Editorial

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The multiple tensions that have existed in the China Seas since the late 2000s, manifested in the inflexibility of narratives relating to sovereign rights or in provocations and skirmishes at sea, have made it necessary to analyse more thoroughly the maritime and foreign policies of the states involved. These analyses are even more important now that power relations are being expressed with more force in the South China Sea as well as the East China Sea in recent years. This is borne out by the firmer action taken by states, such as China's construction of civilian and military infrastructure in the Spratlys, Japan's nationalisation of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in September 2012, and the arbitration proceedings initiated by the Philippines in January 2013. More recently, between October 2015 and May 2016, the United States held three Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOP), indicating that apart from territorial disputes between neighbouring countries, the geopolitical situation in the China Seas is primarily the result of the Sino-American strategic rivalry.

Without aiming to be comprehensive, this special feature studies some aspects of China's policy towards the China Seas. [1] It complements an already rich literature that is difficult to summarise here due to the multisectoral and multidisciplinary nature of the analysed theme. This special feature, consisting of this introduction and four articles by Mathieu Duchâtel, Shinji Yamaguchi, Benoît de Tréglodé, and Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix, attempts to explain the main recent developments in China's policy toward the China Seas, to identify its goals, and to understand its determinants.

The Chinese policy toward the China Seas fits within the dual context of a more ambitious foreign policy seeking to influence the world order through the transformation of some norms and the creation of new institutions, [2] and of a domestic policy aimed at building a genuine maritime power. Gestating since the 1990s, this objective to assert China's power on the seas, either through the modernisation of the Navy or the development of the marine economy, was presented as a priority at the launch of the 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) and the 18th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2012.

China's overall policy toward the China Seas is a complex policy with four main objectives: the first is to claim islands and maritime areas; the second is to strengthen its control over the China Seas in order to more effectively defend its coasts and maritime routes; the third is to assert its power in the context of its strategic rivalry with Japan and the United States; and the fourth is to develop the exploitation of natural resources to meet the needs of its population and its economy. These multiple objectives give free rein to the various and sometimes contradictory initiatives oscillating between firmness, provocation, dialogue, and cooperation, a range that also is explained by the many factors relating to the geography of the China Seas, historical heritages, and the evolution of external and internal policies in China, in neighbouring countries, and in the United States.

Domination or sharing?

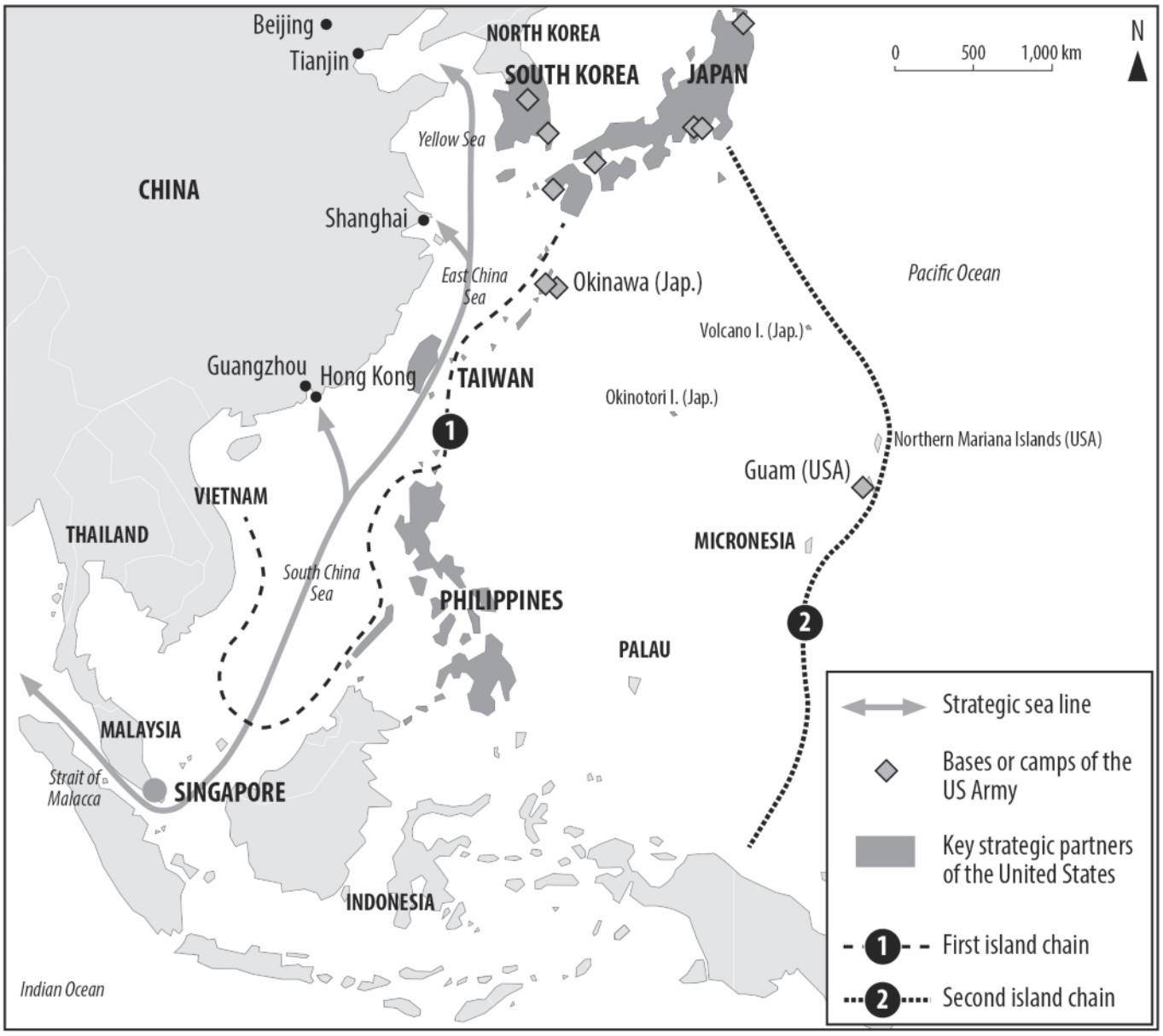
Analysis of China's policy toward the China Seas begins with the consideration of geography. Unlike the United States, bordered by two vast oceans, China is riparian to three semi-enclosed seas: the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea, beyond which lies a peninsular and island arc shared by nine states (see Map 1). This geography is important, because combined with the current US military presence in South Korea, Japan, and the Pacific, and various strategic partnerships forged by Washington with Taiwan, the Philippines, and Singapore, this deepens China's sense of "encirclement," the reality of which is not really in doubt: firstly because it is a device largely inherited from the Cold War; and secondly because one of the main objectives of the United States since the end of the Cold War has been to counter China's ambitions in the China Seas and beyond. [3] From this perspective, we can highlight the impact of the loss of Taiwan, which has twice deprived China of a direct opening to the Pacific.

The result of this geography is a Chinese spatialisation of maritime space characterised by the *jinhai* 近海, which brings together the China Seas, and the *dayang* 大洋, which corresponds to the maritime areas located beyond the "island chain." This spatialisation is at the heart of the redefinition of maritime strategy proposed by Admiral Liu Huaqing in the 1980s, the objective of which, as recalled by Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix in his text, was to develop a navy capable of operating within this island chain before any consideration of broadening its scope to the *dayang*.

This geography also has important implications for the way the Chinese authorities are mobilising the various maritime delimitation principles established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which China signed in 1982 and ratified in 1996. In the case of semi-enclosed seas where the limits of the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of coastal states overlap, Article 74 of UNCLOS advocates seeking "an equitable solution" by "agreement" or, pending a final settlement, the conclusion of "provisional arrangements of a practical nature." [4] On this issue, China's position varies depending on the maritime area in question. In the Yellow Sea and East China Sea, while evoking the principle of equity, China opposes South Korean and Japanese proposals to delimit the maritime boundaries on the principle of the median line (see Map 2). Against Japan, Chinese authorities claim the continental shelf, which is geographically to their advantage, and on that basis submitted, on 14 December 2012, details

1. This special feature corresponds with the publication of oral papers given in the framework of a seminar series entitled "China and the China Seas: Chinese Maritime Policy and Geopolitical Situation in the Maritime Spaces of East Asia," co-organised by the CEFC and Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) from April 2015 to February 2016. As this seminar series received financial support from the CEFC, the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Fonds d'Alembert of the French Institute (Paris), and the Consulate General of France in Hong Kong and Macau, I wish to thank all these institutions. I also extend my thanks to my colleague Jean-Pierre Cabestan, professor and director of the Department of Government and International Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University, for his collaboration in organising and animating this seminar series. The program, consisting of six conferences and a final workshop, is available at www.cefc.com.hk/fr/la-recherche/projets-collectifs/redchina-china-seasred-seminar-series (accessed on 7 September 2016).
2. On this point, see the recent special feature of *China Perspectives* edited by Jean-Pierre Cabestan: "What Kind of International Order Does China Want? Between Reformism and Revisionism," *China Perspectives*, No. 2016/2.
3. See Wen-Lung Laurence Lin, "America's South China Sea Policy, Strategic Rebalancing and Naval Diplomacy," *Issues & Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4, December 2013, pp. 189-228.
4. "UNCLOS, Article 74, Delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone between States with Opposite or Adjacent Coasts," *United Nations Treaty Series*, Vol. 1834, No. 31363, 1994, p. 49. The full text of the Convention is available at www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/closindx.htm (accessed on 7 September 2016).

Map 1 – Strategic environment around the China Seas



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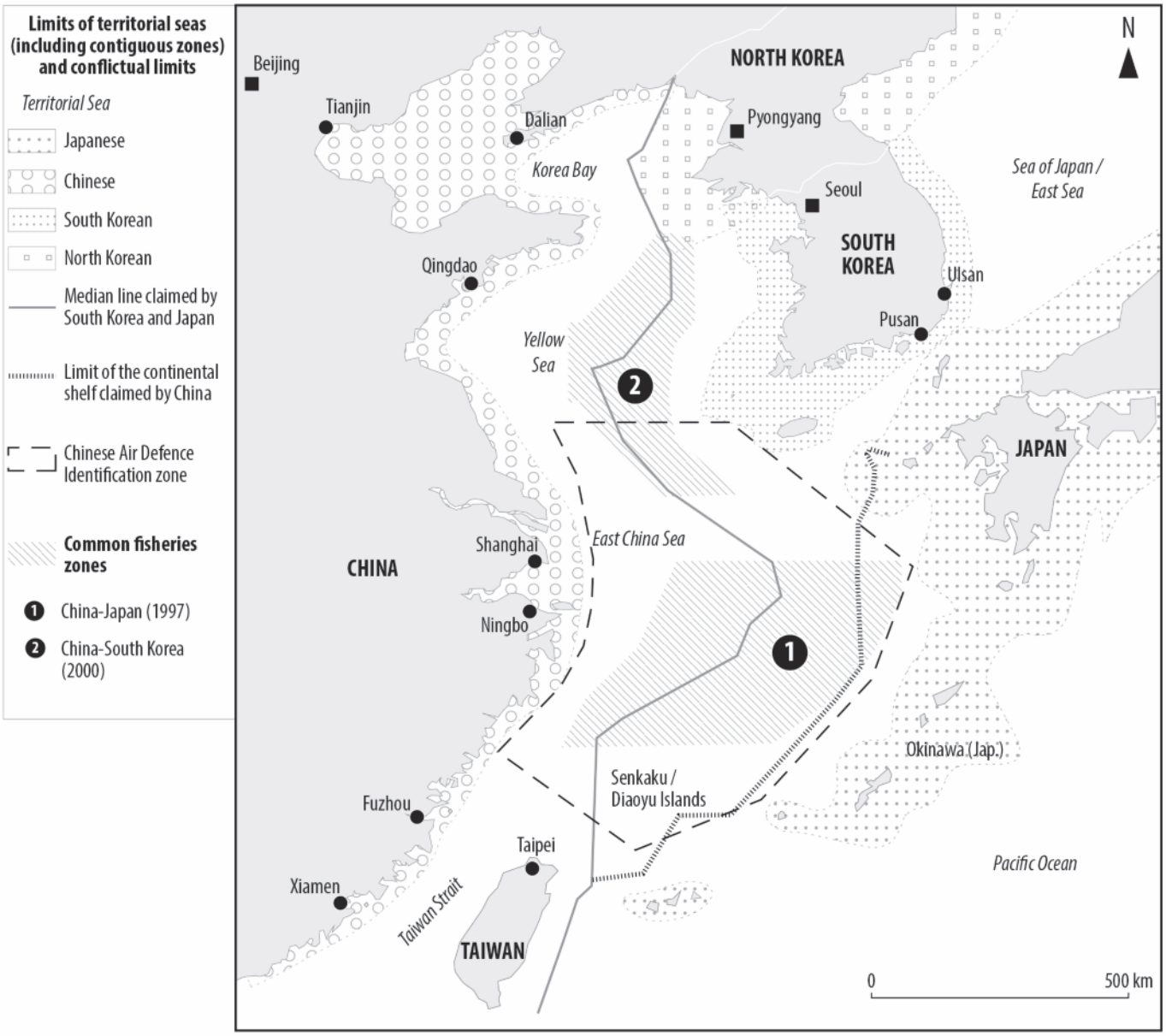
Source: Author's compilation.

of their delimitation project (for the northern part of the continental shelf only) to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) of the Law of the Sea, sparking a lively, but unsurprising, Japanese reaction. [5] Facing South Korea, China is stuck between rejecting the median line and its inability to claim the continental shelf due to the epicontinental nature of the Yellow Sea. In this context, Beijing has opted with Seoul for a "provisional arrangement of a practical nature" via the delimitation in 2000 of a common fishery zone (see Map 2).

To date, the only maritime delimitation established by China is located in the Gulf of Tonkin (see Map 3). It is the result of an agreement signed with Vietnam, also in 2000, in the wake of the 1999 treaty on their land border and on the basis of the Sino-French Convention of 1887. This legal heritage, coupled with the absence of island disputes in the Gulf and the weak strategic nature of the latter, undoubtedly facilitated this single maritime boundary that for a brief time, in the context of the rapprochement between China and ASEAN, created the illusion of a possible change in China's posture toward the South China Sea. Sixteen years later, through land reclamation and constructions of lighthouses, airfields, and other civil and military infrastructure carried out in record time in the Spratly Islands, China has developed, strengthened, and materialised its presence in this space more than ever. Devoid of restraint, these actions on an unprecedented scale are certainly questionable in terms of international law, but they have created a new situation and are probably immovable in the short or medium term. They are as much the realisation of an inherited geopolitical project, originally intended to defend the self-proclaimed sovereignty rights in the Spratly Islands, as the reaction to and anticipation of decisions by the United States or neighbouring states.

5. The project of the Chinese submission and the subsequent exchange of *Notes Verbales* between China and Japan are available at www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/submission_chn_63_2012.htm (accessed on 8 September 2016).

Map 2 – Limits of claims and common zones in Yellow Sea and East China Sea



Source: Sébastien Colin, *La Chine et ses frontières* (China and its borders), Paris, Armand Colin, 2011. Updated by the author.

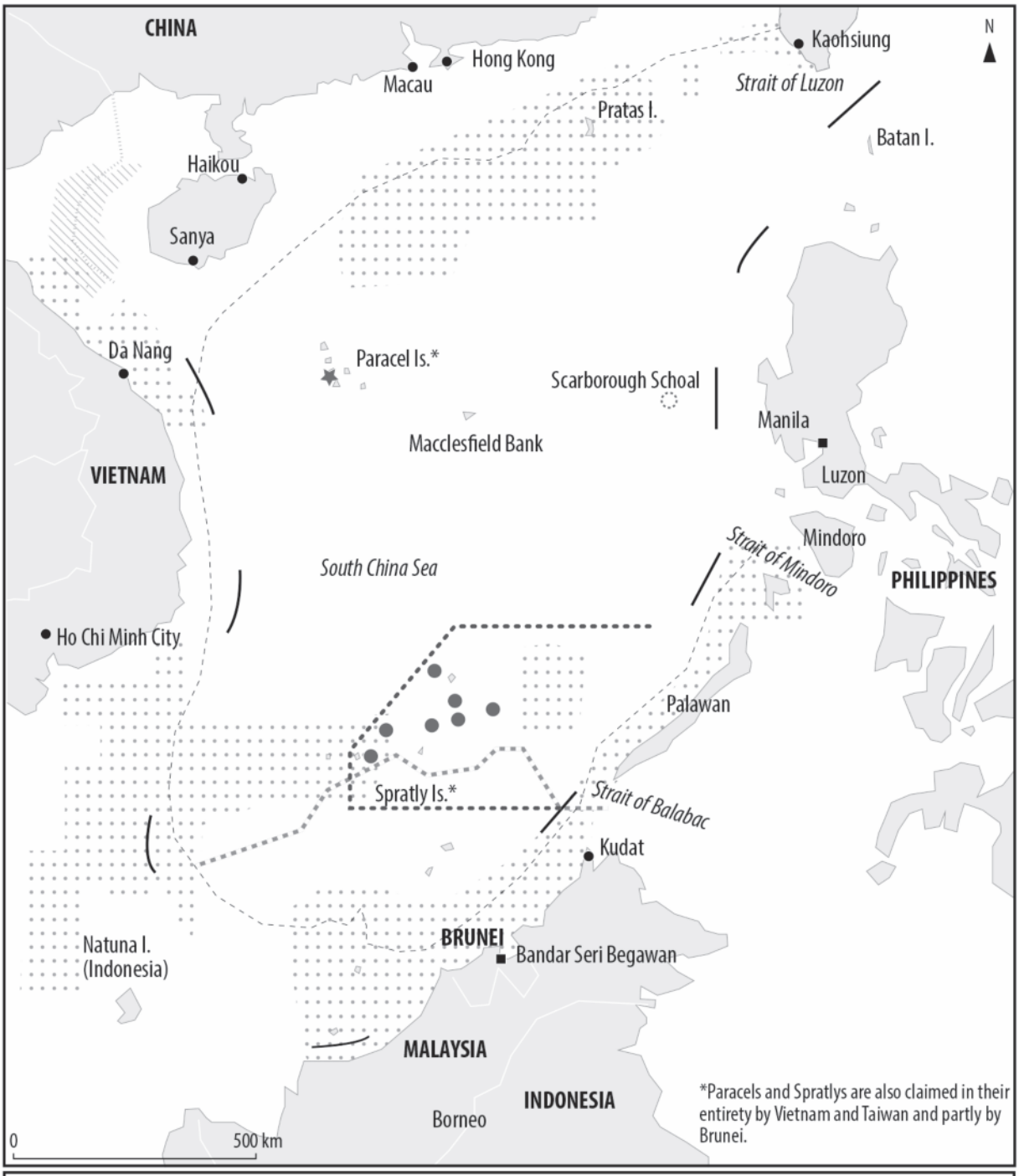
A long-term strategy

A brief overview of the chronology of Chinese initiatives in the South China Sea reflects the existence of a long-term strategy. Having inherited the "U-shaped line" (see Map 3) and territorial claims gradually built during the Republican period, the Communist authorities officially reaffirmed the South China Sea Islands as Chinese territory in September 1958 as part of their "Declaration on the Territorial Sea," [6] and again in February 1992 with the promulgation of the "Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone." [7] Since May 2009 and the joint submission by Vietnam and Malaysia on the limits of their continental shelves, verbal notes sent by the Chinese authorities to the Secretary General of the United Nations and recalling Chinese sovereignty over the islands have multiplied. In the case of the oil rig HYSY981, cited by Shinji Yamaguchi in his article, the arbitration proceedings initiated by the Philippines and Chinese constructions in the Spratlys were particularly conducive to this increase. These various official claims were reinforced by coups and annexations in 1974 (Battle of the Paracels), 1988 (skirmish over the Johnson South Reef), 1994-1995 (annexation of Mischief Reef), and 2012 (takeover of Scarborough shoal). In this context, it is difficult not to see the recent developments as a logical and additional step toward increasing presence in the archipelago, strengthening control over the surrounding maritime areas, and working toward integra-

6. "Declaration of the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea (Approved by the 100th Session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on 4th September, 1958)," printed in *Peking Review*, No. 28, 9 September 1958, p. 21.

7. "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone (Adopted at the 24th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Seventh National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China on February 25, 1992)," Beijing, Legislative Affairs Commission of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 1992. The official text is available online on the Law of the Sea website: www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/CHN_1992_Law.pdf (accessed on 8 September 2016).

Map 3 – China's claims and actions in the South China Sea



Designed by Pascal Orcier © *China Perspectives*, 2016.

Source: Sébastien Colin, "Litiges insulaires et enjeux géopolitiques en mer de Chine du Sud" (Island disputes and geopolitical issues in the South China Sea), in Béatrice Giblin (ed.), *Les Conflits dans le monde. Approche géopolitique* (Conflicts in the world: A geopolitical approach), Paris, Armand Colin, 2016. Updated by the author.

tion of a border region by *fait accompli*. Official support and subsidies received by Hainan fishermen recruited into maritime militias to fish in the disputed areas, [8] as well as the desire to maintain a human presence and develop cruise tourism in the Paracels [9] in the wake of the establishment of Sansha Municipality in 2012, are in my view part and parcel of this strategy.

In the East China Sea, Beijing's claim on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands came later. Officially expressed in December 1971, it actually duplicated the claim made several months earlier by Taiwan, which the PRC had just replaced on the UN Security Council. Although newer and post-1949, we again find something like a legacy of the Kuomintang. Clearly mentioned as territory belonging to China in the Law of 1992 but not in the 1958 Declaration, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands subsequently became subject to ongoing tensions between China and Japan. When the Japanese government announced the "nationalisation" [10] of the islands in September 2012, the Chinese authorities established baselines around them before submitting coordinates to the United Nations. [11] A little more than a year later, in November 2013, Beijing defined an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) covering the islands and almost all of the East China Sea (see Map 2).

By these recent actions, as Mathieu Duchâtel points out in his text, China especially seeks to undermine Japan's administration over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and to develop, through the multiplication of military and civilian patrols, a more regular presence in the entire disputed maritime area. Since the establishment of the ADIZ, these patrols are not only maritime but also, increasingly, airborne, a reminder that the air forces of the People's Liberation Army are now an important actor. In short, China's policy in the East China Sea is, in the words of Mathieu Duchâtel, a "policy of open confrontation" motivated by "a quest for political and territorial gain" and therefore ready "to accept a certain degree of risk." This policy, which also applies to the South China Sea, could seek a status quo, but only if it is likely to freeze a situation generally favourable to China's interests.

Reaction, anticipation

If this long-term strategy aimed at maintaining claims and defending territorial integrity constitutes a framework within which Chinese actions evolve, other factors undoubtedly demonstrate some initiatives that have been taken. This is where the relationship between the actors – whether in the maritime domain and/or in foreign policy, in China or in other countries affected by the disputes – becomes important, as well as political undertakings by neighbouring countries and other existing rivalries and power relations with Japan and the United States. Thus, to cite a few examples, the "Declaration on the Territorial Sea" of September 1958 was also a protest by China vis-à-vis the Convention of the Law of the Sea signed in Geneva a few months earlier. Similarly, while China had not established baselines around the Senkaku/Diaoyu upon its ratification of the Law of the Sea in 1996, the decision of September 2012 was clearly a reaction to/anticipation of the purchase of the islands by the Japanese government.

The extension of the ADIZ beyond the territorial sea that took place a year later did not appear, however, to be a direct response to this "nationalisation." [12] If the new area, including the islands, intends to challenge Japanese "sovereignty," its purpose is primarily military. It aims, in the context of the anti-access/area denial strategy evoked by Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix in his article, to demonstrate a greater military presence inside the first islands chain and in this way to show to Japan and the United States that China has the military capabilities (and confidence) to control this space. Under consideration since the early 2000s, its materialisation in November 2013 was mainly a response to the changing strategic environment around the East China Sea characterised by reform of the Japanese Constitution and the deepening of security relations between Japan and the United States in the context of the American policy of "Pivot to Asia." [13] Xi Jinping's ascent to power and the priority given to building up China as a sea power could be another factor.

As with the project of the ADIZ, the plan to unify various maritime law enforcement agencies in favour of the Coast Guard (*Zhongguo haijing* 中国海警), unveiled in March 2013, [14] had been raised back in the 2000s during the Hu Jintao era without being brought to fruition. [15] As noted by Shinji Yamaguchi in his text, the fact that this plan was implemented after Xi Jinping came to power testifies to Xi's strong influence on China's maritime policy. Despite the difficulties and resistance that can result from such a reform, the unavoidable divergences and interests of different maritime players do not seem to be jeopardising China's overall policy toward the China Seas. Shinji Yamaguchi, like other observers, [16] sees a greater centralisation of decisions and better coordination among maritime actors in recent years under the auspices of a stronger power eager to realise one of its policy priorities. Xi Jinping's visit to the marine militia of Tanmen in Hainan in the month following his enthronement as China's paramount leader could also be a sign of this will toward coordination. [17]

8. Liu Zhen, "Fisher Militia? Maritime Units Put Humble Fishermen on Front Line in South China Sea," *South China Morning Post*, 24 May 2016, www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1951614/fisher-militia-maritime-units-put-humble-fishermen (accessed on 6 September 2016).
9. Liu Zhen, "Yagong Island Was No Place for a Dog, Now It's Home to 400 Trees," *South China Morning Post*, 23 May 2016, www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1948520/yagong-island-was-no-place-dog-now-its-home-400-trees (accessed on 6 September 2016); Liu Zhen, "Sun, Surf and Patriotism… Life as a Tourist Cruising the South China Sea," *South China Morning Post*, 23 May 2016, www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1948479/sun-surf-and-patriotism-life-tourist-cruising-south (accessed on 6 September 2016).
10. This "nationalisation" consisted of the Japanese government's purchase of three islets (Minami-kojima, Kita-kojima, and Uotsuri-jima) that previously belonged to the Kurihara family. The objective of this purchase was to avoid a similar operation proposed in April 2012 by the Governor of Tokyo, the ultra-nationalist Shintaro Ishihara, who wanted to incorporate these three islets into Tokyo municipality, explaining that the Japanese authorities had not defended the "Senkaku Islands" adequately against Chinese claims.
11. "Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhengfu guanyu diaoyudao ji qi fushu daoyu linghai jixian de shengming" (Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China on the baselines of the territorial sea of Diaoyu Island and its affiliated islands), 10 September 2012. China submitted the coordinates of baselines and a marine chart representing them to the United Nations on 13 September 2012. The Chinese version of the text, as well as its English and French translations, are available at www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/STATEFILES/CHN.htm (accessed on 8 September 2012). For the marine chart, see www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/MAPS/chn_mzn89_2012.jpg (accessed on 8 September 2016).
12. Jiagu Richter, Wolfgang Richter, "The 'East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone' of the People's Republic of China: Its Strategic Significance in Light of Growing Regional Tensions," *Asien*, No. 135, April 2015, p. 36.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-46.
14. Wu Jiao and Pu Zhendong, "Nation Merging Maritime Patrol Forces," *China Daily*, 11 March 2013, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-03/11/content_16296627.htm (accessed on 6 September 2016).
15. Masayuki Masuda, "China's Maritime Strategy and Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies: Quest for a Maritime Power," in William Tow et Tomonori Yoshizaki (eds), *Beyond the Hub and Spokes: Australia-Japan Security Cooperation (ANU-NIDS Joint Research Project)*, Tokyo, The National Institute for Defense Studies, NIDS Joint Research Series No. 10, 2014, p. 73, www.nids.go.jp/english/publication/joint_research/series10/pdf/04.pdf (accessed on 6 September 2016).
16. Author's interviews, Beijing, April 2015.
17. Liu Zhen, "Fisher Militia? Maritime Units Put Humble Fishermen on Front Line in South China Sea," *art. cit.*

Finally, although doubts remain as to the actual date on which they were launched, the reclamation work and other construction in the Spratly Islands were probably facilitated and accelerated by the decision of the Philippines to resort to arbitration in January 2013 and by Manila signing the "enhanced defense cooperation agreement" (ECDA) with the United States on 28 April 2014. [18] Signed again as part of the US "Pivot to Asia" policy, one of the objectives of which is to rebalance power relations and limit Chinese influence in Southeast Asia, the ECDA gives the Philippines armed forces access to US Army troops, ships, and aircraft in some Philippine military bases since its ratification by the Supreme Court of the Philippines on 28 July 2016. [19]

It is also legitimate to ask whether these constructions were motivated in anticipation of the arbitration award on the South China Sea, issued by the Permanent Court of Arbitration on 12 July 2016 and the terms of which are largely unfavourable to China. In view of important communication that the Chinese authorities made to the public and to foreign media during preceding weeks, it is clear that the Chinese government was making plans on this issue well in advance. [20]

The arbitration award of 12 July 2016: A future turning point in China's policy in the South China Sea?

While these few introductory pages are not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of the award, it is useful at this point to recall its main conclusions, which emphasise that this award is clearly against Chinese interests. The first conclusion states that there is no legal basis for China to claim historic rights to water resources located within the U-shaped line. The second finds that China's recent actions in the South China Sea (obstruction of Philippines fishing and hydrocarbon exploration, large-scale reclamation work and construction of artificial islands, and failure to regulate its own fishing activities) are in violation of many of the principles of UNCLOS. The third finds that the features occupied by China in the Spratlys are "rocks" or "low-tide elevations," thus prohibiting any delimitation of an EEZ, or even of territorial sea in the case of low-tide elevations. [21]

Not surprisingly, given the position it had taken at the beginning of the arbitration process, China has firmly opposed this award, not only in statements to the media, which are generally limited to qualifying this award as "null and void" and to recalling the "ancient sovereignty" of China over the islands, but also by the publication of a legal argument. [22]

The main question that emerges after the publication of this award is to what extent it will affect (or not) China's policy in the South China Sea. For now, the Chinese authorities continue to maintain a strong military presence [23] and fishermen continue to frequent the disputed areas despite the risks. [24] The questions about current and future Chinese developments on Scarborough Shoal do not seem to indicate a change in posture. [25] The weight of the inheritance, the willingness to build a maritime power, the influence of the military, and the strategic rivalry with the United States are all factors that may anchor this inflexibility for the foreseeable future. In this context, the key to the lull is probably in the hands of neighbouring countries, especially the Philippines, which following Rodrigo Duterte's ascent to power responded to the first wish of Beijing by accepting the resumption of contacts. The visit to Hong Kong in August 2016 of former Philippine President Fidel Marcos, known for his pragmatism vis-à-vis China, seems to constitute a first step. [26]

Exploitation of resources: Room for cooperation?

Although not fully addressed in this special feature, the exploitation of resources is another key aspect of Chinese policy toward the China Seas. In the case of enclosed and semi-enclosed seas, Article 123 of UNCLOS encourages the establishment of coordination or bilateral or multilateral cooperation in fisheries management, protection of the marine environment, and scientific research. [27]

Specifically in terms of fishing, the Chinese authorities are not resistant to compromise and cooperation, as reflected in the three common fishery zones established in the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, and the Gulf of Tonkin (see Maps 2 and 3). In general, fishing has always been a subject of dialogue between China and its neighbours. With Japan and Vietnam, for example, fisheries agreements were negotiated in the 1950s. Bordered by countries that are among the world's largest fish producers and consumers, and with fish stocks in strong decline since the early 1970s, the China Seas are under tremendous pressure, indicating that states have a common interest in cooperating in the management of resources. Nevertheless, beyond the good intentions toward these joint areas, management continually faces political inertia, as shown by Benoît de Tréglodé in his article on the Gulf of Tonkin, or as in the case of the East China Sea, is threatened by Sino-Japanese rivalry and the issue of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. [28]

18. "Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Government of the United States of America on Enhanced Defense Cooperation," *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*, 29 April 2014, www.gov.ph/2014/04/29/document-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement (accessed on 9 September 2016).
19. "US Seeks Access to Philippine Bases as Part of Asia Pivot," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 April 2015, www.smh.com.au/world/us-seeks-access-to-philippine-bases-as-part-of-asia-pivot-20150425-1mt29i.html (accessed on 9 September 2016); Mark Meruenas, "It's Final: SC Affirms Legality of EDCA," *GMA News*, 26 July 2016, www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/575113/news/nation/it-s-final-sc-affirms-legality-of-edca (accessed on 9 September 2016).
20. In Hong Kong, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a special press conference for foreign media encouraging them to present a "more balanced view" of the arbitration. See Song Ru'an (Deputy Commissioner), "Remarks at Briefing on South China Sea for Foreign Press in HK," Office of the Commissioner of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hong Kong SAR, Hong Kong, 13 May 2016.
21. Permanent Court of Arbitration, "Press Release: The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of the Philippines v. The People's Republic of China)," The Hague, 12 July 2016, https://pcacases.com/web/sendAttach/1802 (accessed on 12 July 2016).
22. Chinese society of international law, *The Tribunal's Award in the "South China Sea Arbitration" Initiated by the Philippines is Null and Void*, Beijing, Law Press, 2016.
23. Richard A. Bitzinger, "China's Militarisation of the South China Sea: Creating a Strategic Strait?", *RSIS Commentary*, No. 221, 1 September 2016, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co16221-chinas-militarisation-of-the-south-china-sea-creating-a-strategic-strait/#.V9Z_1sd8OUc (accessed on 1 September 2016).
24. Choi Chi-yuk, "Chinese Fishermen Prepare to Return to Disputed Waters of South China Sea," *South China Morning Post*, 16 July 2016, www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1990387/chinese-fishermen-prepare-return-disputed-waters-south (accessed on 7 September 2016).
25. Minnie Chan, "If China Builds in Scarborough Shoal, It Would Come 'after G20 Summit'," *South China Morning Post*, 13 August 2016, www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2003354/if-china-builds-scarborough-shoal-it-would-come-after (accessed on 8 September 2016); AFP, "Philippines Accuses Beijing of Secret Island Building, Releases Photos of Chinese Boats at Disputed Scarborough Shoal," *South China Morning Post*, 7 September 2016, www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2017130/philippines-accuses-beijing-secret-island-building-releases (accessed on 7 September 2016).
26. Bong Miquiabas, "Fidel Ramos: Duterte's Icebreaker in South China Sea Row," *South China Morning Post*, 12 August 2016, www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2002984/fidel-ramos-dutertes-ice-breaker-south-china-sea-row (accessed on 7 September 2016).
27. "UNCLOS, Article 123, Cooperation of States Bordering Enclosed or Semi-enclosed Seas," *op. cit.*, p. 64.
28. Zou Keyuan, "Sino-Japanese Joint Fishery Management in the East China Sea," *Marine Policy*, No. 27, 2003, p. 136; Clive H. Schofield, Ian Townsend-Gault, "Choppy Waters Ahead in 'a Sea of Peace Cooperation and Friendship'?: Slow Progress towards the Application of Maritime Joint Development to the East China Sea," *Marine Policy*, No. 35, 2011, p. 31.

On the domestic level, delimitation of these areas, one of the main objectives of which is to regulate catches and thus counter overfishing, has had an impact on China's inshore and pelagic fishing sectors. Many fisheries in Guangxi, Hainan, Fujian, and Zhejiang have been forced to reduce their fleet with significant impact on employment but without eliminating illegal fishing. Immense and expanding in the Yellow Sea, Chinese illegal fishing is the main cause of negative perceptions circulating in South Korea about the common fishery zone. Due to the South Korean coastguard's inability to deal with the influx of Chinese trawlers, and despite occasional joint surveillance operations between the two countries, [29] the Yellow Sea is considered by many South Korean observers to be a sea of lawlessness. [30]

This example is symptomatic of the difficulties that China faces in persuading its neighbours to accept its view on the joint development of resources such as fishing or hydrocarbons in the China Seas, perceived rightly or wrongly by neighbouring countries as a way for China to increase its presence in the disputed areas and thus to serve the irredentist cause. A major difficulty in analysing Chinese policy in the China Seas is the sometimes blurred relationship between the exploitation of resources and political objectives. If the installation of the CNOOC's oil rig HYSY981 off the Paracels in 2014 had a political objective, as Shinji Yamaguchi shows, the actions of the Chinese fishermen who do not belong to the militias are motivated less by the desire to defend sovereignty than by food security and economic imperatives. [31] This complexity is of course exemplified by the role of economic actors such as fisheries and oil companies, but also by the role of coastal provinces, where the maritime economy represents an important part of their development. Forced to reduce their inshore fishing fleet in order to fight against overfishing, these provinces now subsidise and develop fishing in distant waters, indirectly encouraging illegal fishing in neighbouring EEZs and disputed waters. [32]

Despite these difficulties and these different issues, economic cooperation is more than ever in Chinese eyes the only way to maintain or restore trust with neighbouring countries. It is therefore no wonder that the Chinese side proposed a joint exploitation of fishery resources around the Scarborough Shoal during Fidel Ramos' visit to Hong Kong. [33] Another illustration of the ambivalence of this policy is Xi Jinping's launch of the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" initiative, which aims to promote economic and cultural exchanges in Southeast Asia, while reclamation work was underway or about to be initiated in the Spratly Islands.

To conclude this introductory analysis, two major characteristics relating to the situation in the China Seas can be highlighted. The first is that unlike previous cycles of tension, the current one seems set for a longer duration. The second is that the US policy of "Pivot to Asia" and the arbitration award have helped to internationalise the dispute in South China Sea, a trend that China has always resisted and that now puts the Chinese authorities at the centre of attention and criticism at a time when they hope to play a growing role on the international stage.

The four articles that structure this special feature each shed light in their own way on Chinese policy toward the China Seas. They discuss security issues, actors' strategies, cooperation, and naval power.

In the first article, Mathieu Duchâtel focuses on China's role in negotiations to establish a maritime and air communication mechanism with Japan in the East China Sea. He stresses that from the Chinese point of view, these negotiations are primarily a tool for securing foreign policy objectives related to sovereignty and its power rivalry with Japan rather than to build security and stability. According to Mathieu Duchâtel, the socialisation of China to norms aimed at building confidence in the security sphere has made little progress, while the risk of incidents in the East China Sea is increasing.

In the second article, Shinji Yamaguchi explores the strategies of Chinese maritime actors in the South China Sea. He wondered whether China's various initiatives taken since 2009 are based on a well-coordinated plan or are merely the consequences of competition between these actors motivated by their own interests. The author defends the first hypothesis by pointing out that institutional coordination is improving, especially since Xi Jinping's rise to power.

A third article by Benoît de Tréglodé relates to Sino-Vietnamese cooperation in the Gulf of Tonkin, which began in 1994 with negotiations over the delimitation of the maritime boundary and then expanded, following agreements signed in 2000, to fisheries, hydrocarbon exploration, and maritime security. The author finds the results of these first 16 years of Sino-Vietnamese cooperation to be quite limited in terms of their realisation. Nevertheless, he believes that for China the interest in cooperation with Vietnam lies elsewhere, especially as a means for the Chinese authorities to test new forms of dialogue and to lend credibility to their narratives of cooperation in the exploitation of resources elsewhere in the South China Sea. The Gulf of Tonkin seems therefore to serve largely as an experimental area for China's maritime policy in Southeast Asia.

Finally, in a fourth article, Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix focuses on China's naval power, which has now expanded its field of action beyond the limits of coastal waters and the China Seas. He cites the modernisation of military equipment, including aircraft carriers, and new naval missions. According to him, if China is a naval power, that power is not global. Still centred on the China Seas, its scope is regional, but nevertheless with strong ambitions and growing projections into the Pacific and Indian oceans, with the main objective of deterring US military intervention in a conflict with Taiwan or in the China Seas, and protecting its maritime trade.

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