Challenge to the Free and Open International Order based on the Rule of Law

The international community is currently at a major turning point in history. After the devastation of the two World Wars and the Cold War, the international community has formed an order of coexistence and coprosperity upholding universal values such as freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights, and the rule of law. Numerous countries around the world, including developing countries, have also enjoyed the fruits of international peace, stability, and economic development in this globalized world rooted in such an order.

However, some states that have surely benefited from the existing international order are strengthening their military power in a rapid and non-transparent manner, becoming more assertive, and challenging the existing international order based on their own historical views.

1. Russia's Aggression against Ukraine

Russia has been continuing its aggression against Ukraine since February 2022. A permanent member of the UN Security Council blatantly violating the principles of the UN Charter, such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the general prohibition of the use of force, is an outrageous act that shakes the very foundation of the existing international order, which the international community has built up over a long period of hard work and much sacrifice. The international community must not allow such an act.



IZIUM, KHARKIV OBLAST, UKRAINE - JANUARY 28: A man walks with his bike near the destroyed residential buildings as the Russian Aggression against Ukraine continues in Izium, Ukraine on January 28, 2024 Photo by Ignacio Marin/Anadolu via Getty Images

2. The Situation in the South China Sea

In the South China Sea, there are territorial disputes between China and several Southeast Asian countries. China has been continuing and intensifying its unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion, which goes against the rule of law and openness, as well as its actions to increase regional tensions. Such activities include militarization of disputed features, coercive actions against coastal States, refusal to accept the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal's award to the Philippines and China, and continuously making claims that are inconsistent with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Related Chronological Table

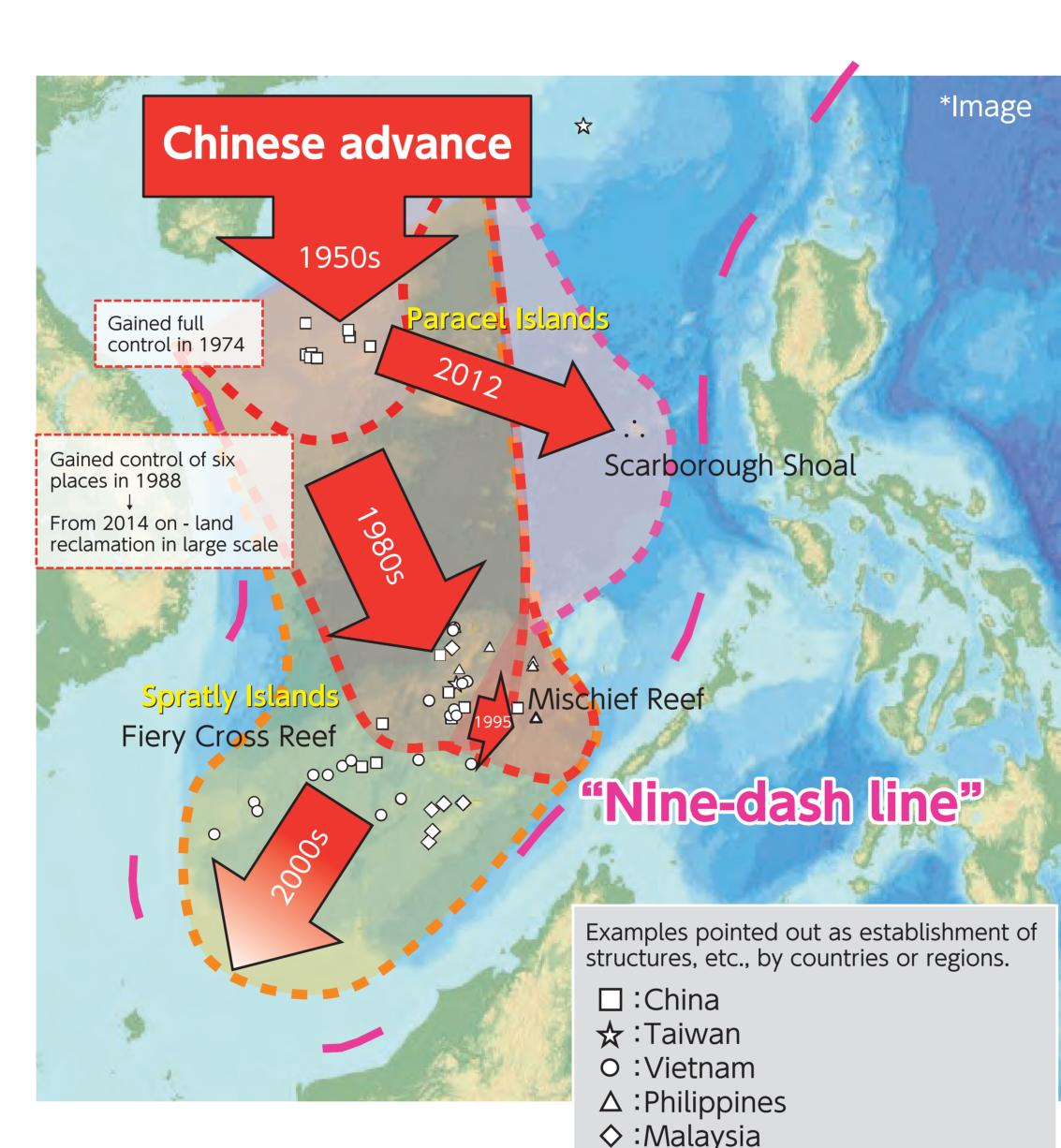
- 1950's: Withdrawal of French Armed Forces
 1950's: China controlled the eastern half of Paracel Islands (South Vietnam also advanced to the islands in that same period)
 1973: U.S. forces withdrew from South Vietnam
 1974: China cleared the Paracel Islands of South Vietnam and controlled whole islands.

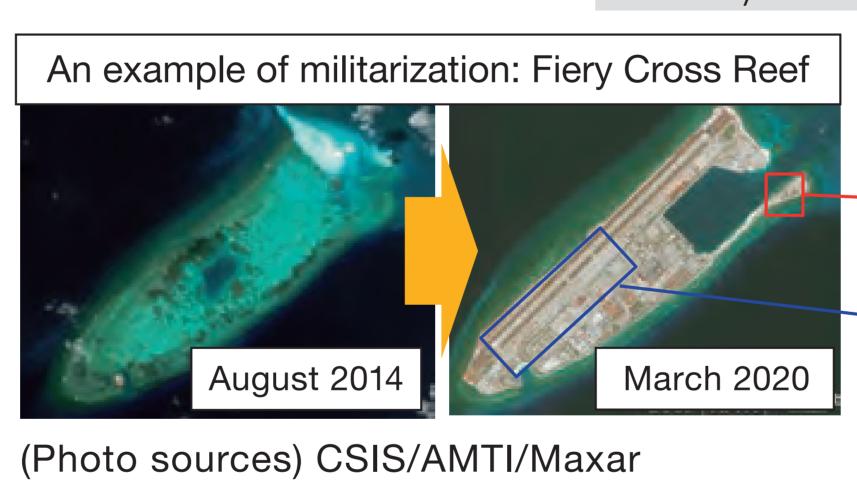
 (1975: Collapse of South Vietnam as a result of the Vietnam War.)

 Mid 1980s: A scale-down of Soviet troops in Vietnam
 1980s: China advanced to the Spratly Islands
 1988: China practically controlled six locations in the Spratly Islands.
 1992: Withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Philippines
- 1992: Withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Philippines
 1995: China practically controlled Mischief Reef
 2000s: China advanced to the Southern South China Sea.
 2012: China practically controlled the Scarborough Shoal.

2012: China practically controlled the Scarborough Shoal.

From 2014 on: China has implemented large-scale land reclamation and infrastructure building in the Spratly Islands





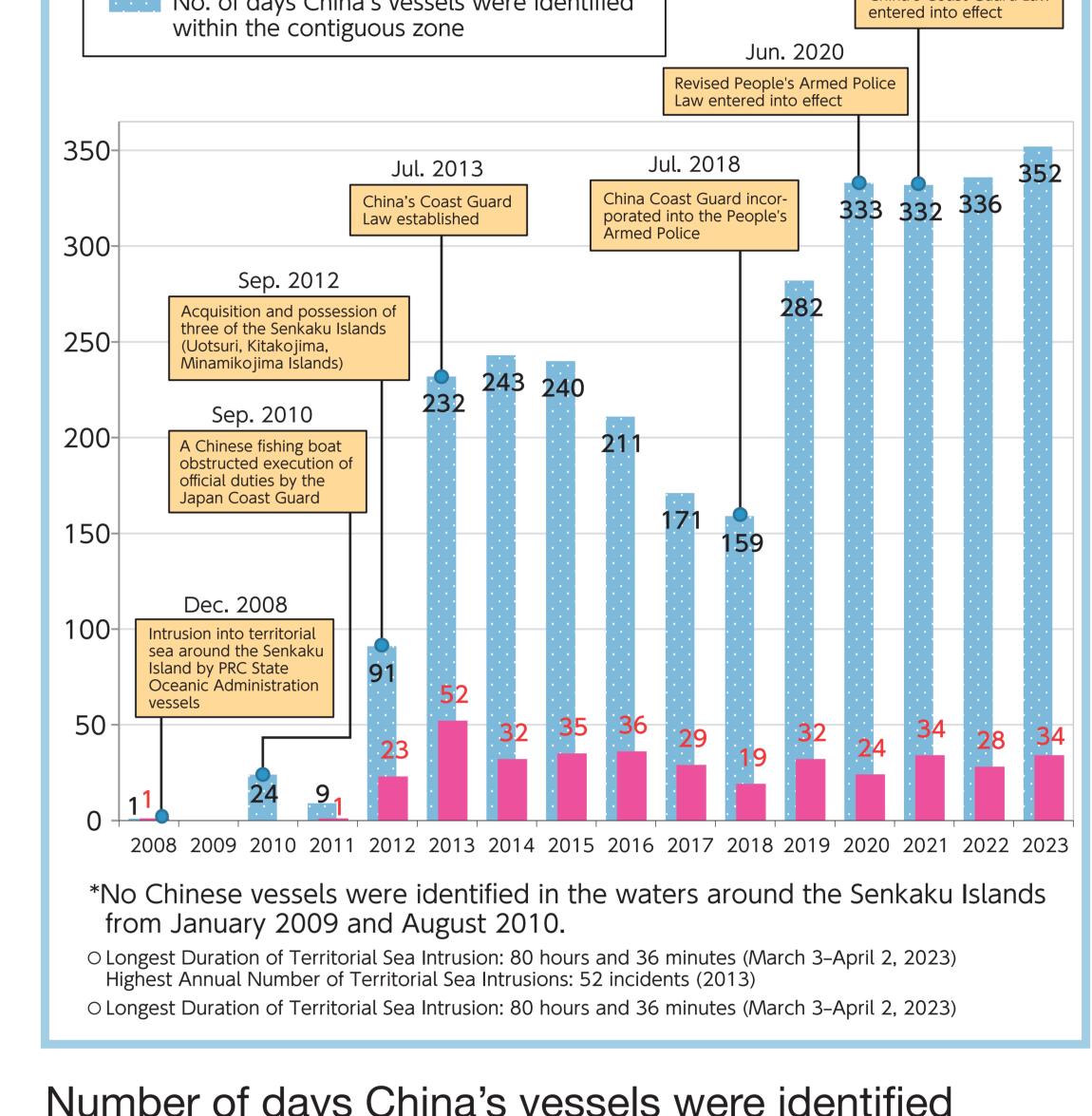
Example of China's Advancement and Militarization Utilizing the Power Vacuum in the South China Sea (image)
Source: DEFENSE OF JAPAN 2024

and runway

3. The Situation in the East China Sea

In recent years, activities by China Coast Guard vessels have been identified almost every day in Japan's contiguous zone around the Senkaku Islands, and intrusions into Japan's territorial sea have also been occurring.

Chinese naval vessels and aircraft have also been increasing their activities in the sea and airspace around Japan, including in the East China Sea. In 2023, Japan confirmed multiple instances in which Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) survey ships navigated Japanese territorial sea. In August 2024, a Chinese military reconnaissance plane intruded into Japan's territorial airspace. In September of the same year, a PLAN aircraft carrier also sailed in waters close to Japanese territorial seas. In addition, joint navigation and flights by Chinese and Russian ships and aircraft have been confirmed in the sea and airspace around Japan. China has been continuing its unilatera activities to develop natural resources while the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and the continental shelf between Japan and China in the East China Sea remain pending delimitation.



Number of days China's vessels were identified within the contiguous zone and the number of incursions into the territorial sea

Souce: Japan Coast Guard Annual Report 2024

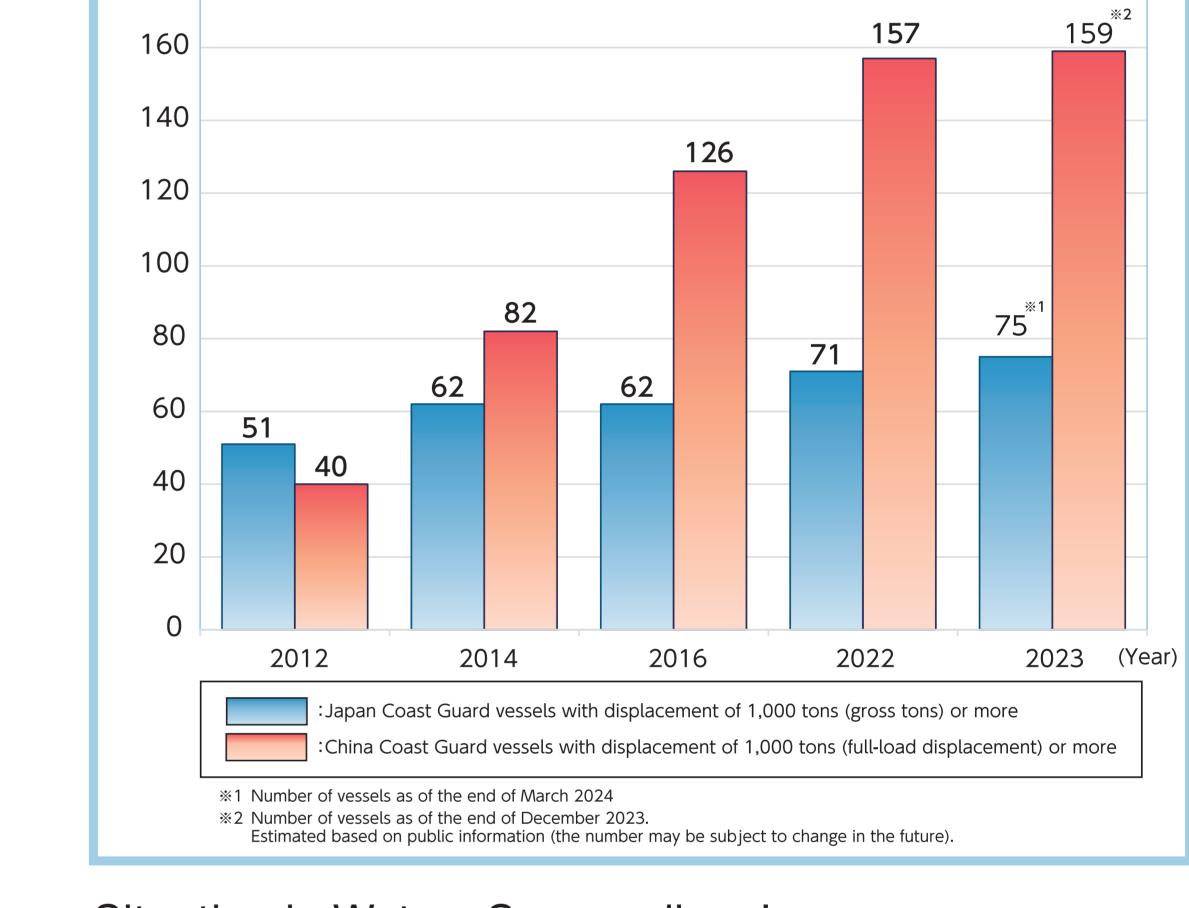
(Number of vessels)



Large vessels belonging to the China Coast Guard Souce: Japan Coast Guard Annual Report 2024



Vessels belonging to the China Coast Guard equipped with autocannons
Souce: Japan Coast Guard Annual Report 2024



Situation in Waters Surrounding Japan
(Increasing Tension in Waters Surrounding
the Senkaku Islands)

Increases in the size of the fleet and the size/armament of
vessels belonging to the China Coast Guard, etc.

Souce: Japan Coast Guard Annual Report 2024

At the moment, the free and open international order based on the rule of law that has supported the development of countries including Japan is being challenged by events such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the situation in the East China Sea and South China Sea! As we can see in the situation in the East China Sea, this is a matter that directly concerns Japan's security! Furthermore, events around the world such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine and what is happening in the South China Sea are not separate events, but are interconnected!