

# China's Rising Maritime Strategy: Implications for its Territorial Disputes

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## Abstract

One strong signal that the Chinese Communist Party's 18th National Congress in November 2012 sent to the international society was that China is to include building a sea power as its national strategy. What followed was the establishment of new governmental maritime sectors to strengthen the governance on ocean and sea affairs. Meanwhile, China greatly increased its budget for navy development and deployment, as demonstrated by the aircraft carrier commissioned. History warns that China faces much greater threats from the sea than from the land. China drew the lesson from its historical humiliation of Opium War era that it must become a strong sea power to cope with the external threats. China's expanded geopolitical interests and increasing demand for energy also request the nation to strengthen its control over the sea chains. The territorial disputes over the islands reemerged when China becomes more assertive and claims more for maritime interests. China's assertive stance on the maritime territorial disputes is in the interests of its national maritime strategy. It is predictable that China will continue to expand its sea power in years to come. The territorial disputes in the seas will thus become more complicated in the near future. China's rising maritime strategy does pose great challenges to the regional stability and peace, but it does not need necessarily lead to conflicts with its neighbors. China needs more cooperation and conversation with the other stakeholders in order to consolidate the foundation of peace and stability in sea.

## Keywords

Chinese foreign policy, maritime strategy, territorial disputes, East China Sea, South China Sea

## **Introduction: China Declares its Maritime Strategy**

One strong signal that the Chinese Communist Party's 18th national congress held in November 2012 sent to the international society was that China has included building a sea power as its national strategy in the coming decade. At the meeting, former president Hu Jintao announced that we must "improve the ability to develop ocean resources, protect national interests in the sea, and build a strong sea power".<sup>1</sup> This was the first time in history that China officially raised such a national goal with regard to building the sea power, since traditionally China was regarded as a continental or land country. Given China's recent policy in ocean affairs, this announcement surprised the international community and has been attracting a lot of concerns.

What followed were the vigorous maritime institutional reforms announced during the annual National People's Congress meeting in March 2013, which marked the actual once-in-a-decade leadership transition. China newly established the National Maritime Committee and combined a series of fragmental governmental sectors into the highly integrated and greatly enlarged National Oceanic Administration under the direct supervision of the Ministry of National Territory and Resources.<sup>2</sup> This was a great step to strengthen the governance and management on ocean and maritime affairs, both civil and military.

Meanwhile, China significantly increased its national defense budget, a large part of which was distributed to navy development. The first aircraft carrier commissioned, Liaoning, is just one showcase of china's rapid and sophisticated navy development and deployment in recent years. By so doing, China projected its amplified navy power and declared its maritime strategy to the world.

The current Xi Jinping administration has inherited the maritime strategy and the national goal to build a strong sea power. In July 2013, President Xi Jinping stressed that the leaders should "further concern about the sea, know about the sea, manage the sea and make new achievements to enhance the progress of building a sea power."<sup>3</sup>

Why China raised such a national goal at this moment? What are the factors

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<sup>1</sup> "Zhonggong 18 da Tichu Jianshe Haiyangqiangguo [The 18th CCP National Congress Raised the Agenda to Build a Strong Sea Power]," *Xinhua Net*, November 10, 2012. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-11/10/c\\_123936993.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-11/10/c_123936993.htm)

<sup>2</sup> "Guowuyuan Jiangchongxin Zujian Haiyangju [The Government will Reorganize the National Oceanic Administration]," *Xinhua Net*, March 10, 2013, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/2013lh/2013-03/10/c\\_114965295.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/2013lh/2013-03/10/c_114965295.htm)

<sup>3</sup> "Dao 2050 Nian Woguo Yao Jiancheng Haiyangqiangguo [China Will Build a Strong Sea Power by 2050 ]," *China Ocean News*, January 13, 2014, <http://epaper.oceanol.com/shtml/zghyb/20140113/36939.shtml>

behind China's maritime aspirations? How would China's maritime strategy influence the maritime territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea? This paper tries to answer these questions.

## 1. The History of China's Maritime Development

In history, traditionally China was not a sea country, but a continental one. In the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongolian conquered China. And when they moved the capital to Beijing, they thought of the lakes as the seas, as they never saw the seas before. That's why these lakes are with names such as Hou Sea and Shicha Sea. In the Ming Dynasty, China did send Zheng He to take the long sea journey. But it didn't last long. The situation was that China still didn't have any sea power so that the coastal areas were frequently disturbed by Japanese pirates. In the Qing Dynasty, China was not able to protect its territory from the western navy powers and also lost the crucial sea battle to Japan in 1894.

Nevertheless, China's declaration to become a sea power and its claim of ocean interests is not a sudden action. After its establishment, the People's Republic of China realized the importance of maritime security. Early in 1970s, China started to strengthen its control over the sea. Early in 1986, Admiral Liu Huaqing proposed to build an aircraft carrier. Though at that time it was not approved due to complicated domestic and international environments.

On 13 February 1987, Liu Huaqing and his commissar Li Yaowen co-signed a doctrine entitled *On the Question of Establishing the Naval Strategy* and formally submitted it to the Central Military Commission for approval. This document has become the guiding doctrine for China's naval development.<sup>4</sup> In the same year, China officially established the Ocean Development Strategic Institute.

China has long dreamed of becoming a "maritime civilization". Early in 1988, the state-operated China Central Television (CCTV) produced a documentary "He Shang" (Sadness of the River) attributing China's miserable historical experience to its land civilization's inferiority to the "maritime civilization" of western powers and Japan. It implicitly expressed the desire to develop the "maritime civilization". This could be seen as China's initial consciousness of maritime importance. However, at that time China's national strategy, set by Deng Xiaoping, was to focus on the domestic agenda and to keep a low profile in the international society. China was not ready to carry out such a maritime dream.

China's ascent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century raised the agenda of setting an aggressive

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<sup>4</sup> Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu* [The Memoirs of Liu Huaqing], PLA Publishing House, Beijing, 2004.

maritime strategy. In 2002, at the 16th National People's Congress, the government report stated that China should speed up "ocean development". In 2005, China's National Defense White Book noted that China should build a strong and modernized navy to protect its national interests in the oceans. In 2006, as an echo to the international discussion on China's rise, another CCTV documentary "The Rise of Great Nations" featured the great powers in history and concluded that all great powers in history were sea powers. The documentary implied that China must first become a sea power if it wants to rise to a great power. In 2008, then President Hu Jintao first pointed out that China must transfer from a land power to a sea power.

Early in 2010, China has held the view that if the country has strong sea power, then the country would become strong.<sup>5</sup> In 2011, in the 12th "Five-Year Plan" for the PRC's economic development, it was clearly stated that China should "make and exercise ocean development strategy."<sup>6</sup> In addition, in December 2011, former President Hu Jintao also expressed the Chinese government's desire to speed up the transitional development of China's navy power and well prepare for the potential battle in the seas. He pointed out the purpose of this policy was to "protect national security and maintain world peace."<sup>7</sup>

In December 2011, the CCTV launched a new documentary "Towards the Sea" as a bold proclamation of China's sea power dream to pursue interests in the oceans. All these paved the way for openly declaring the maritime strategy at the 18th CCP national congress.

After that, China has been accelerating its steps of building a strong sea power. In 2013, the government raised the "National Ocean Development Five Year Plan."<sup>8</sup> The Five-Year Plan provided the detailed policies for China's maritime strategy and also implied that China would persist the strategy of developing a strong sea power in the coming decades.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Sun Zhihui, Director of National Ocean Commission, "Cong Haiyangdaguo Jiakuai Zouxiang Haiyangqiangguo [From a Sea Country to a Sea Power] ," September 5, 2010, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/2010-09/05/c\\_12519151\\_2.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/2010-09/05/c_12519151_2.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Zhiguo Gao, "Shenhua Yanjiu Haiyang Fazhan Zhanlue, Nuli Tuijin Haiyang Qiangguo Jianshe [Deepen Research on Ocean Development Strategy and Strive to Enhance Sea Power Establishment]," *Haiyang Guanli yu Fazhan* [Ocean Development and Management], Issue 2, 2012: 62.

<sup>7</sup> "Zhonggong 18 da Tichu Jianshe Haiyangqiangguo [The 18th CCP National Congress Raised the Agenda to Build a Strong Sea Power]," *Xinhua Net*, November 10, 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-11/10/c\\_123936993.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-11/10/c_123936993.htm)

<sup>8</sup> "Guojia Haiyang Shiye Shierwu Guihua Fabu" [12th 5-Year National Plan for Marine Industry Released], April 11, 2013, *China Net*, [http://news.china.com.cn/txt/2013-04/11/content\\_28516188.htm](http://news.china.com.cn/txt/2013-04/11/content_28516188.htm)

## 2. Motives of China's Maritime Aspirations

If we compare the 2011 CCTV documentary with 1988 CCTV documentary mentioned above, we could find that they have strikingly the same underlying logic. That's, they both argued that China's land civilization was inferior to maritime civilization. And to compete with the western powers and survive in international community, China must become a sea civilization and a sea power.

The 1988 "He Shang" was so radical that it totally denied the Chinese "river civilization" originating from the Yellow River, which was long regarded as the pride of Chinese civilization with a long history. This might be a revolutionary idea about China's geopolitics, as China has long regarded itself as a land country. That's why China calls itself the "mainland" when comparing to Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. The documentary was angry about that we were always looking at the rivers or the inland, but never took a serious look at the vast ocean and sea. That's essentially why we fell behind and lost, according to the documentaries.

Chinese government's awareness of maritime importance started from the 1980s, when the country was in a time of comprehensive self-reflection. Chinese foreign policy to some extent depends on how the government sees its past. The retrospection and introspection on the history always remind China that it was beaten because its land civilization was comparatively underdeveloped in the Qing Dynasty. This is the starting point of dreaming to be a sea power. Robert S. Ross argues that it is the nationalism rather than security that drives China's navy development. He labels the Chinese national sentiments and aspirations for a strong maritime power as the "naval nationalism."<sup>9</sup> It is reasonable to say that China's maritime aspirations come from both geopolitical consideration and nationalism sentiments.

The most important policy question for a country facing multiple external threats is to identify the most prominent one for taking counter-measures. The PLA's 1.5-war plan highlights maritime conflicts while seeking to contain security threats from elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> China drew the lesson from its historical humiliation of the Opium War era that China must become a strong sea power to cope with external threats. Traditionally China is a continental nation. There were no substantial threats from the sea until the British and French vessels and firearms knocked its door in the Opium War. After that, China also lost to Japan in a

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<sup>9</sup> Robert S. Ross, China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response, *International Security*, Fall 2009, Vol. 34, No. 2: 46–81.

<sup>10</sup> You Ji, "The Chinese Navy, Its Regional Power and Global Reach," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.36, Issue 3, 2012: 478.

critical sea battle in 1894. History warns that China faces much greater threats from the sea than from the land. China has abundant experiences of land security management dating back to the construction of the Great Wall, but is very weak in maritime deployment despite of its long coastlines. In China's eyes, all existing great powers such as the US, Japan and Russia are sea powers, while China is still a continental one. To catch up with western powers, China needs not only to realize the military modernization, but also to transfer from a continental power into a sea power.

China recognized that the Qing Dynasty failed because it didn't have a strong navy to encounter the Western powers coming from the sea. Right after the establishment of the PRC, China started to carry on navy development. In 1950, the Leading Headquarter for Navy was set up in Beijing. Early in 1953, when Mao Zedong visited the Chinese navy vessels, he asserted, "to resist to the invasion of the imperialism, we must build a strong navy". This shows that Chinese leaders have realized the importance of a strong navy to protect its territorial integrity and national sovereignty as early as in the Cold War era.

In the 1960s, China raised the goal of realizing the "four modernizations", one of which was military or defense modernization. Navy development has been one of the priorities for military build-up. China has embarked on military (especially navy) modernization to protect overseas interests and adjusted its strategy "coastal defense" to "far seas defense" for the PLA navy.<sup>11</sup> The causes of Chinese naval modernization have been traced to the need to gain command of the sea so as to exploit it for power-projection purposes or maritime trade protection, as well as to the need to deny command of the sea to some potential or actual adversary.<sup>12</sup> In recent years, the full-fledged development of Chinese navy and its global reach has been attracting a lot of international attention, together with its intensified maritime territorial disputes. From China's point of view, its largest foreign security threat comes from the US-Japan military alliance. The territorial disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea, together with the Taiwan issue, make China's Southeastern coastal area its weak belly for national defense. Some scholars argue that although China's navy is fast catching up with the world's cutting-edge technology, it is far from capable of initiating long distance major sea battles.<sup>13</sup> Comparing to the US and Japanese navies, Chinese navy is still not sophisticated enough. It is also worth noting that Chinese navy only has 300,000

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<sup>11</sup> Chris Lin, "China's Strategic Shift towards the Region of the Four Seas: The Middle Kingdom Arrives at the Middle East", *The ISPSW Strategy Series*, Issue No. 226, April 2013: 3.

<sup>12</sup> Yves-Heng Lim, "The Driving Forces behind China's Naval Modernization," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol.30, Issue 2, 2011: 105.

<sup>13</sup> You Ji, "The Chinese Navy, Its Regional Power and Global Reach," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.36, Issue 3, 2012: 477.

troops, out of its 2,900,000 total military troops. China sees the distance between itself and the advanced sea powers and attempts to strengthen its navy forces to protect its national interests and security. Navy development will continue to be one most important agenda of its maritime strategy.

As China rises, the expanded geopolitical interests and increasing demands for resources and energy request the nation to strengthen its control over the sea chains. For example, eighty five percent of China's importing oil has to go through the Malacca Straits. In late 2003, former President Hu Jintao explained the so-called "Malacca dilemma" for China, which means that the problem of sea routes, in particular the Malacca Straits are crucial to China's international trade and security of energy.<sup>14</sup> The latest report on world energy issued by International Energy Agency pointed out that China would soon become the largest energy consumer and oil importer.<sup>15</sup> Although China is relatively rich in energy and natural resources, its energy self-sufficiency rate is on the decline. Compared to developed countries such as the US and Japan, China's energy efficiency is also quite low. That means China needs to consume much more energy to create the same value of gross national product. Energy security has already become an important issue for China's future development. Recent years, China has been actively engaged in the African continents and Middle East to ensure energy supply. However, more importantly, China has to make sure the safety of waterway for its energy import. To do so, China tries to expand its influence in the sea by developing its navy forces and strengthening its control over the sea chains.

The "Malacca dilemma" exactly expressed China's concerns about the free navigation in the sea. There are certainly worries about the threats from the economic terrorism in the sea. But the "Malacca dilemma" also addressed China's complaints about the current international order in the Asia-Pacific. In China's eyes, certain countries have the maritime hegemony in the sea. In fact, China has long accused the US of dominating the sea chains and containing China in the Asia-Pacific by strengthening its military alliances and amplifying its presence in the region. China wants to construct a new international order in the Asia-Pacific as it sees the existing one as unreasonable. China also deems that it deserves to have more national interests in the sea.

More importantly, the mainstream guideline of Chinese foreign policy has subtly changed. Since around 2009 China has gradually abandoned Deng Xiaoping's

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<sup>14</sup> For details, see Marc Lanteigne, "China's Maritime Security and the 'Malacca Dilemma'", *Asian Security*, Vol.4, No.2, 2008:143-161.

<sup>15</sup> "IEA: Zhongguo Jiang Chengwei Shijie Zuida Nengyuan Xiaofeiguo He Shiyou Jinkouguo" [IEA: China Will Become World's Largest Energy Consumer and Oil importer], *China Net*, November 27, 2013, <http://finance.china.com.cn/industry/energy/special/2013yjst7/20131127/2004204.shtml>

strategy of “hiding the capability and biding the time”(Taoguangyanghui) and actively prompted up its global engagement, with Asia as the focus. China gained confidence from its continuous economic growth in the past three decades. China successfully held the Olympic Games in 2008 and Shanghai Expo in 2010, which greatly added to China’s complacency about its rising status in the world. When most of western countries were suffering from the global financial crisis during the past couple of years, China still kept high rate of economic growth. Some people even started to talk about the advantage of Chinese development model and coined it as the “Beijing Consensus,” in comparison with the “Washington Consensus.” As a result, China’s perceptions of itself and the world have changed. Such changes also led to domestic debates on Chinese foreign policy in the new era. Since then, among the foreign policy decision-makers, there have been more and more voices calling for more outward and aggressive diplomacy. It is under such circumstances that China speeded up its maritime strategy. The rising maritime strategy is the result of a more assertive foreign policy adopted by the Chinese government.

Meanwhile, economy is also one important motive for the maritime strategy. As a new potential area for the economic development, China has attached a lot of importance to the so-called “blue economy,” namely the economy related to the ocean. The marine industry has been growing rapidly in the past three decades. In 1979, it had only a value of 6.4 billion yuan. But it exceeded 1 trillion yuan for the first time in 2003 and jumped to nearly 3 trillion yuan in 2008. The gross product value generated by China’s marine industry exceeded 5 trillion yuan, or \$802.6 billion, in 2012, according to the State Oceanic Administration.<sup>16</sup> China has raised the concept of “Gross Ocean Product”. The percentage of GOP in GDP is about 9.5% now, and the Chinese government aims to raise the share to about 30% by 2050.<sup>17</sup> In 2010, the State Council approved and initiated the establishment of “blue economic zones” as part of China’s national development strategy. Since then, several pioneering “blue economic zones” have been set up in Eastern coastal provinces. It is proved that the “blue economic zones” have become new engine of economic growth. As some experts argue, the development of marine resources has gone from traditional fishing to comprehensive utilization to the construction of a modern maritime industry in China.<sup>18</sup> An outline for China’s marine economic

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<sup>16</sup> “An New Engine for Economic Growth,” *China Daily*, January 14, 2013, [http://www.china-daily.com.cn/bizchina/2013-01/14/content\\_16112232.htm](http://www.china-daily.com.cn/bizchina/2013-01/14/content_16112232.htm)

<sup>17</sup> “Dao 2050 Nian Woguo Yao Jiancheng Haiyangqiangguo [China Will Build a Strong Sea Power by 2050],” *China Ocean News*, January 13, 2014, <http://epaper.oceanol.com/shtml/zghyb/20140113/36939.shtml>

<sup>18</sup> “Blue Economy Becomes New Growth Engine for E China,” *People’s Daily*, July 22, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90778/8335170.html>



development during 2011 to 2015 issued by the State Council sets an annual 8-percent growth rate for the marine economy's gross product value. In the outline, the State Council also claimed that China must make use of various favorable factors to maintain the long-term, stable and relatively rapid growth of the marine economy.<sup>19</sup> The marine industry has rosy prospects as a dynamic driving force for China's continuous economic growth. Therefore, China attempts to deepen and broaden its maritime development.

To summarize, China's aspirations to become a sea power originate from its reflections on its history and its changing perception of the sea. China has realized that its further economic development will be more and more dependent on the sea. At the same time, China has perceived more and more security threats from the sea than from the inland. Therefore, historical, security and economic factors altogether drive China to pursue for the dream of becoming a strong sea power.

### **3. Implications for the Maritime Territorial Disputes**

Geographically there are three directions in China's outward maritime strategy: the East China Sea, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Given their geopolitical values, China is determined to develop strong holds in the three waters to ensure entrances to world markets and channels for resources and energy supply.

China's maritime policy has been an integral part of China's foreign policy, which can be best characterized as "proactive engagement."<sup>20</sup> However, there is no clear definition on the goals and spheres of China's maritime strategy so far. This ambiguity leaves the space for doubt and distrust from neighboring countries. China's growing presence in the waters is inevitably perceived as threats and would likely to conflict with the interests of its surrounding sea powers.

The recent territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea intensified when China becomes more assertive and claims more maritime interests. For example, Michael Yahuda argues that the South China Sea has been troubled by the opacity of Chinese politics and of the process of military decision-making amid a proliferation of apparently separately controlled maritime forces.<sup>21</sup> Namely, the complexity of the maritime territorial disputes is execrated

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<sup>19</sup> "Maritime Economy to Hit 10% of GDP by 2015," *China Daily*, January 18, 2013, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2013-01/18/content\\_16136573.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2013-01/18/content_16136573.htm)

<sup>20</sup> Mingjiang Li, "China and Maritime Cooperation in East Asia: recent developments and future prospects," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 19, Issue 64, 2010: 309.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Yahuda, "China's New Assertiveness in the South China Sea," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol.22, Issue 81, 2013:446.

by the Chinese strategy of building a strong sea power and the rising influence of military forces in China's foreign policy decision-making. China defined its "core interests" in the disputed waters, which never applied to its land border disputes. China's tough stance on the disputes demonstrates its strong will to build a sea power and expand ocean interests.

The situation could also be analyzed from the perspective of power transition theory. While the Asia Pacific is having the power transition, China itself is also experiencing the transition from a land power to a navy power or sea power. The Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy has been the focus of world attention in recent years against the backdrop of China's rising military power vis-à-vis its territorial disputes with its neighbors in the East and South China Seas.<sup>22</sup> This would raise challenges to the existing sea powers in the region, such as Japan and Southeast Asian countries. It might be difficult for the existing sea powers and an emerging sea power to get along peacefully in the seas if they fail to negotiate and identify their national interests in the region. Some scholars also raised the question: should China deserve to have some degree of ocean control in the future?

The future East Asian international order is likely to be significantly shaped by the maritime strategies and policies of regional states and relevant external powers.<sup>23</sup> Under such circumstances, China's rising maritime strategy would definitely influence the future development of international relations surrounding the South China Sea and the East China Sea. China has long championed the notion of "peaceful rise" and claimed that its rise will not contradict with interests of other nations. However, its ambitious maritime strategy has caused anxiety in Japan, the US and Southeast Asian countries. It is predictable that China will continue to expand its sea power in years to come. The security dilemma in the seas would evolve into conflicts if distrust and tensions continue to escalate.

At the same time, China has repeatedly stressed that it never intends to search for sea hegemony by building a sea power.<sup>24</sup> China has also realized that its rising maritime strategy has provoked anxieties in the neighboring countries. Therefore China tries to explain that it aims to become a strong sea power, but not a hegemonic sea power.<sup>25</sup> Even though, So far, the mainstream observers

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<sup>22</sup> You Ji, "The Chinese Navy, Its Regional Power and Global Reach," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.36, Issue 3, 2012: 477.

<sup>23</sup> Mingjiang Li, "China and Maritime Cooperation in East Asia: recent developments and future prospects," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 19, Issue 64, 2010: 291.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Chinese National Defense: "Zhongguo Jianshe Haiyangqiangguo Bushi Zhuiqiu Haishang Baquan [China Doesn't Intend to Search for Maritime Hegemony by Building a Sea Power]," November 29, 2012, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/affair/2012-11/29/content\\_4415440.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/affair/2012-11/29/content_4415440.htm)

<sup>25</sup> "Zhongguo Jianshe Qiangerbuba Xinxin Haiyangqiangguo [China Builds a Strong but not Hegemonic, New Type of Sea Power]," *China Ocean News*, November 10, 2012.

and strategists predict that China's rising naval power will destabilize the international order in East Asia and Southeast Asia. For example, China's rising navy development is one of the most important factor that drive India to move East toward the Pacific Ocean.<sup>26</sup> Concerned about China's naval buildups and the potential of maritime conflicts in the East China Sea, Japan and Korea are also strengthening their naval capabilities, and the US is also rebalancing its military presence in the region. China's rising maritime strategy and its assertive posture on the maritime territorial disputes have aroused extensive concerns from regional actors and have caused a new round of navy arm race in the seas.

China's accelerating maritime development in the recent years could also be a response to the intensified territorial disputes with Japan, while it in turn also has made the situation more complicated. As a traditionally sea power, Japan is very wary of China's development in the sea. This is not only because of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, but also that the comprehensive security structure of the Asia-Pacific region might be greatly changed. Under such circumstances, Japanese scholars have also recognized the importance of the topic and started their research on China's maritime issue.<sup>27</sup> Most of the Japanese scholars are worried about China's maritime expansion and accuse it of challenging the existing sea order and infringing on Japan's national interests.

What are behind the maritime territorial issue between China and Japan? Basically there are two issues, the natural resources and the geopolitical security. China and Japan have been increasing their naval presence under the policy of protecting their maritime interests in the East China Sea. There is concern that amid heightened tensions the competitive rush for naval buildups in the troubled waters could lead to accidental military clashes or even to large-scale military conflicts.<sup>28</sup> Due to maritime territorial disputes, the China-Japan political relations have been in a standoff for the past couple of years. As the sea is becoming the flash point, neither side seems to be able to give concessions on their national interests in the sea.

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Walter C. Ladwig III, Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, "Look East," and India's Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific, *Asian Security*, 5:2, 2009: 87-113; Harsh V. Pant, "China Shakes Up the Maritime Balance in the Indian Ocean," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, Issue 3, 2012:364-368.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Shigeo Hiramatsu, *Chugoku no Senryakuteki Kaiyou Shinshutsu* [China's Strategic Expansion to the Sea], Keisoshobo, 2002; Masafumi Iida, *Kaiyoe Bouchosuru Chugoku* [China Expanding to the Sea], Kakugawa Shinsho, Tokyo, 2013; Ocean Policy Research Foundation, *Chugoku no Kaiyo shinshutsu* [China's Expansion to the Sea], Seisanto Shoten, Tokyo, 2013; Kayahara, Ikuo & Yoshiki Mine, *Nijuisseiki no Chugoku: Gunji Gaiko Hen* [China in the 21 Century: Military and Diplomacy Volume], Asahi Shimbun Press, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Suk Kyoon, Kim, "China and Japan Maritime Disputes in the East China Sea: A Note on Recent Developments," *Ocean Development and International Law*, Vol. 43, Issue 4, 2012: 304.

Japan feels an urgent need to build a stronger military force to counteract China's growing maritime military activities in the region, which include the launching of its first aircraft carrier and the frequent times of sending of destroyers into disputed waters. Facing China's rising maritime strategy and growing military presence, Japanese leaders have repeatedly claimed that the security environment surrounding Japan has become unprecedentedly severe and thus substantial adjustment of its national defense strategy is required.<sup>29</sup> The establishment of the Japanese National Security Council (NSC) is partly a result of the threat perception. In the National Security Bureau, the secretariat to the NSC, there is one division covering "friendly countries," while another division exclusively deals with China and North Korea. China might not qualify as a "friendly country" for Japan, but it would be surprised to see itself in the same category as North Korea. From Japan's point of view, China and North Korea are the two biggest destabilizing factors in the region and pose equal threats to its national security. As a result, China's expansion to the sea is deteriorating the mutual security perception between China and Japan. In particular, it has added to the threat perception for Japan.

Territorial disputes are increasingly debated in many of the countries involved not just on a governmental level, but in the public arena as well. As a result, nationalist sentiments appear to be ever more engaged on territorial issues, reducing the room for maneuver of political leaders and further increasing the possibility of damaging, potentially catastrophic incidents.<sup>30</sup> The even more dangerous thing is that the securitization of the sea has become a topic at the public level. National sentiments are provoked by the maritime territorial disputes. As a result, it helps the nationalism in both countries to grow enthusiastically.

## **Conclusion**

China needs to elaborate its maritime policy to the world and carry on transparent maritime cooperation with other countries in the region. For example, China should strengthen non-traditional security cooperation such as counter-piracy activities with India in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea. In particular, China and Japan should seek for areas of common interests including fishery to initiate low-sensitivity maritime cooperation in the East China Sea. Ocean cooperation should start from the functional issues. As

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<sup>29</sup> See for example, *Defense of Japan* [Annual White Paper 2013], Japanese Ministry of Defense.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas U Berger, "Navigating a Sea of Troubles: US Alliances and Maritime Disputes in East Asia", East Asia Institute Fellows Program Working Paper Series No. 35, June 2012.

the multilateral cooperation on the recent search for Malaysian airplane shows, countries have a lot common interests and great potential for cooperation in the sea. Only bilateral and multilateral conversations and cooperation can help China to gain understanding and trust to its regional maritime deployment.

China's rising maritime strategy does pose great challenges to the regional stability and peace. But it depends on also how other countries are going to face it. China's rising maritime strategy does not need necessarily lead to conflicts with its neighbors. In fact, China has become more active in cooperating with neighbors to tackle nontraditional security threats such as piracy, natural disasters, trafficking in peoples and narcotics etc.<sup>31</sup> It is important to recognize that the expansion of Chinese interests does not necessarily entail the expansion of China's claims to sovereignty over new territories and maritime areas.<sup>32</sup> The international community has to accept the fact that China's arrival as a maritime power is an undeniable feature of today's international system.<sup>33</sup> The real question is, to what extent, the international community, in particular for Japan and the US, could accept China as a sea power. As Wang Jisi argues, China might not need to challenge the existing international political and economic order, while international community, in particular the US, should also respect China's domestic order.<sup>34</sup> Eventually China will need to deal with its domestic security challenges rather than going radically outward to the sea. At this transitional stage, China needs more cooperation and conversation with the other stakeholders in order to consolidate the foundation of peace and stability in sea.

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<sup>31</sup> See David Arase, "Non-traditional Security in China-ASEAN Cooperation: The Institutionalization of Regional Security Cooperation and The Evolution of East Asian Regionalism," *Asian Survey* 50(4), (July-August 2010): 805-833.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Yahuda, "China's New Assertiveness in the South China Sea," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol.22, Issue 81, 2013: 450.

<sup>33</sup> Adam P. MacDonald, "China's Maritime Strategy: A Prolonged Period of Formulation," *Canadian Naval Review*, Volume 8, Issue 4, Winter 2013: 9.

<sup>34</sup> Wang Jisi, "Fendaoyangbiao Haishi Shututonggui?: Qianlun Goujian Zhongmei Xinxin Daguoguanxi Zhilu" [Part to Different Routes, Or Achieving Same Goal through Different Ways?: Analysis of Methods of Constructing China-US New Type of Great Power Relationship], *International and Strategic Studies Report*, March 16, 2014.

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