

The Pacific Islands in Chinese Geo-strategic Thinking

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Abstract: Traditionally, the Pacific islands only play a marginal role in Chinese geostrategic thinking simply because they are small states far afield geographically. Yet, during the context of China’s rise and the changing architecture of international politics in the Asia-Pacific, the geostrategic importance of Pacific islands, in line with the significant economic implication often discussed, has become increasingly pronounced accordingly. First, given that the Pacific islands spreading across the central and southern parts of the Pacific Ocean, which are located in the sea route between China and South America, Antarctica, as well as Australia and New Zealand, China’s strategic cooperation with Pacific island countries therefore has become a major concern in order to safeguard maritime security, especially in the context of rising trade and shipment across the aforementioned sea lanes. Second, the Pacific islands serve as a so-called “second island chain” by the US seeking to restrain the global freedom of maneuver by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). Therefore, the close strategic cooperation with islands states is presumed to help undermining the US blockade along with the further development of Chinese blue navy project. Third, due to the uncertainty of mutual relationship across the Taiwan Strain, the diplomatic tug of war between Taiwan and mainland China for winning the hearts and minds of the island countries may happen again. China, therefore, has remained to pay high

attention to the Pacific island countries. Last, the power competition between China and US in the Pacific islands under the backdrop of China’s rise and America’s “pivot to Asia” is unavoidable. However, it is not so much a hard as a soft balancing in the South Pacific. Above all, from the perspective of China, in addition to the economic importance, the geostrategic significance of the Pacific islands has loomed large, and it has been suggested that a long-term strategy in this regard should be taken into serious consideration.

Key Words: Pacific islands; Geo-strategy; China’s rise, Sino-US competition

Chinese people’s knowledge about Oceania pales in comparison with its counterparts living in the surrounding areas and even the European. Since the end of the 1970s, China began to implement the open and reform policy, scholars in university as a result started to provide the course on the Oceania studies and several textbooks were published subsequently. However, Chinese scholars’ understandings of Pacific islands are very basic. For example, in a textbook extensively used in the university, the Oceania territory was described as “scattered in the vast expanse of the South Pacific waters, constitute the island world”.¹ Many people in China prefer to believe that the Oceania countries located in “the edge of the world”.²

Geographically speaking, China is indeed very far away from Oceanian countries, as the straight-line distance is ranging from 4000 to 10000 kilometers. Further, the South Pacific region is beyond the traditional Chinese marine “silk road” historically.

¹ Wang Jian Tang, *The Contemporary Oceania* (Dang dai da yang zhou), Guangdong Education Press, Guangzhou, 1991, P.138.

² Yi Wen and Yang Zi edited, *The Oceania Countries-- the Edge of the World*(Da Yang Zhou Zhu Guo—Shi Jie Bian Yuan Zhi Guo, Military Literature Press, Beijing, 1995.

The traffic contacts are highly inconvenient for a long term. Even nowadays, there is still no any direct flight line between mainland China and those of Pacific Islands.

Most of the Chinese scholars who are interested in the Asia-Pacific issues only paid attention to the US alliance system, of which the key part is Australia considered as an “south anchor” in the US Asia-Pacific strategic scheme during the Cold War. There are few Chinese scholars devoted to the studies of international relations in the Oceania as the top priority of their researches. Moreover, from the political and diplomatic perspective, the Pacific island countries are indeed small and micro states gaining independence not long ago, therefore, it seems that they only play a marginal role in China’s strategic thinking and foreign policies.

Of course, it does not mean that the Pacific islands are not important in China’s foreign policies. In fact, since the establishment of People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Beijing indeed paid some attentions to the Pacific islands according to its pro-independence and anti-hegemonic principle. As one scholar put it in this way, Chinese government,

“according to its consistent policy, has gave fervent sympathy and active support to the national liberation and independence movement in the South Pacific region, and appropriate conducted exchanges with them.”¹

Chinese government’s good will towards the Pacific island countries finally greeted with their formal diplomatic recognition of PRC from the middle of 1970s. However, it should be noted that the major concern of Chinese government towards its Pacific islands counterparts comes down to the political and diplomatic struggle with the

¹ Wang Tai Ping edited, *Fifty Years of PRC Diplomacy (Xin Zhong Guo Wai Jiao Wu Shi Nian)*, Beijing Press, Beijing 1999, P.1532.

Taiwanese authority for the official diplomatic recognition until the end of cold war and the early 21st century. Its strategic importance for China's political and national security is limited given that peripheral countries and great powers (US and Soviet Unions in particular) merits much more attentions from the Chinese government. That said, this trend has been witnessed a substantial changes since the second decade of 21st century. The rapid increase in terms of economic exchanges and trade between China and the South Pacific countries, has facilitated Chinese leadership's rethinking of the South Pacific islands in a strategic way. And this trend will come into prominence if China's rise continues. It is thus arguably reasonable to presume that China may take the Pacific island countries into further serious consideration not only in the economic terms, but also its geostrategic significance. One of the sound evidences is that China and the Pacific islands countries has recently agreed to build a *strategic* relationship.¹

In this context, this paper will explore the role of Pacific island countries played in China's geo-geographic thinking now and the future. Four important roles are in order: first, the important location of various island countries can serve China's safe ship transport through the South Pacific sea lanes; second, the island countries play a significant role in China's offshore defense strategy in the Pacific along with the further development of blue water navy; third, Pacific island countries remain a major concern of Chinese leadership for the struggle with Taiwanese authority for the diplomatic recognition, which is closely linked to China's peaceful unification strategy; and last, Pacific islands can serve as a litmus test for China's strong promise

¹ Xinhua News Agency, "China, Pacific Island Countries Announce Strategic Relationship," http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/22/c_133807415.htm

as responsible great power in commensurate with its rising strength within the international community.

Pacific islands and China's maritime navigation security

There are more than 20,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean, most of them are located near the equator or south of the equator. Apart from Australia and New Zealand, those islands can be divided into three archipelagoes — Melanesian, Micronesia, and Polynesian. For Chinese navigation activities in the south Pacific, those islands have become an indispensable relay and a resupply station for the only one sea lane across this region. Its economic and strategic importance hence deserves further attention.

As one commentator concluded as follows:

Those Oceania developing countries are located in-between the Asia, Australia, North and South America, and linked with the Pacific Ocean and India Ocean. Many international submarine cables are going through that region, -both -maritime and air transportation lines are also met there."¹

As China's domestic economic and external trade grows continuously, its further reliance on the global public goods in terms of maritime security and navigation freedom becomes a major concern without doubts. Statistics show that about 90% of China's total import and export of goods and 40% of petrol oil depend on the marine transportation. By 2020, China's annual maritime trade will reach one trillion US dollar, and those products will mainly transported by the Chinese commercial

¹ Wang Jian Tang, *The Contemporary Oceania* (Dang dai da yang zhou), Guangdong Education Press, Guangzhou, 1991, P.182.

shipping.¹ In this sense, it is not surprised to observe that Chinese government has started to attach a great importance to the maritime security and stability of the Pacific sea lines of communication and its surrounding area. As one analyst stated it bluntly:

*"China's petrol oil and other important raw materials are supplied mainly by the maritime transportation, and the delivery of its huge finished products to overseas market also chiefly depends on shipping. So the maintenance of security of the sea line of communication is critical to Chinese maritime security, even more broadly to its national security."*²

Simply put, there are three major sea lanes in the Pacific Ocean: north line, middle line and the south line. Among them, the South Pacific line stretches from East Asia to South America, Australian and New Zealand, and the total length of the lines is about 10000 nautical miles. The Pacific islands located in the intersection area, and there are many natural harbors in those countries.

Since infrastructures are the bottleneck problem in these countries for a long time, China can help them to develop modern shipping industry through the port construction and upgrade, and provides them with resources and technologic assistance if necessary. At present, China is vigorously promoting the strategy of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, and taking "connectivity" as the breakthrough point.

¹ Xi Qi, The Development of Chinese maritime geo-strategy and China Navy in the early twenty-first Century(Er Shi Yi Shi Ji Chu Zhong Guo Hai Shang Di Yuan Zhan Lue Yu Zhong Guo Hai Jun De Fa Zhan), in *Chinese Military Science*(Zhong Guo Jun Shi Ke Xue)No.4,2004,P.80.

² Gabriel Collins, China's Dependent on Global Sea Public Goods, in Erickson, A.S., Goldstein, L. J. and Li, Ni edited, *China the United States, and 21st Century Sea Power: Defining a Maritime Security Partnership* , Translated by Xu Sheng and etc. Ocean Press, Beijing 2014,P.26.,

Oceania region has been regarded as the natural extension of the new silk road and given great importance by Chinese government.



Meanwhile, Pacific islands are also the important transfer and supply stations for the Chinese scientific expedition ships to Antarctic. As far as we know, China has undertaken a series of Antarctic scientific expeditions since 1984, with an attempt to study the potentiality of peaceful utilization of the Antarctic. In so doing, China has successfully built four scientific expedition stations- including the *Great Wall*, *Zhongshan*, *Taishan*, *KunLun*. Currently, Chinese Antarctic scientific expedition ships often sailed through the sea lanes around the South Pacific islands. With the possible development of Antarctic tourism lines, South Pacific islands can also serve as a halfway station for goods. To sum up, it is beneficial for China to advance further

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cooperation with Pacific island countries in this regard. As one Chinese scholar suggested:

“As long as China and South Pacific island countries have established good relationships, it will bring about mutual benefits to both parts. If China build some observation bases or transform stations, not only it can significantly reduce the field of aerospace, marine, oil and gas exploration costs, but also enhance space technology development.”¹



¹ Xie Xiao Jun, Prime Minister Wen’s trip to South Pacific (Wen Zong Li De Nan Tai Ping Yang Zhi Xing, the Aged (Lao Nian Ren), No5,2005,P.8-9.

In short, the Pacific island countries are important strategic pivots for the future development of China maritime transportation and navigation.

The Pacific islands and China's maritime defense strategy

Along with the expansion of China's overseas interests due to its deeper engagement with the international economy, China has sought to boost its maritime power in order to safeguard its interests if necessary. In so doing, China has already paid a special attention to the Pacific maritime defense strategy. Simply put, China's maritime strategic priorities now and the future can be summarized as: safeguarding national sovereignty, protecting the marine rights and interests, maintaining the security of sea lanes, establishing a stable relationship of great powers and marine order. For these purposes, China is dedicated to building a powerful blue water navy.

From the geographic and strategic vantages, as a big country on the Pacific Rim, China has developed its strategic orientation towards the Pacific Ocean. Its dedication towards a strong maritime power is logical, though it is traditionally earthbound in history.¹ However, China's strategic activity of moving towards the Pacific Ocean has been stymied by the invisible hands from the alliance of the United States, Japan and Australia. Since the early stage of Cold War, the U.S. had constructed three "C" type of Pacific island chain networks against the Soviet Union and P.R. China.

Among them, the second island chain is also called the Southwest Pacific Network of which Guam serves as the center of the Micronesia base group, extending from the

¹ John K. Fairbank, "China's Foreign Policy in Historical Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 3 (April 1969): 449-63.

Guam to Micronesia islands, New Zealand, Australia. As a result, an arc base has come into being, of which the Tasman Sea, the Coral Sea, the Arafura Sea and other important waters are under tight control by the US-led alliance. It plays a crucial role in enabling US to carry out a containment and deterrence strategy against Soviet Union and P.R. China. Although Soviet Union has been sidelined by the history, this “C” type defensive network remains active as China has still been considered as a potential threat therein.

Against this background, China’s maritime strategic thinking comes down to its “coastal defense” in the first island chain and the surrounding areas including the Yellow Sea, East China Sea and South China Sea. However, China’s modernization of PLAN and its ambitious strategic of building a real blue water navy for “offshore active defense” indeed requires it to achieve substantial breaking-through in undermining the US-led defensive network in the second island chain.¹ Its maritime great power dream will not be come true if the second island chain remain intact.



¹ David Bennett, “China’s Offshore Active Defense and the People’s Liberation Army Navy,” *Global Security Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 126-41.



As showed in the map, some of the Pacific island countries are located in the second and third chain, and thus have important strategic position in Chinese defense strategy

One Chinese analyst noted:

In the Pacific Ocean, this area (Pacific island countries) crisscrossed two strategic channels— from eastern to northern, from south to north, it has therefore always been a strategic location where the fierce competition of various marine powers doomed.¹

Given that China’s strategic orientation towards the Pacific Ocean is clear-cut, the US government, as a result, continued to strengthen its presence in this region and reemphasized America as a “Pacific power”.² This kind of statement carries with an important implication during the period of escalating maritime disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea. That is, US will not turn a blind eye to China’s recent

¹ Xie Xiao Jun, Prime Minister Wen’s trip to South Pacific (Wen Zong Li De Nan Tai Ping Yang Zhi Xing, the Aged (Lao Nian Ren), No5,2005,P.8.

² “US defence Secretary: ‘We are a Pacific Power, We Aren’t Going Anywhere,’” *The Guardian*, 11 August, 2011, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/11/us-defence-secretary-we-are-a-pacific-power-we-arent-going-anywhere>; Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century.

assertiveness, and then develop a predilection to constrain China's rising influence in this region, as the argument goes.¹ In so doing, USA will further strengthen the military presence in the Pacific region, of which the Pacific island countries in particular have been regarded as the strategic backyard of USA. In order to prevent the infiltration by the external force, America implementation of "denial" strategy in the Pacific islands region.² Some Western scholars even speculated that China's rise will eventually replace the US as the protector for these small island countries. So much so that, Sino-US competition is unavoidable in this region ultimately.³

The strategic competition between China and the US, if it indeed emerges in the future, may not necessarily turn into a zero-sum game. Therefore, the Pacific island countries do not have to choose either China or US. Some even argued that it is inappropriate and counterproductive to speculate the great-power rivalry in this region.⁴ After all, China's grand strategic thinking is increasingly in favor with "defensive realism" which focuses on the top priority of national security rather than the relentless pursuit of power as the offensive realism suggests.⁵ True, national interests mentioned above are major concerns of Chinese government now and the near future, but it does not necessarily mean that China cannot accommodate its

¹ Robert Ross, "Chinese Nationalism and Its Discontents", *The National Interest*, no. 116 (November/December 2011); Hugh White, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 2011;

² Statements of Derek Mitchell, Principle of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, Submitted to the House of Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Global Environment, September 29, 2010.

³ Betel -Vintner, *The South Pacific, China's New Frontier*, in Anne-Marie Brady edited, *Looking North, Looking South, China, Taiwan and the South Pacific*, World Scientific publishing Co.2010,P. 30.

⁴ Jenny Hayward-Jones, *Big Enough for All of Us: Geo-strategic Competition in the Pacific Islands* (NSW: Lowy Institute, 2014).

⁵ Tang Shiping, "From Offensive to Defensive Realism," in Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng eds., *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and Future of International Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press): 141-162.

position and pay no attention to the mutual benefits subsequent to the strategic cooperation with the US and/or the Pacific island countries. That is why analysts argued that there has emerged a “soft” rather than “hard” balance of power behavior in the South Pacific currently and it may remain unchanged for the foreseeable future.¹

The Pacific islands countries and China’s peaceful reunification

Obviously, the peaceful unification of China is an indispensable part of Chinese dream as announced by the top Chinese leadership.² The Taiwan issue has been the biggest challenge in China's internal and foreign affairs. For a long time, both sides of China and Taiwanese government were at pains to contend with each other for international diplomatic recognitions, which cost both of them considerable resources and energy. In short, seen from the perspectives of geopolitics and the national reputation, the Taiwanese issue has become the stumbling block against China’s rejuvenation.

Since most of the Pacific island countries are small, underdeveloped and recently independent, it paves a unique way for the Taiwanese authority to carry out the chequebook diplomacy, namely, to provide economic aid for the exchange of their diplomatic recognition. Within the current 22 “diplomatic allies” of Taiwan, 6 of them are from Pacific island countries, they are Salomon islands, Nauru, Kiribati,

¹ Marc Lanteigne, “Water Dragon? China, Power Shifts and Soft Balancing in the South Pacific,” *Political Science* 64, no. 21 (2012): 21-38.

² David Gosset, “China Dream Over the Taiwan Strait”, *The Huffington Post*, 17 February 2014, at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-gosset/china-dream-over-the-taiwan-strait_b_4771628.html

Marshall Islands, Palau, Tuvalu. The Taiwanese authority has indeed placed a high premium on the Pacific island countries for its diplomacy. As one local Taiwan scholar concluded:

“Although Taiwan is far away from those countries in the South Pacific, they are highly important for the Taiwanese authority in three levels: diplomatic relations concentration of Taiwan; bolstering up for the America strategic dominance in the Asia Pacific; as well as improving Taiwan’s strategy posture in East Asia. Therefore, we (Taiwan) can-not underestimate the importance of those countries in the south Pacific.”¹

In order to secure the “diplomatic relations” with the Pacific island countries, Taiwanese authority has continuously strengthened its influence in these countries through political, economic and cultural investment. in terms of political investment, Taiwanese authority has carried out the “visiting diplomacy”, “summit diplomacy”, and “transit diplomacy” and so on. Meanwhile, Taiwanese government has increased economic aids to those countries with an attempt to win the strong supports from those top ranking officials in the Pacific. Culturally, Taiwanese authority has touted the cultural similarity between the aboriginal peoples in Taiwan and the islanders. More importantly, Taiwanese authority has made concerted effort with the US in order to retard the rising stature of China in this region.

The diplomatic tug of war between PRC and the Taiwanese authority in the south Pacific has been at play for a long run. According to Yang Jian, “the reality is that for many years until recently to compete with Taiwan diplomatically was perhaps the

¹ I-Chung Lai, Taiwan’s South Pacific Strategy, *Taiwan international Studies Quarterly*(*Taiwan Guo Ji Yan Jiu Ji Kan*), Vol.3, No.3, Autumn 2007, P.147.

most important factor for China's growing involvement in the South Pacific."¹ During the late 1980s and early 1990s in particular, when China's had experienced serious domestic political turmoil, the Taiwanese regime attempted to advantage this golden opportunity to sabotage the normal relationships between China and some of the Pacific island countries. This serious challenge thus ensued in the south Pacific islands.² China's diplomatic relations with the Pacific island countries hence suffered setbacks.

As times went on, China's remarkable economic growth and its returning to the stable political situation has indeed paved a way for China to consolidate and develop friendly relations with the Pacific island countries strictly in accordance with the "One China" policy. At present, there are eight Pacific island countries which have formal diplomatic relations with mainland China, slightly more than that of Taiwan. However, China's economic relations with the Pacific island countries grew fast recently, the total volume of trade between mainland China and the Pacific island countries had greatly exceed those of Taiwan. In terms of foreign aids, China has become the top number three aid donors to the Pacific island countries only behind Australian and New Zealand.³ Moreover, China is the full dialogue partner countries of the Oceania regional organizations the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific community. It seems that China has got the upper hand hitherto.

¹ Jian Yang, *The Pacific Islands in China's Grand Strategy: Small States, Big Games* Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011,P.51.

² Xi Ming Yuan, *My diplomatic Mission in the South Pacific (Yi Ren San Shi Feng Yu Ji)*, Xin Hua Press, Beijing, 2009,P.38.

³ Yu Chang Sen, Chinese Economic Diplomacy toward the Oceania Island States in the first Decade of 21st Century, *Blue Book of Oceania 2013-2014*, Social Science Academic Press, Beijing 2014.

Not until the 2008 the Kuomintang candidate Ma Ying-Jeou was elected as leader of Taiwan, did the “diplomatic truce” indeed emerge as a consequence. That is, the long-standing diplomatic contention in this region was temporarily suspended. However, such a hard-won *modus Vivendi* might be reversed as long as the peaceful unification remains a challenge. Presumably, Taiwan will continue to utilize its diplomatic leverages at those island countries and expand its “international space”, even strive for the formal membership in the United Nations and other international organizations. Specifically, Taiwan's “chequebook diplomacy” and “democratic values diplomacy” remains attractive in the South Pacific region. Therefore, the sophisticated diplomacy used by the Taiwanese government towards Pacific island countries may continue to pose a big strategic challenge to mainland China’s foreign policy in this regard.

The Pacific island and China’s soft balancing strategy

Among the 14 Pacific Islands sovereign countries, 12 of them are UN member states. In addition, there are about a dozen of territories which subject to American and French jurisdiction. In the future, if some of these territories can achieve independence and join in the UN as formal members, the influence of the Pacific islands will nominally increase. There is considerable number of Chinese diasporas scattered in those islands, with the total population is about 80,000, according to 2007 statistics, which accounting for about 1% of -the local population.¹ Though lots of Chinese people had inter-marriage with the local people, and have deeply integrated into local society. Their Chinese descents and the close linkage to both Chinese and

¹ Ron Crocombe, *Asian in the Pacific Islands, Replacing the West*, (Suva, 2007) Pp.93-7.

local culture, can serve as a bridge to further the promotion of friendly relations between China and the Pacific island countries.

Recently, China has invested in various infrastructure projects for the Pacific island countries through foreign developing aids. According to “China's Foreign Affairs” white paper records, from 2000 to 2012, Chinese government has offered about 30 major projects to six diplomatic Pacific island countries – Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Micronesia, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. It includes the construction of government official buildings, e-government networks, and the infrastructural construction such as highways, bridges, and hydropower station and sea embankment. Also, Chinese government also offered a large number of free aid and grants to those islands countries in the forms of human resources training, cultural communication, medical and health cares and emergency aids and so on.¹ More importantly, Chinese foreign aids generally are free of political conditions attached, which made both political elites and the general publics can enjoy the benefits provided by China, and lay a strong foundation for the mutual beneficial relationship between China and the Pacific island countries as a result.

In the future, according to the sophisticated mobilization of economic leverages, and the deep understanding of the real demands, as well as the full respect of the concerns of local people, China may ensure the sustainable development of island countries.

Such as showed the concept of “green innovation and win-win cooperation” proposed as in the second China- Pacific island countries economic development and cooperation forum hold in November 2013 Guangzhou, China. China is working hard

¹ Yu Chang Sen, Chinese Economic Diplomacy toward the Oceania Island States in the first Decade of 21st Century, *Blue Book of Oceania 2013-2014*, Social Science Academic Press, Beijing 2014.P.20-25.

together with the international community to tackle poverty and low development problem of the Pacific island region.

Meanwhile, China can draw on its rising soft power through the Confucius Institute and the other public diplomacy to cultivate the local elites' and the public opinion, and shape a good image of China in this region. As one scholar observed:

*China's public diplomacy can "shape the (favorable) image of China as a peaceful and responsible country which honors the equality of sovereignty regardless of either it being a big or small countries, which therefore may enhance the mutual understanding and trust in the South Pacific."*¹

In fact, China's economic aids and public diplomacy indeed produced positive returns.

Many Pacific island countries publicly started to "look north"² and looked forward to the "dragon's hug"³, and more importantly, expressed their willingness to further strengthen the bilateral relationship with China as a key component of their diplomatic strategy and national policy. Many island leaders decided to visit Beijing as their first foreign trip destinations. This positive trend becomes obvious especially in 2014 when Chinese president Xi Jinping visited Fiji, and held group meeting with the Pacific leaders. While staying in Nadi, Fiji, president Xi Jinping announced a new

¹ Li De Fang, The Public Diplomacy Practice of China in the South Pacific Island Countries(Zhong Guo Kai Zhan Tai Ping Yang Dao Guo Gong Gong Wai Jiao De Dong Yin Ji Xian Zhuang Ping Xi),*Pacific Journal*, No11,2014,P.33.

² Ron Crocombe, The Software of China-Pacific Relations, in Anne-Marie Brady edited, *Looking North, Looking South, China, Taiwan and the South Pacific*, World Scientific publishing Co. Singapore, 2010.PP.35-38.

³ Dragon's hug, *Fiji Times*,23November 2014,P.1.

package of economic cooperation initiations including zero tariff treatment to 97% imported goods from the least developed countries, offered one thousands of training scholarships, and provided support for the islands in response to climate change.¹

Conclusion

China is in the early stage of formulating its grand strategy in the new century. Great powers, peripheral countries and developing countries have dominated China's grand strategic thinking traditionally. In contrast, the Pacific island countries only play a marginal role in this regard. Yet, due to China's rise and the expansion of China's global interest recently, Chinese leadership has learned to pay a considerable attention to the Pacific Oceania, and building strategic relationship with the Pacific islands countries has become a major concern in particular. That is because it is directly and indirectly bound up with China's maritime security and navigation freedom along with the sea lane across this region, China's offshore defense strategy, maritime development and the competition with Taiwanese authority for winning the diplomatic recognition of these island countries, which is closely linked to China's strategy of peaceful reunification. In short, a further reconsideration of Pacific islands countries in China's strategic blueprint is in order.

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¹ Xi Jing Ping Meet with the Leaders of Pacific Island Countries :http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2014-11/22/c_1113361879.htm

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