

# China's "Sea Power Nation" Strategy



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## **Abbreviations**

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CPC	Communist Party of China
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication

## Executive Summary

China is a large maritime nation. It has a coastline of more than 18,000 km, three million square kilometers of territorial seas, and over 6,500 islands with an area larger than 500 square meters. However, China is not a strong “sea power” nation. Its ocean economic development lags behind that of its land economy and the level of other world sea powers. Moreover, China is facing many daunting challenges and risks related with its harsh strategic situation. As the disputes between China and adjacent countries over the sovereignty of islands, demarcation of sea areas, and exploitation of ocean resources become increasingly strained, it is clear that China needs a new and comprehensive strategy.

The adoption of the strategy of “building China into a sea power nation” was put forward on November 8, 2012, at the 18th Party Congress of the Communist Party of China. It foresees China developing its economy in an all-round way – with ocean economic development pursued in tandem as part of China’s broader national development strategy – at the same time as safeguarding its national sovereignty, security, and interests. Under the guidance of the strategy, as is explored in this paper, China will seek to take effective measures such as conflict avoidance, promotion of dialogue, maritime cooperation, and joint exploitation of natural resources.

The sea power strategy is deeply rooted in China’s history as both a once-great maritime country and as a nation subjugated by invasions from the sea. The factors behind the adoption of the strategy are accordingly dealt with at length in this paper. All in all, the strategy seeks to realize the peaceful rise of the Chinese nation in a world where contemporary challenges necessitate a more robust, multi-faceted approach.

## Introduction

After more than thirty years of reform and opening up, China has become the world's second biggest economy with an unprecedented level of economic growth, which has served to greatly enhance its comprehensive national power. Though China enjoys a robust rate of economic growth, its development has been to some extent uncoordinated and unsustainable, and problems such as population, resources, and environment exert great pressures on the Chinese government. Meanwhile, China also faces many daunting challenges and risks related to its maritime sovereignty, rights, and interests. Disputes with neighboring countries over the sovereignty of islands, the demarcation of sea areas, and exploitation of ocean-based natural resources have all become increasingly strained. The situation is further exacerbated by the "Pivot to Asia" policy of the United States which seeks to strengthen relations with some of China's neighboring countries so as to encircle and confront China. It is clear, therefore, that China is in need of a more comprehensive and clear-cut national maritime strategy.

Accordingly, on November 8, 2012, at the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), a strategy was officially put forward that aimed at "building China into a sea power nation." The concept refers to the development, utilization, protection, management, and control of the ocean. The concept thus envisages China attaining enhanced comprehensive power in respect to maritime security, ocean economy, ocean technology, and protection of the ocean environment. As the CPC put forward in the report at the Congress, it is imperative to "enhance the capacity for exploiting ocean resources, develop ocean economy, protect ocean ecological environment, and resolutely safeguard China's maritime sovereignty, rights and interests, and build China into a sea power."<sup>1</sup>

This has been further emphasized by Chinese President Xi Jinping:

The 18th Party Congress has set the important task of building China into a sea power nation. It is of great significance to implement the important task for promoting China's economic development in a sustainable and

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<sup>1</sup> Report of Hu Jintao to the 18th CPC National Congress, *China.org.cn*, November 16, 2012, [http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th\\_cpc\\_congress/2012-11/16/content\\_27137540\\_8.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th_cpc_congress/2012-11/16/content_27137540_8.htm)



healthy way, safeguarding national sovereignty, security and developing interests, realizing the objective of building China into a well-off society in an all-round way and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. We must advance our concern for the ocean, understanding of the ocean, and administration over the ocean, so as to make new achievements to push forward the building of China into a sea power nation.<sup>2</sup>

This was the first time that the building China into a sea power nation officially appeared in a CPC report, thus placing an unprecedented level of importance on enhancing China's sea power.

In terms of structure, this paper first "unpacks" the concept of what a sea power nation constitutes and briefly identifies its main features. It moves on to examine in more detail the factors which have determined China's adopting such a strategy, which include lessons from history and the demands of China's economic development, among others. In the final part, the paper concludes by putting forward some recommendations on the principles and measures by which such a strategy can be implemented in a peaceful, cooperative, and sustainable way.

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<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping, "We Must Advance Our Concern for, Understanding of, and Administration Over the Ocean," The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, July 31, 2013, [http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2013-07/31/content\\_2459009.htm](http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2013-07/31/content_2459009.htm)

## Sea Power Nation: Concept and Connotations

On November 8, 2012, at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the Communist Party of China, China put forward the strategy of “building China into a sea power nation.” As previously stated, the concept implies that a country should enhance its comprehensive power in respect to the development, utilization, protection, management, and control of the ocean. The connotation is that China should increase its exploitation of ocean resources, promote the ocean economy, protect the ocean ecological environment, maintain national maritime sovereignty, rights, and interests, and build a sea power nation.

In terms of maritime security, this is namely to ensure that national maritime sovereignty, rights and interests are not violated or threatened, and that the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) for transport function safely and smoothly. Maritime security should be based on a strong maritime force. In this respect, it is a must for China to build a strong and modern navy that is commensurate with China’s international status and which can safeguard its maritime sovereignty, rights and interests. If these cannot be safeguarded, the whole concept of building a sea power nation becomes redundant.

In regard to ocean economy, it means a high rate of growth and a significant contribution of the maritime economy to the total growth of the national economy. This means that the structure of the ocean economy and that of its industries is advanced and well-organized, with major ocean industries being globally competitive. At the moment, the development of China’s ocean economy lags far behind that of the land economy; and, furthermore, it is far less advanced than the developed countries of the world. In order to change this reality, China should promote a more balanced development between its ocean economies and land economies, thereby increasing the contribution of the ocean economy to the total growth of the national economy and ensuring that China’s ocean economy is in the forefront by global standards.

As for advanced ocean technology, it entails that science and technology are the primary driving forces for ocean development and management. Today China has certain advanced ocean technologies at its disposal: for example, the manned submersible “Dragon,” which can reach a depth of more than 7,000 meters, and its first aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, which was launched in 2012. What is more, China should continue to pursue new and advanced ocean tech-

nologies, making technical breakthroughs in key fields such as oil and gas exploration, seawater desalination and enhancing abilities in innovation.

Last but not least is ocean environmental protection. Sound ocean environmental protection demands that the ocean be preserved in its natural state by minimizing pollution, over-fishing, or over-exploitation. Though it is not currently the case, it is necessary that China takes a long-term view on ocean environmental protection, preserving the natural and ecological environment while exploiting and utilizing ocean resources. Indeed, "in utilizing the sea, five requirements must be abided by: overall planning, intensive use, eco-protection, by means of science and technology, and abiding by the relevant laws."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Liu Cigui, "The 18th CPC Congress's Report First Put Forward the Building of a Powerful Nation by Ocean Development, the Realistic and Strategic Significance," [http://news.xinhuanet.com/18cpcnc/2012-11/10/c\\_113656862.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/18cpcnc/2012-11/10/c_113656862.htm) (in Chinese; the titles of subsequent references have been translated into English where necessary).

## Main Features of the Strategy

The sea power strategy is an important part of China's national development strategy. Guiding the strategic directive for China's development, the sea power strategy has a unique role to play in countering the pressures and challenges that China faces. It is guiding China's ocean development both at present and into the future. Four obvious features can be observed as follows:

First, it is in keeping up with the times. The twenty-first century is a century of great maritime development with the ocean playing an increasingly important role in international relations as well as the necessity for China to develop and build a powerful and prosperous nation. It is incumbent on China to keep pace with new challenges and take active measures—which is what the strategy is designed to do. The strategy not only takes into account China's domestic problems, but is also concerned with external factors, in particular China's traditional maritime sovereignty, rights and interests, which have been undermined by some of its neighboring countries.

Second, it represents a major shift, since it completely departs from the traditional thinking of emphasizing land development at the expense of or neglecting ocean development. It indicates that the sea has been accorded unprecedented strategic status, acknowledging the fact that "China not only has a territory of 9,600,000 square kilometers on land, but also has 3,000,000 square kilometers at sea. Therefore we should hold the concept of the territory as a whole on land and at sea."<sup>4</sup>

Third, it is a comprehensive maritime strategy. Its strategic status has been enhanced in aspects of politics, economy, military and technology. For the first time the Chinese government has put forward a great and comprehensive strategy for the exploitation and utilization of the ocean, and for ocean economic development, ocean environmental protection, and safeguarding national maritime sovereignty, rights and interests. The strategy is rich in content. It concerns not only ocean economy and security, but also ocean technology and environmental protection. All of the elements incorporated into the strategy are inter-related and mutually promoted together.

Fourth, it sets out a clear and mandatory objective for China's development. In addition to the implementation of the strategy for the Grand Development

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<sup>4</sup> Zhang Shiping, *China Sea Power* (Beijing: People's Daily Press, 1998).

of Northwest China, the sea power strategy is an important policy to deal with the problem of imbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable development that has plagued China's economy. This is a requirement if China is to build a society that is better-off overall and one that necessitates significant growth in both the land economy and ocean economy. It is a strategic guidance for the orientation of China's future efforts. It thus marks the beginning of a historic leap forward for China from being simply a large maritime nation to a sea power nation.

## Determining Factors behind the Strategy

There are a number of determining factors, including lessons drawn from history and other prerequisites and considerations, which necessitate that China adopt a sea power strategy. These are explored at length below.

### First, drawing lessons from history

China was at one time the world's leading seafaring nation. As early as 221 BC, Emperor Qin Shihuang sailed around and inspected the Shandong Peninsula<sup>5</sup> on several occasions, as well as dispatched Xu Fu who led a fleet and set off from Port Langya to open up a sea route eastward. During the Western Han Dynasty, Emperor Wudi set sail several times with a large number of Chinese fleets sailing eastward to Korea, Japan, and southward to the Indian Ocean. As a result of this, there was an enormous increase in sea trade, port building, and a booming ship-building industry. By the time of the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, China's foreign trade and ocean industry prospered as a result of the great strides achieved in the development of ocean-going technology, ship-building technology, and chart-mapping technology including the invention of the compass. Shipping routes reached coastlines across the western Pacific and northern Indian Ocean, with traffic on the sea being particularly busy between China and Korea, Japan, and other countries in Southeast Asia. According to the *New Book of the Tang Dynasty*, China even had contact with people as far away as the mouth of the Euphrates and the Gulf of Aden.

Centuries later, during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), Emperor Yongle dispatched Zheng He on seven sea voyages to more than 30 countries in Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the east coast of Africa, opening up a "Silk Sea Road." On these voyages they took Chinese tea, silk, porcelain, and Oriental civilization. They assisted countries along their voyage in combating piracy as well as demonstrated benevolence. These voyages not only connected the eastern civilization and western civilization, but also showed China's capability of ocean navigation and displayed a high level of ship-making. As a matter of fact, Zheng He's voyage was almost a century earlier than that of the era of "great geographical discovery" by the Europeans. It is also notable that the

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<sup>5</sup> Editor's Note: The Shandong Peninsula is located in Shandong Province in eastern China and juts into the Yellow Sea.

ships of his fleet were even bigger than that of the Swedish warship *Vasa*—which was symbolic of the rise in Swedish sea power even if it did sink on its maiden voyage. According to Louise Levathes in her book *When China Ruled the Seas*, Zheng He's fleet "was a unique armada in the history of China—and the world—not to be surpassed until the invasion fleets of World War I sailed the seas."<sup>6</sup> So we can see, therefore, that China indeed made a great contribution to the world maritime civilization.

However, not long after the founding of the Ming Dynasty, the government adopted the policy of "turn away from the sea" and closed the door to the outside world, mainly to avoid the harassment and plundering of Japanese pirates along its coastal waters. This "turn away from the sea" policy cut the connection of the Chinese people with the outside world and it continued through the Ming Dynasty and into the Qing Dynasty. As a result, China was invaded by foreign aggressors who came from the sea and suffered great humiliations. For instance, in the space of six decades alone during the Qing Dynasty, China was invaded four times by foreign powers who arrived from the sea in 1840, 1860, 1895, and 1901 respectively.<sup>7</sup> Without a strong maritime defense and a well-trained navy, China lost the wars in resisting foreign aggressors. The Chinese government was forced to sign a series of unequal treaties which not only ceded 1.6 million square kilometers of land but also involved paying 710 million *liang* of silver in reparations. From then on, China was forced to open almost all its seaports to foreign aggressors, with the result that soon afterwards China became an impoverished semi-colonial and semi-feudal country. It should also be mentioned that in the War against Japanese Aggression (1937-1945) during WWII, Japan invaded China and retreated back via the sea. These facts and lessons have been recorded in Chinese history books and included in Chinese school textbooks for young people to learn and remember.

In fact, there have been constant calls for the awareness of the importance and control of the ocean. In the early fifteenth century, Zheng He, the great Chinese voyager mentioned previously, once put it that "to make a country rich, we cannot afford to overlook the seas; both wealth and dangers come from the

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<sup>6</sup> Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-1433* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> These powers included Britain, an Anglo-French alliance, Japan, and an eight-power force consisting of Britain, Germany, the United States, France, Tsarist Russia, Japan, Italy, and Austria.

seas.”<sup>8</sup> Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the leader of China’s modern democratic revolution, pointed out that “with the changing of the world situation, the rise and fall of a country was determined by the ocean instead of the continent. Those who possess sea power will be the powerful nations, and the control of the seas will lead us to survive, and loss of control of the seas will lead to our demise. China should have a plan for the North and South China Sea.”<sup>9</sup>

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Mao Zedong, the first Chairman, emphasized on many occasions that lessons from China’s history should be learned: namely, that most foreign aggressors had invaded China from the sea, and that “in order to fight against imperialist aggression, we must build a strong navy.”<sup>10</sup> The leader of China’s opening-up and reform, Deng Xiaoping, also pointed out that sovereignty cannot be negotiated. Furthermore, in regard to the South China Sea, he said: “China has the most proper right to voice its claim on the issue of the Nansha Islands. The Nansha Islands have been part of China’s territory in history.”<sup>11</sup>

Historical development shows the importance of the sea for China. Accordingly, if China wants to be a powerful nation in the world, it should first become a sea power like Great Britain and the United States. At present, China is a large maritime state rather than a sea power nation. Therefore, it is a necessity for China to now grasp the strategic opportunity of building a sea power nation in order to achieve as quickly as possible the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. “China’s maritime rise is part of our nation’s rejuvenation ... and it is connected to the grand strategy of China’s rise.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Second, maintaining maritime sovereignty and rights**

The sea power strategy is also based on the need to safeguard China’s maritime sovereignty, rights and interests. In recent years, disputes between China and some of its neighboring countries have become increasingly strained, mainly concerning the sovereignty of islands, demarcation of sea areas and exploitation of ocean resources.

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<sup>8</sup> See the Baike entry on the “Zheng He Strategy”: <http://www.baike.com/wiki/>

<sup>9</sup> Sun Zhongshan, *The Complete Works of Sun Zhongshan*, Volume 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> Mao Zedong, “Inscription on the Occasion of Inspecting Naval Troops,” February 21, 1953.

<sup>11</sup> *Military Collection of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Military Science Press, July, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Chen Xiangyang, “China’s Maritime Rise along the Path of Peaceful Development,” January 31, 2013, [http://opinion.China.com.cn/opinion\\_23\\_63923.html](http://opinion.China.com.cn/opinion_23_63923.html)



In the East China Sea, the main dispute is over the sovereignty of Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands. For years, Japan has been attempting to occupy Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands by undertaking a series of actions. One such action was seen on September 10, 2012, when the Japanese government announced its decision to "purchase" Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated Nanxiao Island and Beixiao Island under what Tokyo called "nationalization." This move taken by the Japanese government constitutes a serious violation of Chinese sovereignty. Japan's eagerness to seize Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands is motivated by its political, economic, and military intentions. Strategically located in the East China Sea, the Diaoyu Islands lie en route east to the Pacific Ocean. Japan's attempt to control over Diaoyu Dao would serve to hinder China's access to the Pacific Ocean. Not only this, by claiming Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands, Japan would also come into possession of 740,000 square kilometers of maritime territory in the East China Sea, whereby it would possess the rich resources of the area. Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands have been China's inherent territory since ancient times having first been discovered, named, used, and defended by the Chinese people. There are voluminous materials that have depicted the topography and geography of the Diaoyu Islands in detail, such as *Voyage with a Tail Wind* (Shun Feng Xiang Song) in 1403, *Records of the Imperial Title-Conferring Envoys to Ryukyu* (Shi Liu Qiu Lu) in 1534, and *Records of Messages from Chong-shan* (Zhong Shan Chuan Xin Lu) in 1719. For centuries the Diaoyu Islands have been under the jurisdiction and defense of Chinese governments. In 1561, *An Illustrated Compendium on Maritime Security* (Chou Hai Tu Bian) compiled by Hu Zongxian, a Supreme Commander of the southeast coastal defense, and Zheng Ruozeng, a geographer, marked the Diaoyu Islands as under the jurisdiction of the Ming's coastal defense. The Chinese coastal defense generals Zhang He and Wu Zhen patrolled China's southeast coast and drove away the Japanese pirates in the early years of the Ming Dynasty. This illustrates that the Diaoyu Islands were under the jurisdiction of China's coastal defense and were a coastal front line in the battle against Japanese pirates. Taken by Japan in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, China was forced to sign with Japan the unequal Treaty of Shimonoseki that prescribed the cession of "Taiwan and its surrounding islands," with Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands being included among them. In 1900, Japan changed the name of Diaoyu Dao to Senkaku. However, the ceding of Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands to Japan lost its lawfulness after the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact (also known as the Pact of Paris and officially as the General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy).

The unequal Treaty of Shimonoseki was against the will of the Chinese people. On the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China declared that all the unequal treaties (including the Treaty of Shimonoseki) by previous governments ceased to be effective. In thus doing, it was deemed that the Treaty of Shimonoseki was counter to modern international laws and the UN Charter of 1954. In 1943 and 1945 during World War II, the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation made by the international community solemnly and clearly stated that Japan should return to China all the Chinese territories it had previously grabbed from China. The Chinese government has been adhering to the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, especially in dealing with territorial disputes with Japan, and emphasizing their roles as the legal basis. Meanwhile Japanese government has on many occasions declared that it accepted and abided by the Potsdam Proclamation. In the Japanese Letter of Surrender publicized on August 15, 1945, both Article One and Article Six articulated Japan's promise "to fulfill fully all the commitments of Potsdam Proclamation." In the Sino-Japan Joint Communiqué of September 29, 1972, it reiterated "it will observe Article Eight of Potsdam Proclamation." However, Japan refused to return Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands seized from China. Furthermore, it unilaterally declared the so-called "nationalization" of the Diaoyu Islands, denying any territorial dispute between China and Japan and attempting to make its illegal occupation a *fait accompli*. Japan's illegal action not only breaks its promise of observing the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, but also poses a serious threat to China's territorial sovereignty and integrity. Meanwhile, it is also a serious challenge to the world peace and order established at the end of World War II.

China has solemnly reiterated that the so-called "purchase" of Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands by the Japanese government is unilateral, illegal and invalid. As Chinese former foreign minister Yang Jiechi said, the Japanese move is a gross violation of China's territorial integrity and sovereignty, an outright denial of the outcomes of victory of the world anti-fascist war, and a grave challenge to the post-war international order. In September 2012, China published a white paper that asserted that the Diaoyu Islands are inseparable parts of Chinese territory. The white paper cites a large body of historical literature including documents, books, and maps as evidence for the Chinese ownership of these islands since ancient times.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China White Paper" State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, September 29, 2012, <http://losangeles.china-consulate.org/eng/topnews/t975371.htm>

Recently the issue has become more complicated because of the "Pivot to Asia" policy of the United States, which aims at strengthening its Asia-Pacific alliance so as to prevent China's rise. In June 2013, U.S. Secretary of State Chuck Hagel publicly announced that 60 percent of U.S. naval force and 60 percent of the U.S. air force would be redeployed to Asia and the Pacific area before 2020.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, the U.S. is strengthening its relation with Japan, insisting on placing the Diaoyu Islands within the framework of *The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan* and carrying out large joint military exercises with Japan. It would appear therefore that the U.S. could embolden Japan in making more efforts to confront China. As a matter of fact, Japan has taken a series of unprecedented actions in the military and security field, including pushing for lifting the ban in its Constitution on the right to collective self-defense. This not only poses an obvious threat to regional peace and stability, but also constitutes a major obstacle to China's safeguarding its maritime sovereignty, rights and interests.

Regarding the South China Sea, the disputes are mainly over the sovereignty of islands and exploitation of ocean resources between China and some of the Southeast Asian countries. The attitudes of the related countries on the disputed island sovereignty and demarcation of the adjacent sea areas have become increasingly hardline in these years. Of particular subject to dispute are the Nansha Islands. Recently some countries have even escalated the disputes by taking unilateral measures.

As is the case of the Diaoyu Islands, China also maintains indisputable sovereignty over the islands and adjacent sea areas in the South China Sea. China was the earliest to discover, name, and exercise administrative control of the islands—for which there is sufficient historical and legal evidence and which has been recognized by the international community.<sup>15</sup>

In February 1948, China published *The Map of the Location of the Islands in*

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Symonds, "'Pivot to Asia': US Military Build-up in Asia, Threatening China," The Centre for Research on Globalization, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/pivot-to-asia-us-military-build-up-in-asia-threatening-china/5337361>.

<sup>15</sup> During the Second World War, the Japanese invaded China and occupied most areas of Chinese territory. The Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, as well as other international documents, clearly prescribed that Japan should return to China all the Chinese territories it grabbed, including the Nansha Islands. In December 1946, the Chinese government at that time sent senior officials to the Nansha Islands to attend the official handover ceremony, and the Chinese troops were subsequently stationed on the islands. Also see: "The Handover of the Nansha Islands by Lin Zun's Fleet in 1946," April 13, 2010, <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/85039/11351429.html>

*the South China Sea*—which included the Xisha, Zhongsha, and Nansha Islands in the South China Sea, marking a clear sea border line around them. At that time, none of the Southeast Asian countries had any objections. However, in recent years, some of the Southeast Asian countries have put forward claims to the islands because of their strategic location and the rich resources discovered in the seas around them. While taking activities in the area, some countries have enhanced their ties and cooperation with the U.S., especially in regard to the purchase of military weapons and equipment, conducting of military exercises, and establishment of naval bases aimed at confronting China. All of which serves to make the issue even more complicated. The South China Sea issue not only stands in the way of an improvement of relations between China and some of the Southeast Asian countries, but is also an obstacle to maintaining peace and stability in the region. In sum, in order to safeguard China's maritime sovereignty and rights, as well as to maintain peace and stability in the region, China has to build a sea power nation.

### **Third, promoting sustainable economic development**

Another factor determining China's sea power strategy is that it is necessary for the sustainable development of China's economy. Since the reform and opening up, China's economy has been developing rapidly. However, it also faces many challenges and problems such as a large population, limited arable land, and insufficient oil and gas resources. Indeed, the contradiction between an increasing population and decreasing land resources poses a huge obstacle to China's economic development. The best solution to the major questions of sustainable development therefore lies in developing its ocean economy. According to Xu Litao, "The pace of national development cannot be stopped. Placing greater emphasis on a maritime strategy will decide our future. We must acquire resources, energy, and efficiency from the ocean."<sup>16</sup>

The ocean has become a new site of strategic importance for China's development. According to the 2011 Statistical Bulletin on Economy, under the continental shelf extending thousands of kilometers along the southeast coastline there are rich reserves of oil and gas.<sup>17</sup> Verified oil and gas reserves in the Bohai Sea amount to 3.36 billion cubic meters, while the much larger South China Sea

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<sup>16</sup> Xu Litao, "The 18th Party Congress Puts Forward a New Great Sea Power Strategy in Keeping with the Development Requirements of the Times," *Global Times Blog*, November 8, 2012, <http://bbs.huanqiu.com/forum.php>

<sup>17</sup> "2011 Statistical Bulletin on China's Maritime Economy," *Zhejiang Online*, March 29, 2012, <http://www.zjol.com.cn/zsxq/system/2012/06/25/018606377.shtml>

is estimated to contain still greater oil and gas reserves.

China's ocean economy is developing fast—ranging from not only more traditional ocean industries such as fishery, transport, travel, and salt production, but also a new type of maritime economy that encompasses deep sea oil and gas exploration, ocean biology and medicine, wind energy, solar energy, as well as other new technologies of ocean energy development.<sup>18</sup> China's ocean economy therefore has great potential for future development and is vital to the sustainability of the Chinese economy in years to come. According to China's Ocean Development Report (2009), "The preconditions of going in for a great leap forward in developing China's ocean economy have been ripe."<sup>19</sup>

#### **Fourth, safeguarding sea lines of communication**

The security of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) directly concerns China's national economic development. Safeguarding SLOCs is thus a lasting and extremely important strategic concern. China's coastline is adjacent to the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, and, to the south, the South China Sea close to the Indian Ocean. In an era of globalization, China is reaching out to many parts of the world to facilitate economic, cultural, scientific, and technological exchanges. As of today 90 percent of China's foreign trade is conducted on the seas. Moreover, nearly 60 percent of China's imported crude oil arrives through the Indian Ocean via the Malacca Strait into the South China Sea. However, with numerous choke points and sea areas controlled by other countries, China is not optimistic about the security of the SLOCs upon which it depends.

Though China has some 18,000 kilometers of coastline, the seas surrounding it are largely closed or semi-closed. To the north, the only outlet is the Tumen River which forms the boundary between China, North Korea, and for a small section, Russia. However, facing the Sea of Japan, it is also not easily navigable for much of its length and does not constitute a direct outlet for China.

To the east, meanwhile, forming the eastern limit of the East China Sea, China faces what is known as the island chains. The First Island Chain stretches in an arc from Japan to the Philippines, while the Second Island Chain stretches in an arc from Bonin Island to Mariana Island. There are a number of military

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<sup>18</sup> "We Must Not Go in For a 'Great Leap Forward' in Developing the Ocean Economy," *China Online*, January 31, 2013, [http://opinion.China.com.cn/opinion\\_26\\_63926.html](http://opinion.China.com.cn/opinion_26_63926.html)

<sup>19</sup> *China's Ocean Development Report (2009)* (China Ocean Press, January 2009).

bases on the island chains occupied by foreign powers, which further creates security concerns for China.

To the south, the South China Sea has the most important SLOCs for imports to China with the Malacca Strait being of particular significance. Any blockages of the Malacca Strait, whether caused by piracy and terrorism at sea, natural disasters, domestic disturbances in nearby states, or other contingencies, may pose a threat to China. In fact, piracy has already had to some extent a negative impact on China's transports by sea, notably in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia. What is more, numerous other international strategic waterways and choke points such as the Bab-el Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and the Strait of Hormuz are also in control of other powers.

### **Fifth, modernizing the PLA Navy**

China is in need of enhancing its naval forces. While the Chinese economy is developing rapidly, bolstering the strength of its naval forces has lagged behind. Nowadays, China faces a whole range of traditional and non-traditional maritime threats. In order to safeguard China's maritime sovereignty, rights, and interests—by no means an easy task—China must further strengthen and modernize the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

It is necessary to recognize that profound changes are underway in the way naval battles are conducted. The future battlefield at sea will extend into multi-directional spaces. Remote precision strikes will become critical to warfare. The domination of the sea will mainly depend on the capabilities of cyber warfare. Though the PLA Navy has made some progress in recent years, it still lags far behind the world's sea powers in terms of the level of weapons and the modernization of equipment. For the effective protection of its maritime sovereignty, rights, and interests and to fulfill the need to conduct diversified maritime military operations, the PLA Navy should further effectively enhance its "awareness" of China's surrounding sea areas, advance its modernization, systematically establish patrol mechanisms, speed up the transformation to a new generation of combat capabilities, and develop new and advanced maritime technologies and weapons. In November 2010, Chinese naval ships sailed to the Indian Ocean on a counter-piracy and convoy escort mission, which demonstrated the firm resolve of the PLA Navy to protect the security of SLOCs. However, if China wants to be a sea power, it must also increase logistical support for escort missions.

On April 16, 2013, China published the white paper on *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, in which it was duly confirmed that "The PLA

Navy is China's mainstay for operations at sea, and is responsible for safeguarding its maritime security and maintaining its sovereignty over its territorial seas along with its maritime sovereignty, rights and interests."<sup>20</sup> The white paper also points to the necessity of developing blue-water capabilities for conducting mobile operations, carrying out international cooperation, and countering non-traditional security threats, as well as enhancing its capabilities of strategic deterrence and counterattack. As Professor Hou Xiaohe of the National Defense University has argued: "In the future China will further strengthen its Navy for the purpose of safeguarding maritime sovereignty, rights and interests, and the security of international sea lines of communication. Without a powerful navy, China cannot be a really powerful maritime nation."<sup>21</sup>

In sum, the factors highlighted above—ranging from historical lessons, economic imperatives, and the necessity of securing SLOCs, to the need for a strong and modern navy, and defending China's territorial and maritime sovereignty, rights and interests—are all determining inputs into China's strategy of building a sea power nation.

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<sup>20</sup> "Full Text: The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces," April 16, 2013, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c\\_132312681\\_2.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c_132312681_2.htm)

<sup>21</sup> Hou Xiaohe, "The Four Major Features of China's First White Paper on National Defense with Special Topics," July 17, 2013, [http://military.China.com.cn/2013-04/17/content\\_28566363.htm](http://military.China.com.cn/2013-04/17/content_28566363.htm)

## Implementation: Principles and Measures

Building China into a sea power nation is in fact an arduous and long-term task. It requires practical and effective measures for China to implement its sea power strategy. What then should China do to implement the strategy? First of all, three principles should be observed.

### Principles

The first principle is to insist on peaceful development. Peaceful development is necessary to create a peaceful environment to develop one's own country, and at the same time to promote world and regional peace. Unlike the sea powers and imperial nations of the past, China will resort to peaceful means for developing and utilizing the ocean for peaceful purposes. Accordingly, China and its neighboring countries and other powers should uphold the concept of a harmonious ocean. The concept of a harmonious ocean is to promote harmony between human beings and the seas. It reflects the new characteristics of our era, and it is the only way to meet the challenges and requirements for effective management of the ocean by international society. There will continue to be problems and disputes concerning the ocean, but the option of confrontation in an era of globalization that facilitates exchanges and communication would appear to be improper and outdated. In fact, no country can deal with international threats and crises, especially those of a non-traditional nature, by itself. To quote Xiao Hanqiang: "Our minds should move forward. We should get rid of the idea of seeking hegemony and dividing the ocean. The ocean is the belonging of all human beings."<sup>22</sup> We should strive hard to create a long-standing, peaceful, and stable maritime environment. Therefore, China will adhere to maintaining good relations with its neighbors while creating a conducive environment for peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit.

The second principle is to insist on scientific development. Scientific development is necessary to develop the national ocean economy in a coordinated and balanced way. This not only necessitates developing the ocean economy in coordination with the land economy, but also developing the ocean economy

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<sup>22</sup> "Maritime Power Dream Realizes the Need to Develop a Strategic Plan," January 31, 2013, [http://opinion.china.com.cn/opinion\\_23\\_63923.html](http://opinion.china.com.cn/opinion_23_63923.html)



by factoring in issues of population, resources, and environment. China is currently developing its ocean economy at a rapid pace. However, it is important for China to have a comprehensive plan and to handle the relationship between long-term goals and short-term goals. While focusing on enhancing the capabilities of ocean exploration and utilization, we should better coordinate relations and the dynamics among the ocean industries including setting priorities and improving scheduling so as to avoid delays and inefficiency.

The third principle is to insist on sustainable development. Sustainable development implies promoting a greater degree of harmony between a country's population and the ocean so that the latter can continue to be sustainably used for generations. The ocean not only contains abundant resources, but also plays an important role in regulating the earth's climate. As a large and responsible country, it is incumbent on China to explore and utilize the ocean in an environmentally friendly and orderly way.

China's maritime economy now finds itself at an important turning point; therefore it must take advantage of the newly drawn up maritime strategy to strengthen maritime management, perfect maritime laws and regulations, modernize its naval forces, as well as make the utmost efforts to combat ocean pollution and preserve the ocean's biological environment.

## **Measures**

In line with the principles above, it is necessary for China to uphold them by taking a number of measures.

The first measure is to control disputes. This entails suppressing unstable elements so as to prevent them from escalating. Any confrontation, conflict, or even war may lead to human disaster. Settling disputes requires patience, wisdom, and constraint. Further, ways and means should be sought to establish mutual trust between the parties concerned before solutions are reached. In the process of building a sea power nation, China will keep disputes at bay and prevent them from escalating. China advocates solving disputes through peaceful means, opposing any acts that resort to force. To control disputes, therefore, China could propose the setting up of a cooperative maritime mechanism. This could serve to establish stability and order as well as awareness of common interests, thus preventing disputes from escalating. This may then create favorable conditions for a final solution to a settlement of disputes later on.

The second measure is to engage in dialogue. Dialogue is a key step for controlling and preventing the escalation of a dispute. Whenever there is a dispute, there is a need for dialogue to come to a common consensus. If the parties

concerned all come to the table with good intentions, then mutual understanding can be created and thus a final solution is not difficult to reach. China promotes the settlement of all maritime disputes through dialogue and on an equal footing, believing it is the best way to solve problems. Conducting dialogue can be done in various ways—through different channels and at different levels. In this regard, China is practical, flexible, and proceeds out of good will.

The third measure is to pursue joint exploitation of natural resources. Joint exploitation of natural resources is also an effective solution to the disputes over the sea areas among neighboring countries or, more specifically, prescribing joint exploitation areas and shared interests prior to demarcation agreements. In fact, joint exploitation has become a common practice worldwide. Not only this but joint development and maritime cooperation carry a broader political and strategic significance for regional peace and stability which goes beyond simply economic gains. Efforts in joint exploitation in disputed waters will not only meet mutual needs for energy, but also benefit regional peace and stability.

The fourth measure is to expand maritime cooperation. Indeed, one can observe increasing cooperation between states in international relations today. In this respect there is a large room for maritime cooperation between China and its neighboring countries. One such dimension of cooperation is tackling non-traditional maritime security threats of common interest to different parties and countries, and which can help in paving the way for regional long-term security and stability. China has advocated on many occasions the win-win outcomes that can be achieved through cooperation. For instance, Chinese leaders have expressed the willingness to strengthen maritime cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to make good use of the China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund sponsored by the Chinese government, and to build maritime cooperative partnerships and a “Silk Sea Road” of the 21st Century. In October 2013, China and ASEAN signed the Joint Statement of the 16<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-China Summit on Commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership. It emphasizes that maritime cooperation between China and ASEAN countries has great potential in fields such as ocean economy, environmental protection, search and rescue at sea, combating transnational crimes, maritime communications, ports cooperation, disaster relief, and personnel training.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See copy of the statement at the following link: [http://www.miti.gov.my/cms/documentstorage/com.tms.cms.document.Document\\_a58f0438-c0a81573-26b77801-34c88e58/23rd%20ASEAN%20Summit%20Joint%20Statement%20of%20the%2016th%20ASEAN%20China%20Summit.pdf](http://www.miti.gov.my/cms/documentstorage/com.tms.cms.document.Document_a58f0438-c0a81573-26b77801-34c88e58/23rd%20ASEAN%20Summit%20Joint%20Statement%20of%20the%2016th%20ASEAN%20China%20Summit.pdf)

In conclusion, the essence of China's strategy of building a sea power nation can be summarized as follows. China will develop its maritime economy at the same time as raising its capability of exploiting ocean resources while protecting the ocean ecological environment. It will also seek to develop more advanced maritime technology, enhance maritime management, and build a maritime force on a moderate scale. In safeguarding national maritime sovereignty, security, and interests, it will nevertheless resort to peaceful means to resolve disputes. All in all, building China into a sea power nation will help realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

## **About the Author**

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