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## South China Sea: China's Rise and Implications for Security Cooperation<sup>1</sup>

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In March 2010<sup>2</sup>, Chinese diplomats told senior Obama administration officials that China (People's Republic of China: PRC) would not tolerate any interference in the South China Sea, now part of China's "core interest" of sovereignty. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) navy and the Chinese maritime security agencies have begun to deploy their battleships and patrol boats in the South China Sea. Tensions between China and its Southeast Asian neighbors are on the rise. The United States, Japan, and Australia also show concern for the security of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) in the South China Sea. It is also said that the PLA navy has a plan to develop aircraft carriers. This paper analyzes these maritime challenges and explores implications for the security cooperation between China and its neighboring countries including Japan and the United States.

### **Background of the South China Sea Conflict**

There are four Island groups, namely, the Pratas Islands, the Paracel Islands, the Macclesfield Bank, and the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea (See Fig-1). The Pratas Islands were occupied by Taiwan (Republic of China: ROC) in 1946, the Paracel Islands were occupied by China after the naval clash between the PLA navy and Republic of Vietnam (RVN) navy in 1974. The reefs of Macclesfield Bank are all sunken reefs with the exception of two rocks of the Scarborough Shoal being occupied by the Philippine Armed Forces.

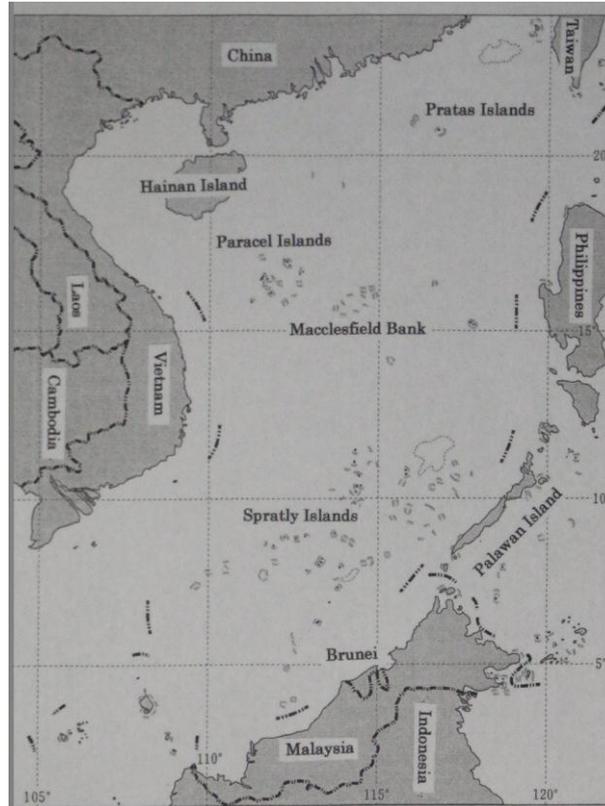
The focal point is the territorial disputes over the Spratly Islands. According to Chinese sources, the sea area of the Spratly Islands is around 800,000 square

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<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, 23 April 2010. "China's core interests," in reference to territory, usually means Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

kilometers, or 38% of the total sea area of the South China Sea; the area includes 230 islands, reefs, and cays<sup>3</sup>. 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. The four claimants, namely Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam are members of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).



**Fig-1: Broken U-shaped line and South China Sea Islands**

The sea area of the Spratly Islands is believed to be rich in oil and fishery resources, and this is the main reason that all claimants assert their sovereign right to the Spratly islands. But no oil detection has yet been successful, and the Japanese specialists are rather pessimistic about the oil & gas production in the sea area surrounding the Spratly Islands<sup>4</sup>. It is true that some oil fields and natural gas deposits were found in

<sup>3</sup> Ji Guoxing, *The Spratlys Disputes and Prospects for Settlement*, Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, 1992, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Akira Ishi and Kazuhiko Fuji, *Sekai Wo Ugokasu Sekiyu Senryaku [World Oil Strategy]*, Chikuma Publishing, 2003, pp. 136-140. China's Ministry of Land Resources has optimistically claimed that the South China Sea might hold 23-40 billion tons of oil reserve (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. Ralf Emmers, *Geopolitics and Maritime Territorial Disputes in the*

the South China Sea, but they are located mainly in the sedimentary basins of the coastal areas of Vietnam, Sabah and Sarawak of East Malaysia, and the Natuna Islands of Indonesia. No resources were found in the sea area surrounding the Spratly Islands, which are located in the central deep sea area of the South China Sea.

Regarding the fishery resources in the South China Sea including the sea area surrounding the Spratly Islands, recent statistics showed about 11.5 million tons total catch 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)<sup>5</sup>. The statistics show that China's catch in 1989 was 5 million tons. If so, the fishery production capability of the South China Sea is failing<sup>6</sup>.

In regard to the actual occupation of the Spratly Islands (i.e. troops stationed there), Taiwan did so in 1947, the Philippines in 1956, the Vietnamese (RVN) in 1974, and China in 1988<sup>7</sup>. The Chinese government asserted its sovereignty over the whole Spratly Islands group in August 1951, though the PLA navy was the latest comer among the claimants to the Spratly Islands. PLA navy Jiangdong class destroyers (displacement 2000 tons) attacked Vietnamese troopships in the sea area surrounding Johnson Reef of the Spratly Islands in March 1988, sinking two Vietnamese ships and wrecking one<sup>8</sup>.

The PLA navy built a territorial marker at the Gaven Reef in July 1992, and the ASEAN foreign ministers showed their concern without naming China in the Declaration on the South China Sea<sup>9</sup>. The PLA navy built some military posts for stationing troops on the Mischief Reef, which was also claimed by Vietnam and the Philippines, in February 1995, and they expanded them in October 1998<sup>10</sup>. The ASEAN

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South China Sea: From Competition to Collaboration? Joshua Ho, ed., *Realising Safe and Secure Seas for All*, Select Publishing, 2009, p. 147.

<sup>5</sup> 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], Haijun Chubanshe, Beijing, 2007, pp. 91-104.

<sup>6</sup> Shigeo Hiramatsu, *Chugoku No kaiyo Senryaku* [China's Naval Strategy], Keiso Shobo Publishing, 1993, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Tatsuo Urano, *Nankai Shoto Kokusai Funso Shi* [History of the International Conflicts over the South China Sea Islands], Tosui Shobo Publishing, 1997, Tokyo, pp. 1106-1175.

<sup>8</sup> *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 28 May 1988, p. 1072, Shao Yonglin, *Haiyang Zhanguoce* [The Chinese Naval War Strategy], Shiyou Gongyue Chubanshe, 2010, p. 165. Shao Yonglin is a professor of the Second Artillery Division Academic Institute, and the PLA senior colonel.

<sup>9</sup> *New Straits Times*, 10 July 1992, *Declaration on the South China Sea*, ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Manila, 22 July 1992.

<sup>10</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 February 1995, pp. 14-16, *Straits Times*, 11 November 1998.

foreign ministers published the Statement on Mischief Reef in March 1995.<sup>11</sup> ASEAN countries couldn't contend with China for military supremacy over the South China Sea, so they began to utilize their conference diplomacy<sup>12</sup> for the peaceful settlement of the South China Sea conflict.

The ASEAN leaders began to explore ways for the peaceful settlement of the South China Sea conflict at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) that they had begun in 1994, and ASEAN-China Summit Meetings that they had begun in 1997. They planned the Regional Code of Conduct for the South China Sea (COC) to check Chinese claims in the South China Sea<sup>13</sup>. 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 (DOC) at the ASEAN-China Summit on 4 November 2002<sup>14</sup>.

Regarding the actual occupation of the features of the Spratly Islands, a Philippine scholar said that "China occupies 7, Taiwan occupies 1, Vietnam occupies 21 Malaysia occupies 5, and the Philippines occupied 9 (total 43)," though the PLA officer asserted that the Vietnamese occupied 29 features, and a Chinese scholar asserted "China occupied 6 features"<sup>15</sup>. China delineated the broken U-shaped line in the South China Sea (See Fig-1), and the Chinese diplomats called the broken U-shaped line a boundary line of Chinese historic waters in ambiguous way and the Chinese law of the territorial waters claimed the sovereignty of all the South China Sea Islands including the Spratly

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<sup>11</sup> *Statement by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers on the Recent Developments in the South China Sea*, ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Singapore, 18 March 1995.

<sup>12</sup> ASEAN ministers call their principle of conferences the "ASEAN Way," though the rules of conferences are rather vague. Therefore this author organized the "ASEAN Way" of conference diplomacy along a set of six features. First, decision-making procedure based on consensus; second, the maintenance of dialogue takes priority over the settlement of conflicts among conference attendants; third, ASEAN takes a 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." Koichi Sato, "The ASEAN Regime: Its Implications for East Asian Cooperation – A Japanese View," Tamio Nakamura ed., *The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism in Comparative Perspective*, Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo, 2007, pp. 19-30.

<sup>13</sup> *Straits Times*, 21 July 1999.

<sup>14</sup> *Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea*, Phnom Penh, 4 November 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Rommel C. Banlaoi, *Renewed Tensions and Continuing Maritime Security Dilemma in the South China Sea: A Philippine Perspective*, Tran Truong Thuy ed., *The South China Sea: Cooperation for Regional Security and Development*, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, 2010, p. 148, Shao, op. cit., p. 202, Li Guojiang, *Zhongguo Chugoku To Shuuhun Kokka No Kaijou Kokkyo Mondai* [The Maritime Frontier Issue between China and its Neighboring Countries], *Kyokai Kenkyu* [Japan Border Review], No. 1, Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, p. 50.

Islands<sup>16</sup>.

China's claim on the Spratly Islands is very weak because it was not based on the historical inhabitation of Chinese nationals. The four ASEAN countries' claims are also not so persuasive for the same reason. 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 issue<sup>17</sup>.

### **Chinese Military Build-up**

If we follow the record of the Military Balance, China's military budget in 1990 was US\$ 6.06 billion, and China's military budget in 2009 was US\$ 70.30 billion, in other words, it increased 11.6 times in 20 years<sup>18</sup>. The question is how the PLA navy developed their weapons and seamanship. Shao Yonling 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)<sup>19</sup>.

In her book, Shao wrote that the PLA navy got the technical assistance for warship construction from Russia at first, 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. The first occasion for the PLA fleet to traverse the Pacific Ocean was from February 1997 to May 1997. 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<sup>20</sup>. The PLA navy made public the plan of construction of two aircraft carriers (displacement 50,000 tons) on 23 December 2008, carriers that will be launched by 2015<sup>21</sup>.

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 9.0% of Chinese warships have adopted gas-turbine engines; most of their warships still use the old diesel engines, which take 4 hours for stoking up (the gas-turbine engines only take 90 minutes for stoking up), and their change-over of propellers from

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<sup>16</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 April 1995, p. 28, *People's Daily*, 26 February 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Hidekuni Takeshita, *Minami Shina Kai Funso No keii To Ryouyuuken Mondai* [The History of the South China Sea Conflicts and the Territorial issues], the second volume, *Ajiatorendo*, 1992, IV, P. 91.

<sup>18</sup> *The Military Balance 1991-1992*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1992, p. 150, *The Military Balance 2010*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2010, p. 398.

<sup>19</sup> Shao, op. cit., pp. 160-174. Shao Yongling is a professor of the Second Artillery Division Academic Institute, and a PLA senior colonel.

<sup>20</sup> *Dangdai Haijun [Modern Navy]*, February 2006, Beijing, pp. 4-13.

<sup>21</sup> Shao, op. cit., p. 173, pp. 223-227.

forward to reverse is very slow.

**Table-1: Comparison of the main Warships**

	Crew (10000)	Submarine	Aircraft Carrier	Cruiser	Destroyer	Frigate	% of Gas-turbine	total
U.S.A.	32.8	71	11	22	59	28	100%	191
Japan	4.6	16			45	6	76.4%	67
China	24	57	(1)		27	51	9.0%	135
Taiwan	4.7	4				22	54.5%	26
ROK	3.5	23			11	9	55.0%	43
India	5.1	17	1		8	13	54.5%	39
AUS	1.4	6				12	100%	18
Indonesia	3.7	2				6	-	8
Malaysia	2.0	2				2	-	4
Philippines	2.2					1	-	1
Singapore	0.45	4				6	0%	10
Thailand	6.3		1			9	10%	10
Vietnam	1.3	(2)				5	0%	5

Source: *Sekai No Kaigun 2011-2012 [World Navies 2011-2012]*, Ships of the World, Kaijinsha Publishing, 2011, Tokyo.

Notes: The U.S. aircraft carriers are all nuclear powered. The Chinese aircraft carrier is not yet commissioned. The Vietnamese submarines are small Yugo class submarines, and Vietnamese government entered into contract with Russia to purchase 6 Kilo class submarines in 2009.

The PLA navy has 57 submarines, including two newly developed Shang class nuclear submarines (displacement 6,000 tons), four Yuan class diesel submarines (said to be equipped with the Stirling AIP [air independent propulsion] system, displacement 3,000 tons), and twelve Russian-made Kilo class diesel submarines (Photo-1, displacement 3,076 tons), though four nuclear submarines and nineteen Ming class diesel submarines (Photo-2, displacement 2,113 tons) have the noisy old engines.

The total number of PLA navy's main warships is two times the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF)'s, though the number of seamen is 5.2 times the JMSDF's. The PLA navy is oversupplied with crew. The number of PLA navy's tankers is five, equivalent to JMSDF's (the U.S. navy has more than 14 tankers). If so, the deployment capability of the warships of PLA navy is not superior to the JMSDF. Further, the model changes of the PLA warships are very frequent. This shows the existence of

technological difficulties which the PLA navy is facing for the warship development. It is safe to say that the PLA navy is at their beginning stage as a blue water navy.



**Photo-1: PLA navy's Kilo Class Diesel Submarine off the coast of Okinawa Island in April 2010 (Courtesy: Joint Staff Office, JSDF)**



**Photo-2: PLA navy's Ming Class Diesel Submarine in the Osumi Strait in November 2003 (Courtesy: Joint Staff Office, JSDF)**

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. The Thai navy commissioned the Chakri Naruebet (displacement 11,485 tons) in 1997, and the South Korean (ROK) navy commissioned the Dokdo (displacement 19,000 tons) in 2007<sup>22</sup>. The JMSDF commissioned the Hyuga in 2009, and launched Ise in 2011 (Photo-3, displacement 19,000 tons)<sup>23</sup>. Therefore it is not necessary for the East Asian Nations to stress the threat of the Chinese carriers; however they should keep track of the capability of the Chinese carriers and the purpose of the PLA navy.

The first proposer of the aircraft carrier in China was Late Senior Admiral Liu

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<sup>22</sup> South Korean navy calls Dokdo an amphibious assault ship.

<sup>23</sup> The JMSDF officers never call these ships light aircraft carriers; they call them helicopter escort ships.

Huaqing<sup>24</sup>. He proposed the construction of aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines to the PLA General Headquarters on 31 March 1987<sup>25</sup>. 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. It seems that China's desire to possess aircraft carriers was also strengthened by the Taiwan Strait crisis in March 1996. The U.S. navy dispatched two aircraft carrier battle groups to stop the PLA's missile launch exercise. 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<sup>26</sup>.



**Photo-3: JMSDF's Helicopter-escort Ship, Hyuga (Koichi Sato)**

Senior Colonel Shao also stressed the importance of aircraft carriers to “retake” the islands of the East China Sea and the South China Sea which were “illegally deprived by the foreign countries.”<sup>27</sup> But it is strange that she didn't mention the liberation of Taiwan in her book. It may be relevant to the historic reconciliation between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP) in April 2005. If so, the Taiwan Strait is not the main strategic front to the PLA navy for the moment, and the “retaking” of Senkaku Islands is at a high stake because the PLA has to confront the Japan-U.S. alliance. This is the reason that the South China Sea could be the main strategic focus of the PLA in the near future.

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<sup>24</sup> Late Senior Admiral Liu Huaqing was the founder of the PLA navy, and the right hand-man of Deng Xiaoping, the paramount leader of China.

<sup>25</sup> Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu [Memoirs of Lui Huaqing]*, Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 2005, Beijing, pp. 477-481.

<sup>26</sup> This author doesn't think the PLA navy really can confront with the U.S. navy, even if they possess the aircraft carriers. It is an issue of desire.

<sup>27</sup> Shao, op. cit., p. 224.

China imported four foreign aircraft carriers for research purposes, though all of them except the Varyag were scraps. 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 (Photo-4). The Russian navy, the PLA's teacher, has not developed the steam catapults yet, because their development is technically very difficult. No one has confirmed whether the PLA navy has the technology to develop steam catapults or not. However, it is said the PLA naval fighter squadron has begun take-off training on the mock-up deck with ski-jump slope on the ground at Wuhan.<sup>28</sup>



**Photo-4: Steam Catapults of the USS Independence  
In Dock in Yokosuka Base (Koichi Sato)**

China may abandon the development plan of steam catapults at present. The payload of aircraft on a carrier without steam catapults is limited; therefore they cannot load heavy weapons such as big bombers and missiles. Further, an aircraft carrier battle group needs three carriers for one operation: a carrier for the actual operation, a carrier for the landing & take-off training of pilots, and a carrier for maintenance in the dock.

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<sup>28</sup> It is also said that they have not begun the landing training on the mock-up deck yet. Hideaki Kaneda, Zhugoku No Kubo Kido Butai Hoyu Keikaku (China's Plan for the Aircraft Carrier Battle Group), *Asagumo Shinbun*, 25 August 2011, Yefim Gordon and Dmitriy Komissarov, *Chinese Air Power - Current Organization and Aircraft of all Chinese Air Force*, Midland Publishing, 2010, pp. 286-287.

China will have three carriers, two planned carriers and the Varyag. If so, the PLA navy only can utilize one carrier for an operation. The Chinese aircraft carriers do not matter much for the time being. It seems that the possession of the carriers is just a symbol of the major naval power for the Chinese people<sup>29</sup>.

### **China's Rise in the Asian Waters**

It is said that 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 another line from the Philippine Archipelago and Guam Island to Japan's Boso Peninsula as the second island chain<sup>30</sup>. It signifies a two-step defense strategy to control the islands and the SLOC surrounding China, after which the PLA navy will move forward the defense line from the first island chain to the second island chain when their capability is sufficiently developed.

The two step defense strategy was said to be initiated by Late Senior Admiral Liu Huaqing at the PLA navy Communist Party Committee with an enlarged membership in January 1986<sup>31</sup>. Admiral Liu stressed the "near seas defense" in the Chinese naval strategy. He said that the PLA navy would remain in the first island chain for a long period, and they would move forward the defense line to the second island chain in accordance with the development of Chinese economy, technology, and the PLA navy's capability. In that time, the PLA navy would practice the active defense.

The PLA navy may consider, "The time has come for us to move forward the defense line". The PLA navy mobilized two destroyers, three frigates, two submarines, a tanker, a submarine rescue vessel, and a tug boat, and practiced the naval exercise in the second island chain sea area surrounding Japanese Okinotorishima Island in April 2010<sup>32</sup>. A retired JMSDF admiral, Mr. Hideaki Kaneda said, "It was possible that the PLA navy likened a tanker and a submarine rescue vessel to the aircraft carriers, and practiced the anti-aircraft carrier exercise."<sup>33</sup>

The JMSDF dispatched the destroyer Asayuki (displacement 4200 tons) to watch the exercise. The PLA naval helicopter approached Asayuki by 90 meters, and provoked the destroyer. It was a very dangerous activity, because the cruising speed of the PLA

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<sup>29</sup> A PLA navy Vice Political Commissar, Wu Hua admitted this point at the press conference on 9 March 2009. Shao, op. cit., pp. 223-224.

<sup>30</sup> *Annual report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2006*, the U.S. Department of Defense, Washington, p. 15. The lines are guessed by the U.S. Department of Defense, and the actual shape of the first and second island chains are not confirmed.

<sup>31</sup> Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu*, op. cit., pp. 436-437.

<sup>32</sup> *Asagumo Shinbun*, 29 April 2010.

<sup>33</sup> *Asagumo Shinbun*, 29 April 2010.

naval helicopter is about 250 km/h (69 meters/second), so it might have collided into Asayuki within 2 seconds. The Japanese government protested the provocation of the helicopter to the Chinese government<sup>34</sup>. It might cause the similar incident to the Sino-U.S. air clash at Hainan Island in April 2001.

The PLA navy mobilized three fleets; the North Fleet, the East Fleet, and the South Fleet, and practiced the joint naval exercise of three fleets in the South China Sea in July 2010<sup>35</sup>. It's rare that the PLA navy mobilized three fleets at the same time. They deployed Luyang-class destroyers (displacement 7000 tons), Sovremenny-class destroyers (displacement 7940 tons) and guided-missile frigates. The battleships carried out synchronized warfare drill and test-fired several types of surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missiles. A PLA officer said, "We show that the PLA navy has the power to beat the U.S. aircraft carrier battle group."<sup>36</sup>

The PLA navy also conducted the landing exercise with 1800 troops including marines, and more than 100 ships, amphibious tanks, submarines and aircraft off the port of Zhanjiang and the coast of Hainan Island in November 2010<sup>37</sup>. The exercise was codenamed Jiaolong (submerged dragon) 2010; it had as a scenario to retake some South China Sea Islands which had been occupied by foreign countries. The exercise was conducted in front of more than 200 foreign military attaches<sup>38</sup>.

It was said that the PLA showed their military capability to capture the Spratly Islands from the other claimants at any time, and would like to oppress them at the diplomatic negotiation<sup>39</sup>. However there are not so many long beaches in the Spratly Islands equivalent to that of Hainan Island. The biggest Island of the Spratly Islands is Itu Aba Island (Taiping Dao in Chinese), and its area is about 0.489 square km (1.36km [East-West]×0.35km [North-South])<sup>40</sup>. The Spratly Islands have no long coast such as Normandy. So the landing exercise with amphibious tanks is not necessary.

Further, China dispatched the patrol boats of the various maritime security agencies to the South China Sea and the East China Sea. It is said that China has at least five maritime security agencies; the State Oceanic Administration of the Ministry of Land and Resources, the China Coast Guard of Ministry of Public Security, the

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<sup>34</sup> *Asagumo Shinbun*, 29 April 2010.

<sup>35</sup> *Dangdai Haijun [Modern navy]*, September issue, 2010, pp. 42-47, *South China Morning Post*, 30 July 2010.

<sup>36</sup> *Asahi Shinbun*, 30 December 2010.

<sup>37</sup> *PLA Pictorial*, Later Half of January 2011, pp. 6-7, *Global Times*, 3 November 2010, *New York Times*, 3 November 2010, *Asahi Shinbun*, 30 December 2010.

<sup>38</sup> *PLA Pictorial*, Later Half of January 2011, pp. 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> *Asahi Shinbun*, 30 December 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Itu Aba Island has the fresh water resource. You Sakushu, *Funso Nansa Shoto (The Conflict over Spratly Islands)*, Shinhyoron Publishing, Tokyo, 1994, p. 30.

Fishery Patrol Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Transport (Photo-5), and the Chinese Custom House<sup>41</sup>. Every ministry has their own patrol vessels and boats, though no linkage and cooperation among them have been confirmed by foreign observers.



**Photo-5: A Patrol Vessel of the Chinese Ministry of Transport  
(Courtesy: Japan Coast Guard)**

A big fishery patrol vessel of the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture dispersed Indonesian navy patrol boats when the Indonesian navy had captured a Chinese fishing boat for poaching off the coast of the Natuna Islands in June 2010<sup>42</sup>. A Vietnamese fishing boat was captured by Chinese authorities off the coast of the Paracel Islands in September 2010<sup>43</sup>.

The Chinese Ministry of Agriculture also dispatched fishery patrol vessels to the sea area surrounding the Senkaku Islands in October 2010<sup>44</sup>. Some of these vessels were said to be PLA navy gunboats at the beginning, and were repainted from grey to white<sup>45</sup>. 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<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Lyle J. Goldstein, *Five Dragons Stirring Up the Sea: Challenge and Opportunity in China's Improving Maritime Enforcement Capabilities*, U.S. Naval War College, China Maritime Study 5, April 2010, Kazumine Akimoto, Joho Bunseki (information analysis), <http://www.sof.or.jp/jp/monthly/monthly/pdf/201008.pdf>, 5 September 2011 accessed.

<sup>42</sup> *Mainichi Shinbun*, 27 July 2010.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/nr04087104143/nr040807105039/ns10100618017/new...> 10 October 2010 accessed

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/gxh/tyb/fyrbt/t763155.htm>, 23 October 2010 accessed.

<sup>45</sup> Eiichi Fukami, *Chugoku Diani, Daisan No kajouseiryoku (China's Second and Third Maritime Forces)*, [http://www.sof.or.jp/jpnews/201-250/219\\_3.php](http://www.sof.or.jp/jpnews/201-250/219_3.php), 23 October 2010 accessed, this author's interview with the Indonesian military officers in anonymity.

<sup>46</sup> *Jakarta Post*, 3 March 1996.

### Implications for Security Cooperation

How to understand China's rise in the Asian waters? Defense analysts in the United States and Japan have referred to China's Anti-Access / Area-Denial (A2/AD) Strategy<sup>47</sup>. They consider that China would like to develop the naval capabilities of anti-access in the sea area of the first island chain, and area-denial in the sea area of the second island chain. The anti-access capability means the Chinese capability to control the sea area, and to prevent the access of enemy forces. The area-denial capability means the capability to prevent the enemy's control of the sea area, though it does not mean the PLA capability to control the sea area.

If the PLA navy really develops A2/AD capability, it would obstruct the freedom of navigation. It is said that is one of the reasons the U. S. navy initiated the AirSea Battle Strategy in 2010, and the U.S. navy asks the allied forces and fraternal forces to cooperate with them. The whole concept of AirSea Battle Strategy is still not clear yet, though the military analysts explain that it is to maintain the U.S. accessibility to the allied countries and fraternal countries in the world, and the forward deployment capability<sup>48</sup>. The U.S.-Japan-Australia trilateral joint naval training in the South China Sea on 9 July 2011 may be one of the efforts for it<sup>49</sup>.

The U.S. navy, the JMSDF and the fraternal forces have no intention to contain China, though they insist on the freedom and safety of navigation. The PLA navy's equipment including the main warships (Table-1) is not equivalent to the U.S. navy at present, and the PLA navy's power projection capability is limited, though they are superior to the ASEAN neighbors<sup>50</sup>. The PLA navy's military build-up effort may catch up with the U.S. navy in the long run, but not in the near future<sup>51</sup>. If so, what is the real reason for the provocative maritime deployment of the PLA navy?

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<sup>47</sup> Toshihide Yamauchi, Chugoku Kaigun No Hatten To Kadai (PLA Navy's development and problem), Tomohide Murai, et al., *Chugoku Wo Meguru Anzen Hosho (China's Defense and Security Environment)*, Minerva Shobo Publishing, 2007, pp. 172- 195, Naoto Yagi, Ea See Batoru No Haikei (Background of the AirSea Battle), *Kaikanko Senryaku Kenkyu (Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Staff College Review)*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 2011, pp. 4-22.

<sup>48</sup> Naoto Yagi, Ea See Batoru No Haikei (Background of the AirSea Battle Strategy), *Kaikanko Senryaku Kenkyu (Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Staff College Review)*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 2011, pp. 4-22.

<sup>49</sup> *Asagumo Shinbun*, 14 July 2011.

<sup>50</sup> A Japanese defense analyst said, "The idea of first and second island chains is similar to the idea of Imperial Japan's Absolute Defense Zone in September 1943. It is meaningless to draw lines without the effective military equipment. (This author's personal interview.)"

<sup>51</sup> G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2008, Vol. 87, No. 1, pp. 23-37. Prof. Ikenberry remarked that PRC's military budget cannot compete with the U.S. beyond 2030.

It is said that not only the PLA navy's strategy but also the CCP's foreign policy has changed a bit. The Chinese foreign officials' comment: 'The South China Sea, now part of China's "core interest" of sovereignty,' is evidence of this.<sup>52</sup> It is also said that the change is relevant to a Chinese domestic power struggle between the PLA and the civilian cadre of CCP. One ASEAN scholar has said: "The PLA wants a bigger portion of economic pie, and the strong influence on the policy making procedure; that is why they utilize the irredentism on the South China Sea Islands. The CCP leaders at present, such as Hu Jintao, and Wen Jiabao, are not the PLA leaders from the beginning. The CCP leaders in the past, such as Mao Zedong, and Deng Xiaoping, were also the leaders of the PLA from the beginning, so the CCP leaders at present, cannot control the PLA officers"<sup>53</sup>.

In any case, ASEAN countries, Japan, the U.S., and other fraternal countries should persuade their Chinese counterparts to stop radical maritime activities through the ASEAN's conference diplomacy. The external powers should attach importance to "ASEAN's centrality." The military and maritime security agencies exchanges are also important. In addition to ARF and ASEAN-China Summit, there are ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting plus 8 (ADMM+8) that began in 2010, the East Asia Summit (EAS) that began in 2005, and the Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting that began in 2004. Through all of these conferences, they should explore the way for Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) with China, and composing the code of conduct in the South China Sea in the long run.

The CBMs in the South China Sea may include the military & maritime security agencies annual exchanges and dialogues, the notice of military activities, establishment of the hotline linkage among the regional naval headquarters of claimants, self-restraint of the new occupation of the features, maritime security cooperation such as search & rescue training, anti-piracy & armed robbery operations, anti-illegal traffic in drugs and anti-poaching operations, and so on<sup>54</sup>.

The claimants may also establish the South China Sea Cooperation Institute (SCSCI) or the South China Sea Cooperation Joint Projects (SCSCJP) for security cooperation and marine scientific research: for example, counter-measures for the

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<sup>52</sup> *New York Times*, 23 April 2010. Prof. Akio Takahara of Tokyo University also mentioned that the Chinese foreign policy became a bit positive, not to say radical, in July 2009. Akio Takahara, Senkaku Gyosen Dahojiken To Kongo No Nichibeichu Kankei [The Capture Incident of the Chinese Fishing Boat and the Future of the Japan-U.S.-China Relations], Nihon Kisha Kurabu (Japan Press Club), 22 October 2010, <http://www.jnpc.or.jp/files/2010/10/bOcd1e08c67c4abc748c385415a10081.pdf>, 29 April 2011 accessed.

<sup>53</sup> This author's personal interview.

<sup>54</sup> Most of these ideas appeared in discussions of the Workshop "Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea," organized by Indonesia from 1990 to 2003, and *The Philippine Draft*, Regional Code of Conduct for the South China Sea, 9 July 1999.

non-traditional maritime security issues, biodiversity investigation, ocean stream & tide level surveys, marine environment protection, and fish farming (Photo-6) through the efforts of ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN-China Maritime Consultation Mechanism (ACMCM). The external dialogue partners can extend hands for technological and financial support, if all the claimants agree on this idea<sup>55</sup>.



**Photo-6: Fish Farming at Ha Long Bay in Vietnam in September 2009 (Rachycentron Canadum [Linnaeus, 1766]: In Japanese, Sugi or Kuro-kanpachi. It's a popular item in the Conveyor belt sushi restaurants in Japan: Koichi Sato)**

This author once suggested the Japanese support through a non-governmental organization because there had been a strong precedent for this<sup>56</sup>. In 1968, Japan established the Malacca Strait Council as a non-governmental organization that was to assist in hydrographic surveys, install navigational aids such as lighthouses (all donated by Japan) and clear navigational fairways for Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

At the time, Japan was one of the largest users of the strait, and the three countries involved were not in the mood for cooperation. The Japanese were able to take the lead to resolve the navigational issues, and because it was done through a non-governmental organization, it avoided any taint of Japanese assertiveness. Whether this approach would work in the Spratly Islands is anyone's guess. It's a decision neither Japan nor any other external dialogue partners can make themselves. The ASEAN countries and China must take the first step.

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<sup>55</sup> The Workshop "Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea" was financially supported by Canada.

<sup>56</sup> Koichi Sato, "The Japan Card", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 April 1995, p. 32, Malacca Strait Council, *History of the Malacca Singapore Straits' Navigation Route*, Malacca Strait Council, 1978.

### Concluding Remarks

The Chinese Premier, Mr. Wen Jiabao visited the earthquake-afflicted Northeast Region of Japan on 21 May 2011, and showed his cordial sympathy toward the Japanese people<sup>57</sup>. This author believes Premier Wen's sincerity, though the PLA navy fleet still appeared in the waters surrounding Japan, and the PLA navy's spy plane Y-8 approached the air-space of Senkaku Islands by 200 km<sup>58</sup>. The Chinese President, Mr. Hu Jintao also suggested U.S. \$ 13 billion economic cooperation agreement to President Aquino of the Philippines on 31 August 2011, though the PLA navy still confronted with foreign ships in the South China Sea<sup>59</sup>.

The fraternal China and the confrontational China, both of them are reality. If so, the East Asian Neighbors and the United States may regard China as a multi-headed dragon, its every head (every ministry, and every department, relevant to maritime security affairs) goes its own way, so they cannot easily be unified. It takes a lot of perseverance for these countries to communicate and persuade the multi-headed dragon, and it's a very tough time for the neighbors. If the PLA navy pursuits the naval hegemony, and obstructs the freedom of navigation in the Asian Waters, it will lead to a disastrous result not only for the East Asian neighbors but also for China itself.

The Chinese people should remember the international anti-piracy cooperation in the sea off Somalia. No country could defend the whole SLOC by itself. The PLA navy showed itself to be a dependable and responsible partner for the international society to defend the merchant ships of the world. This author hopes that China will be a responsible stake-holder for the peace and prosperity of East Asia.

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<sup>57</sup> [http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/jck/summit2011/jc\\_gaiyo.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/jck/summit2011/jc_gaiyo.html), 11 September 2011 accessed, <http://www.asahi.com/national/update/0521/TKY201105210516.html>, 11 September 2011 accessed.

<sup>58</sup> *Asagumo Shinbun*, 16 June 2011, *Asagumo Shinbun*, 7 July 2011.

<sup>59</sup> <http://ph.news.yahoo.com/philippine-president-back-china-13b-deals-051003402.html> 11 September 2011 accessed, *Times of India*, 1 September 2011.