

HISTORICAL AND
LEGAL BASIS OF
CHINA' S TERRITORIAL
SOVEREIGNTY AND
MARITIME RIGHTS IN
THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

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Preface

Eighty years ago, Japan announced its acceptance of the Potsdam Proclamation and unconditionally surrendered when the sunshine of peace once again bathed the land.

Thereafter, in accordance with the explicit provisions of the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, the Chinese government reclaimed the islands of the South China Sea— Nanhai Zhudao.

During its war of aggression against China, Japan had illegally occupied these islands, but the Chinese people courageously resisted the aggression, upholding their ancestors' legacy of development and governance over the islands.

With the advancement of the World Anti-Fascist War and the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, China, the United States, and the United Kingdom jointly issued the Cairo Declaration in December 1943, solemnly declaring that Japan must return all territories it had stolen from China. In July 1945, the three nations reaffirmed this in the Potsdam Proclamation, with Article 8 explicitly stating that "the terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out."

The return of Nanhai Zhudao to China was an integral part of the post-war international order and territorial arrangements, protected by international law, including the UN Charter. To deny China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao is to deny the post-war international order and brazenly violate international law.

Eight decades later, the historical records remain irrefutable, and the evidence stands powerful like a mountain.

Chinese activities in the South China Sea date back over 2,000 years. China was the first to discover, name, and develop the islands and adjacent waters, exercising continuous, peaceful, and effective sovereignty and jurisdiction there. China's sovereignty and maritime rights in the South China Sea were established through centuries of history, grounded in ample historical and legal foundations.

For decades after World War II, no country contested China's sovereignty or rights in the region.

Yet today, a sea once freely navigated by commercial vessels and fishing boats has become murky waters.

From February 18 to 20, 2025, Philippine aircraft—two C-208 and one N-22—

illegally intruded into the airspace near China's Nansha Qundao, with one C-208 even violating the airspace of China's Huangyan Dao. In a deliberate and dangerous maneuver, one C-208 abruptly descended 920 meters in just 218 seconds, recklessly crossing the altitude of a Chinese helicopter conducting routine patrols—an unprofessional act that nearly triggered a maritime or aerial incident.^①

Such confrontations have become alarmingly frequent, turning the once-tranquil waters into a hotspot of instability.

As the United States rallies its allies and partners to strategically contain China, certain claimant states, like the Philippines, collude with non-regional powers to provoke disputes. The South China Sea, once a zone of peace, cooperation, and friendship, has been tainted into a geopolitical arena rife with confrontation. The disputes have escalated and become more international and complicated in nature.

The Chinese government has always advocated resolving overlapping territorial and maritime claims with the relevant countries concerned through negotiation and consultation, based on historical facts and international law. The successful delimitation of the Beibu Gulf with Vietnam stands as a testament to China's independent foreign policy, good-neighborly diplomacy, and commitment to upholding international law.

China's position on the South China Sea has been consistent and clear: disputes must be settled peacefully through dialogue, with rules and mechanisms established to manage differences. This reflects China's steadfast adherence to international law and the basic norms of international relations, as well as its successful practice of the rule of law at the international level. It remains the only viable path to managing and resolving South China Sea issues.

Beneath the waves, islands dot the vast blue; beyond the horizon, China's rightful shores endure.

The South China Sea is not only the “ancestral waters” of the Chinese people but also a living testament to China's maritime civilization. The ocean nurtures life, connects the world, and drives progress. Moving forward, China will uphold

① “Remarks of the spokesperson for the Southern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army”, from the WeChat account of the Southern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army, February 21, 2025.

the vision of a “maritime community with a shared future,” serving as a guardian of peace, a builder of order, a promoter of cooperation, and a contributor to development in an effort to turn the South China Sea into a sea of peace, friendship, and shared prosperity for all.

Chapter One Nanhai Zhudao Belongs to China—An Integral Part of the Post-War International Order

To set the record straight, we must get to the root of the issue.

To forge ahead, we must remember history.

The year 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War. Eight decades ago, as part of the post-war international order and global landscape, China resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao in accordance with international legal instruments such as the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, which laid the foundation for the post-war international order.

This represents a comprehensive repudiation of the illegal occupation of Chinese territories by Japanese militarism and Western colonialism, as well as a recognition and affirmation of China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in Nanhai Zhudao.

In 1945, after 14 years of bloody struggle and at the cost of over 35 million military and civilian casualties, the Chinese people, together with the people of the world, achieved victory in the World Anti-Fascist War. As a decisive victor of World War II and a founding architect of the post-war international order, China holds sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao which is inherently part of that order and its territorial arrangements.

I. Post-War International Order Clearly Affirming Nanhai Zhudao as Chinese Territory

On Yongxing Dao in Sansha City, China, there stands a stone monument approximately 70 centimeters tall and 50 centimeters wide facing the sea. Despite over seven decades of weathering, it remains solemn and striking. On its front are four red-painted characters: *Nan Hai Ping Fan* (meaning South Sea Bulwark).

The back bears the inscription: Monument to the Recovery of Xisha Qundao by the Navy • 24th November, 35th Year of the Republic of China • Erected by Zhang Junran.

This monument captures the historic moment when China lawfully resumed sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao after World War II. In November 1946, the Guangdong Provincial Government was tasked with organizing a mission to retake Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao, which had been occupied by Japanese forces. On November 24 and December 12, Chinese officials completed the handover, re-erected boundary markers, conducted surveys, assessed resources, and held official ceremonies—proclaiming to the world China's sovereignty over Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao in the heart of the South China Sea.

The restoration of China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao was an inseparable component of the post-war international order. The disposition of territories illegally seized by Japan during World War II was crucial to achieving peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific. International legal documents such as the Cairo Declaration and Potsdam Proclamation established the principles and basic policies governing the disposition of such territories.

In November 1943, the leaders of China, the United States, and the United Kingdom convened in Cairo and issued the Cairo Declaration, which stated: "It is their purpose that Japan shall be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has seized or occupied since the beginning of the first World War in 1914, and that all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China. Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed."^①

In July 1945, on the eve of the complete victory of the World Anti-Fascist War, China, the U.S., and the U.K. issued the Potsdam Proclamation, reaffirming that "the terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out" and that "Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku, and such minor islands as we determine."

After Japan's unconditional surrender, its forces occupying Xisha Qundao and

① Formosa and the Pescadores refer to Taiwan and Penghu Qundao respectively as officially named by China today.—Translator's note.

Nansha Qundao withdrew to Yulin Port in Hainan and surrendered to Chinese forces stationed there.

II. China's Recovery of Nanhai Zhudao Being a Right Granted by International Law to Victors of Anti-Fascist Aggression

The Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression was an integral part of the World Anti-Fascist War. China was the main theater in the fight against Japanese fascist aggression and the primary Eastern battlefield of the global anti-fascist war. China's resistance drained Japan's military strength, pinned down the bulk of its army and navy, and prevented Japan from advancing north or south—thereby relieving pressure on the Soviet Union, the U.S., and the U.K. Even after the Pacific War broke out, China's front continued to tie down the main force of Japanese army. During World War II, the U.S. and Japan also engaged in fierce naval and air battles near Nansha Qundao.

China's recovery of sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao was a legitimate right under international law as a victor over fascist aggression. China was the main Eastern battlefield for the Global War against Fascism. It began the earliest, lasted the longest, resisted and eliminated the most Japanese troops, made the greatest sacrifices, and played a decisive role in the complete victory over Japanese fascism. During Japan's strategic offensive and China's strategic defense, the total troops deployed by both China and Japan exceeded 4 million, with a front line stretching over 1,800 kilometers. The war spread across more than 10 provinces in China, covering a combat area of approximately 1.6 million square kilometers and involving 400 million Chinese people. China's immense sacrifices and contributions to the anti-fascist victory fully entitled it, under international law, to reclaim territories illegally occupied by Japan.

China's recovery of sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao conforms to the international law principle of restitution. Under international law, wartime occupation does not constitute a transfer of territorial sovereignty, and illegally occupied territories must be returned to their rightful owners. As a victorious nation in the World Anti-Fascist War, China had the right to reclaim territories Japan had illegally occupied. Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao belonged to China before Japan's invasion and occupation, and should be rightfully restored to China after Japan's defeat and

surrender.

China's recovery of sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao was further confirmed by international treaties. To resolve the territorial and international status issues of Japan as a defeated nation, the Treaty of Peace with Japan (hereinafter referred to as the San Francisco Peace Treaty), was signed on September 8, 1951, and entered into force as of April 28, 1952. The Treaty states that Japan recognized the independence of Korea and renounced its right to Taiwan, Penghu, the Kurile Islands, part of Sakhalin, Nansha Qundao and Xisha Qundao. Chapter II-Territory, Article 2 (6) of the Treaty, in particular, specifies that "Japan renounces all right, title, and claim to the Spratly Islands and to the Paracel Islands."^①

Despite being the primary victim of Japanese militarism and one of the four major victors of World War II, the People's Republic of China was excluded from the San Francisco Conference. In response, the Chinese government issued the Statement by Zhou Enlai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, on the U.S.-U.K. Draft Peace Treaty with Japan and the San Francisco Conference on August 15, 1951, declaring that Nanhai Zhudao, including Nansha Qundao, "have always been China's territory." It opposed the fact that the San Francisco Peace Treaty stipulated Japan's renunciation of all rights to Nanhai Zhudao without mentioning the return of sovereignty, and reaffirmed that these islands had been "completely recovered by the Chinese government at that time" after Japan's surrender, and that the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China over these islands "shall not be in any way affected."

In 1952, the Japanese government officially stated that it had renounced all right, title, and claim to Taiwan, Penghu, as well as Nansha Qundao and Xisha Qundao. In the same year, Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao, which Japan renounced under the San Francisco Peace Treaty, together with Dongsha Qundao and Zhongsha Qundao, were all marked as belonging to China on the 15th map, Southeast Asia, of the *Standard World Atlas* recommended by then Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuo Okazaki with his signature. In the Joint Statement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of Japan in

① The Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands refer to Nansha Qundao and Xisha Qundao respectively as officially named by China today.—Translator's note.

1972, Japan reaffirmed its adherence to Article 8 of the Potsdam Proclamation, once again confirming the fact that Nanhai Zhudao belong to China.

III. International Recognition of China's Lawful Resumption of Sovereignty Over Nanhai Zhudao

On May 23, 1946, China dispatched naval forces to Dongsha Qundao and established a meteorological station. On August 15, a platoon from the 64th Reorganized Division was reinforced to garrison the island. On November 24 of the same year, Chinese forces stationed on Yongxing Dao of Xisha Qundao, and on December 12, personnel recovering Nansha Qundao held a flag-raising ceremony on Taiping Dao to mark the takeover of Nansha Qundao. From then on, China completed the recovery of Nanhai Zhudao, stationed troops on the islands, and established various military and civil facilities, thus restoring the exercise of sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao both legally and de facto.

Recognition by major countries. From November to December 1946, the Chinese government sent senior military and government officials, led by Colonel Lin Zun, aboard four warships (*Yongxing*, *Zhongjian*, *Taiping*, and *Zhongye*) to Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao respectively, where they held ceremonies, re-established sovereignty monuments, and stationed troops. The Chinese government renamed four islands in Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao after these four warships. This mission was supported by U.S. General Douglas MacArthur; historical records show that the four warships used in the operation were provided by the United States.

Thereafter, the United States demonstrated its recognition of China's sovereignty over Nansha Qundao through diplomatic inquiries, applications for surveys, and notifications of navigation and overflight plans. Between 1957 and February 1961, U.S. air force personnel stationed in the Philippines repeatedly applied to the Taiwan authorities of China for permission to conduct charting surveys and meteorological investigations in Huangyan Dao and Nansha Qundao, indicating that the United States recognized China's sovereignty over these islands and reefs. China even hosted U.S. military personnel on some islands and reefs in Nansha Qundao during this period. Meanwhile, U.S.-published maps and books, such as the 1961 *Columbia Lippincott World Gazetteer*, the 1963 *Wilder's Encyclopedia*

of the Nations, and the 1971 *Encyclopedia of the World's Peoples and Places*, all confirmed China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao.

The 1952 *Map of the Indochinese Peninsula and Indonesia* compiled by the Geodetic and Cartographic Department of the Soviet Council of Ministers used phonetic transliterations of Chinese names for Dongsha Qundao, Xisha Qundao, and Nansha Qundao, with the abbreviation "China" in parentheses.

Recognition by international organizations. China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao has also been widely recognized by international organizations. For example, from March 17 to April 1, 1987, the 14th Meeting of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO discussed the Global Sea Level Observing System Implementation Plan 1985–1990 submitted by the Commission's secretariat, recommending the inclusion of Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao in the global sea level observing system and designating these two island groups as belonging to the "People's Republic of China." To implement this plan, the Chinese government was entrusted to build five marine observation stations, including one each in Nansha Qundao and Xisha Qundao.

China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao has been widely recognized by the international community since the end of World War II. The fundamental reason is that the return of Nanhai Zhudao to China is part of the post-war international order and related territorial arrangements, protected by international law, including the UN Charter.

Denying China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao means denying the post-war international order.

Chapter Two Some Claimant States Escalate South China Sea Disputes, Challenging the Post-War International Order

Intrusions, illegal occupations, standoffs, expulsions...

Since the discovery of abundant oil and gas resources in the South China Sea in the 1970s, claimant states such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, and Malaysia have persistently staged farces of occupying uninhabited islands and reefs and plundering marine resources in the South China Sea, disregarding repeated dissuasions and warnings from China. In particular, since 2020, emboldened

and supported by non-regional powers like the United States, the Philippines has continuously confronted China's legitimate and lawful rights protection efforts in the South China Sea through its "gray zone" strategy. It has shaped misperceptions about South China Sea issues through a "victim narrative" tactic, promoted domestic maritime legislation under the banner of implementing international law, and whitewashed its illegal encroachment on China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea.

Irresponsible actions by countries like the Philippines have escalated South China Sea disputes to a level close to "quasi-military operations," even pushing the situation to the brink of conflict or war.

I. Illegal Occupation of Chinese Islands and Reefs by Some Claimant States

Following the discovery of massive oil and gas resources in the South China Sea in the 1970s, countries like the Philippines and Vietnam accelerated their military occupation of Chinese islands and reefs in the South China Sea, intensifying disputes over them. Vietnam and the Philippines have illegally occupied parts of China's Nansha Qundao, launched large-scale construction, and deployed troops there—actions prohibited by international law and the UN Charter.

Vietnam has continuously reinforced military deployments on illegally occupied islands and reefs. In recent years, Vietnam has accelerated its military deployments on some islands and reefs of Nansha Qundao it illegally occupied, enhancing its military projection capabilities. This has further increased the possibility of Vietnam achieving its military strategy in the South China Sea. The ever-expanding occupied islands, together with Vietnam's "S"-shaped southern coastline, form a relatively complete system, enabling it to "control larger areas through key points" and leverage geographical advantages to maximize the operational flexibility of small-tonnage vessels for effective maritime confrontation.

The Philippines has further enhanced its construction of military facilities on illegally occupied islands and reefs. Since 2022, the Philippines has significantly accelerated the construction of military facilities on Zhongye Dao, Xiyue Dao, Mahuan Dao, and Beizi Dao it occupied. In March 2022, the Philippines built a new helicopter landing pad on Mahuan Dao. In May, the Philippine Coast Guard established surveillance outposts on Xiyue Dao, Mahuan

Dao, and Beizi Dao to enhance its maritime detection and monitoring capabilities in the South China Sea. These outposts are used to monitor surrounding ships and report information to the Philippine Coast Guard headquarters. In June 2022, the Philippines established a coast guard workstation on Zhongye Dao and completed a 1,300-meter-long, 100-meter-wide concrete runway.

Malaysia has also built a naval base on Danwan Jiao. With external support, some South China Sea claimant states like the Philippines and Vietnam have either carried out facility construction and military deployments on the islands that they occupied or increased the number of residents and expanded the functions of island facilities, with the fundamental aim of demonstrating and consolidating their so-called “sovereignty” over the occupied Chinese islands and reefs.

II. Unlawful Oil and Gas Exploitation in the South China Sea by Some Claimant States

Driven by greed for oil and gas resources in the South China Sea, countries like the Philippines and Vietnam have continuously strengthened their sovereignty claims over China's South China Sea islands and illegally seized resources through the strategy of “contesting sovereignty at sea and resources under the sea.”

Some South China Sea claimant states have achieved a structural shift from relying on crude oil imports to exporting oil by illegally seizing oil and gas resources in disputed areas, becoming tangible beneficiaries. Faced with the enormous wealth brought by abundant oil and gas resources, these claimant countries have persistently intensified their illegal exploitation of the resources, despite China's warnings and opposition.

In 2018, China and the Philippines signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation on Oil and Gas Development, establishing a “two-tier structure” consultation mechanism involving joint government-enterprise cooperation in oil and gas development. However, such oil and gas cooperation was constrained by the Philippines' constitution and the maritime disputes between the two countries, and the Philippines suspended negotiations with China on South China Sea oil and gas cooperation in 2022. Meanwhile, the Philippine Ambassador to the U.S. stated in March 2024 that the Philippines was seeking to collaborate with the U.S., Japan, Australia, and other allies to develop oil and gas resources in the South China Sea.

III. Provocations and Infringements by Some Claimant States

This is what happened around Xianbin Jiao of China's Nansha Qundao on September 14, 2024:

Facing repeated failures to forcibly occupy Xianbin Jiao by “grounding” ships, the Philippine Coast Guard, under intense pressure from various quarters^①, finally withdrew its vessel BRP Teresa Magbanua from the waters after illegally lingering for nearly five months.

The illegal lingering of BRP Teresa Magbanua at Xianbin Jiao was an attempt to replicate the tactic employed 25 years ago by the Philippine warship BRP Sierra Madre, which illegally “grounded” itself in the northwestern lagoon slope of Ren'ai Jiao under the pretext of needing spare parts for repairs due to an unexpected stranding^②. For 25 years, the dilapidated, rust-covered BRP Sierra Madre has remained under constant guard, with personnel on board burning and discarding household waste and discharging sewage, constantly polluting the clean waters of the South China Sea.

Incomplete statistics show that in 2024 alone, the Philippines carried out 34 large-scale infringements in the South China Sea, including illegal fishing, intruding into Chinese waters, and illegally landing on uninhabited Chinese islands and reefs. These actions violated China's territorial sovereignty, breached the consensus of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and severely undermined regional peace and stability.

The Philippines has focused its attention on uninhabited Chinese islands and reefs like Xianbin Jiao, Niue Jiao, and Houteng Jiao, engaging in provocative actions that grant itself legitimacy while remaining below the threshold of war. By instigating localized conflicts, it continuously raises the costs of China's geopolitical competition against it, attempting to force China into making concessions amid unbearable harassment and “choosing the lesser of evils,” thereby achieving the

① Statement by the Spokesperson of the China Coast Guard on the Withdrawal of Vessel 9701 Illegally Lingering in China's Xianbin Jiao, China Coast Guard official website, March 13, 2025.

② Spokesperson of the China Coast Guard Answering Questions on the Ren'ai Jiao Issue, China Coast Guard official website, March 13, 2025.

objective of de facto reef occupation.

IV. Public Perception Distorted by Some Claimant States

This is what happened around Ren'ai Jiao of China's Nansha Qundao on March 5, 2024:

Two Coast Guard vessels and two supply vessels of the Philippines intruded into the adjacent waters of Ren'ai Jiao, in an attempt to deliver various supplies, including hull reinforcement materials, to the illegally grounded Philippine warship^①. In disregard of China's warnings, the Philippine Coast Guard vessels deliberately rammed China's law enforcement ships, causing minor collisions^②.

Yet in reports by the Philippines and major media of the U.S. and other Western countries, this incident—with clear facts and full responsibility on the Philippine side—was distorted into sensational false narratives such as “Chinese vessels maliciously ramming Philippine vessels,” “Chinese Coast Guard using water cannons against Philippine supply vessels,” and “damaged Philippine vessels resisting Chinese aggression.” By portraying itself as the “weak victim” in South China Sea disputes, the Philippines seeks to mislead the perception of the international community on the current situation.

This is a key component of the Philippines' “gray zone” strategy in the South China Sea: the “victim narrative” tactic. Deliberately ignoring the historical context and international legal basis of the disputes, the Philippines avoids mentioning its illegal occupation of Chinese islands and reefs to seize South China Sea oil and gas resources. Instead, with skillful media techniques, it refocuses international discussion of the disputes on sensational events that generate diverse interpretations and spread widely. By exploiting the international public opinion environment in which Western countries are ready to portray China as a so-called “revisionist power” on South China Sea issues, it constructs a narrative of itself as “resisting Chinese dominance,” thereby launching an information war in the cognitive domain

① Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference on March 5, 2024, Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website, March 12, 2025.

② Statement by the Spokesperson of the China Coast Guard on Philippine Vessels' Illegal Intrusion into Ren'ai Jiao, China Coast Guard official website, March 13, 2025.

of the disputes.

V. Pursuing Greater Gains through Domestic Legislation by Some Claimant States

November 8, 2024, Manila.

The controversial Philippine “Maritime Zones Act” and “Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act” were officially promulgated. These acts illegally incorporate China’s Huangyan Dao and parts of Nansha Qundao into Philippine territory, flagrantly violating the core principles of international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This exposes the Philippines’ ambition to expand its territory in the South China Sea. In fact, three international treaties—the 1898 Treaty of Peace Between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Spain (the Treaty of Paris), the 1900 Treaty Between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Spain for Cession of Outlying Islands of the Philippines (the Treaty of Washington), and the 1930 Convention between His Majesty in Respect of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States Regarding the Boundary the State of North Borneo and the Philippine Archipelago (Convention Between the United States and Great Britain)—have clearly delimited the territorial scope of the Republic of the Philippines under international law. China’s Huangyan Dao and Nansha Qundao fall entirely outside this scope^①.

“Spain cedes to the United States the archipelago known as the Philippine Islands, and comprehending the islands lying within the following line: A line running from west to east along or near the twentieth parallel of north latitude, and through the middle of the navigable channel of Bachi, from the one hundred and eighteenth (118th) to the one hundred and twenty seventh (127th) degree meridian of longitude east of Greenwich, thence along the one hundred and twenty seventh (127th) degree meridian of longitude east of Greenwich to the parallel of four degrees and forty five minutes (4° 45') north latitude, thence along the parallel of four degrees and forty five minutes (4° 45') north latitude to its intersection with the meridian of longitude one hundred and

① Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China on the Philippines’ Enactment of the “Maritime Zones Act” and “Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website, March 12, 2025.

nineteen degrees and thirty five minutes (119° 35') east of Greenwich, thence along the meridian of longitude one hundred and nineteen degrees and thirty five minutes (119° 35') east of Greenwich to the parallel of latitude seven degrees and forty minutes (7° 40') north, thence along the parallel of latitude seven degrees and forty minutes (7° 40') north to its intersection with the one hundred and sixteenth (116th) degree meridian of longitude east of Greenwich, thence by a direct line to the intersection of the tenth (10th) degree parallel of north latitude with the one hundred and eighteenth (118th) degree meridian of longitude east of Greenwich, and thence along the one hundred and eighteenth (118th) degree meridian of longitude east of Greenwich to the point of beginning.”

—Article III of the 1898 Treaty of Peace between the United States and the Kingdom of Spain (the Treaty of Paris)

In recent years, China and ASEAN have been conducting negotiations and consultations to advance a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC). Despite strong opposition from China, the Philippines has forcibly promoted domestic maritime legislation, with the deeper scheme of using the implementation of the South China Sea arbitration award as pretext to provide purported legal basis for its continued illegal occupation of China's South China Sea islands and reefs. This has increased the difficulty of resolving South China Sea disputes through negotiation and consultation, seriously undermining the atmosphere for COC negotiations, deepening confrontation among relevant parties regarding South China Sea disputes, damaging confidence in reaching the “Code of Conduct in the South China Sea,” and hindering efforts by regional countries to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea.

Chapter Three Long History of China's Sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao and Its Rights and Interests in the South China Sea

From *Yi Wu Zhi* (*Record of Strange Things*) of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE) to the record of deploying naval fleets to patrol the South China Sea in the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127 CE); from the account of Zheng He's official naval expeditions navigating the South China Sea from 1405 to 1433 during the Ming Dynasty to *Geng Lu Bu* (*Manual of Sea Routes*) used by Chinese fishermen

for over 500 years; from the 1868 *China Sea Directory* published by the British Admiralty to the *Le Monde Colonial Illustré* published in France in 1933...

Extensive historical documentation demonstrates the Chinese government's effective administration of the South China Sea, Chinese fishermen's long-standing maritime activities, and the deep roots of Chinese maritime civilization in these waters. This evidence repeatedly confirms that China was first to discover, name, and develop Nanhai Zhudao and adjacent waters, and was first to exercise continuous, peaceful, and effective sovereignty and jurisdiction over them. China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao and related maritime rights were established through centuries of historical development and rest on solid historical and legal foundations.

I. Documented Discovery and Naming Established China's Historical Rights in the South China Sea

Abundant historical records preserved in both official and private sources demonstrate that by the first century CE, Chinese official documents clearly recorded that the Chinese people, including government officials, had discovered Nanhai Zhudao through navigation and maritime activities. Over the long course of history, as the Chinese people established an ever-deepening understanding of the South China Sea, their naming of these islands evolved from general designations to specific names.

China was the first to discover and name Nanhai Zhudao. More than 1,400 years before the Western Age of Discovery, adventurous Chinese navigators had already discovered these islands, named them, and documented them in written records. Over the next 1,000-odd years, the Chinese people continuously refined their understanding of the South China Sea and its islands—including their bearings, distances, sea routes, and geographical features—through maritime practices.

Yang Fu, a Chinese official, recorded Nanhai Zhudao as “Zhanghai Qitou” in *Yi Wu Zhi* (compiled c. 76–88 CE)—at least 1,400 years earlier than Vietnam's claimed discovery of Xisha Qundao in the 15th century and nearly 1,900 years earlier than the Philippines' claimed discovery of Nansha Qundao in 1947. In fact, as early as the Western Han Dynasty (202 BCE–8 CE), China had established the “Maritime

Silk Road” from its southeastern coast through the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean.

With the development of maritime undertakings and productive activities, the Chinese people's understanding of Nanhai Zhudao deepened progressively. The naming of these islands evolved from the general term “Zhanghai Qitou” to specific designations for Dongsha Qundao, Xisha Qundao, Zhongsha Qundao, and Nansha Qundao, which were recorded in Chinese historical documents across dynasties. From the 10th century onward, over one hundred different types of Chinese texts commonly referred to Nanhai Zhudao as “Changsha” and “Shitang.”

The South China Sea serves as Chinese fishermen's “Ancestral Waters.” Fishermen along China's southeastern coast hold this sea their ancestral livelihood—the waters that have sustained them and their forebears with abundant catches, hence the term “Ancestral Waters.” Through generations of fishing and maritime cultivation, these fishermen developed distinctive local names for Nanhai Zhudao, passed down through oral tradition and brief written records.

Tanmen Town in China's Hainan Province remains one of the closest ports connecting Hainan Dao to Nanhai Zhudao. Today it still serves as a logistics hub for fishing vessels operating around Xisha Qundao, Nansha Qundao, Zhongsha Qundao, and Dongsha Qundao and as a distribution center for deep-sea catches. Even today, many local fishermen have been utilizing the *Manual of Sea Routes*, also known as *Geng Lu Bu*—a navigation guide developed over centuries of practical fishing experience.

In *Geng Lu Bu*, first compiled in the early Ming Dynasty, Chinese fishermen named 136 islands and reefs in the South China Sea. For example, Yongxing Dao in Xisha Qundao was called “Bazhi,” and Taiping Dao in Nansha Qundao was called “Huangshanmazhi.”

The West has long recognized China's naming of Nanhai Zhudao. Chinese names for these islands have been adopted by Western officials and civilians through transliteration, influencing Western understanding of the South China Sea for centuries.

In the mid-19th century, when the British survey ship HMS Rifleman conducted surveys in the South China Sea, the resulting *China Sea Directory* recorded Hongxiu Dao as “Namyit” and Jinghong Dao as “Sin Cowe”—clearly

transliterations of Chinese fishermen's traditional names "Nanyi" and "Chenggou."

II. Millennium-Old Development and Maritime Activities Demonstrate China's Historical Rights in the South China Sea

From the illustrious thousand-year-old Maritime Silk Road to artifacts recovered from South China Sea shipwrecks to archaeological remains on the islands themselves—each piece of ironclad evidence testifies to over 2,000 years of Chinese presence and activities in the South China Sea, a compelling demonstration of China's historic rights in these waters.

The world-connecting Maritime Silk Road traversed the South China Sea. Throughout history, commerce has served as the primary force linking different regions. The Maritime Silk Road, which originated during China's Western Han Dynasty (202 BC-8 CE) and flourished during the Sui and Tang periods (581-907 CE), not only connected China with the world through maritime trade but also witnessed China's millennium-long development of the South China Sea.

Merchant vessels set sail one after another from ports along China's southeastern coast, carrying cargo across the South China Sea... This is what happened along the Maritime Silk Road. Chinese scholars divide the Road into two main routes: the East China Sea Silk Road and the South China Sea Silk Road. The latter originated in the South China Sea and was characterized by trade in silk, ceramics, and pearls, linking China's South China Sea with Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and ultimately Europe.

The billows of the South China Sea have witnessed sunken treasure unscathed throughout history.

Some Chinese merchant ships sank in the South China Sea, having accidentally preserved the records of ancient Chinese development of the region. On the third floor of the Hainan Museum of the South China Sea, over 400 cultural relics recovered from two sunken ship sites in the northwestern South China Sea are on display, including the Fahua porcelain from Jingdezhen that has glowed for centuries underwater.

The South China Sea served as a conduit for Chinese cultural transmission. Beyond being a shipping route and fishing ground, the South China Sea has connected civilizations and enriched human exchange for over 2,000 years, spreading

Chinese culture worldwide through commerce and exchanges.

In the 15th century, Ming Dynasty China stood at the forefront of the Age of Navigation. Between 1405 and 1433, Admiral Zheng He led officially commissioned Chinese fleets on seven expeditions through the South China Sea to the “Western Ocean” (the Indian Ocean), carrying Chinese technology and culture to regions along the Maritime Silk Road while bringing back local spices, plants, and animals—serving as a bridge of friendship and cooperation across the South China Sea.

For centuries, Chinese culture spread from China's coastal regions through the South China Sea to neighboring lands. When present-day Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and other Southeast Asian nations had not yet emerged as modern states, people from China's southeastern coast traveled by ship through the South China Sea to these regions, considering this movement within their own territorial domain. These Southeast Asian countries today still host large overseas Chinese communities and feature neighborhoods and architecture reflecting Chinese civilization—buildings that mirror architectural styles found in places like Hainan.

Archaeological evidence confirms Chinese ancestors' maritime activities and island habitation in the South China Sea. Decades of archaeological work by Chinese researchers on various South China Sea islands have uncovered numerous sites and artifacts from different periods of Chinese history, providing indisputable evidence of China's long history of South China Sea development and operation.

In the 1970s, Chinese archaeologists discovered and excavated a Tang and Song Dynasty residential site on Ganquan Dao in Xisha Qundao. The excavation yielded Tang and Song artifacts including porcelain, iron pot fragments, iron knives, and copper ornaments—daily utensils used by island residents. Archaeologists also found bird bones and cracked conch shells—refuse piles from human consumption. Chinese archaeologists conclude that the discovery and excavation of Tang and Song Site on Ganquan Dao proves that Chinese fishermen maintained continuous residence on the island from at least the Tang Dynasty, engaging in development and production activities.

In 1992, Chinese historian Professor Wang Hengjie conducted a 33-day survey of the Nansha Qundao, discovering striated hard pottery from the Warring States through Qin-Han periods, Wuzhu coins from the Eastern Han Dynasty, pottery

urns from the Tang Dynasty, celadon fragments from the Song Dynasty, blue-and-white porcelain pieces from the Ming and Qing Dynasties, along with such coins as “Jiaqing Tongbao,” “Daoguang Tongbao,” and “Xianfeng Tongbao,” and Qing Dynasty iron anchors. These artifacts provide irrefutable physical evidence that Chinese ancestors were the first to develop the South China Sea and that successive generations treated these waters as their own domain for production and livelihood.

III. Continuous Effective Jurisdiction Consolidates China's Historical Rights in the South China Sea

From incorporating the region into administrative districts to deploying naval fleets for defense and appointing officials to build facilities—the South China Sea and its islands represent not only the homeland where Chinese people have lived and worked, but also bear the imprint of continuous, peaceful, and effective administration by successive Chinese governments.

Territorial incorporation and administrative establishment. Chinese historical documents clearly show that by the 8th century, the Chinese government had placed Nanhai Zhudao under the jurisdiction of Hainan Qiongzhou Prefecture (present-day Hainan Province). Thereafter, successive Chinese governments maintained continuous jurisdiction while completely incorporating Nanhai Zhudao into Chinese territory on officially produced maps.

Yuan Shi (History of Yuan Dynasty), China's official historical record of 13th-14th century events, clearly documented that the territorial boundaries of the Yuan Dynasty included Nansha Qundao. After the 14th century, the Chinese government explicitly placed Nanhai Zhudao under the jurisdiction of Wanzhou, Qiongzhou Prefecture, Guangdong Province (present-day Wanning and Lingshui counties, Hainan Province). Various local chronicles of different periods have mentioned “Wanzhou's Qiangli Changsha and Wanli Shitang.”

Official Chinese maps, such as the 1767 *Da Qing Wan Nian Yi Tong Tian Xia Tu* (Map of the Eternally Unified All-under-heaven of the Great Qing Empire) and the 1810 *Da Qing Wan Nian Yi Tong Di Li Quan Tu* (Map of the Eternally Unified Great Qing Empire), clearly marked the four island groups (Dongsha, Xisha, Zhongsha, Nansha) within China's administrative boundaries.

Naval deployment and South China Sea patrols. Military presence represents

a crucial aspect of China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao and its historic rights in these waters. A millennium ago, the Chinese government dispatched naval forces to patrol the South China Sea and its islands, apprehending pirates and maintaining order.

Wu Jing Zong Yao (Outline Record of Military Affairs), published in 1023 to document contemporary Chinese military systems and major defense affairs, clearly recorded the history of Chinese naval patrols in the South China Sea and around its islands. Subsequent Chinese historical works documented additional instances of Chinese naval patrols in Nanhai Zhudao. In April 1909, the Chinese government dispatched Li Zhun, Commander of the Guangdong Naval Forces, to lead over 170 naval officers and sailors to patrol Xisha Qundao, surveying and naming 15 islands while erecting monuments and raising flags on each—reaffirming China's sovereignty over Xisha Qundao.

Astronomical surveys and facility construction. For centuries, the Chinese government has continuously conducted surveys and measurements of the South China Sea and its islands while establishing astronomical and meteorological observation posts throughout the island groups—demonstrating that China's central government exercised effective jurisdiction over Nanhai Zhudao.

Over 700 years ago, the Chinese government commissioned Guo Shoujing, a renowned astronomer, to lead “the Survey of Four Seas” nationwide. *Yuan Shi* recorded that Guo Shoujing positioned his southern observation point at “15 degrees from the North Pole in the South Sea”—equivalent to 14 degrees 47 minutes north latitude when converted from the Yuan measurement system to today's 360-degree system. Chinese scholars note that given the technological limitations of that era, most of Guo Shoujing's survey points contained roughly one-degree margins of error. Adding one degree to 14 degrees 47 minutes north latitude places his astronomical observation point precisely within Xisha Qundao.

Chinese governments effectively asserted exclusive jurisdiction over surveys and measurements. In 1883, when German vessels conducted unauthorized surveys in waters near Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao, the Qing government protested to the German government immediately after learning of these actions, whereupon Germany discontinued its illegal activities. In 1936, following recommendations from the Hong Kong Far East Meteorological Observatory conference, the Chinese

government constructed meteorological stations, radio facilities, and lighthouses in Xisha Qundao to ensure maritime safety and communication.

Chapter Four Legal Basis for China's Territorial Sovereignty and Maritime Rights and Interests in the South China Sea

An ancient Chinese philosopher said, “Law is the very foundation of governance.”^①

From an international law perspective, the South China Sea disputes primarily involve territorial sovereignty disputes arising from neighboring countries' illegal occupation of some Nansha islands and reefs, as well as maritime rights disputes centered mainly on maritime boundary delimitation. Vietnam, the Philippines, and some other countries have illegally occupied parts of China's Nansha Qundao, creating territorial sovereignty disputes with China. The South China Sea littoral states have asserted jurisdiction over territorial seas, exclusive economic zones and continental shelves under the UNCLOS, giving rise to maritime boundary delimitation issues between adjacent or opposite coastal states. These territorial sovereignty and maritime delimitation disputes have generated additional issues concerning natural resource development and utilization, marine scientific research, and marine environmental conservation and protection.

China's sovereignty over Nansha Zhudao rests on solid legal foundations, including the principles of discovery and occupation, effective jurisdiction, estoppel, and other relevant international law principles governing territorial acquisition.

I. China's Earliest Discovery and Development of Nansha Zhudao Conform to the International Law Principle of “Acquiring Territorial Sovereignty through Discovery and Occupation”

China's sovereignty over Nansha Zhudao was established historically. For over 2,000 years, China has exercised continuous, peaceful, and effective jurisdiction over these islands and related waters through administrative governance, naval

^① *Xunzi*.

patrols, resource development, astronomical surveys, and geographic investigations, and other activities.^①

Under international law, discovery and occupation are among the most important legal bases for a state to acquire territorial sovereignty. In ancient times, before the modern concept of territorial sovereignty had fully developed, the earliest discovery and naming of Nanhai Zhudao, along with human habitation or production activities there, held significant international legal significance.

The development of international law shows that China's discovery, occupation, and effective administrative jurisdiction over Nanhai Zhudao fully demonstrate its indisputable territorial sovereignty. As early as the Western Han Dynasty (2nd century BC), Chinese people navigated the South China Sea and discovered its islands through long-term maritime practice. China not only discovered the islands first but also developed a relatively fixed naming system for them in the course of developing and utilizing the South China Sea—for example, calling islands and shoals “Zhi,” reefs “Chan,” “Xian,” or “Sha,” atolls “Kuang,” “Quan,” or “Tang,” and banks “Shapai,” among other designations.^② Some of the names given by the Chinese people to Nanhai Zhudao were adopted by Western navigators and marked in some authoritative navigation guidebooks and charts published in the 19th and 20th centuries.^③

International judicial practice has shown that a nation's long-term residence or economic activities in a region are crucial for determining its territorial ownership. In its 1953 judgment on the *Minquiers and Ecrehos Case*, the International Court of Justice noted that the fact of British people living on these islands for generations

① The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China: *China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea*, Article 18.

② The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China: *China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea*, Article 11.

③ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China: *China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea*, Article 12.

was clear evidence of their sovereignty over them.^① China's long-term residence and production activities on Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao suffice to establish original sovereignty over them. Building upon this foundation, successive Chinese governments have exercised continuous, peaceful and effective jurisdiction over the islands and related waters through administrative governance, naval patrols, and other means. Over time, China has established sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao and related rights and interests in the South China Sea, with the Chinese people having long been the rightful masters of these islands.

II. China's Sovereignty Claims over Nanhai Zhudao Have Received Broad International Recognition, Conforming to the International Law Principle of "Estoppel"

China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao had never been challenged before the 20th century.^② After World War II, China recovered Nanhai Zhudao and resumed exercising sovereignty, with many countries recognizing them as Chinese territory. Yet today, some countries treat their previously signed declarations as worthless pieces of paper. These national commitments, preserved in historical archives, stand as "estoppel" markers in international law, establishing benchmarks of good faith across time and space.

In matters of territorial acquisition under international law, the principle of estoppel means that a state that has once recognized another state's sovereignty over specific territory may not later deny that right. Modern international rules are essentially formed based on countless historical diplomatic negotiations, declarations, and commitments. Any discussion of the South China Sea issue must be grounded in historical continuity.

Before the 1970s, neither surrounding countries nor the international community ever challenged China's sovereignty and maritime rights in the South China Sea, nor did disputes exist. For example, when France invaded Nansha

① Historical and Legal Basis for Nanhai Zhudao Belonging to China, Outlook, June 23, 2014.

② The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China: China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, Article 23.

Qundao in the 1930s, not only did China lodge a strong protest, but Japan also acknowledged that Nansha Qundao “should belong to China” and that Chinese fishermen “had long used the islands as bases for deep-sea fishing.” In the 1950s, the Philippines explicitly recognized that Nansha Qundao did not belong to the Philippines and made no sovereignty claims over them. Before Vietnam’s unification, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government also acknowledged that “according to Vietnamese materials, Xisha Qundao and Nansha Qundao should belong to China” and marked the latter as Chinese territory in its published textbooks and maps.^①

However, some countries have recently reneged on their commitments, blatantly disregarding relevant rules of international law. The Philippines’ disregard for its commitments in turning to judicial procedures and insisting on arbitration constitutes “estoppel” and seriously violates international law. Some countries’ contradictory practices raise doubts about their motives, suggesting they are driven not by good faith or international law, but by ulterior motives.

III. The Philippines and Other Regional Countries’ Occupation of South China Sea Islands and Reefs Based on So-Called “Geographic Proximity” Violates Relevant International Law Principles

“Geographical proximity” has never been an international law principle for resolving territorial ownership.^② Claiming territorial sovereignty based on “geographic proximity” lacks foundation in international law. Neither traditional international law, modern international law, international treaties, nor international judicial precedents contain international law rules determining territorial sovereignty based on factors such as distance. It is absurd for the Philippines and other regional states to claim all or part of Nanhai Zhudao on the pretext of

① Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China: China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea.

② The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China: China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, Article 66.

“geographical proximity.” It is merely an attempt to subvert international legal norms with the primitive logic of “what is near me belongs to me.”

Since the 1970s, the Philippines has coveted China's South China Sea islands, employing different tactics and pretexts at various times. Its unilateral initiation of the South China Sea arbitration constitutes an abuse of UNCLOS dispute settlement mechanism and an infringement of China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights. This reflects the political calculations of some in the Philippines to strengthen their unilateral claims and exposes the sinister intentions of non-regional countries to destabilize the South China Sea and sow discord between China and the ASEAN nations. Over the years, to pursue territorial expansion and legitimize its illegal occupation of parts of Nansha Qundao, the Philippines has fabricated a series of fallacious theories including “terra nullius,” “trust territory,” “geographic proximity,” “national security needs,” and “exclusive economic zone and continental shelf” claims—all lacking factual basis or conformity with international law provisions on territorial acquisition, and thus completely untenable.

International law theory and practice consistently reject territorial sovereignty claims based on excuses such as “geographical proximity.” International law practice also categorically excludes claims that territorial ownership is determined by distance. Many countries' islands are often far from their own mainland or main islands while being close to other countries. For example, the Channel Islands in the English Channel are closer to France but have always belonged to Britain—such cases are numerous. Claims to sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao based on factors like “proximity” are therefore groundless and inconsistent with international law.

IV. China's Claims to Maritime Rights and Interests in the South China Sea Conform to the International Law Principle of “Land Dominates Sea”

A state's territorial sovereignty serves as the foundation for its maritime rights—this is a general principle of international law. The International Court of Justice has stated in many cases that “maritime rights derive from a coastal state's sovereignty over land, which can be summarized as the principle of ‘land dominates sea’” and that “a state's rights over the continental shelf and exclusive economic zone

are based on the principle that land dominates sea.”^①

“Land dominates sea” is an ancient principle of international law. Territorial sovereignty is the basis for claiming maritime rights, which are derived from territorial sovereignty. The International Court of Justice reaffirmed this principle in its 1969 judgment on the North Sea Continental Shelf case, stating that “land is the legal source of a state’s power over the maritime extension of its territory.” Only by possessing sovereignty over land or islands can a state enjoy sovereign rights and jurisdiction over adjacent maritime areas. The continental shelf is a legal concept applying the “land dominates sea” principle.

The UNCLOS grants coastal states the right to claim and delimit exclusive economic zones, continental shelves, and other jurisdictional waters, and to enjoy sovereign rights over natural resources therein. Meanwhile, the UNCLOS explicitly states in its preamble (Paragraph 5) “the desirability of establishing through this Convention, with due regard for the sovereignty of all States, a legal order for the seas and oceans.” Clearly, the UNCLOS does not address issues of territorial sovereignty. A coastal state’s sovereign rights cannot deny or undermine another state’s inherent territorial sovereignty, nor can they serve as a basis for claiming new territorial sovereignty.

The arbitration case submitted by the Philippines involves maritime disputes concerning territorial attribution, maritime delimitation, and military activities—matters over which China enjoys the right under international law, and has long declared to be exempt from any international judicial or arbitral jurisdiction. The Philippines has gone to great lengths attempting to portray the territorial sovereignty and maritime rights disputes between the two countries as issues that can be resolved through international arbitration, unilaterally interpreting the UNCLOS’s scope of application while deliberately avoiding the important international law principle that “land dominates sea.” The Philippines and other countries’ argument that these islands and reefs should belong to them because they lie within their exclusive economic zones or on their continental shelves puts the

① Chinese Government’s portal website: Position Paper of the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the Matter of Jurisdiction in the South China Sea Arbitration Initiated by the Republic of the Philippines, Article 11.

cart before the horse—this neither conforms to the “land dominates sea” principle nor aligns with the UNCLOS’s purposes and principles.

V. China’s Historical Rights in the South China Sea Are Protected by International Law

China’s historical rights in the South China Sea are protected by international law, including the UNCLOS, and cannot be denied.^① China not only owns sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao but also fully enjoys historical rights in the South China Sea. These rights stem from over 2,000 years of continuous productive and residential activities by the Chinese people on Nanhai Zhudao and in adjacent waters, and from successive Chinese governments’ continuous exercise of sovereign jurisdiction over these islands and waters.

China’s historical rights in the South China Sea are compatible with the UNCLOS. First, historical rights are a concept of general international law. The UNCLOS does not exhaust all rules of the law of the sea; on the contrary, it explicitly states that general international law applies to matters not regulated by the Convention. Second, the Convention itself does not exclude historical rights that were formed and continuously asserted before its adoption. The Convention mentions “historic bays” and “historic title” in multiple articles, clearly showing respect for historical rights.

China’s history of developing and managing the South China Sea, along with China’s established practice, demonstrates that China enjoys territorial sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao and historic rights in waters within the South China Sea dashed line. These rights primarily include historic title to such historic waters as the Qiongzhou Strait, traditional fishing rights, and historic navigation rights. The dashed lines in the South China Sea represent China’s territorial sovereignty over the islands and historic rights in the South China Sea. The waters around Nanhai Zhudao are traditional fishing grounds for Chinese fishermen, who have long traveled between Hainan Dao, Guangdong Province, and the island groups in the South China Sea for fishing, aquaculture, and other production activities. Through

① Chinese Government’s portal Website: Ministry of Foreign Affairs: China’s Historical Rights in the South China Sea Are Protected by International Law.

successive dynasties, rulers deepened their understanding of the South China Sea and Nanhai Zhudao, and administrative structures and governance over the islands became increasingly complete, making the islands de facto Chinese territory. China has developed, managed and exercised jurisdiction over the South China Sea in a peaceful and effective manner, covering the main islands, reefs, and waters of Nanhai Zhudao.

China's historical rights in specific areas of the South China Sea are the natural outcome of thousands of years during which the Chinese people have braved storms and waves to fish and farm the sea in this maritime space. These rights represent integrated sovereignty and maritime rights over the South China Sea waters and islands, reefs, shoals, and cays scattered throughout, with "islands and waters as an integrated whole." These rights are naturally formed and unique, having been nurtured within the Chinese nation and evolved together with it throughout history to the present day. This maritime sovereignty and these maritime rights are deeply embedded in China's history and traditions.

Conclusion

Today, 80 years after the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea requires full respect for China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the region as established by history and international law.

China's historical rights in the South China Sea have been formed through historical development, supported by abundant historical and legal evidence, protected by international law, including the UNCLOS, and cannot be denied. China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao, as part of the post-WWII international order, is safeguarded by international law, including the UN Charter.

For generations, the Chinese people have lived and worked in the South China Sea, long establishing themselves as the rightful masters of these islands. Over the past century, despite the vicissitudes of the South China Sea and the islands' brief suffering under foreign aggression, China's indisputable sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao and their adjacent waters—confirmed by history and international law—

remains unassailable. China's resolve to defend its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights has never wavered.

The tide of history rolls on irresistibly.

Peace and development are the will of our times, and the iron law of history has proven that defying this trend is doomed to failure. Setting the record straight on the South China Sea disputes in a timely manner and eliminating the negative interference of non-regional hegemonic powers and certain regional countries seeking private interests are necessary steps to restore calm to the South China Sea and allow countries in the region to once again raise the sails of friendly cooperation.

Maintaining the international order established since World War II, upholding historical precedent and legal justice, respecting China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights in the South China Sea, and consistently resolving differences through dialogues and consultations to promote peaceful settlement of South China Sea disputes—this is the correct path forward. It is also the right approach to address the changes unseen in a century and work together to build a better future for humanity.

The Chinese nation is a peace-loving people, with peace running in its veins. As the largest coastal state in the South China Sea, China has exercised utmost restraint for decades since the South China Sea issue arose, never provoking disputes or taking actions to complicate or escalate them, out of commitment to regional peace and stability. China has always stood for safeguarding peace and stability in the South China Sea, dedicated to maintaining friendly relations with neighboring countries, and hopes to jointly build the South China Sea into a sea of peace, friendship, and cooperation.

When the South China Sea is stable, regional countries benefit; when it is turbulent, they suffer. Tension in the South China Sea must be eased. Peace and stability in the South China Sea are a vital prerequisite for regional development, making it crucial to safeguard the bottom line of peace.

Truth distinguishes right from wrong, and justice resides in people's hearts.

On the stage of the South China Sea, there have been colonial aggression, illegal occupations, and now attempts to stir up trouble and showcases of military might. However, just as tides come and go, these schemes will ultimately come to nothing.

No matter how the situation in the South China Sea evolves, it will never be the bullies, spoilers, or destroyers who prevail—but the benevolent, the peacemakers, and the builders.