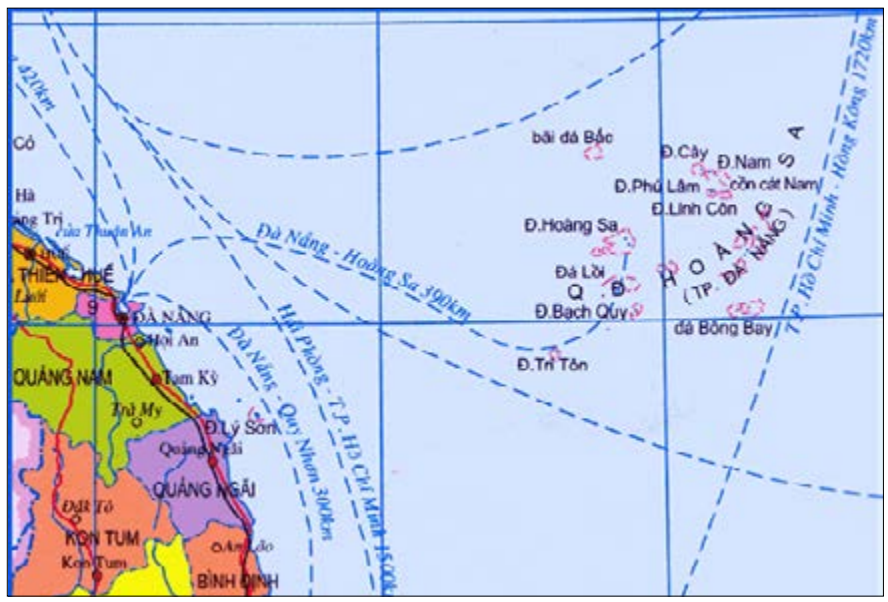
Vietnamese Advisor Recalls Battle of the Paracel Islands with China

OE Watch Commentary: China secured control of the Paracel Islands on 19 January 1974 when the then South Vietnamese government was unable to defend the island from Chinese attack. Vietnam's loss in the Battle of the Paracel Islands still resonates today among Vietnamese. The excerpted 19 January article in *thannhien.vn*, a Vietnamese-language newspaper with a focus on social issues, reflects how memories of that battle are rekindled on the anniversary of that battle.



hoang-sa.

Source: Vietnamese Government, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-hoang-sa.png, Attribution: CC x 2.0

The article was written by Trần Văn Thọ, a Tokyo-based former Vietnamese economic advisor to the Japanese government. Thọ was a 25-year old student in Japan when the 1974 battle occurred. In the article, he discussed how China carefully curates narratives about wars it has conducted in its borderlands, including the Battle of the Paracel Islands, which Vietnamese call Hoang Sa. Thọ also noted a Japanese professor close to him had also visited China's Hainan Island and told Thọ about China's memorial for the 1974 battle, which referred to Chinese soldiers as martyrs and heroes and, according to Thọ, included numerous fabrications about Chinese self-defense in the battle. Thọ nevertheless recognized that although it was at Vietnam's expense, China was succeeding in passing on a legacy of its battle achievements to future generations in China.

Throughout much of the article, Thọ analyzes China's ways of memorializing the Battle of the Paracel Islands and notes the importance of Vietnam doing the same—creating its own narratives. This is especially important in regards to the forty-seventh anniversary of South Vietnam's inability to withstand China's assault on the Paracel Islands—China's first stake in the South China Sea islands. Thọ laments that Vietnam is not doing enough to clarify the true history from Vietnam's perspective to justify its sovereignty over the Paracel Islands. Thọ's article, therefore, highlights how in Southeast Asia history is among the most important ways that countries inspire their citizens to claim sovereignty in the South China Sea and to justify their claims over territory legally and through popular opinion. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

"The invader not only distorted the truth, but also desired to forever pass on the story of the 'achievements' of the invasion through memorials."

Source: "47 năm ngày Trung Quốc cưỡng chiếm Hoàng Sa: Kẻ xâm lược nguỵ tạo ký ức như thế nào? (47 Years Since China Conquered Hoang Sa: How is the Invasion Remembered?)." *thanhnien.vn* (Vietnamese language newspaper), 19 January 2021, https://thanhnien.vn/thoi-su/47-nam-ngay-trung-quoc-cuong-chiem-hoang-sa-ke-xam-luoc-nguy-tao-ky-uc-nhu-the-nao-1331507.html?utm_source=coccoc&utm_medium=ccnews

On this day 47 years ago our Hoang Sa was suddenly captured by China through force. Few people know well what China did then. We all know that the invasion of our territory by China was propagated to its people as a self-defense war. Having the opportunity to read what they disseminate and propagate about the Hoang Sa event, I cannot help but be surprised at the very blatant fabrication.

In 2012, I held a Vietnam-China intellectual dialogue in Tokyo and invited Professor Ishii to speak. He visited the Vietnam-China border and wrote a chapter about the war in 1979. Particularly regarding the Hoang Sa incident, he visited Hainan province because he heard China built a memorial area for martyrs in the battle.

The invader not only distorted the truth, but also desired to forever pass on the story of the 'achievements' of the invasion through memorials. Has our efforts to clarify history and justify sovereignty been enough?