China’s Sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands: A Historical Perspective

Jianming Shen

I. Introduction

Shortly after I wrote my article on the territorial disputes over the South China Sea Islands in 1996, which was published in Hastings International and Comparative Law Review in 1997, I began to engage in follow-up studies of the same subject matter on an on-and-off basis. My plan was to undertake extensive research and writing projects that would yield a few research papers and eventually lead to a scholarly book. Largely due to the lack of funding, among other reasons, I had to cut short my plan. Nevertheless, thanks in part to a research grant from the University of Hong Kong, I was able to reduce part of my follow-up studies to three draft papers. The first of these, titled “Territorial Aspects of the South China Sea Islands Disputes,” was presented at a conference in New York City in February 1997, and was later published in a book by Martinus Nijhoff Publishers in 1998. The second paper, also finished in 1997, was in Chinese, and was titled “On China’s Sovereignty over the Xisha and the Nansha Islands.” The third one, drafted between 1998 and 1999, was presented at an international seminar held in Macau in April 1999 and included in a collection of conference papers. In writing the present article, I

---

have freely drawn upon my earlier research and writings, with necessary modifications and updates, of course.

Although my projected in-depth research on the South China Sea Islands disputes has come to a halt, I am satisfied that my past research and writings on the subject have proved to be useful. My article in the Hastings Review has been not infrequently cited or referred to in non-Chinese legal literatures. More importantly, I am pleased to have read the Chinese and English versions of the Chinese Foreign Ministry’s 2000 document on “The Issue of South China Sea” that add affirmative support to my personal writings and position.

Since 1996, little substantive progress, not surprisingly, has been achieved towards the resolution of the disputes. Media attention to and legal


6 Ministry of Foreign Affairs People’s Republic of China, The Issue of South China Sea (June 2000) [hereinafter FM-PRC, The Issue of South China Sea]. The document contains five parts:


commentaries on the disputes, however, have continued to flourish. Recently the journal *Ocean Development & International Law* even devotes an entire issue to the South China Sea Islands disputes. Nevertheless, the nature and essence of the territorial disputes over the South China Sea Islands, particularly as to the merits of China’s claims, continue to have been largely ignored and/or distorted, both before and after 1996. Misstatements about the South China Sea are almost everywhere. It has been stated, for example, that the *Xisha* (Paracel) island group “was occupied by the former regime of South Vietnam until the PRC took it by force in 1976,” although in fact the group was in Chinese control until South Vietnam began its invasions and occupations in the 1950’s through early 1970’s; further, China regained her control and occupation in 1974, not in 1976. Another example is that in June 2001 *The Washington Times* reported that “[t]he Chinese military occupation of the disputed Spratly Islands...is part of Beijing’s strategy of expanding its sovereignty claims further from its coasts as part of what...is an ‘island chain’ strategy.” In still another instance, a commentator alleges: “[China’s] near disputed Spratly islands,” AFX News, June 26, 2001; “Vietnam asserts “undeniable sovereignty” over Spratly and Paracel Islands,” BBC Monitoring, Dec. 29, 2000; “Philippines investigating alleged Spratly encroachment by Malaysia,” Agence Fr.-Presse, Sept. 13, 1999; “No need for middleman to resolve Spratly issue,” The New Straits Times, Jan. 16, 1999, 02.


assertion of its claim over the Mischief Reef...is an educative case study of how China doggedly pursues its irredentist territorial claims - by stealth, if possible, and by other means, including force, if necessary."\textsuperscript{12} Statements such as the above tend to show, if not bias, at least the lack of knowledge of the truth.

Indeed, there seems to have been widespread anti-China propaganda among and by some politicians, commentators and journalists in the West and certain parts of Asia, possibly by reason of conspiracy, bias, misinformation, or otherwise, to have put much of the blame for the disputes on China as if it were China that was the invader or that had caused the troubles. This article, from a historical perspective, and partly based on materials newly available to me since 1996 (including some photographed pages of relevant Chinese historical books reproduced here as evidentiary exhibits), aims at neutralizing the effects of such ignorance and/or distortions by reexamining how the disputes arose, and why China possesses sound and solid sovereignty claims to the disputed areas that should prevail over the claims of competing States. By focusing on the historical aspects of China's sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands in the present article, I am leaving for another day the other aspects of the disputes, including the claims that have been made by, and arguments that have been developed for, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei, the scope and method of delimitation of territorial seas, contiguous zones, continental shelf and exclusive economic zones in the South China Sea, as well as the legal nature and status of the remaining portions of the water areas within China’s U-shaped line of boundary.

II. Brief Overview of The Disputes

II.A. The Disputes and the Disputants

The South China Sea disputes center on two major areas: the Nansha Islands (the Spratly Islands) and the Xisha Islands (the Paracel Islands). The Nansha Islands consist of more than 230, perhaps as many as over 400, islands, cays, reefs, atolls, banks and shoals, and are dispersed over some 250,000 square km of the South China Sea. None of these islands and other features is permanently inhabitable. Sovereignty over these islands or some of them and other features has been hotly contested by five nations—China (including the local authorities in Taipei), Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. Currently, the local Taipei authorities remain in control of the Taiping Island (the Itu Aba Island), the largest island of the island group, and its surrounding

area; about seven of these islands, reefs and atolls are in the Chinese mainland's possession; more than twenty are being occupied by Vietnam, two by Malaysia, and about eight by the Philippines. Of these contesting parties, China and Vietnam claim sovereignty of the Nansha Islands in their entirety. The Philippines lays claim to some 60 reefs, cumulatively called the Kalayaan chain, while Malaysia contests the sovereignty of seven smaller islands. The claims of the Philippines and Malaysia overlap with each other's, as well as with those of China and Vietnam. Further, Brunei also claims a small portion of the area that overlaps with the demands of every other claimant.

The Xisha Islands consist of more than 20 islands, cays, atolls, reefs banks and shoals lying about 150 nautical miles south of Hainan Island, China. These islands, often partly inhabited with seasonal Chinese visitors and settlers, had been grounds for fishing and other economic activities by Chinese fishermen throughout history until South Vietnam's invasion in the 1950's the early 1970's. This island group is claimed in its entirety by both China (including her Taiwan Province) and Vietnam, but has been firmly under Chinese control and administration since the battle at sea in 1974 between China and South Vietnam.

II.B. The Roots and Present Status of the Disputes

China's sovereignty over the Nanshas and other island groups in the South China Sea was not challenged until the arrivals of invading powers. The Chinese government in different eras always treated these islands as China's own. Basically speaking, China enjoyed peaceful and uninterrupted control over the South China Sea Islands and the surrounding waters until the 1930's when France seized the opportunity to occupy and "annex" several islands in the South China Sea. This took place at a time when the Chinese government was preoccupied with internal conflicts and threatened by the full-scale Japanese aggression, and was therefore unable to effectively defend herself except for lodging the strongest possible protests to the French government time and again.  

After the Pacific War broke out, Japan replaced the French and took over the entire South China Sea chain of islands (as well as Hainan Island) in 1939, placing them under the jurisdication of Taiwan, which was then administered by Japan. Following Japan's surrender in 1945, the Chinese Government formally regained physical possession of the Nanshas and other

14 Ibid., 43.
islands in the South China Sea in 1946. France, and later Vietnam, subsequently re-asserted claims to the Xisha and Nansha Islands, but their claims were specifically rejected by the Chinese Government.

It is worth noting that at the San Francisco Peace Conference held in 1951, Japan formally renounced all of its claims to the South China Sea Islands. China did not participate in the Conference, but Premier Zhou Enlai issued a statement reiterating China’s unquestionable sovereignty over these islands and warning against any arrangement at the Conference that might be aimed at challenging or affecting China’s sovereignty. In his address at the San Francisco Peace Conference on September 5, 1951, the Soviet representative, Andrei Gromyko, Deputy Foreign Minister of the then Soviet Union, appealed to recognize the “full sovereignty” of the “Chinese People’s Republic” over “Taiwan (Formosa), the Penhuletao Islands (the Pescadores),” the Xisha Islands and the “the Nanshaasunao Islands including the Spratly.” Both France and Vietnam were represented at the Peace Conference and made claims to the South China Sea Islands, but such claims were ignored at the conference in particular and by the international community in general.

Along with the gradual realization and recognition of the geographical, economic and strategic importance of the South China Sea, particularly the Nansha Islands, the potential for confrontation around this area became

15 Ibid., 43-44.
16 Ibid., 45. See also Shen, “Territorial Aspects,” above n.2, 177-86.
17 The United States had intended to invite the Nationalist authorities in Taiwan to participate in the San Francisco Peace Conference, but the United Kingdom insisted that the Government of the People’s Republic of China should represent China at the Conference. As a compromise between the U.S. and the U.K., neither the legitimate Chinese government on the mainland nor the Nationalist regime in Taiwan was invited. China considers the Peace Conference and the resulting Peace Treaty, without the participation of China as the biggest victim and the main battle field of the Far East War, is null and invalid. India and Burma boycotted the Conference in protest of this unfair treatment. The Soviet Union attended the Conference, but its various proposals were rejected. As a result, the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia refused to sign the Peace Treaty. See He Chunchao, ed., Guoji Guanxi Shi, A History of International Relations—1945-1980 (1986), 142.
20 The South China Sea is important for (1) the rich fishing grounds it contains, (2) the sea lanes through the Nanshaas through which commercial and military vessels must
emerged, ultimately leading to a complex web of rivalries for and assertions of sovereignty over the Nansha, the surrounding waters and the living and non-living resources in the area. In mid 1950s, the Philippines claimed to have discovered the so-called Kalayan islands and declared them to be Philippine territory. In the mean time, Vietnam began to occupy some islands in both the Xisha group and the Nansha group in the 1950s and 1960s. Competing claims and occupations accelerated in late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, with Malaysia and Brunei also joining the race. These newly emerged claims, challenges and occupations have led to a few isolated conflicts.

The battle of 1974 between China and South Vietnam around the Xishas enabled China to regain control over this island group. In February and March 1987, the Chinese and Vietnamese naval forces exchanged fire within the area of the Nansha Islands, causing casualties to both sides. In March 1988, another major military encounter occurred between China and Vietnam around the Chigia Jiao atoll (Johnson Reef) and the Yongshu Jiao reef (Fiery Cross Reef), causing the sinking of three Vietnamese vessels and the loss of 74 lives. In 1995, military confrontation took place between China and the Philippines when Filipino forces dispatched ten aircraft and three patrol boats near the Meiji Jiao Reef (Mischief Reef) area where the Chinese fishery administration was constructing shelters for Chinese fishermen who habitually engage in fishing production there. Meanwhile, despite China's strong and persistent protests, other claimants, particularly Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia, have stepped up their military and nonmilitary activities in the South China Sea in order to back up their respective claims. The Philippines have on numerous occasions destroyed Chinese installations and fishing vessels on or near certain islands and reefs in the Nansha group and the Huang
Yan Island (Scarborough Shoal), and wounded, detained, arrested, prosecuted and/or released Chinese fishermen who use the Nansha area as their traditional fishing fields, and otherwise entered into conflicts with China’s claims. 28 Malaysia is reported to have recently constructed structures on the Yuya Ansha shoal (Investigation Shoal) and the Boji Jiao reef (Erica Reef). 29 Vietnam has reportedly planned to set up an administrative office on the Nansha Islands, 30 and has even decided to hold elections on the islands it occupies within the Nansha group. 31 While most claimants have openly proposed or supported the idea of a common code of conduct in the South China Sea, 32 Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia have nevertheless continued to engage in various conducts inconsistent with the spirits of the proposed code. In essence, these claimants, by way of a proposed code or otherwise, appear to have always attempted to prevent China from doing something which is exactly what they have been doing.

III. Historical Analyses

As I pointed out several years ago, China’s claims to the South China Sea Islands and the adjacent waters are supported by both historical facts and rules of international law pertaining to the acquisition of territorial


China has always taken the Nansha Islands, the Xisha Islands, Zhongsha Islands (Macclesfield Banks) and Dongsha Islands (Pratas Reefs) and the adjacent waters as part of the Chinese territory and waters. She established and has maintained her sovereignty over these island chains by ways of discovery, naming, mapping, patrol and control, public and private use, administrative allocation of jurisdiction, and other manifestations of authority throughout history.

III.A. Discovery

China was the first to have discovered the islands in the South China Sea. Chinese history books contain numerous references to the Chinese people’s knowledge and actual use of the South China Sea throughout history.

In Yi Zhou Shu (《逸周书》, Scattered Books of the Zhou Dynasties) written in the early Qin Dynasty, it was recorded that “in the Xia Dynasty [21st century-16th century B.C.] the tributes from the South Sea [by the southern “barbarians” to the Xia rulers] were zhuji dabei [珍珠大贝, pearl-carrying shellfish],” turtles and hawksbill turtles, and these tributes continued through the Shang Dynasty (16th century-11th century B.C.), the Zhou Dynasties (11th century-221 B.C.) (comprising the West Zhou (11th century-

---

33 See Shen, “International Law Rules,” above n.1; id, “Territorial Aspects,” above n.2. My previous studies and the present article have so far referred to China’s claims to or sovereignty over the disputed islands or island groups in the South China Sea and the surrounding waters or adjacent waters. That is, I have not dealt with specific issues relating to the nature and status of the waters within China’s traditional ocean boundary in the South China Sea. For a recent and fairly balanced analysis of China’s historic rights within the U-shaped line in the South China Sea, see Zou, above n.9, 159-164.

34 The original title of the books was Zhou Shu. Books from the Qin Dynasty which were not officially adopted in the education system of the West Han Dynasty and therefore scattered among the private were called yi shu (literally “scattered books”). The Zhou Shu volumes were among such scattered Qin books. They were therefore re-titled Yi Zhou Shu. See Ci Hai, Ban (Suoyin Ben) (A Lexicographical Dictionary, literally “The Sea of Words,” [hereinafter Ci Hai] (1979), 1059.
According to *Yi Zhou Shu*, six southern “barbarian” peoples were ordered to contribute “pearl-carrying shellfish” (珠玑, *zhuji*), “hawksbill turtles” (玳瑁, *daimao*) and other rarities to the rulers of the *West Zhou* Dynasty. *Daimao* was described in *Nanzhou Yiwu Zhi* (《南州異物志》, Records of Rarities of the Southern Territories) as “living in the southern sea” (“生南方海中,” *sheng nan fang hai zhong*), which denotes the *Xisha* and the

---

103 Shen, China’s Sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands

771 B.C.) and the *East Zhou* (770-221 B.C.), and the *Qin* (221-206 B.C.) and *Han* (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) Dynasties (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1

According to *Yi Zhou Shu*, six southern “barbarian” peoples were ordered to contribute “pearl-carrying shellfish” (珠玑, *zhuji*), “hawksbill turtles” (玳瑁, *daimao*) and other rarities to the rulers of the *West Zhou* Dynasty. *Daimao* was described in *Nanzhou Yiwu Zhi* (《南州異物志》, Records of Rarities of the Southern Territories) as “living in the southern sea” (“生南方海中,” *sheng nan fang hai zhong*), which denotes the *Xisha* and the

---


* Ibid., 35-36.*
Nansha Islands in the South China Sea. Indeed, 

Indeed, zhuji, dabei and daimao are all produces of the Xisha and the Nansha Islands.

The famous Shi Jing (The Classics of Poems), a collection of classics of poems of the Spring and Autumn Period (475-221 B.C.), also made a reference to the South China Sea: "Yan yu Nan Hai" ( "言于南海," orders or words [from the Chu rulers] to the South Sea), another indication that the Chinese rulers and people were at least aware of Nan Hai or the South China Sea Islands more than two thousand years ago. This knowledge (and necessarily discovery) of Nan Hai may be "corroborated" by a similar reference to it in Zuo Zhuan (Zuo’s Commentaries), another set of classics of the Spring and Autumn Period believed to be authored by Zuo Qiuming, a well-known historian of Confucius’ contemporary. Here, it was stated that "Hehe Chu Guo, fu you man yi, yan zheng Nan Hai, yi shu zhu Xia." Xia is the abbreviated form of Hua Xia, another name for Zhong Guo or China. When properly translated, the quoted passage means that "the illustrious Chu State appeased the barbarians to make expeditions to the South China Sea [islands], in order to make them belong to the various parts of China."

Still another relevant set of classics of the Spring and Autumn Period titled Guo Yu (Statements of the States), also believed to have been authored by Zuo Qiuming, which contained statements of nobles of the West Xia Dynasty and the various states in the Spring and Autumn Period, similarly referred to the South China Sea and its islands in the following words:

"Hehe Chu Guo, er jun lin zhi, fu zheng Nan Hai, xun ji zhu Xia"—meaning that "The illustrious Chu State was commanded by its emperor; it appeased [the barbarians] and made expeditions to the South China Sea [islands]; and its commands reached various parts of China”.

The above passages provide sufficient evidence that the South China Sea Islands were already destinations of Chinese expeditions and targets of conquests during the East Zhou Dynasty (770-221 B.C.), which comprised the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) and the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), suggesting that the South China Sea Islands might have been discovered by the Chinese in an even earlier era. Such discovery and

---

37 Ibid., 36.
38 Shi Jing (The Classics of Poems), quoted in Wang Hengjie, above n.35, 36.
40 Guo Yu (Statements of the State), quoted in Wang Hengjie, above n.35, 36.
conquest has naturally led the Chinese rulers and people to believe that the South China Sea Islands were part of China throughout history, from the Xia Dynasty (21st–16th centuries B.C.) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).41

III.B. Naming

China was the first to have named the South China Sea and the island chains therein.

In the era surrounding the West and East Zhou Dynasties (1066-221 B.C.), Chinese rulers called the South China Sea Nan Hai (南海, The South Sea).42 In the Qin Dynasty, Emperor Qin Shihuang used the term “San Shen Shan” (三神山, Three Mysterious Groups of Islands) to refer to the islands and reefs in the South China Sea.43

Beginning with the East Han Dynasty (23-220), China adopted the alternative name Zhang Hai (涨海, The Rising Sea) for the South Sea, and named the island chains in the South Sea Zhanghai Qitou (涨海崎头, literally Islands and Atolls in the Rising Sea). The term qitou (崎头) was the generic name used by ancient Chinese to denote islets, reefs, shoals and the like in the oceans. Zhanghai Qitou collectively refers to the South China Sea Islands.44

In the Jin Dynasties (265-420) and pre-Jin era, the islands and reefs in the South China Sea were specifically referred to as Shanhu (珊瑚洲, Coral Islands and Reefs).45

In the Tang (618-907) and North and South Song (960-1279) Dynasties and afterwards, the Xisha and the Nansha island groups were variously referred to with the following names:

(1) Jiuru Luozhou (九乳螺洲, referring to the Xisha Islands);
(2) Qizhou Yang (七洲洋, referring to the Xisha Islands);
(3) Changsha (长沙, generally referring to the Xisha Islands);
(4) Shitang (石塘, generally referring to the Nansha Islands);
(5) Shichuang (石床, also generally referring to the Nansha Islands);
(6) Qianli Changsha (千里长沙, generally referring to the Xisha Islands);
(7) Wanli Shitang (万里石塘, generally referring to the Nansha Islands);

42 See above n.38-40 and accompanying text.
43 See Han Zhenhua, Nanhai Zhudao Shi Di Yanjiu (Studies on the History and Geography of the South China Sea Islands) (1996) [hereinafter Han Zhenhua, 1996], 53, quoting Han Shu (《汉书》, Books of the Han), vol. 25 (Jiao Si Zhi, 郊祀志).
44 See FM-PRC, The Issue of South China Sea, Pt 2, above n.6.
45 See below n.78-82 and accompanying text.
Depending on the context in which each term appeared, *Changsha* and/or its variations generally referred to the *Xisha* Islands, but they sometimes denoted the *Nansha* group; similarly, *Shitang* and/or its variations symbolized the *Nansha* island chain in most cases, although they were also used to represent the *Xisha* chain in some other cases. In still some other cases, a term was used to denote the entire South China Sea Islands, including the *Nansha* group. For example, the Chinese Foreign Ministry states:

Wang Dayuan . . . wrote about the Nansha Islands in his . . . Abridged Records of Islands and Barbarians in these words: “The base of Wanli Shitang originates from Chaozhou. . . .” Wanli Shitang here refers to all the islands in the South China Sea, including the Nansha Islands.47

The Ming Dynasty continued to use some of the above-listed names for the South China Sea Islands. In an atlas entitled *Hunyi Jiangli Lidai Guodu zhi Tu* (《混一疆理历代国都之图》, Consolidated Map of Territories and Geography and Capitals of Past Dynasties) prepared in 1402 by Li Hui and Quan Jin of the Ming Dynasty, for instance, the South China Sea islands were all included within the boundary of China. On the map, there are three places in the South China Sea respectively marked “Shitang,” “Changsha” and another “Shitang.” “From the geographical locations [of these places] as marked on the Map,” as the Chinese Foreign Ministry properly states, the first *Shitang* denotes the *Dongsha* Islands, *Changsha* denotes the *Xisha* Islands, and “the second *Shitang* denotes today’s *Nansha* Islands.”48

In the Qing Dynasty, the South China Sea Islands continued to be known as “Qianli Changsha,” “Wanli Shitang,” or their variations, for a considerable period of time. The Chinese people even named specific islands and reefs of

46 See below n.136-144 and accompanying text.
47 FM-PRC, The Issue of South China Sea, Pt 2, above n.6. See also below n.69-70 & 83-84 and accompanying text.
48 FM-PRC, The Issue of South China Sea, Pt 2, above n.6. See also Liu Nanwei, “The Naming of the South China Sea Islands in Ancient China,” in Selected Papers, above n.35, 83-91, at 84; Wang Liyü, “Shiyong yu Nanhai Zhudao Zhuquan Guishu Wenti de Guojifa Guize” (Rules of International Law Application to the Issue of Sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands), in Selected Papers, above n.35, 15 ff., 23 (concluding that on the same map, the mark Changsha denotes both the *Xisha* and *Zhongsha* Islands, while the two marks of Shitang respectively refer to the *Dongsha* and the *Nansha* Islands).
the Xisha and Nansha island groups. For instance, the Road Map (《更路簿》, Geng Lu Bu) drawn up in the Qing Dynasty “marks the specific locations of all the islands, reefs, shoals and isles of the Nansha Islands which fishermen of China’s Hainan Island have traditionally been frequenting, including 73 named places of the Nansha Islands.”\(^49\) Having always considered the South China Sea Islands as her own, the Qing Government exercised her right and power to rename 15 major islands and islets in the year of 1909.\(^50\) Stone markers were erected there, Chinese flags were raised and cannon-shooting ceremonies were held to re-demonstrate China’s sovereignty over the islands.\(^51\)

The above noted naming and renaming took place long before the other claimants began to even make a claim.\(^52\)

In the Republic of China era (1911-1949), the Nansha chain of islands and reefs were officially renamed Tuansha Qundao (團沙群岛) and later Nansha Qundao (南沙群岛), and the Xisha group the Xisha Qundao (西沙群岛). The Nationalist’s Government organized three rounds of large-scale survey and renaming activities respectively in 1932, 1935 and 1947. The 1935 round renamed 132 islands, reefs and banks in the South China Sea, and the 1947 round renamed 159.\(^53\)

The People’s Republic of China, since 1949, has continued to adopt the official names for the four major island groups in the South China Sea. On April 24, 1983, as part of the nation-wide process of standardization of geographic names, the Chinese Place Name Commission published an incomplete list of standard names for 287 islands, reefs, banks and shoals in the South China Sea.\(^54\) The process of renaming or standardizing the names for specific islands and other features in the South China Sea is a continuing one, and is fully within China’s sovereignty power over them.

III.C. Boat Building, Expeditions and Voyages

Thanks to her relatively advanced boat-building techniques, China was the first to have made expeditions and voyages to and across the South China Sea Islands.

\(^{49}\) FM-PRC, The Issue of South China Sea, Pt 2, above n.6.

\(^{50}\) See below n.148-149 and accompanying text.


\(^{53}\) See below n.118-119 and accompanying text.

\(^{54}\) People’s Daily, Apr. 25, 1983, 4. See also Han Zhenhua, et al., Collection of Historical Materials on the South China Sea Islands (1988) [hereinafter Han Zhenhua, et al].
Expeditions and voyages to and through the South China Sea and the island groups therein were inseparable from China's discovery, naming, sea lane opening and other activities in the South China Sea. It was these expeditions and voyages, despite all sorts of hardships, that made it possible for China to discover, gain and deepen knowledge about, name, patrol, regulate, utilize and otherwise display her authority over the South China Sea Islands.

Despite her slow growth in modern history, China possessed sophisticated skills and technology in the construction or making of many types of structures and tools. Not surprisingly, ancient Chinese were able to build boats strong enough to sail to the Nansha area and beyond.

The Xia Dynasty was still a primitive society. During that period of time, the Chinese people heavily relied upon natural living creatures for food, and the period is known as an “Era of Fishing and Hunting” (漁獵時代). Those close to the coast would naturally seek food from the ocean. It was thus noted:

To catch fish in the ocean, there must first be boats. Boat-building techniques of [China] began to develop in a very early age. The book Zhou Yi: Xi Ci (《周易•系辞》), completed in the Spring and Autumn era, recorded that “Fu Xi Shi carved woods into boats [伏羲氏刳木为舟].”

Fu Xi Shi is believed to be the Chinese inventor of boat-building and one of the second generation kings in China’s pre-ancient era bearing the title of “Mu De Wang Tianxia” (木德王天下, Mu De King of the World). Whether Fu Xi Shi is a legendary figure or not, the ancient Chinese boat-building techniques may be independently assessed with the help of archeological discoveries. In 1975, a 7.1 meter long boat made of camphor wood (樟木) was unearthed in Fujian Province, which scientists say had been made in the New Stone Age. A similar boat of the Warring States era was unearthed in Jiangsu Province. According to an ancient book titled Tong Dian (《通典》, General Codes), nearly 4000 thousand years ago, “the voice and instructions [i.e., sphere of rule] of Xia Yu [i.e., the Xia rulers] reached Nan Hai [the South Sea] and Jiaozhi [now northern and central Vietnam] (“夏禹声教，至南海交趾”).

56 Ibid, 268, quoting Liu Shu, Tong Jian Wai Ji (刘恕, 《通鉴外记》).
57 Ibid, 268.
58 Tong Dian, quoted in: Xin Yejiang, ed., above n.55, 268.
To make expeditions to and beyond the South China Sea, ancient Chinese rulers would need boats large and good enough to survive sailing in the open sea. According to a history work titled *Yue Jue Shu* (《越绝书》) authored by Yuan Kang (袁康) of the *East Han* Dynasty, in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, China was already capable of making five types of boats and military vessels (see Exhibit 2).

---

Exhibit 2

...闻问见（伍）子胥，敢问船运之备何如？对曰：“船名大翼、小翼、突冒、楼欘、桥舰。今船军之教比陵军 [i.e., 陆军] 之法。大翼者，当陵军之重车；小翼者，当陵军之轻车；突冒者，当陵军之冲车；楼欘者，当陵军之楼车；桥舰者，当陵军之轻足骑业。” (... When Helü saw [Wu] Zixu, he asked [him]: May I ask how was your preparation for boats and transportation? [Wu Zixu] answered: “The boats are respectively named Da Yi, Xiao Yi, Ty Mao, Lou Jiang and Qiao Jiang. Nowadays the system of the navy is comparable to that of the army. Da Yis are equivalents of the heavy vehicles of the army; Xiao Yis
are like light vehicles of the army; Tu Mao are like the charge vehicles of the army; Lou Chuan are like the storied vehicles of the army; and Qiao Chuan are like light cavalries of the army.\(^{59}\)

The term Da Yi denotes heavy and large boats; Xiao Yi small and light boats; Tu Mao boats that charge forward; Lou Chuan boats with two or multiple levels or stories; and Qiao Chuan the equivalents of mosquito boats bridging between big boats or between big boats and the coast. On the size of these boats, Wu Zixu himself wrote:

\[
\text{大翼，一艘广一丈五尺二寸，长十丈；中翼，一艘广一丈三尺五寸，
长九丈六尺；小翼，一艘广一丈二尺，长九丈。 (A Da Yi [big
boat] is one zhang, five chis and two cuns wide, ten zhang long. A Zhong Yi
[median sized boat] is one zhang, three chis and five cuns wide, nine zhangs
and six chis long, A Xiao Yi [small boat] is one zhang and two chis wide, nine
zhangs long.)\(^{60}\)
\]

According to Xin Yejiang and his co-authors, the measure scale system of the Zhou Dynasties was followed in the Spring and Autumn Period. One chi in the Zhou and Spring and Autumn eras is equivalent to 19.9 cm.\(^{61}\) If this is true, the size of a big boat made in Eastern Zhou would be equivalent to more than 3 meters wide and nearly twenty (19.9) meters long. This gives us an idea how advanced the Chinese already were in the art and technology of boat making in the Spring and Autumn Period which covered the first part of the entire Eastern Zhou Dynasty era. The exact size of a big boat made for sea going at that time might well be larger than those described above.

Boat-making techniques were further developed in the Han era. In Taiping Yu Lan (《太平御览》), it was recorded that “large boats [built] in Yuzhang could carry one to ten thousand people; and a palace could [even] be constructed on the boat” (“豫章大船，可载万（千）人，

\(^{59}\) Yuan Kang (袁康, East Han Dynasty), Yue Jue Shi (《越绝书》), quoted in: Li Fang (North Song Dynasty, 960-1127), Taiping Yu Lan (The Imperial Books of the Taiping Reign [of the Song Dynasty]) [hereinafter Taiping Yu Lan], v. 770, Section of Boats (舟船). See also Xin Yejiang, ed., above n.55, 345.


\(^{61}\) Xin Yejiang, ed., above n.55, 346.
Chinese Southerners living in the coastal areas of Guangdong and Guangxi were good at boat-building and ocean-going. Because of their long time use of and reliance on the South China Sea, they were “not only able to build large boats with highly developed craftsmanship, but also rich in sea sailing and navigation experience.” With the boat-making techniques being already sophisticated in the Han and pre-Han times, there is no reason why subsequent generations of the Chinese empire could not build at least equally sophisticated sea-faring boats for sailing to or through the South China Sea.

The availability of suitable boats enabled the Xia rulers to collect zhujī, dabei and daimao from the coral islands of the South China Sea, and the Chu rulers to dispatch expeditionary forces and declare the South Sea (Nan Hai) as part of their territory. Similarly, the Han Dynasty was able to make expeditions to the Malay Peninsula via the Nansha Islands, the Wu State to send envoys to India via the sea routes through the South China Sea, the Chinese shuishi (naval forces) in various dynasties to patrol the Xisha and Nansha Islands, and so on.

In the Yuan era, expeditions to and/or through the South China Sea remarkably thrived. Wang Dayuan (汪大淵), a prominent Chinese navigator in the Yuan Dynasty, made numerous voyages to the South China Sea and beyond and even made notes of his observations. Wang’s voyages were but only among other expeditions and voyages in the long history of the Yuan Empire’s existence. With respect to an expeditionary force that was dispatched to Java in 1292, for instance, Greenfield observes:

Records of the voyage report that it sailed through “Chi’chou yang” (the ocean of the seven islands) and the “Wanli shih[t]’ang” (Myriad on ten thousand li rocks). The “Chi’chou yang” [now spelled Qizhou Yang] (Seven Islands) were the seven islands of the present Paracel Islands and...
“Wanli shih-t’ang” [now spelled Wanli Shitang] apparently referred to the present Spratly Islands.

Noteworthy is the famous Zheng He’s Seven Voyages. A well-known navigator and a high-ranking official of the Ming imperial court, Zheng He (also known as Cheng Ho, 1371-1435) led seven (or possibly eight) large-scale voyages through and beyond the South China Sea between 1405 and 1433, with each round trip taking about two years. His destinations included Southeast Asia, India, East coast of Africa and the Red Sea.71 The following observations are worth quoting:

When...Cheng Ho of the Ming Dynasty...sailed seven times through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean between 1403 and 1433, his fleet passed through the Paracel and Spratly Islands on several occasions and the locations of these two islet groups were recorded on a detailed map drawn between 1425 and 1430 (the exact year cannot be determined). The Paracels were referred to as “Shih-t’ang” (Rocks) and “Wansheng shih-t’angyu” (Islands of ten thousand rocks), and the Spratly as “Shihsing shih-t’ang” (Stone star rocks). A subsequent Ming dynasty publication on the products and geography of the sea entitled “Haiyu” (On the Sea) also clearly described the location of these islet groups. The text explicitly states that the “Wanli changsha” (Myriad on ten thousand li sand banks) is located southeast of “Wanli shih-t’ang” (Myriad on ten thousand li rocks). The Spratly Islands are indeed located south-east of the Paracels.72

III.D. Knowledge of Geographical and Natural Features

China was the first to know the geographical and natural features of the Nanshas and the Xishas.

As early as during the East Han Dynasty (23-220), the Chinese people already knew that waters in the South China Sea Islands area were shallow, so shallow that ships would get stranded by the “magnetic rocks” under beneath. In his book titled Yêu Zhi (《異物志》, Records of Rarities), Yang Fu (杨孚) of the East Han era described the geographical features of the South China Sea islands in these words: “Zhanghai qiyou, shui qian er duo cish”

71 See Ci Hai, above n.34, 448.
72 Greenfield, above n.70, 31.
meaning that “There are islets, sand cays, reefs and banks in the South China Sea, the water [there] is shallow and filled with magnetic rocks or stones”).

As noted earlier, the term qitou refers to islets, reefs, shoals and the like in the oceans. The term cishi (磁石), literally denoting magnetite, or magnetic “rocks” or “stones,” was vividly used in Yang Fu’s Yiyou Zhi to refer to the fact that ancient Chinese ships sailing to the South China Sea got stranded by the reefs, shoals and banks as if the ships were attracted by lodestones or magnetic rocks.

The South China Sea islands were further described in two famous books published in the period of San Guo (Three Kingdoms) (220-280): Nanzhou Tiwu Zhi (南州異物志, Records of Rarities in the Southern Boundary) and Funan Zhan (扶南传, Journeys to and from Funan [now Cambodia]).

Nanzhou Tiwu Zhi, authored by Wan Zhen (万震) of the Wu Kingdom (222-280), and referred to in Taiping Yu Lan (太平御览) authored by Li Fang (李方) of the Song Dynasty, recorded the encounters of Chinese expedition sailors of the Han Dynasties (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) on their way back from the Malay Peninsula to China: “Dongbei xing, ji da qitou, chu Shanghai, zhong qian er duo cishi” (東北行, 极大峙头, 出上海, 中浅而多磁石), meaning that “Sailing northeastward, one would encounter a large number of islets, reefs, shoals and banks becoming visible and noticeable in the South China Sea, where [the water is] shallow and filled with magnetic rocks”).

Elsewhere, the author made a similar reference (see Exhibit 3):

涨海崎头, 水浅而多磁石, 外象人乘大船, 皆以铁探探之, 至此关, 以磁, 不得过。(Zhanghai qitou, shui qian er duo cishi, wai xiang ren cheng da chuan, jie yi tie die zhi, Zhi ci guan, yi ci, bu de guo) (There are islets, sand cays, reefs and banks in the South China Sea, and the water there is shallow and filled with magnetic rocks. Officers on patrol

---

73 Yang Fu (East Han), Yiyou Zhi (Records of Rarities) (no longer in existence), quoted in Qiong Tai Zhi (Records of Hainan and Taiwan), Volume 9, written and published during the reign title of Zhengde (1506-1521) of the Ming Dynasty (1664). “Rarities, Part Two,” 14. See Lin Jinzhi, below n.75, 181, n. 1. See also Han Zhenhua, et al., above n.54.

74 See text accompanying above n.44.


missions took big boats all covered with iron; when they approached the area, they could not proceed further because of the magnetic rocks).77

The Chinese people also learnt that these islands and reefs were formed by corals and even named these island chains Shanhu tuwu (Coral Islands and Reefs) in the era of San Guo and the Jin Dynasties (265-420).78

In 226 A.D., Kang Tai (康泰), a famous ancient Chinese navigator of the Wu Kingdom, and Zhu Ying (朱应) were dispatched on diplomatic missions by Emperor Huangwu (黄武帝) via the South China Sea to Funan

funan was an ancient state established in the first century in the southern part of cambodia. in the seventh century, the funan state was annexed by the state of jinie (khmer), which had been a vassal state of funan in the northern part of cambodia today. see ci hai, above n.34, 516.

feb. 859.


peiyuan (north jin dynasty), guangzhou ji, quoted in: le shi (north song), ed., taiping huanyu ji (the world chronicles of the taiping reign [of the song state]), vol. 157, “lingnan dao, guangzhou and dongguan county.” see also liu nanwei, above n.48, 83.
Wang Dayuan, who made multiple voyages to and through the South China Sea and its islands, wrote the following in his one-volume publication entitled *Dao Yi Zhi Lue* (《岛夷志略》, Abridged Records of Islands and Barbarians):

......石塘之骨，由潮洲而生，迤逦如长蛇，横亘海中，越海诸国，俗云：万里石塘。以余推之，迄止万里而已哉......原其地脉，历历可考，一脉至爪哇，一脉至渤泥及古里地兜，一脉至西洋مبر昆仑之地......避之则吉，遇之则凶。（Shitang zhi gu, you Chaozhou er sheng, yili ru chang sha, heng gen hai zhong, yue hai zhu guo, su yun: Wanti Shitang. Yi yu hai zhi, qizhi wun li er yi zai. . . . Yuan qi dimai, lili
ke kuo, yi mai zhi Zhuawa, yi mai zhi Boni ji Gulidimen, yi mai zhi xi yang xia Kunlun zhi di.... Bi zhi ze ji, yu zhi ze xiong.

The following is the translation of the above passage:

The base of Shitang originates from Chaozhou. It is tortuous as a long snake lying in the sea, and across the sea it reaches various states, and it is popularly called: Wanli Shitang. According to my estimates, it is less than ten thousand lis.... Its veins can all be traced. One such vein stretches to Java, one to Boni and Gulidimen, and one to the west side of the sea toward Kunlun in the distance.... One would be safe to avoid it, and dangerous to come across it.  

Here, Boni denotes Burni, a kingdom which existed then in what is now Brunei and its vicinity on the Kalimantan Island. Gulidimen was another kingdom on the Kalimantan. Kunlun denotes the Kunlun Islands (Con Son Islands, also known as Is. de Paulo Condore) which is located outside the mouth of the Mekong River about 200 nautical miles away from Saigon. Given the description that the three veins of the Wanli Shitang each respectively extends to Kalimantan, Java and the western part of the South China Sea looking over the Kunlun Island in the distance, it is evident that Wang Dayuan meant the Nansha Islands by Shitang and Wanli Shitang.

III.E. Sea Lane Opening

China was the first to open sea lanes through the Xishas Islands and the Nanshas Islands. 

Unlike on the deep open sea, voyages through the South China Sea are not at one's will. Reefs, atolls and shoals beneath the water surface make it difficult to sail to and across the island groups even if to do so would shorten the travel distance to a large extent. Sea routes through these coral island chains would have to be explored and actually "opened" on the basis of prior experience of expeditions, voyages and other explorative activities. In this regard, ancient Chinese made great contributions in locating dangerous sailing areas and establishing safe sea lanes through the Nansha and Xisha Islands.

83 Wang Dayuan (Yuan), Dao Yi Zhi Lue (Abridged Records of Islands and Barbarians), entry of "Wanli Shitang," 93. See also Wu Fengbin, above n.81, 109; Lin Jinzhi, above n.75, 182.
84 Ibid. (translation).
According to the late Professor Han Zhenhua, the West Han rulers established and maintained close navigational and commercial ties with Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and India through the usage of sea-routes in the South China Sea. It took Chinese envoys of the West Han Dynasty only two months to sail from the Strait of Malacca back to the coast of central Vietnam by using the sea route through the Nansha Islands area. In contrast, sailing through the conventional sea route along the Asian coast would have taken them several months longer. Later generations either continued to utilize previously opened sea lanes, or sought to open new sea routes in order to further shorten the voyages between the Chinese mainland and destinations in and beyond the South China Sea.

Zhu Fan Tu (《诸番图》, Map[s] and Chart[s] of the Various Barbarian Peoples), a no-longer-available set of charts referred to in Zhu Fan Zhi (《诸番志》, Records of the Various Barbarian Peoples), a set of books authored by the South Song official Zhao Rukuo (赵汝适) in 1225, depicted navigational sea lanes from and to the Chinese mainland through the South China Sea Islands:

汝适被命来此[指泉州], 暇日阅《诸番图》, 有所谓石床、长沙之险, 交洋、竺屿之阻。问其志, 则无有焉。……宝庆元年[1225年]九月, 日, 朝散大夫提及福建路市舶赵汝适序。{[I,] Rukuo was ordered to come here [i.e., Quanzhou]. In my spare time, I read Zhu Fan Tu, which contains the so-called reference to the following words: Shichuang, Changsha zhi xian, Jiao Yang, Zhu Yu zhi xian [liberally, the dangerous water areas of the Shichuang and Changsha are the outer limits of the Jiaozhi Sea and the Natuna Islands]. When I asked whether they had records of the barbarous peoples, they did not have any... Preface by Zhao Rukuo, Chaosan Dafu Tiju, Fujian Lu Shibó, September __, Year One of Baoqing [of the Song Dynasty] [i.e., 1225 A.D.].}

Here, Shichuang (Shitang) denotes the Xisha Islands whereas Changsha symbolizes the Nansha Islands. Jiao Yang (交洋) is an abbreviated form of Jiaozhi Yang (交趾洋, Jiaozhi Sea), the sea area west of the Xisha Islands. It is what is

---

85 Han Zhenhua, 1996, above n. 43, 54, citing Han Shu, vol. 28, pt B, Geography, entry of Yue Di (《汉书》28卷下, 地理志, 異地条末后).
86 Han Zhenhua, 1996, above n. 43, 62, n. 19.
known as Beibu Wan or the Gulf of Tunkin. In the words Zhu Yu (竺屿), Zhu was the traditional transliteration of Datcu; Yu means islands. The combination of these two words refers to the Dateu Islands (now Natuna Islands). The above passage means that once one passes through the dangerous sea routes across the Xisha and the Nansha Islands, one would reach the sea boundaries between China and foreign countries. 88

Lingwai Daida (《岭外代答》, literally Substitute Replies from Lingwai (now Guangdong and Guangxi)), another set of books of the Song era written by Zhou Qufei (周去非) in 1178, contained a similar depiction of the sea routes through the Nansha Islands between China and other parts of the world that conforms with that referred to above:


When translated into English, the above passage reads as follows:

89 Zhou Qufei (South Song), Lingwai Daida (Substitute Replies from Lingwai), vol. 3, “Hanghai Waiyi (航海外夷)” (Voyages to the External Barbarians).
Among those foreign states which are rich in resources and treasures, none is comparable with the State of Dashi, the next is the State of Shepo, and next comes the State of Sanfoqi, followed by the other states. Sanfoqi is the strategic pass for communications between various states via sea routes. [Here is how] to travel from Sanfoqi to China: One would sail by boats northward, pass the upper and lower Datcus and the Jiaozhi Sea, and then respectively enter the territory of China [on the sea]. To reach Guangdong, one would go through Tunmen; to reach Quanzhou, he would go through Jiaozimen. From Shepo to China: Sailing northwest for some distance, passing the Twelve Rock-Islets, and meeting the sea route between Sanfoqi and China right before the Datcu Islands. From the State of Dashi to China: Taking small boats southbound, reaching the State of Gulin, changing to large boats and sailing eastward, arriving at the State of Sanfoqi, and then taking the same sea route to enter China. Other tributary states such as Zhancheng and Zhenla are all close south of the Jiaozhi Sea, and their distances to China are far shorter than half of those of the State of Sanfoqi and Shepo, while the distances of Sanfoqi and Shepo to China are again shorter than half of the distance between the State of Dashi and China. To travel from the various foreign states to China, one can complete the round trip in one year, with the only exception of the State of Dashi, the round trip between which and China must take more than two years to complete.

Sanfoqi refers to the Kingdom of Sriwidjaja which existed on part of what is now Sumantra Island with Palembang as its center. Shepo State was located in Java and part of Sumantra. The State of Dashi refers to the empire of Taziks, and the word Dashi comes from the Persian word Tazi and was used since the Tang and Song Dynasties to denote the Arabian Empire. Tunmen is in Kowloon, Hongkong, and was a gateway to Guangzhou. Shi'er Zishi (Twelve Rock-Islets) refers to the small islets north of the Karimata Islands near Java. Gulin State is the Chinese transliteration of the kingdom of Kulam which existed on the southwest coast of India. Shang Xia Zhu (Upper and Lower Datcus) and Zhu Yu (Datcu Islands) both refer to the Natuna Islands. Quanzhou is located in Fujian Province. Zhancheng was a state in central-southern Vietnam and part of Cambodia with Qui Nhon as its capital. Zhenla, in most part, was what is now Cambodia.

The sea route between Sanfoqi and Guangdong and Fujian was newly opened up in the Song Dynasties. Part of the new sea route, i.e., that between Zhancheng and Guangdong and Fujian, was the same as the old one. From

---

90 Emphasis added by the author in the translation.
Sanfoqi to Zhancheng, the old sea route was along the coasts of Malay Peninsula and Indo-China, while the newly developed sea route would pass the Natuna Islands and then immediately enter the domain of China in the South China Sea, namely, the Nansha Islands water area which was then called Changsha Hai (Changsha Sea). Along this new sea route, one would then exit the Chinese territory in the Changsha Sea area, passing Zhancheng on the central-southern Vietnamese coast, proceed through the Jiaozhi Sea, and then re-enter the Chinese territory in the Xisha Islands water area called Shitang Hai (Shitang Sea). The major difference between the new route and the old one is that using the new route, one would enter China’s territory on the sea twice, once in the Nansha Islands area and the other in the Xisha Islands area, whereas along the old coastal sea route between Sumantra and Zhancheng, one did not need to enter and traverse China’s Changsha Sea (the Nansha) area, instead, he only needed to enter China’s territory once in the Shitang Sea (the Xisha) area. The words “li Shang Xia ^huyujiao  Tang,  naizhi  ^hongguo zhijing” mean that by using the new sea route, one could “enter the territory of China both after passing the Upper and Lower Dacques and after traversing the Jiaozhi Sea.”

The existing and newly opened sea routes through the Xisha and Nansha areas greatly facilitated China’s interactions with the outside world. When Zheng He made his famous voyages, he followed such routes through the South China Sea Islands. The sea routes that Zheng He’s fleet followed, Swanson observes, “had been known and used for several centuries,” and, in fact, “had been systematized into two major sea lanes” since the Song era: “the East Sea Route and the West Sea Route”; and each of the routes was “subdivided into a major and minor route.” Describing one of the routes, Swanson goes on:

Following the period of intensive training, the fleet wound its way through the Taiwan Strait and sailed directly into the South China Sea, where land falls were made on Hainan Island and the Xisha Islands (Paracel Islands). From the Xishas the fleet turned westward and made for an anchorage at modern-day Qui Nhon on the Champa [i.e., southern Vietnam] coast. The total time of the Fujian-Champa transit was about ten days. Once there, provisions were taken aboard and the crews had “liberty” and “sim call.” From Qui Nhon the fleet sailed

91 Han Zhenhua, 1991, above n.87, 312.
92 See text accompanying above n.71-72 (Zheng He’s Seven Voyages).
southward toward the west coast of Borneo, making land falls on the various islands in the southern portion of the South China Sea.  

Having noted the above, I believe that more than enough historical records exist to link China with the opening and usage of sea routes through the South China Sea Islands.

III.F. Naval Patrols

China was the first to have made official naval patrols in the area surrounding the South China Sea Islands.

The practice of naval patrol, then known as xing bu Zhang Hai (行部张海), started in the Han Dynasties when Admiral Ma Yuan conquered central and northern Vietnam. In his Hou Han Shu (《后汉书》, Books of the Latter Han Dynasty), e.g., Xie Cheng (谢承) recorded that Chen Mao (陈茂), the Biejia (别驾, a rank of officials lower than Cishi (刺史)) of Jiaozhi Province (交趾, covering most parts of Guangdong and Guangxi as well as the central and northern parts of Vietnam) of the East Han Dynasty, accompanied Zhou Chang (周敞), the Cishi (the highest official of a province) of Jiaozhou Province (交州, the same area of jurisdiction as Jiaozhi which was renamed Jiaozhou at that time), in their naval inspection and patrolling cruise to the islands in the South China Sea (“xing bu Zhang Hai”).

Surviving history books and materials indicate that such practice continued, or at least existed, in later times of the Chinese history—from the Jin Dynasties, the Song State of the Southern Dynasties, the North Song Dynasty, the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, to the Republican era. In Guangdong Tong Zhi (《广东通志》, The General Records of Guangdong) authored by Hao Yulin (郝玉麟), e.g., it was reported that Bao Jing (鲍靓), the Administrator of Nan Hai (南海太守, the highest official in charge of the South China Sea affairs) of the Jin Dynasties (265-420), went on patrolling and inspection voyages in the South China Sea (“xing bu ru hai”) (“行部入海”). Similarly, there were credible records of the Chinese naval force of the Song State of Southern Dynasties (南朝, 420-479)

---

54 Ibid, 38.
56 Xie Cheng (Wu State), Hou Han Shu (Books of the Latter Han Dynasty). See Liu Wenzong, above n.65, 69.
58 Hao Yulin (Jin), Guangdong Tongzhi (General Records of Guangdong), cited in: Liu Wenzong, above n.65, 69.
patrolling the Xisha and the Nansha islands in the South China Sea area. In his *Wudi Lei* (《武帝列》, In Memory of Emperor Wudi), Xie Lingyun (谢灵运, 385-433 A.D.), a poet of the *Song State of the Southern Dynasties*, referred to the Chinese navy's activities in the South China Sea in the following words: "Huqi Wuxi, Zhou shi Zhonghai" ("虎骑骛越，舟师张海") (Brave cavalrmen galloped across the wet lowlands, while naval soldiers fought and patrolled in the *Zhan Hai* [South China Sea]).

In his *Shui Jing Zhu* (《水经注》, Commentaries on the Books of Waters), the *Wei* Dynasty official and geographer Li Daoyuan (郦道元) also wrote that in Year 1 of *Yuanjia* (元嘉) of Emperor Song Wendi (i.e., 424 A.D.), naval forces of the *Song State in the Southern Dynasties* era patrolled ocean areas far south of Linyi (林邑), a place in central and southern Vietnam, including the areas around the Kunlun Islands (昆仑) near the coast of southern Vietnam.

The official *Yuan Shi* (《元史》, History of the *Yuan* Dynasty) completed in the *Ming* era not only contained a geographical description of the South China Sea islands, but also recorded that the Navy of the *Yuan Dynasty* had made inspections and patrols of the *Qizhou Yang* (七洲洋, the *Xisha Islands*) and *Wanli Shitang* (万里石塘, the *Nansha Islands*). The "Shi Bi Zhuan" ("史弼传," History about [General] Shi Bi) section of *Yuan Shi* recorded the experience of Chinese naval forces led by General Shi Bi (see Exhibit 5).

十二月，弼以五千人合诸军发泉州。……过七洲洋、万里石塘，历交趾占城界……入湿漉大洋、檇旖屿、假里马答、巨栏等山，驻兵伐木，造小舟。…… (Shier Yue, Bi yi wuqian ren he zhu jun fa Quanzhou... Guo Qizhou Yang, Wanli Shitang, li Jiaozhi Zhancheng jie... ru Hundun Dayang, Ganlan Yu, Jialimada, Julan deng shan, zhubing famu, zao xiao zhou...) (In December, [General Shi] Bi led five thousand combined forces, sailing from Quanzhou... [they] sailed through Qizhou Yang [referring to the Xisha Islands] and Wanli Shitang [referring to the Nansha Islands], passing the territory of Jiaozhi and Zhancheng... [They then] landed on such islands as Hundun Dayang, Ganlan Island, Jialimada and Julan, where they stationed and cut down lumbers to build small boats...).”

99 See Wang Liyiu, above n.48, 25.
100 Li Daoyuan (郦道元, 466-527), *Shui Jing Zhu* (《水经注》, Commentaries on the Books of Waters), vol. 36, Records of Yushui and Linyi (郁水、林邑记), cited in: Han Zhenhua, et al., above n.54, 29.
In his *Dao Yi Zhi Lu*, Wang Dayuan recorded the Yuan naval inspection and patrol activities by noting that when the navy of the Yuan Empire was patrolling the South China Sea islands and the sea zones near Kalimantan, "there were more than a hundred sick soldiers who could not go any further and had to stay on the islands" ("有病卒百余人，不能去者，遂留山中" (*you bing zu bai yu ren, buneng qu zhe, sui liu shan zhong*)).\(^{102}\) Here, only the number of those soldiers who could not further take part in patrolling due to ailment was given, which was already over one hundred—there must have been more healthy sailors. The scale and magnitude of patrols by the Yuan navy in the *Nansha* area thus appeared to be substantial.

\(^{102}\) Wang Dayuan, above n. 83. See Wu Fengbin, above n. 81, 109.
In the Ming Dynasty, the naval arm of Hainan Garrison Force (Hainan Wei) was particularly responsible for patrolling as well as exercising jurisdiction over the South China Sea and its islands. In the official Records of Qiongshan County (《琼山县志》) compiled by Li Xi (李熙) of the Ming era, it was recorded:

......广东濒大海，海外诸国皆内属......公统兵万余，巨舰五十艘，......[巡逻]海外几万里。(...Guangdong bīn da hǎi, hǎi wài zhūguó jiě neǐshān... Gong tōng bīng wǔshí jiù, jiǔ jian wúshí sōu, ...xúnluó hǎi dào jī wàn lǐ...) (...) Guangdong is adjacent to the grand [South China] Sea, and the territories beyond the Sea all internally belong [to the Ming Empire]...The General led more than ten thousand soldiers and fifty huge ships to patrol several ten thousand ēs on the South China Sea.)

During the reign of Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722) of the Qing Dynasty, the Navy of Guangdong (Canton) (广东水师) was responsible for patrolling the South China Sea. In 1710 to 1712, e.g., Wu Sheng (吴升), Vice-Admiral of the Guangdong Navy (广东水师副将, Guangdong Shuishi Fujiang), personally led his fleet to the South China Sea Islands and the vicinity to patrol the sea area:

......吴升，擢广东副将，调琼州。自琼崖，历铜鼓，经七洲洋、四更沙，周遭三千里，躬自巡视，地方宁谧。...... (...Wu Sheng, zhōu Guangdong Fujiang, diào Qiongzhou. Zì Qiongya, lì Tonggu, jīng Qizhou Yang and Sigeng Sha, zhōu zào sănqían lǐ gōngzǐ xúnshì, difang nínì...) (...) Wu Sheng was promoted to the position of Vice-Admiral of Guangdong [Navy], and was transferred to Qiongzhou [of Hainan]. [The fleet] started from Qiongya [of Hainan] by way of Tonggu, passing through Qizhou Yang and Sigeng Sha, traveling three thousand līs, with [General Wu Sheng] leading the patrol personally, leaving every place [of patrol] in peace.]

The patrol activities of various Chinese dynasties were unparalleled, and constituted an important aspect of China’s active exercise of authority over the South China Sea Islands.

---

103 Wu Fengbin, above n.81, 110, citing Li Xi, Qiongshan Xian Zhi (Records of Qiongshan County), vol. 14. See also Hu Ruisu, Wan Zhou Zhi (Records of Wan Zhou Sub-Prefecture) [hereinafter Wan Zhou Zhi], vol. 4, “Bian Hai Waiguo” (The Boundary Seas and Foreign Countries).

104 Quanzhou Fu Zhi (Records of Quanzhou Prefecture). See Wang Liyu, above n.48, 25; Duanmu Zheng, ed., above n.51, 156.
III.G. Scientific Surveys

China was the first to engage in systematic scientific surveys of the South China Sea and the Xisha and the Nansha Islands.

As early as 1279, the emperor of the Yuan Dynasty (A.D. 1279-1360) dispatched the well-known high-level official and astronomer, Guo Shoujing (郭守敬), to the South China Sea to survey and measure the Xisha and the Nansha islands and the adjacent sea area. The Chinese government in the early and latter parts of the twentieth century also conducted various surveys and studies of the Nanshas and the Xishas, long before Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei advanced their respective claims.

III.H. Mapping

China was the first known State to have mapped the South China Sea and its island groups, and the first to have adopted an official U-shaped line to enclose the South China Sea Islands and their adjacent waters within her defined claims.

As early as in the Song Dynasties, as well as through the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, the South China Sea Islands were referred to as Qianli Changsha, Wanli Shitang or the like in China’s official maps. Zhu Fan Tu (《諸蕃圖》, Maps of the Various Barbarian Peoples) of the North Song Dynasty mentioned earlier may be said to be one of the sets of ancient Chinese maps that referred to the South China Sea Islands as being subject to the Chinese rulers.

Maps published in the Yuan era invariably included the Changsha (the Xisha Islands) and the Shitang (the Nansha Islands) within the domain of Yuan. Yuandai Jiangyu Tu Xu (《元代疆域圖叙》, Map of the Territory of the Yuan Dynasty Illustrated) stated that China’s territory included the North Sea to the north and the South Sea to the south (北至于北海，……南至于南海). Other maps of the type included Sheng Jiao Guang Bei Tu (《聲教廣被圖》) of 1330 by Li Zemin, the Huyi Jiangli Tu (《混一疆理圖》, Consolidated Maps of the Territory [of the Yuan Dynasty]) of 1380, and the authoritative Yu Di Tu (《舆地图》, The Maps of the Territory [of Yuan]) drawn and illustrated by Zhu Siben (Yuan), which
invariably included Shitang and Changsha as being within the scope of the Chinese territory.

In the Ming Dynasty, official Chinese maps continued to indicate China's sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands. In *Hunyijiangli Lidai Guodu zhi Tu* (Consolidated Map of Territories and Geography and Capitals of Past Dynasties) (1402), for example, the South China Sea Islands were all included within the boundary of China. Another Ming map published in the year of 1637 also included the entire South China Sea Islands as part of the Ming Empire's territory. Chinese maps and charts drawn up in the Ming era were convenient tools utilized by and throughout the well-known Zheng He's Seven Voyages.

In his *Haiuo Wenjian Lu* (《海國聞見錄》) published in 1730, Chen Lunjiong, the Qing scholar, re-depicted the geographical positions of the Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands. The book contained a set of maps called "Sihai Zongtu" ("General Maps of the Four Seas"), which referred to the Xisha group of islets as "Qizhou Yang" and the Nansha group as "Shitang." Chen also identified the other groups of islands in the South China Sea: Qi or Nan'ao Qi for today's Dongsha Islands, Shatou for the Nanxu Shayin in today's Dongsha Islands, Qizhou Tang for the Xisha Islands, and Changsha for today's Zhongsha Islands. Qizhou Tang was drawn in the west of the South China Sea, thereby denoting the whole or part of the Xisha Islands; Shitang was marked in the south of the South China Sea between Wentai (Brunei) and Kunlun Islands (Con Son Islands), which roughly represents the location of the Nansha Islands.

Official maps of the Qing Dynasty invariably enclosed the Nansha Islands and other parts of the South China Sea Islands within the Qing boundary, and they were many.

1) *Da Qing Zhong Wai Tianxia Quan Tu* (The Complete Sino-Foreign Maps of the Great Qing) of 1709;
2) *Qing Zhi Sheng Fen Tu* (Individual Maps of the Provinces Directly under the Administration of the Qing Empire) of 1724;

---

110 See text accompanying above n.48.
112 Greenfield, above n.70, 31.
113 Wu Fengbin, above n.81, 108; Greenfield, above n.70, 31.
114 Wu Fengbin, above n.81, 108; Greenfield, above n.70, 31-32.
(3) *Huang Qing Ge Zhi Sheng Fen Tu* (Individual Maps of the Provinces Directly under the Administration of the Royal Qing) of 1755;

(4) *Da Qing Wan Man Yitong Quan Tu* (The Complete Maps of the Unified Great Qing for Ten Thousand Years) of 1767 charted by Zhu Xiling and revised by Huang Zhengsun;

(5) *Qing Hui Fu Zhou Xian Ting Zong Tu* (The Qing-Charted General Maps of the Capital Cities, Prefectures, Counties and Tings) of 1800 charted by Xiao Feng;

(6) *Da Qing Wan Nian Yitong Tianxia Quan Tu* (The Complete Maps of the Whole Unified Country of Great Qing for Ten Thousand Years) of 1803 charted by Yang Senzhong;

(7) *Da Qing Wan Nian Yitong Dili Quan Tu* (The Complete Geographical Maps of the Unified Great Qing for Ten Thousand Years) of 1810;

(8) *Da Qing Yitong Tianxia Quan Tu* (The Complete Maps of the Whole Unified Country of Great Qing) of 1817;

(9) *Gu Jin Di Yu Quan Tu* (The Complete Maps of the Lands and Territories Then and Now) of 1895;

(10) *Da Qing Tianxia Zhonghua Ge Sheng Fu Zhou Xian Ting Dili Quan Tu* (The Complete Geographical Maps of the Provinces, Capital Cities, Prefectures, Counties and Tings of the Whole China of the Great Qing) of 1904 charted by Wu Changfa; and

(11) *Da Qing Tianxia Zhonghua Ge Sheng Fu Zhou Xian Ting Dili Quan Tu* (The Complete Geographical Maps of the Provinces, Capital Cities, Prefectures, Counties and Tings of the Whole China of the Great Qing) of 1905 charted by Wang Xingshun.\(^{117}\)

While the above-mentioned ancient maps lack precision due to limitations on map drawing techniques, they do establish that China not only considered the South China Sea Islands her territory by action and words, but also illustrated her sovereignty over these areas through visual devices.

In April 1935, the Committee for the Review of Maps of Lands and Waters of the Republic of China charted and published a map entitled *Zhongguo Nan Hai Ge Daqyu Tu* (Map of the Islands of China in the South [China] Sea), which specifically depicted the Dongsha Islands, Xisha Islands, “Nansha Islands” (now Zhongsha Islands) and “Tuansha Islands” (now Nansha Islands) were created in the Qing Dynasty as an administrative locale at both the prefecture level and the county level in newly established provinces. The prefecture-level *Tings* were called *Zhili Ting* (Tings Directly under Provinces) which were parallel to the capital cities (Fus) and prefectures (*Zhous* or *Zhili Zhous*); the county-level *Tings* were called *San Ting* (Scattered *Tings* or *sub-Tings*) which were parallel to counties (*Xians*) and sub-prefectures (*San Zhous*). See *Ci Hai*, above n.34, 146.

\(^{116}\) *Tings* were created in the Qing Dynasty as an administrative locale at both the prefecture level and the county level in newly established provinces. The prefecture-level *Tings* were called *Zhili Ting* (Tings Directly under Provinces) which were parallel to the capital cities (Fus) and prefectures (*Zhous* or *Zhili Zhous*); the county-level *Tings* were called *San Ting* (Scattered *Tings* or *sub-Tings*) which were parallel to counties (*Xians*) and sub-prefectures (*San Zhous*). See *Ci Hai*, above n.34, 146.

\(^{117}\) See Wu Fengbin, above n.81, 111; Wang Liyu, above n.48, 26-27.
Shen, China’s Sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands

Islands), among others, as within the boundary of the Chinese territory, with detailed and specific names and locations of some 135 major islands, cays, reefs, banks and shoals. This was the first official map of the kind published by the Republic of China.

In January 1948, the Chinese Ministry of Interior published the Map of Locations of South China Sea Islands (Nan Hai Zhudao Weizhi Tu) with a U-shaped intermittent line to indicate the traditional boundary of China’s territory in the South China Sea. The 1948 Map, with newly standardized names of most specific islands and other features, encloses all the island groups in the South China Sea that are considered to be under Chinese sovereignty, i.e., the Dongsha Islands, the Zhongsha Islands, Xisha Islands, and the Nansha Islands. Later maps published before 1949 continued to adopt the less ambiguous U-shaped line (vis-a-vis previous maps) to delimit China’s traditional ocean boundary.

Since 1949, the People’s Republic of China has invariably adopted the same U-shaped intermittent line in all of her official maps covering the South China Sea area. By continuing the U-shaped line on her official maps,
China has been able not only to demonstrate China's sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands, but also to tell the world public, with a considerable degree of relative certainty, where China's territorial claims end.

III.1. Fishing and Other Private and Public Uses

China was the first to make use of the South China Sea Islands, not only for fishing and other private ends, but also for public and official purposes.

The Chinese people and their rulers had a history of more than two thousand years in making economic, navigational and other uses of the South China Sea and the Nansha and the Xisha Islands.

Rarities and other valuable items collected from these island groups were used as official tributes to the Chinese rulers, a practice that started in the Xia Dynasty more than three thousand years ago. The words “Yan yu Nan Hai” in Shi Jing indicate that the Chinese rulers and people at least were also making use of the South China Sea and the islands and banks therein during the East Zhou era.124

According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, “fishermen from Haikou Port, Puqian Port, Qinglan Port and Wenchang County [of the Ming Empire] went to the Nansha Islands to fish sea cucumber and other sea produce.”125 Indeed, Chinese fishermen from Guangdong, Hainan and other coastal areas have habitually taken the South China Sea Islands area as their fishing grounds. They would also take some of the atolls and islands as shelters and/or stopping spots en route to and from remote fishing grounds.126 Seasonal Chinese settlers would also engage in some forms of plantation in the Nansha Islands, a practice that was started no later than the Ming Dynasty.

The economic activities of Chinese fishermen on the Xisha and Nansha Islands have been lively spotted and vividly described by foreign visitors to these islands. For instance, the 1868 edition of China Sea Directory published by the London Hydrographic Office contains the following observations made in the Qing era:

Fishermen from Hainan Island went to Zhenghe Isles and Reefs and lived on sea cucumber and shells they got there. The footmarks of

83-101 (assessing the difficulty of meeting the criteria of historic waters and favoring focusing on the “ownership of South China Sea Islands”).
128 See text accompanying above n.38.
129 FM-PRC, The Issue of South China Sea, Pt 2, above n.6.
fishermen could be found in every isle of the [Spratly] Islands and some of the fishermen would even live there for a long period of time. Every year, there were small boats departing from Hainan Island for the Nansha Islands to exchange rice and other daily necessities for sea cucumber and shells from the fishermen there. The ships used to leave Hainan Island in December or January every year and return when the southwesterly monsoon started.131

Traditions of Chinese people conducting economic activities in the Nansha and Xisha Islands have been carried on generations upon generations. Since the Qing Dynasty, as the Chinese Foreign Ministry observes, “fishermen from Hainan Island and Leizhou Peninsula of China have kept going for fishing on the Nansha Islands. Most of the fishermen come from Wenchang County and Qionghai County. One or two dozens of fishing boats from these two counties alone would go to the Nansha Islands every year.”132

The Chinese development and productive activities in the South China Sea Islands during the Republic of China era may be reflected upon in the following observations:

Mr. Okura Unosuke of Japan wrote about his expedition trip to Beizi Island [i.e., Northeast Cay] in 1918 in his book Stormy Islands, which reads: “[H]e saw three people from Haikou of Wenchang County when the expedition team he organized arrived in Beizi Island.” In 1933, Miyoshi and Matuo of Japan saw two Chinese people on the Beizi Island and three Chinese people on the Nanzi Island [i.e., Southwest Cay] when they made an investigation trip to the Nansha Islands. It is also recorded in A Survey of the New South Islands published in Japan that [Chinese] “fishermen planted sweet potato on Zhongye Island [i.e., Thitu Island] [and that] fishermen from the Republic of China resided on the islands and grew coconuts, papaya, sweet potato and vegetables there.”133

Private use of the South China Sea Islands was generally with the blessing, permission, encouragement or support of the Chinese central or local

128 FM-PRC, The Issue of South China Sea, Pt 2, above n.6 (emphasis added). The Chinese version contains the words “jin cong...,” meaning “from...alone.”
129 Ibid.
government, and, not infrequently, even organized by the government itself.\textsuperscript{130} In the imperial periods of time, Chinese fishermen and other sea-going people making use of the South China Sea Islands would pay tributes and taxes to the Chinese government in kind or otherwise out of the proceeds of their fishing and other production activities in that area.\textsuperscript{131} Since the end of the imperial era, both private and government licensed or sponsored fishing and other economic activities have been conducted in the \textit{Xisha} and \textit{Nansha} Islands areas.\textsuperscript{132}

\textbf{III.J. Jurisdictional Allocations} \textit{China was the first to officially place the South China Sea Islands under the jurisdiction of her national and/or local governments.}

China had regarded the South China Sea and the islands therein to be subject to her authority and control since no later than the \textit{Han} Dynasties.\textsuperscript{133} In the \textit{Tang} Dynasty, the \textit{Xisha} and the \textit{Nansha} Islands were placed under the jurisdiction and authority of the \textit{Qionghao Prefecture} (now \textit{Hainan}).\textsuperscript{134} Various official records of \textit{Guangdong}, \textit{Hainan} and some of their lower level administrative prefectures and counties prepared in the periods from the \textit{North Song} Dynasty to the \textit{Qing} Dynasty invariably confirm that China intended to, and did, exercise jurisdiction over the \textit{Nanshas} and the \textit{Xishas} and their adjacent waters.\textsuperscript{135}

In an official chronicle book published in the \textit{South Song} Dynasty (1127-1279) titled \textit{Qiong Guan Zhi} (《琼管志}, Records of the \textit{Qiong} Prefecture and its Jurisdiction), it was specifically mentioned that the \textit{Qianli Changsha} (now the \textit{Xisha} Islands) and \textit{Wanli Shitang} (now the \textit{Nansha} Islands) were under the jurisdiction of the \textit{Qiong} Prefecture (now \textit{Hainan Province}).\textsuperscript{136} Similar references can also be found in such Song-related books as \textit{Song Hui Yao Ji Gao}.

\begin{footnotes}
131 See text accompanying notes 34-37 & 123.
136 See Wang Liyù, above n.48, 24.
\end{footnotes}
Shen, China’s Sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands

Song Shi (《宋史》, The History of the Song Dynasties), and Zhu Fan Tu (《诸蕃图》, Maps of the Various Barbarian Peoples, the North Song Dynasty).

Tang Zhou (唐胄) of the Ming Dynasty recorded in his Zhengde Qiong Tai Zhi (《正德琼台志》, Records of Qiong[zhou] and Tai[wan] During the Reign of Emperor Zhengde) that the sphere of jurisdiction of the Qiongzhou Prefecture included the Qianli Changsha and Wanli Shitang, which respectively referred to the Xisha Islands and the Nansha Islands. Qiong Guan Gu Zhi (《琼管古志》, Ancient Records on the Jurisdiction of Qiong[zhou Fu]), also written in the Ming era, provides the same evidence.

In the Qing Dynasty, the official Records of Wanzhou Subprefecture (《万州志》) stated that within the sphere of jurisdiction of Wanzhou, there were Qianli Changsha and Wanli Shitang (万州有千里长沙、万里石塘), and that “sea boats would be smashed when encountering atolls [in the Xisha area], and wouldn’t be able to come out once entering the reefs [in the Nansha area]” (“海舟触沙立碎，入塘无出理，人不敢近”). Similarly, the Records of Qiongzhou Prefecture (《琼州府志》) recorded that “Wanzhou has jurisdiction over Qianli Shitang, Wanli Changsha, which are the most dangerous areas of the Qiong Ocean [i.e., the South China Sea]” (“万州有千里石塘，万里长沙，为琼洋最险之处”). Here, Qianli Shitang refers to the Xisha Islands, while Wanli Changsha denotes the Nansha area.

More importantly, the Chinese Government in the Ming and Qing Dynasties invariably considered itself to have sovereignty over both the South China Sea Islands and their adjacent seas. According to Guangdong Tong Zhi (《广东通志》, General Records of Guangdong) prepared by Jin Guangzu

---

137 Xu Song (1781-1848, Qing), ed., Song Hui Yao Ji Gao (Selected Manuscripts of the Digests of the Song Dynasties), 366 vols., vol. “Fan Yi” (The Barbarian Peoples), Pt. 4, Sec. 99 (reprinted in 1936).
138 Tuo Tuo (1314-1355, Yuan), Alu Tu (also Yuan), & Ouyang Xuan (1274-1358, Yuan), eds., Song Shi, 496 vols., vol. 489: “Zhancheng Zhuan” (Chronology of Zhancheng [now part of Guangdong, Guangxi and Vietnam]).
140 Tang Zhou (Ming), Zhengde Qiong Tai Zhi (Records of Qiongzhou and Tai[wan] During the Zhengde Reign), entry of “Jiangyu” (Territory or Scope of Domain). See Wu Fengbin, above n.81, 110.
141 See Wu Fengbin, above n.81, 110.
143 Ming Yi (Qing), Qiongzhou Fu Zhi (Records of Qiongzhou Prefecture), quoted in: Wu Fengbin, above n.81, 110.
of the Qing Dynasty, in the Ming and Qing era, Qiongzhou Prefecture and its Wanzhou Subprefecture had jurisdiction not only over Qianli Changsha (the Xisha Islands) and Wanli Shitang (the Nansha Islands), but also over the "Changsha Hai, Wantang Hai" (长沙海、万塘海, Changsha Sea and Wantang Sea), i.e., the sea areas respectively surrounding the Xisha Islands and the Nansha Islands. Subsequent governments of China have followed basically the same ownership claim and pattern of jurisdictional allocation.

It deserves emphasizing that China’s persisting claim to the South China Sea Islands has never been changed or interrupted in spite of modern and contemporary intervening events such as the French and Japanese occupations, and the current demands of and occupations by the other claimants. From the first time the South China Sea Islands became the targets of foreign assertions to the present, China has persistently and resolutely reiterated her sovereignty and opposed all forms of foreign claims, occupation and interference.

III.K. Other Acts of Sovereignty

China has exercised various other sovereign rights and performed various other sovereign duties in the South China Sea.

Throughout history, China has performed various other acts not covered above that amount to active display of sovereign authority. These sovereign activities include the installation of facilities for fishing, forecasting and navigation, rescues of Chinese and foreign vessels in mishaps, granting and revoking licenses to private companies for the exploration and exploitation of natural resources, and organizing large scale fishing and other production activities around the Xishas and the Nanshas.

Between 1862 and 1874, the Qing Customs and General Revenue Office made plans to erect lighthouses in the Dongsha Islands for facilitating navigation in the South China Sea. In 1908, the Qing Customs Office

---

144 Jin Guangzu (Qing), Guangdong Tong Zhi (General Records of Guangdong), vol. 13, "Shanchuan: Wan Zhou" (Land: Wan Zhou [Sub-Prefecture]). See Wu Fengbin, above n.81, 110. The Wan Sub-Prefecture was a zhou level local administration in the southeast part of Hainan Island, covering areas such as Wanning County and Lingshui County.

145 See text accompanying below n.167-212 (China’s protests against foreign encroachments).

146 Qing Ji Waijiao Shi Liao (Historic Materials on the Diplomacy of the Qing Dynasty). See Lin Jinzhi, above n.75, 188.
similarly planned to build lighthouses on the Xisha Islands upon the request of foreign countries.  

In 1909, the Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi, Zhang Renjun, sent the naval officer-in-charge Li Zhun (李准) to the Xisha and Nansha Islands area. An anti-China and pro-Vietnam website states: “The first time China sent its stationed troop to Nansha Islands (Taiping) is 1910 by the navy minister Li Zhun. Due to the Xin Hai Revolution of 1911, they starved there soon.” It is not clear what happened to Li Zhun’s troop later on, but it is certainly wrong to regard Li Zhun’s dispatch of troop to the Nansha Islands as China’s first attempt to do so. Nevertheless, the above quoted passage at least acknowledges that Li Zhun’s crew did sail to the Nansha Islands (in addition to the Xisha Islands) to demonstrate sovereignty on behalf of the Qing Government. Further, Li Zhun’s mission identified and renamed 15 islands and islets, where his crew erected stone markers, raised Chinese flags, and held cannon-shooting ceremonies. These acts were performed in order to re-demonstrate China’s sovereignty over the entire South China Sea island groups.

In 1910, the Qing Government decided to invite Chinese merchants to contract for administering the development and exploitative affairs of the South China Sea Islands. Meanwhile, it demanded that “guan wei baohu weichi, yi zhong lingtu, er bao quan” (“the government shall provide protection and maintenance in order to strengthen [Qing’s] territorial sovereignty and to protect [Qing’s] titles and interests”).

After the 1911 Revolution, the New Government of Guangdong Province made redistribution of jurisdictional spheres by placing the Xisha Islands under the jurisdiction of the Ya Xian (Ya County) of Hainan Prefecture instead of being directly under the Prefecture itself. In 1921, the Southern Military Government affirmed and adopted the 1911 decision. To be sure, these decisions do not mean that China merely had sovereignty over the Xisha Islands. Instead, they simply meant that starting with 1911, the Ya County of Hainan, rather than the higher level government or governments, would have

---

147 Lin Jizhi, above n.75, 188.
149 Duanmu Zheng, ed., above n.51, 156; Lin Jizhi, above n.75, 188 & 189.
151 Liu Wenzong, above n.65, 70; Lin Jizhi, above n.75, 191.
152 Lin Jizhi, above n.75, 191.
original administrative and other authoritative jurisdiction over the Xisha Islands, while China's sovereignty over the Nansha Islands and other islands in the South China Sea would remain to be exercised directly by the relevant governments at the prefecture, provincial and central level.

In her initial decades, the Republic of China put more emphases on encouraging Chinese companies and businesses to participate in the development of the Xisha Islands. There were numerous examples of the Chinese Government granting licenses or taking other measures for developing the Xisha island group. The Nansha Islands are much more difficult to sustain year-round human inhabitation than the Xisha Islands. Further, the Xisha Islands are closer to Hainan Island and the Chinese mainland. The Xisha group's geographical and other natural conditions, still primitive, are more favorable than those of the Nansha Islands. Consequently, development and exploitation of the latter group naturally became China's priority in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, such priority programs by no means suggest that China ever had any intention of ignoring or abandoning the Nansha Islands.

China's civil wars and the war of resistance against the Japanese aggressors to a large extent interrupted China's exercise of sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands. Nevertheless, the Chinese Government, far from "forgetting" these island groups, took every opportunity it could to exhibit China's sovereignty over the Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands throughout the 1930's and 1940's.

III. Recovery from Japan

China is the only State to have accepted the Japanese surrender and gained legal recovery over the robbed or stolen territory in the South China Sea.

During the Second World War, Japan invaded and occupied not only a large part of the Chinese mainland, but also some major islands in the South China Sea in 1939. It renamed the Nansha island chain Shinnam Gunto (新南群岛, New South Islands), and placed these islands under the jurisdiction of Taiwan, which had been under Japanese rule since 1895. The Chinese people and Government engaged in relentless struggles of resistance against the Japanese occupation of China's territories, including Taiwan and the

---

South China Sea Islands, which in substantial part led to China’s victory and Japan’s surrender and withdrawal in 1945. It was these relentless efforts that culminated in China’s resumption of her physical exercise of sovereignty over these islands and the adjacent waters:

...China made unremitting efforts for the recovery of these islands from the Japanese occupation. In 1943, China, the United States and the United Kingdom announced in the Cairo Declaration that all the territories that Japan had stolen from China should be “restored to China,” including “Manchuria, Taiwan and the Penghu Islands.” At that time, Japan put the Nansha Islands under the jurisdiction of Taiwan. The territories to be restored to China...naturally included the Nansha Islands. The 1945 Potsdam Proclamation confirmed once again that the stolen territories should be restored to China. [In accordance with] the Cairo Declaration and Potsdam Proclamation, China recovered the Nansha Islands in 1946. At the same time it went through a series of legal procedures and announced to the whole world that China had resumed the exercise of sovereignty over the Nansha Islands. Subsequently, the Chinese Government held a take-over ceremony and sent troops to the islands on garrison duty. An official map of the Nansha Islands was drawn and printed, the Nansha Islands were renamed, collectively and individually, and the earliest book of the physical geography of the Nansha Islands was also compiled and printed.

Writing about China’s recovery of the South China Sea Islands, Swanson observes that “one of the first operations carried out by the ex-British ship [the Fubo] was the reoccupation of the Xisha (Paracel) and Nansha (Spratly) islands. In October and November 1946, a Chinese naval squadron visited these islands and assisted in setting up radio and meteorological stations.” Along with the naval contingent went officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to carry out survey and other administrative functions with regard to selected islands and reefs of both island groups. The Chinese Government stationed troops on the largest island in the Nansha Group, the Taiping Island, to oversee and patrol neighboring islands and adjacent waters, and constructed a weather station on the island.

156 FM-PRC, The Issue of South China Sea, Pt 3, above n.6.
157 Swanson, above n.93, 169.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
It is interesting to note that prior to the Japanese takeover, Japan had recognized China’s sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands. In 1938, for example, Japan found and declared it “unjustifiable” for France to claim title to the Xisha island group given the fact that both France and the United Kingdom had previously recognized the Xisha Islands as part of China’s Hainan Administrative Prefecture. Needless to say, Japan’s declaration must have been out of its own interest-driven considerations. To deny the French claims by recognizing China’s sovereignty would give Japan justification and latitude to occupy and “annex” the South China Sea Islands vis-à-vis France and the West in the near future.

While the West regarded Japan as the administrator of the entire South China Sea Islands for the period of its occupation, it is highly questionable whether Japan established its title to these island groups at all, because invasion and occupation per se do not suffice to acquire title to territory. In this regard, Japan was in a like position as France—the mere presence of claims and physical occupation, over China’s persistent objections, would establish title neither for France, nor for Japan. Upon Japan’s defeat at the end of the Second World War, it was only logical and natural for China as the legitimate title-holder to recover the South China Sea Islands from Japan. Indeed, China was the only country that dispatched naval forces and government officials to the Xisha and the Nansha areas to formally accept the Japanese surrender and withdrawal in the South China Sea areas and to declare her recovery of the entire South China Sea Islands. For China, the status of the Nansha and Xisha Islands after Japan’s surrender would not and should not depend on Japan’s renunciation of claims and/or any international scheme of disposition; because Japan never acquired title to the islands from China—it merely acquired physical control. China, and China only, would be entitled to recover what she considers to be inalienable parts of her territory irrespective of how a peace treaty with Japan would provide. On this point, Premier Zhou Enlai made it very clear in his “Statement on the United States’ and Great Britain’s Draft Treaty of Peace with Japan and the San Francisco Conference” of 1951: China’s inviolable sovereignty over the Nansha and Xisha Islands would not be affected by the draft peace treaty, regardless of whether and how it provides for their status.

Even if we conceded to accept the proposition that Japan’s full-scale occupation and annexation of the entire South China Sea island chains would

---

162 See text accompanying below n.181.
have established its title to the disputed area, subsequent events would still allow China to legally restore her sovereignty over the Dongsha, Zhongsha, Xisha and Nansha Islands. Under the unconditional 1943 Cairo Declaration and the 1945 Potsdam Proclamation, Japan was to return to China all territories that it had stolen from China during and prior to the war, which indisputably included the Xisha and Nansha Islands. More specifically, under Article 2 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty of September 8, 1951, "Japan renounces all right, title and claim to the Spratly Islands and to the Paracel Islands." The fact that the Treaty does not specifically provide that these islands be returned to China is insignificant; such express provision is not required.

In the first place, the return by Japan of all stolen territories to China was already guaranteed under the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation.

Secondly, the provision of specific recipients of territories formerly occupied by a defeated power is necessary only where the territory concerned was terra nullius or otherwise not falling under the jurisdiction of any other State prior to the occupation. Where an occupied territory was formerly under the sovereignty of another State, renunciation of all claims by the defeated State to the territory would automatically restore ownership and control to the former titleholder. Since China was the sole legitimate titleholder of the Xisha and Nansha Islands before Japan’s occupation (note that France never acquired any title interest in the island groups), Japan’s de facto and de jure renunciation of its claims to the South China Sea Islands would only lead to China’s full recovery.

Thirdly, Japan’s prior recognition of China’s ownership of the South China Sea Islands, and its implied or express intention to return them to China, were important factors in re-establishing China’s ownership. Japan’s intention to return the island groups to China is strongly indicated in a Japanese map published in 1952, the Map of Southeast Asia of the Standard World Atlas, the first Japanese official world atlas after the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty. The atlas (and the map in question), endorsed by the


then Japanese Foreign Minister, Cats Okazaki, with his signature, clearly marks the entire Xisha and Nansha island groups as part of China.\textsuperscript{166}

Lastly, it is significant to observe that neither France, nor Vietnam, nor the Philippines, nor any other country advanced any protests or objections when China resumed her sovereignty and control over the Nansha and Xisha Islands in 1946. Nor was there any objection on the part of any country when China renamed the island groups and published a list of standardized names for each of the major islands, reefs, banks, atolls and banks.

**III.M. Persistent Sovereign Claims and Protests against Foreign Encroachments**

Having always treated the South China Sea Islands as her own, China has persistently and consistently reiterated her “indisputable” sovereignty over them, and has opposed any form of foreign encroachments, invasions and occupations.

Because foreign powers generally recognized and respected China’s sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands, there were few instances that would give rise to the need for China to make formal protests. Whenever foreign encroachments, invasions and occupations take place or continue, however, China has invariably declared her oppositions by way of protests, reiteration of China’s sovereignty and/or otherwise.

**III.M.i. The Qing Government**

Since no foreign claims to the South China Sea Islands were known to the Qing Government and her predecessors, there was no felt need for the Central Kingdom to declare to the outside world that these islands and their adjacent waters were China’s historic territories and waters. Still less were there circumstances requiring the then Chinese Government to make any objection to a foreign party absent any competing claim. When such a chance did arise, however, China wasted no time in taking responsive actions. Such was the case in 1883 when the Qing Government lodged strong protests against Germany upon learning that the Germans were conducting survey activities in the Xisha and the Nansha areas without China’s permission. It was reportedly because of such protests that the Germans terminated their survey activities.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{166} Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, China’s Sovereignty over the Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands Indisputable (Jan. 30, 1980), People’s Daily, Jan. 31, 1980.

\textsuperscript{167} Duanmu Zheng, ed., above n.51, 156.
III.M.ii. The Republic of China

When the French laid claims to and forcibly occupied nine islands in the Nansha group, the Chinese people and Government in various forms demonstrated their strong protests and resistance. As the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated in 2000:

In 1933, France invaded and occupied 9 of the Nansha Islands, including Taiping and Zhongye Islands. The Chinese fishermen who lived and worked on the Nansha Islands immediately made a firm resistance against the invasion and the Chinese Government lodged a strong protest with the French Government.168

The following account written in 1933 by a Chinese historian and geographer, Ling Chunsheng (凌纯声), as translated by the present author, not only evidences Chinese fishermen's resistance against the French claims, but also demonstrates China's traditional links with and entitlement to the Nansha Islands:

(1) Amboyna Cay [i.e., Anbo Shazhou]...There is no natural water on the cay, nor plant. Yet, traces of fishermen temporarily living on the Cay are everywhere.

(2) Is. Tempete, Storm Island, also known as Spratly Island [i.e., Nanwei Island]...There are plants on the island. French men raised the French flag on the island in 1930, and the flag post remains there. However, the flag on the post has been replaced with a new [Chinese] flag that the Chinese [residents] on the island bought from Hainan. When the French vessel, The Malaiseuse, arrived here in 1930, there were already four Chinese men on the island, who had dig a well of natural water, and planted coconut trees, banana trees,...and vegetables. Their main occupations were to catch sea turtles...

(3) Itu Aba Island [i.e., Taiping Island]...The largest island of the [Nansha] Islands... There are plenty of plans on the island, including newly grown meng trees and coconut trees. There are currently no residents on the island, but there are many traces of inhabitation. People used to exploit phosphate deposits in 1920... There are three wells, one of them being natural water well. There is also a water tank. Buildings are very sloppy... Plants and trees include coconuts, bananas, pineapples, fan gua, etc. The above...suffices to indicate that fishermen recently lived here...

168 FM-PRC, The Issue of South China Sea, Pt 2, above n.6.
Loaita Island [i.e., Nanyue Island]...Plants on the island include meng trees, coconut trees and other trees. There are no residents for the time being, but vestiges of human inhabitation remain fresh. Fragrant joss sticks placed before a shrine are still there. Under a big tree is a thatched cottage, beside which there is a teakettle and a furnace...

Thitu Island [i.e., Zhongye Island]...There are meng trees, one coconut tree and several other big trees on the island. Five fishermen from China’s Hainan Island are living here this year. There is one well of natural water, yielding enough water for the five men to drink. Besides fishing, these men plant coconuts, bananas and fan gua, and also exploit phosphate deposits.

Shuang Islands [literally Twin Islands, also known as Two Islands], the northernmost islands in the [Nansha] Islands....The Northeast Island has been named Is. Allette [the North East Cay, i.e., Beizi Island]. Phosphate deposits on the island have not been exploited. No one is currently living here. There are only a few thatched cottages left. The French wrote the following large words on a cottage with white powders: “French vessels have been here and raised the French flag. France has occupied the two islands. Chinese fishermen were fishing here, but that already became past history.”

On the Southwest Island [South West Cay, i.e., Nanzi Island], there are seven Chinese people, including two children, all from Hainan Island. Food supplying boats did not come last year, but food deposits are still enough. [The Chinese] are raising tens of chicken...

In addition to the above seven islands, there are also...two small islands, the Nam Yit Island [now the Hongxiu Island] neighboring the Itu Aba Island, and the [West York, now Xiyue] Island near Loaita Island. There are all together nine islands [claimed by France], three of which are currently inhabited by Chinese. The other islands are also frequented by Chinese from time to time. Whether these inhabited islands are the so-called terra nullius under international law, and whether France could unilaterally occupy and claim as its own, are seriously questionable.\(^\text{160}\)

Shen, China’s Sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands

The resistance of Chinese residents on the French-claimed islands in the Nansha group is also evidenced in the interviews of some Chinese fishermen of Hainan Island conducted by the late Professor Han Zhenhua and his team during the 1970’s. Here’s the notes taken during one of the interviews:

On June 30, 1977, we interviewed the old fisherman Fu Guohe (72 years old) of the Xingguang Village of Longlou Commune, Wenchang County, Hainan Island. He recalled: When he was in his 20’s and 30’s, he spent a total of seven to eight years fishing in the Nansha Islands. His fellow village man Fu Hongguang (deceased in 1976) not only refused to raise the foreign flag which the foreigners (i.e., the Frenchmen) gave him and requested him to raise on the Niaozi Zhi (now the Nanwei Island), but also tore it up afterwards, in order to show his resolute resistance...

More importantly, when and after the French invasions of some of the islands in the Xisha and Nansha Islands took place, the Chinese Government repeatedly reaffirmed her title to the South China Sea Islands and lodged her protests against the French actions. According to a Chinese newspaper, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman, on July 26, 1933, made the following statement:

The coral islands between the Philippines and Vietnam have been inhabited by Chinese fishermen only, and have been recognized by the international community as China’s territories. We are shocked to have received the official French journal announcing France’s formal occupation. The French Government makes no justification for its actions. This [Foreign] Ministry, in addition to instructing by wire the Chinese Embassy in France to make inquiries for clarifications, is also actively considering countermeasures together with the Ministry of Navy, and will put forward serious protests over the French actions.

Meanwhile, the Guangdong Provincial Government, which was charged with special responsibility to deal with the French authorities because of Guangdong’s jurisdiction over the South China Sea Islands and its proximity

170 Han Zhenhua, et al., above n.54.
172 “France Occupies Nine Islands in Yue Hai [i.e., the South China Sea]; Foreign Ministry Protests,” Shen Bao [《申报》], July 27, 1933, quoted in Han Zhenhua, et al., above n.54.
to Vietnam, also lodged a strong protest to the French authorities. The same newspaper reported:

The Southwest Commissioner is seriously concerned with the incidents of France occupying the coral islands, and will do everything he can to preserve China's sovereignty over these island groups. Xiao Focheng [, the identity of whom is unclear] states today that the Yue [i.e., Guangdong] Provincial Government, upon instructions, has already lodged protests to the French authorities. The Southwest Commissioner is submitting this matter to the world public in request for justice. 173

On August 4, 1933, China notified the French Government that China reserved her rights to the coral islands in question pending an investigation. The diplomatic note, delivered by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the French Legation in Nanjing, stated:

The Chinese Government is very much concerned with this matter [i.e., the French-declared occupation of and sovereignty over nine islands in the South China Sea]. She hereby requests Your Excellency, the Minister of the French Legation, to inquire into and ascertain the name, the exact location and the longitude and latitude of each island and report the same to the Chinese Government. Pending such investigation and verification, the Chinese Government reserves her titles vis-à-vis the afore-mentioned declaration of the French Government. 174

When the names and locations of the nine islands claimed and occupied by the French later became known, it was apparent that these islands were in fact among China's Nansha Islands (then known as Wanli Shitang and various other names), Ambassador Wellington Koo (Gu Weijun) of China to France, subsequently delivered China's protest against the French occupation, stating that those islands and the entire Spratly Islands (Nansha Islands) were the territory of the Republic of China. 175

173 Shen Bao, Aug. 2, 1933, quoted in Han Zhenhua, et al., above n.54.
175 Hungdah Chiu & Choon-Ho Park, Legal Status of the Paracel and Spratly Islands, 3 Ocean Dev. & Int'l L J. (1975), 1, 12. See Tao Cheng, South China Sea, above n.157, 268-269.
Shortly after the Second World War, France once again laid claims to some of the islands in the South China Sea. The Chinese Government repeatedly rejected the French claims by reiterating China's sovereignty over those islands. On January 19, 1947, for example, in response to a re-emerging French claim to the Xisha Islands, the Chinese Embassy in France issued a public notice, stating that the Xisha Islands are China's territory. On January 21 of the same year, the Chinese Foreign Ministry delivered a diplomatic note to the French Embassy in Nanjing to reject the French claims, stating that the Xisha Islands belong to China. On January 28, 1947, upon learning of France’s invasion and occupation of the Shanhu Island, the Chinese Foreign Ministry delivered another diplomatic note to the French Embassy in strong protest of the French action.

In November 1947, the Chinese Ministry of Internal Affairs renamed many of the islands on the basis of comprehensive surveys conducted jointly by the navy and the Ministry of Internal Affairs officials.

III.M.iii. The People's Republic of China

Since 1949, the Chinese Government has on numerous occasions repeated her indisputable sovereignty over the entire four island groups in the South China Sea, issued various declarations and statements protesting against each and every foreign claim to and invasion of any part of the South China Sea Islands within the sphere of China’s claimed boundary, and invariably declared that any foreign occupation of, or any foreign action concerning the ownership of the South China Sea Islands, particularly the Nansha and Xisha groups, would be illegal and invalid.

Several important facts in the history of the PRC are worth mentioning here. The first of such facts was Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai’s “Statement on the United States' and Great Britain's Draft Treaty of Peace with Japan and the San Francisco Conference” issued on August 15, 1951. The Statement states, in part:

The Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands, like the Dongsha and Zhongsha Islands, have always been China’s territory. China’s sovereignty over the

---

176 Lin Jinzhi, above n.75, 193.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands shall not be affected no matter whether the U.S./U.K. Draft Peace Treaty with Japan would contain provisions [pertaining to these islands] and how it would provide [for them].

On May 29, 1956, in protest of the Philippines' claims of May 1956 to some islands in the Nansha island group, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a Declaration of Sovereignty over the Nansha Islands to the effect that the "Taiping Island and Nanwei Island in the South China Sea, together with the small islands in their vicinity, are known in aggregate as the Nansha Islands. These islands have always been a part of Chinese territory. The PRC has indisputable, legitimate sovereignty over these islands." The Declaration emphasized that "China's legitimate sovereignty over the Nansha Islands shall under no circumstances be violated by any country on any ground or by any means.

On September 4, 1958, the Chinese Government issued the PRC’s Declaration on Territorial Sea. Articles 1 and 4 of the Declaration expressly stated that the Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands, as well as the Dongsha and Zhongsha Islands, are China’s territory since ancient times, and that the principles of the Declaration shall equally apply to these island groups.

On February 27, 1959, in protest of South Vietnam’s continuing encroachments upon some of the islands in the Xisha Group and its abduction of Chinese fishermen off Chenhang Island (Duncan Island), the Chinese Foreign Ministry lodged a strong protest, reiterating that "the Xisha Islands are China's territory." On July 16, 1971, in protest of increased encroaching activities of Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia in the South China Sea Islands, the Chief of the General Staff of the PLA stated that "the Xisha and Nansha Islands have always been China’s territory."

In response to South Vietnam’s increased occupations of and claims to islands in the South China Sea in 1973, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign

---


182 FM-PRC Documents, above n.181, vol. 4, 62. See also Greenfield, above n.70, 33.

183 Ibid.


Ministry issued a statement on January 11, 1974, warning against South Vietnam's territorial claims over the Taiping Island, the Nanwei Island and more than 10 other islands, and reiterating China's indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha, Xisha, Zhongsha and Dongsha Islands.\(^7\)

Ignoring China's "repeated warnings," troops of the "Saigon South Vietnam regime," starting from January 15, 1974, constantly intruded into China's territory, territorial waters and air space around and over the Xisha Islands. On January 17, the Saigon troops forcibly occupied the Ganquan Island (Robert Island) and Jinyin Island (Money Island), and removed Chinese flags on the islands. On January 18, the Saigon forces attacked Chinese Fishing Vessels No. 402 and 407, totally disabling Fishing Vessel No. 407 near the Lingyang Reef (Antelope Reef). On January 19, 1974, at about 7:00 am, the Vietnamese forces attempted to occupy the Chenhang Island (Duncan Island), fired at Chinese fishermen on the island, causing a number of deaths and wounds. The Chinese fishermen and militia were forced to fight back in self-defense, expelling the intruders' attacks. At 10:20 am the same day, South Vietnamese naval vessels began firing at the Chenhang Island. At 10:30 am, four Vietnamese military airplanes bombed and raked the Chenhang Island. At the same time, four South Vietnamese naval forces opened fires at patrolling PLA vessels in the Xisha Islands.\(^8\) The Chinese naval patrollers had no choice but to fight back "in self-defense against invading South Vietnamese troops," sinking one Vietnamese navel vessel and repulsing three others.\(^9\) By January 20, 1974, the Chinese soldiers, with the help and cooperation of local Chinese fishermen and militia, had recovered the Ganquan Island, the Jinyin Island, and the Shanhu Island (Patde Island), completely defeating the intruding South Vietnamese forces.\(^1\)

The Chinese Foreign Ministry, in its declaration of January 20, 1974, reiterated that the "Xisha Islands, Nansha Islands...have always been China's territory."\(^1\) On February 4, 1974, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in his declaration in strong protest against the South Vietnamese intrusion and occupation of the Nanzi Island (South West Cay) and several others of the Nansha Islands, once again pointed out: "The Nansha Islands, Xisha Islands, Zhongsha Islands and Dongsha Islands, are all part of Chinese

---

7 Ibid., Jan. 12, 1974, 1.
9 Ibid.
10 People's Daily, Jan. 21, 1974, 1.
11 Ibid., Jan. 21, 1974, 1.
territory. The People's Republic of China has undisputable sovereignty over these islands and their surrounding sea area.\textsuperscript{192}

At the second meeting between Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Han Nianlong and his Vietnamese counterpart on April 26, 1979, the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister made the following statement:

The Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands have always been an inalienable part of Chinese territory. The Vietnamese part should come back to its original position of recognizing that fact, respect China's sovereignty over these two sets of islands, and withdraw all its personnel from those islands of the Nansha Islands which it occupies.\textsuperscript{193}

In his statement of September 26, 1979, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterated that China has undisputable sovereignty over the Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands and their surrounding sea areas. He emphasized that the natural resources in these areas are China's property.\textsuperscript{194}

On January 30, 1980, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued an official document titled “China’s Sovereignty over the Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands Indisputable.” The document cited a significant amount of historical material, records, maps, and cultural relics to demonstrate that these islands have been China’s territory since no later than the Song Dynasty.\textsuperscript{195}

On November 14, 1983, Qi Huaiyuan, the Head of the Press Division of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, made the following statement at a press conference:

Recently, the Danwan Reef located within China’s Nansha Islands was illegally occupied by foreign armed forces; some other countries subsequently made territorial claims towards certain islands and reefs of China’s Nansha Islands. China has undisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands and the surrounding sea areas, and the natural resources within such areas are China’s property. China’s legitimate sovereignty over the Nansha Islands is under no circumstances allowed to be violated by any country on any ground by any means. Any and all occupations,

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid, Apr. 27, 1979, 5.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid, Sept. 27, 5.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid, Jan. 31, 1980, 1.
exploration, exploitation and other activities in the Nansha Islands areas by any foreign country are all illegal and impermissible.196

In May 1987, the PLA dispatched naval vessels to the Nansha Islands area to perform patrols.197 On February 12, 1988, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that China's normal patrols and other operations in some of the Nansha Islands and their surrounding waters are matters which are entirely within China's sovereign rights, and that Vietnam had no right to interfere.198 On March 14, 1988, Vietnamese naval vessels opened fire at China's naval patrol forces which were conducting surveys on the Chigua jiao Reef (Johnson Reef; also known as Mabini Reef). The Chinese forces were compelled to return fire in self-defense.199

In February 25, 1992, China passed her Law on Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone, which reiterates that “the territory of the People's Republic of China includes...the Dongsha Islands, Xisha Islands, Zhongsha Islands, Nansha Islands, and all other islands that belong to the People's Republic of China.”200 Two other relevant pieces of legislation passed respectively in 1998 and 1999 would create the same scope of applicability to cover the South China Sea Islands.201

On May 11, 1995, in reference to the Philippines' encroaching activities in the Nansha Islands, Shen Guofang, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, accused the Philippines of these moves, and reiterated China's “irrefutable sovereignty” over the Nansha Islands.202 Shen stressed that “China is an independent state and is a country which will stick to its principles and will not bend down in the face of any pressure. China will not give limitless

197 Lin Jinzhi, above n.75, 196.
tolerance to these encroachments and provocations on China’s sovereignty and dignity.”

On May 15, 1996, the Standing Committee of the NPC of China passed a Decision to Ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Decision declares that China reiterates its titles and rights to the various islands referred to in Article 2 of the 1992 Law on Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone, which include the Xisha and Nansha Islands. Meanwhile, China issued her “Declaration...on the Baselines of the Territorial Sea of the People’s Republic of China.” The Declaration announces the baselines “of part of [China’s] territorial sea adjacent to the mainland and those of the territorial sea adjacent to [the] Xisha Islands,” and states that the baselines for the Nansha Islands and other islands of China are to be issued separately.

On June 329, 1999, Zhang Qiyue, Spokeswoman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, commented on the reportedly Malaysian construction of facilities on the Yuyue Ansha (Investigation Shoal) and Boji Jiao (Erica Reef) of the Nansha island group. She said China has irrefutable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands and their adjacent waters, and that the construction of facilities on the Yuyue Ansha and Boji Jiao, by whatever other country for whatever purposes, had already constituted an encroachment upon China’s territorial sovereignty, and would therefore be illegal and null and void. She added that the Chinese Government had sent a diplomatic Note of Protest to Malaysia, demanding the latter to undo what it had been doing, and stop its encroachments upon China’s territory.

On March 2, 1999, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Zhu Bangzao, expressed China’s strong protests over the Philippines’ construction of airport runways and other military installations on the Zhongye Island (Thi Tu Island). Reiterating that the Zhongye Island is an integral part of the entire Nansha island group, over which China has indisputable sovereignty, he said the Philippines’ conduct constituted a grave violation of China’s territorial

---

203 Ibid.
sovereignty. On January 27, 2000, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman reiterated China’s indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands, and “warned the Philippines not to create any new ‘trouble’ in the South China Sea.”

On February 13, 2001, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhu Bangzao, reiterated China’s “indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands and the adjacent waters” when expressing China’s “serious concerns” over reports that Vietnam was planning to install an administrative function in the Nansha area. “Any unilateral act by any other country concerning the Islands,” he stated, “will constitute an infringement upon China’s territorial sovereignty and will be illegal and null and void.”

On March 20, 2001, when rejecting the Philippines’ claim of March 15, 2001 to the Huang Yan Island (Scarborough Shoal), the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson made the following remarks:

The Huang Yan Island is China’s innate territory and the waters around it is the traditional fishing area for the Chinese fishermen, for which China has abundant historical and jurisprudence backings. Ever since the ancient times, numerous documents on the Chinese history have put down definitely in writing that the Huang Yan Island belongs to China’s territory. The fact that China has sovereign right and exercises jurisdiction over the Huang Yan Island is widely respected by the international community.

The Huang Yan Island has never been within the territorial limits of the Philippines. A series of treaties on the delimitation of the Philippine territory have stipulated explicitly that the demarcation line in the west of the territorial limits of the Philippines is at 118 degree east longitude while the Huang Yan Island is to the west of it and a component part of China’s Zhongsha Islands. The map published by the government of the Philippines also clearly indicates that the Huang Yan Island is not within the Philippine territorial limits.

---


210 Ibid.

211 People’s Daily, Mar. 21, 2001, 1.
When commenting on the Philippine navy's boarding some 10 Chinese fishing boats near the Huang Yan Island and confiscating some fishing equipment and catches a week earlier, the spokesperson stated that since the Huang Yan Island is an innate part of the Chinese territory and its adjacent waters is a traditional fishing area for Chinese fishermen, the fishing activities of the Chinese fishermen in the waters near the Huang Yan Island were "proper and normal." The spokesperson added that the Philippines "has no right whatsoever to go aboard the Chinese boats in the waters around the Huang Yan Island for inspection and take any measure."

The above are but some examples of China's efforts in protecting and maintaining China's sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands. The Chinese claims of sovereignty and objections to foreign assertions concerning the South China Sea Islands have been persistent and consistent throughout history, and such claims and efforts are continuing.

IV. Conclusions

The above analysis shows that China has strong and convincing evidence of sovereignty over the Xisha and Nansha Islands. Nevertheless, over the years since I became interested in the issue of the sovereignty over the South China Sea islands, I have read and heard scholars and non-scholars questioning the historical bases of China's sovereign claims to the Xisha and Nansha Islands. For example, Joyner, citing the *Legal Status of Eastern Greenland* case, writes that "discovery only creates inchoate title, which must be perfected by subsequent continuous and effective acts of occupation, [i.e.]...permanent settlement," and that "[e]vidence of such permanent settlement is not compelling in the case of China's claim to the Spratlys." Clagett, in his opinion paper commissioned by Vietnam, took a similar line of argument. Finally, an unsigned commentary published on the web also took a similar line, and seized upon an alleged Chinese government report published in 1928 that allegedly did not mention the *Nansha* (Spratly)

---

212 Ibid.


Islands. This unsigned commentary gives no citation to this alleged report, nor does it mention which office issued it, or what purpose the report served.

What Joyner, like others, relies upon is the general rule of modern international law on the acquisition and perfection of territorial title. The general rule had been earlier outlined in the Island of Palmas Arbitration, which is regarded a landmark case containing a more authoritative statement of the general rule, but to which Joyner makes no reference. He, like many commentators, fails to consider the other side of the Legal Status of Eastern Greenland case that states an important exception to the general standard, an exception which governs the acquisition of title to thinly populated or unsettled territory, and which I will discuss shortly.

It is true that, surviving historical records, judged against the above-referred-to general rule governing the acquisition of titles in normal territorial situations, when viewed piece by piece, may seem less than overwhelming. However, a single piece of evidence, no matter how probative, does not necessarily in itself suffice to lead to a conclusion in one direction or the other. One cannot look at the largely scattered pieces of evidence in isolation from one another, nor can he or she neglect to ask the questions of what types of territorial situations are at issue and therefore what rules of law (or exceptions thereto) should be the governing law.

What I mean is as follows. In the first place, we must weigh the evidence in its totality rather than in a piece meal fashion. Putting aside the question of which side has genuine and reliable historical records, an issue I intend to specifically deal with at a later time, and assuming that all evidence put forward by the claimants is genuine and credible, we must decide in whose favor the totality of the evidence weighs on the balance. As far as I am aware, none of the other claimants to the South China Sea Islands, according to the Eastern Greenland standard, has made out a “superior” claim over that of China’s—their claims came rather too late to defeat China’s title. In the absence of more compelling contrary evidence, the afore-discussed lines of historical materials, which by no means are exhaustive, do constitute in their entirety an abundance of overwhelming evidence sufficient to make the

---

216 Quoted in: <http://members.tripod.com/paracels74/chinaargument.htm> (Paracels Forum) (author and source of publication unspecified).
218 See text accompanying below n.226.
219 See text accompanying below n.227.
balance in China's favor. This is so even under the general international law rule governing the acquisition of territorial title in normal situations.\(^220\)

Secondly, assuming the alleged 1928 Chinese report mentioned in the unsigned commentary mentioned above did exist, the existence of which nevertheless needs to be verified, such alleged evidence, even coupled with other China-disfavored evidence, if any, in no sense appears to reach a level sufficient to chip away at the totality of the evidence in China's favor.

If such a neglect did exist, it could only be inadvertent, and thus not meaningful, and could not constitute any abandonment or disclaimer of China's sovereignty over the areas in question by any scale. The unnamed author did not tell us which government office issued the report or for what purpose the report was issued. Without such information, one cannot give the report any value, even under normal circumstances. Besides, China was constantly at civil wars in the first half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1910's, 1920's, and 1930's, resulting in a China with one country and two and sometimes several governments, none of which at times could speak for the entire country. If, for the sake of argument, any maps and publications published during these periods did neglect to mention the South China Sea Islands, even if under official color, they could hardly be considered to represent the true and real official position of China as a country. Indeed, the very first relevant official map approved by the Chinese central authorities after the 1911 Revolution was not published until 1935,\(^221\) a fact that places the alleged 1928 Chinese "official" report in serious doubt.

Most importantly, neither Vietnam, nor the Philippines, nor any other contender to the South China Sea Islands, has presented any "superior" map or other document covering the same period of time in history as China does. Regardless of the existence or non-existence of the alleged 1928 report, and absent any "superior" map or claim by other claimant in light of the standard outlined in the Eastern Greenland case,\(^222\) the abundance of Chinese maps and other documents in China's favor suffices to support China's claims to the South China Sea Islands.

Thirdly, the principle of inter-temporal law requires that when dealing with territorial disputes, the applicable law is not the law that is in effect when the disputes arise or are submitted for resolution; rather, the law that was in effect at the time of alleged acquisition governs. Under pre-18th century rules of international law, discovery alone, or at most discovery along with some

\(^{220}\) See Shen, "International Law Rules," above n.1, 10-12.

\(^{221}\) See text accompanying above n.118-119.

\(^{222}\) See text accompanying below n.227.
form of symbolic acts, was all that was required to establish title to territory. Under the then applicable law, China had long before discovered the South China Sea Islands, and had done more than mere symbolic acts to display her authorities. Therefore, China had unquestionably acquired title to the South China Sea Islands before any foreign claims arose, regardless of whether China was aware of the existence of general rules of international law at that time.223

Fourthly, while the general rules requiring actual and continuous display of authority in regular and normal territorial situations, as were typically outlined in the Palmas and the Eastern Greenland cases,224 continue to be the general law, one must take into account the enormous irregularity and abnormality of the South China Sea Islands as well as an important exception to the general rule, i.e., the exception that governs the establishment of sovereignty over abnormal territories requiring little actual display of authority. This exception to the general rules of present-day international law has been well delineated in a number of holdings of international tribunals, and widely supported by State practice and scholarly writings.225

The Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Palmas case, while mainly discussing the general rule, wasted no time in recognizing the exception. It held that the displays of “territorial sovereignty assume...different forms, according to conditions of time and place,” that while “continuous in principle, sovereignty cannot be exercised in fact at every moment on every point of a territory,” and that “the intermittence and discontinuity compatible with the maintenance of the right necessarily differ according as [sic] inhabited or uninhabited regions are involved...”226

In the Legal Status of Eastern Greenland case, the Permanent Court of International Justice similarly observed and upheld that “in many cases the tribunal is often satisfied with very little in the way of the actual exercise of sovereign rights, provided that the other state could not make out a superior claim,” and that “[t]his is particularly true in the case of claims to sovereignty over areas in thinly populated or unsettled countries.”227

The Clipperton Arbitration tribunal stated this exception to the general rule in crystal clear tones: Although the exercise of effective sovereignty normally required the establishment of an administration “capable of securing respect of

---

224 Ibid, 10-11.
226 Island of Palmas, above n.215.
227 Eastern Greenland, above n.213.
the sovereign’s rights, this was not necessary in the case of uninhabited territory at occupying state’s absolute and undisputed disposition.\textsuperscript{228}

The International Court of Justice, in the \textit{Western Sahara} advisory opinion, similarly held that even an “insignificant display of sovereignty” can establish sovereignty over an unpopulated or barely inhabited area.\textsuperscript{229} Indeed, as has been rightly stated, “[i]n a remote, uninhabited territory the degree of authority actually displayed may be relatively small, whereas in a populated area the degree must be greater.”\textsuperscript{230}

Few territorial features in the world, perhaps, can more adequately be described as “remote” and/or “uninhabited” than the South China Sea Islands. Except for a few in the \textit{Xisha} Islands, the South China Sea Islands are so hard to sustain human settlement on a permanent basis that they are virtually entirely uninhabitable. Even the Yongxing Island (Woody Island) in the \textit{Xisha} group, the very largest one, did not have potable water until 1996. Given the high \textit{abnormity} and \textit{uninhabitability} of the South China Sea Islands that China undeniably discovered, it is clear that the general rule of territorial acquisition does not apply; rather, the exception to the general rule governs. In other words, China did not, and does not, need to display such extensive acts of sovereignty as required by the general rule, \textit{e.g.}, transporting migrants, setting up administrations and/or stationing troops, in order to perfect or maintain her already established sovereignty over the \textit{Xisha} and \textit{Nansha} Islands and their adjacent seas. All that may be required of China under the exception to the general rule of international law is to exhibit some form of symbolic authority over these self-discovered uninhabitable territories, a test which China has far more than satisfied over a period of more than two thousand years.

Before concluding, I feel compelled to come back to the allegations that China was making expansions in the South China Sea, or that China was claiming or occupying parts of the \textit{Nansha} island group by stealth or force.\textsuperscript{231} As demonstrated in the above analysis of historical evidence, these areas have already been within Chinese control and under her sovereignty since ancient times. Any allegation that China was making expansions in the South China Sea, or that China was claiming or occupying parts of the \textit{Nansha} island group

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{228} Clipperton Island Arbitration, 2 U.N.R.I.A.A. 1105, 26 Am. J. Int’l L. (1931), 390 (\textit{emphasis added}).
\item \textsuperscript{229} Advisory Opinion on the Status of Western Sahara, 1975 I.C.J. Rep. 12, 43 (Oct. 16, 1975).
\item \textsuperscript{231} See text accompanying above n. 11-12.
\end{itemize}
As a peace-loving nation, China has exercised an extreme degree of forbearance, tolerance and self-restraint in the face of frequent and offensive foreign claims, intrusions and occupations, so as to avoid armed conflicts and maintain peace and stability in the region and good relationship with the other claimant parties. This high degree of self-restraint, however, should not be interpreted as a limitless one. Nor should it be read to mean that forcible recovery could never be an option. As the titleholder, China has the right to decide whether, when and how to utilize these island chains and natural resources therein, to make and maintain physical presence there, and to install military and non-military facilities for the purpose of self-defense and/or protection of Chinese fishing and other economic and non-economic activities. She has the right to maintain peace and order in the area within her jurisdiction. She also has the right, if she so wishes and when she deems it necessary, to expel invading foreign occupiers as an alternative to diplomatic and political measures, although whether and when to exercise such right is entirely at China's discretion as the titleholder. Peaceful settlement through negotiation, adjudication or otherwise, as all parties seem to prefer, must, of course, remain the desirable means.