 26; Koichi Sato, "Taitonanajia Shokoku Rengou Kankei [Sino-ASEAN relations]," in *Chugoku Souran 2007-2008* (Tokyo: Gyousei Publishing, 2008), 191.

⁸³ Akihiko Tanaka, "Tainichi Kankei [Japan-China Relations]," in *Chugoku Souran 1994* (Kazankai Publishing, 1994), 152.

⁸⁴ A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower, October 2007. Accessed September 24, 2010. <http://www.Navy.mil/maritime/>

⁸⁵ *Brunei Times*, October 26, 2010. Accessed October 26, 2010. <http://www.stripes.com/news/cobra-gold-2009->

This network can be developed as the basis for maritime security cooperation not only for non-traditional security issues such as piracy, terrorists activities, drugs and weapons trafficking, smuggling, and illegal immigration, as well as emergencies at sea. The JMSDF and the U.S. Navy should also strengthen cooperation with regional blue water navies, such as the Australian Navy and the Indian Navy, to maintain the sea lane defense through naval exercises and patrols like Ex. Malabar and Ex. Rimpac.⁸⁶

Secondly, Japan and the United States should consider more concrete ideas, bilaterally. The Japanese government should take precautions against more troubles between the Japan Coast Guard and Chinese fishing boats or patrol vessels of the Chinese maritime security agencies in the East China Sea. The Chinese fishing boats also conducted illegal poaching activities in the Yellow Sea off South Korea's coast, and their illegal activities have been escalating, recently. On December 18, 2010, a Chinese fishing boat resisted the Korean marine police, and rammed against a Korean marine police patrol vessel, resulting in the fishing boat capsizing in the Yellow Sea.⁸⁷ A Chinese fisherman died in the incident, another one was lost, and four Korean marine police officers were wounded.⁸⁸

A similar incident was repeated by a Chinese fishing boat in March 2011, when a Korean marine police patrol vessel had no choice but to engage in live shooting.⁸⁹ These incidents could happen in the East China Sea in the future, and we should take precautions against minor shoot-outs between the Japan Coast Guard and armed Chinese fishing boats or patrol vessels of the Chinese maritime security agency.

The Japan-U.S. alliance should also take precautions against provocative activities of the PLA Navy in the East China Sea. The U.S. Navy and the JMSDF should be reminded of the Hainan Island incident (the collision of a U.S. surveillance plane and Chinese fighter jet) in April 2001, the Impeccable incident (Chinese disturbance of the activities of a U.S. surveillance ship) in March 2009.⁹⁰ There also occurred provocative actions by Chinese naval helicopters towards JMSDF destroyers in April 2010 and March 2011.⁹¹ The Chinese helicopters' dangerous activities might lead to a similar accident as the Hainan Island incident. If so, the Japan-U.S. alliance should prepare for such eventualities.

The Japan-U.S. alliance should strengthen bilateral naval exercises also on the high seas and

u-s-military-prepares-allies-in-pacific-. Japan, U.S., and Australia conducted the first trilateral naval exercise in the South China Sea in July 2011 (Accessed May 27, 2012. <http://www.asagumo-news.com/news/201107/110714/1171411.html>).

⁸⁶ Accessed October 26, 2010. <http://www.c.f.Navy.mil/news/2009/04-April/18/.htm>; http://www.Navy.gov.au/RIMPAC,_here_we_come!

⁸⁷ *Asahi Shinbun*, December 18, 2010.

⁸⁸ On December 21, twelve Chinese fishing boats appeared in the Yellow Sea, being tied together with ropes, in a bid to thwart an attempt by South Korean marine police vessels to stop their illegal fishing in the Yellow Sea (*Straits Times*, December 24, 2010).

⁸⁹ *Asahi Shinbun*, March 4, 2011.

⁹⁰ *New York Times*, April 19, 2001; *New York Times*, March 11, 2009.

⁹¹ *Asagumo Shinbun [JMSDF's newspaper]*, April 10, 2010; *Asagumo Shinbun*, March 10, 2011.

the Japanese EEZs of the East China Sea to cope with any Chinese provocation,⁹² and the alliance should consider a joint defense linkage of the Senkaku Islands and the Nansei Islands Group, which possess airstrips.⁹³ The Japanese government also has to consider stationing lighthouse keepers,⁹⁴ or meteorologists on the Senkaku Islands, and JMSDF troops on the Sakishima Islands in order to prevent Chinese occupation.

The Japanese government has begun to study stationing JSDF troops on the Sakishima Islands including Ishigakijima Island and Miyakojima Island, which are in close proximity to the Senkaku Islands.⁹⁵ Further, the Japanese government could possibly be driven to reconsider its interpretation of the right of collective self-defense in the Japanese Constitution.⁹⁶ It is ironic that a Chinese offense might drive Japan into a radical interpretation of its constitution. The United States government should maintain the position that the Senkaku Islands are included within the scope of the Japan-U.S. security treaty, too.

The above are my observations and ideas on how to cope with offensive Chinese maritime deployments. If a simple comparison is allowed, China may come to be regarded as a multi-headed dragon, every head (every ministry, and every department, relevant to maritime affairs) going its own way. It may also be regarded as evidence of the pluralized decision making procedure of Chinese foreign and defense policies. The power struggle in the CCP also has some impact on their maritime policies, because the CCP is now in a power transition period from President Hu Jintao to Vice President Xi Jinping in anticipation of the 2012 party congress.

Therefore we should watch China's behavior carefully. The Chinese people should remind themselves that there is no advantage gained in disturbing neighboring countries at sea, because all of China's neighbors are investors in and customers of China. If so, China should not be a changing power, but a status quo power in the Asia Pacific region.

⁹² The ultimate option for the Japan-U.S. navies to check the PLA Navy's radical activities is the temporary closure of the Miyako Channel between the Miyakojima Island and Okinawa Island. We should recall the fact that the Indonesian Navy temporarily closed the Sunda and Lombok straits in late September 1988 for live firing exercises (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 10, 1988, 18). It was said that the Indonesian Navy would like to check Sino-Vietnamese ambitions in the South China Sea.

⁹³ Some of the Nansei Islands group which have airstrips are likely to be occupied by the PLA at the next regional emergency, such as another Taiwan Strait crisis. The move of the airport in Futenma and the U.S. Marines also may be one of the points of reconsideration, though the safety of the residents surrounding the airport should be secured.

⁹⁴ The Japan Coast Guard eliminated all lighthouse keeper positions in 2006 (*Kaijo Hoan Repoto* 2007, 7).

⁹⁵ Accessed May 8, 2011. <http://www.headlines.yahoo.co.jp/hl?a=20110508-00000042-jjj-pol>. The PLA's occupation of the Senkaku Islands is not likely to occur because it is too costly, though the landing of Zhongguo Minjian Baodiao Lianhehui [ZMBL] (a non-governmental organization for the Liberation of Diaoyudao in China) for political demonstrations may be possible. It is said that the PLA's occupation of the Senkaku Islands can happen if the PLA practices operations for the occupation of some of other Nansei Islands (*Sankei Shinbun*, May 9, 2011). The next Taiwan Strait crisis would possibly be the occasion for the PLA's occupation of some of the Nansei Islands group (*Jianchuan Zhishi [Naval & merchant Ships]*, May 2006, 24-28).

⁹⁶ Until now, the Japanese government hasn't permitted the use of the right of collective self-defense for the Japan-U.S. security treaty. Masashi Nishihara, et. al., *Nichibeidomei Saikou [Reconsideration of the U.S.-Japan Alliance]* (Tokyo: Aki Shobo Publishing, 2010), 186-187.

Confidence building measures (CBMs) with China through ASEAN's conference diplomacy such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asian Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Defense Ministers + 8 Meeting (ADMM+8), and military and maritime security agencies' exchanges should be promoted in parallel with the above-mentioned military and security cooperation between the Japan-U.S. alliance and the countries of the region. The Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting and the International Workshop on the South China Sea: Cooperation for Regional Security and Development may be also quite useful for the promotion of CBMs of regional countries.⁹⁷ These countries still have the will to contain China which many PLA officers fail to understand. Asia-Pacific countries including Japan, the U.S. and ASEAN countries should persuade China, and bring maritime issues back to the table of conference diplomacy.

The establishment of the Japan-U.S.-China Summit or another ASEAN+3 (the Japan-U.S.-China) Summit in the EAS or the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit may be a policy option. The dialogues of the above-mentioned conferences should stress non-offensive behaviors at sea, and should lead to the common concept of the security rules of navigation in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. The fraternal fleet visits, the invitation to fleet reviews, high level officer dialogues, young cadet exchanges among navies and maritime security agencies, are also very important for CBMs with China.⁹⁸

If China halts its offensive behavior at sea, and withdraws its claims on the South China Sea as their core interest,⁹⁹ then the Japan-U.S. alliance and other countries in the region should let China join the above-mentioned common efforts to cope with non-traditional security issues and SLOC defense in the Asia Pacific region. Japan and the United States should also remember that the PLA Navy is our fellow worker in operations against piracy in the Gulf of Aden off Somalia.¹⁰⁰ No country can maintain the security of the SLOC alone.

⁹⁷ The Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting was established by the leadership of the Japan Coast Guard in 2004 (*Joint Statement 6th Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting [HACGAM]*, The Japan Coast Guard, October 15, 2010). The International Workshop on the South China Sea: Cooperation for Regional Security and Development was co-organized by the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DVA) and the Vietnam Lawyers' Association in 2009 (Tran Truong Thuy, ed., *The South China Sea: Cooperation for Regional Security and Development* [Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam: 2010]).

⁹⁸ The JMSDF invited PLA Navy officers to a JMSDF fleet review in 2006 for the first time. This author was on board the JMSDF destroyer Hiei at the fleet review by chance (this author's observation on October 29, 2006). The Chinese destroyer's first fraternal visit to Japan was in November 2007, and the Chinese cadets' first visit to Japan was in September 13, 2008, and a PLA's training vessel visited Japan in November 2009 (Accessed May 11, 2011. <http://www.china-embassy.or.jp/jpn/hjapanr/t385412.htm>; *Renmin Ribao* (Japanese edition), November 6, 2009. Accessed May 11, 2011. <http://www.china-embassy.or.jp/jpn/zrgx/t512794.htm>). It is a pity that these military exchanges are currently interrupted.

⁹⁹ Currently, Chinese diplomats have stopped asserting the claim on the South China Sea as their core interest, but military activities continue.

¹⁰⁰ The U. S. Navy and the PLA Navy agreed to participate in joint naval training exercises for anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden off Somalia (*Mainichi Shinbun*, May 19, 2011).