Introduction

Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself.

English explorer Sir Walter Raleigh[1]

The western Pacific has had its share of the international spotlight. In August 2022, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan. China launched the military exercises around Taiwan to express its dissatisfaction. A war across the Taiwan Strait was on the verge. To ease the tension, President Joe Biden had a meeting with Xi Jinping during the G20 Bali Summit in November. While both sides reached nothing, the United States took advantage of this occasion to demonstrate its determination of maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait again. It is because, in addition to chip production and democratic values, Taiwan occupies the position of geostrategic value. This small island in the western Pacific rim is the gateway to the central Pacific and the South China Sea, which are closely linked with America's national security.

America's attention to the tie between the Pacific and national interests was unequivocally shown up in Vice Presidents' commencement addresses at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. On 22 May 2015, the then Vice President Joe Biden said: 'President Xi of China, when I was meeting

[1] Thomas Wemyss Fulton, *The Sovereignty of the Sea* (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint Co., 1976), 136.

with him, asked me why do I continue to say America is a Pacific power? And I said because we are'.[2] His exchange with Xi Jinping filled the hall with laughter. However, his words were not just a demonstration of his sense of humour; they reflected the increasingly severe tensions with China in the western Pacific rim. In the years leading up to Biden's address, maritime East Asia had become a site of rivalry between great powers and sometimes of conflict. In 2009, US naval forces (including the USNS *Impeccable*) got into a scrape with five Chinese vessels in the South China Sea.[3] This incident was not unusual. In 2013, the guided missile cruiser USS *Cowpens* almost collided with a Chinese warship in the same area.[4] The maritime space in the western Pacific rim has had the potential to trigger a conflict between the United States and China. For this reason, after joking light-heartedly with the midshipmen, Biden's tone grew more serious. 'But we do – unapologetically – stand up for the equitable and peaceful resolution of disputes and for the freedom of navigation'.[5] He told the young naval officers that Americans 'are going to look to you to uphold these principles wherever they are challenged, to strengthen our growing security partnerships, and to make good on our unshakable commitment to the mutual defense of our allies'.[6] This includes securing America's interests in maritime East Asia. In Vice President Mike Pence's commencement address at the Naval Academy in 2017, he said something similar: the United States must remind 'the world what American leadership looks like. That's also what the Navy does'.[7] The two men may have different party affiliations, but they voiced a unified perspective: that for the United States, not only does the oceanic space serve as a geographical space in which it can project its military power, it also links up its allies and thus allows the United States to maintain its dominance in East Asia. Both aspects of this perspective suggest that the United States should stand up for the freedom of navigation and commit itself to the mutual defence of its allies.

[2] 'Commencement Address by the Vice President at the United States Naval Academy', see: bit.ly/3WdPBkP. Access: 1 March 2022.
[3] 'Officials: Ship in China spat was hunting subs', see: bit.ly/3BAL7wJ. Access: 4 September 2022.
[4] 'U.S., Chinese warships narrowly avoid collision in South China Sea', see: bit.ly/3YkWRxa. Access: 4 September 2022.
[5] 'Commencement Address by the Vice President at the United States Naval Academy', see: bit.ly/3WdPBkP. Access: 1 March 2022.
[6] Ibid.
[7] 'Vice President Mike Pence at U.S. Naval Academy: It's Your Turn to Assume the Watch', see: bit.ly/3UX78gf. Access: 14 December 2022.

The strife between the United States and China in the western Pacific has a long history, but the chaotic year of 2019 culminated in a showdown between Washington and Beijing. The deterioration of the US–China relationship as the result of a trade war, the Hong Kong crisis, and COVID-19 are currently exacerbating regional security issues in the western Pacific. In April 2020, Beijing dispatched its first aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, to patrol between Taiwan and the Philippines in the South China Sea. The United States bolstered its naval forces in response. The maritime space serves as a barometer allowing one to gauge the twists and turns of international politics, US foreign policy, and intra-East Asian relationships. Decision-makers in contemporary Washington DC view the ocean as an essential element of international security. Nevertheless, the connection between the seas and international security has not always been well understood. Seventy years ago, the Truman administration not only reduced the strength of the US Navy but also halted plans for the construction of a supercarrier, the 65,000-tonne USS *United States*. Naval leaders publicly balked at Truman's policies in what became known as the revolt of the admirals. The contrasting appreciation of the maritime space then and now compels us to explore the historical evolution of US foreign policy and the concept of international waters.

The scholarship on the US Navy and the US–Atlantic Europe relationship is extensive, but we have yet to adequately understand the entanglements between the United States and maritime East Asia during the Cold War. Drawing on archives in Chinese, English, and Japanese, this book seeks to provide a clear and reasoned description and an in-depth analysis of the links between America's East Asian policy and the ocean following the dissolution of the Japanese Empire in August 1945, a turning point in world history that Ian Buruma refers to as *Year Zero*.[8] In maritime East Asia – a geographical space consisting of countries on the East Asian landmass and offshore islands in the western Pacific rim embracing the maritime space of the Yellow and East China Seas – regional politics were being rapidly restructured. Imperial Japan's *Gunkan kōshinkyoku* (Fleet March) was no longer being chanted and the British Royal Navy's glory days had faded away, a juncture which the United States exploited to assume dominion over maritime East Asia on the strength of its mighty naval forces. Might we hence conclude on the basis of America's robust military strength that, in the context of the

[8] Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), 9–10.

Cold War standoff, the shaping of the maritime space's new political contours was a black-and-white story? I argue that it is not. In support of my argument, this book centres on two inter-related aspects of this story: how the seas changed along with the shifting political and military contours of East Asia, and the roles played by local sovereignty and local interests in East Asia in the shaping of America's post-war maritime policy and international security concerns. The legacy of America's role in post-war maritime East Asia and the international political order in the Asia–Pacific area during the Cold War still weighs heavily even now. The questions of how the United States managed this hub-and-spokes alliance in East Asia via the maritime space and how, why, and when the United States changed its perception of the sea prior to the US–China rapprochement have so far eluded historical enquiry.[9] In this book, maritime East Asia is looked at from a geographical perspective as an integral international community whose vibrant stories tell of the sovereignty, local interests, and American national and international security concerns that shaped the dynamics of Cold War East Asia.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PACIFIC IN AMERICAN HISTORY

When analysing history, the sea must not be overlooked.[10] American history is no exception. The maritime lanes governed by the European colonial powers of Britain, France, and Spain prepared the waters for them to sail across the Atlantic and establish settlements in the New World in the seventeenth century.[11] The Atlantic played an extremely important role in linking the European powers and their colonies. In 1783, following the American War of Independence, Great Britain

[9] The hub-and-spokes alliance is a security system created by the United States in Asia–Pacific in the early Cold War. Unlike North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which was a multilateral pact, the US (hub) had bilateral military commitments with its local partners (spokes), but each spoke had no military ties with others. In this way, the US could maintain its leadership in the Asia–Pacific region. See: Victor Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 185. Gilford John Ikenberry, 'American hegemony and East Asian order', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 58:3 (2004), 353–67.

[10] Jerry H. Bentley, 'Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis', *Geographical Review*, 89:2 (1999), 215–24.

[11] Maria Fusaro, 'Maritime History as Global History? The Methodological Challenges and a Future Research Agenda', in Maria Fusaro and Amélia Polónia, eds., *Maritime History as Global History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 275. Also see: Elizabeth Mancke, 'Early Modern Expansion and the Politicization of Oceanic Space', *Geographical Review*, 89:2 (1999), 225–36.

recognised the United States. The geographical features of the North American continent allowed this budding country to develop into both a continental and a maritime country. However, it did not become a maritime power immediately. America's founders viewed the Atlantic merely as a belt facilitating American relations with Europe or as a natural barrier against the menace from Europe. At this point, it is necessary to define the difference between a maritime state and a maritime power. A maritime state can be broadly defined as a country that has a coastline or access to the ocean for fishing, smuggling, and trade purposes; this cannot be equated with a maritime power. Sergey Georgyevich Gorshkov, Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union, gave a distinctive definition of the nature of sea power. According to Gorshkov, a powerful navy was a prerequisite to a maritime authority being able to back the 'possibilities for the state to study (explore) the ocean and harness its wealth [and] the status of the merchant and fishing fleets and their ability to meet the needs of the state'.[12] A sea power's navy was not limited to the function of protecting its civilians by showing its flag, but such a power could, as Gorshkov further pointed out, exert its military and political influence in support of its foreign policy.[13] Early America's limited maritime activities justify classifying it as a maritime state rather than a maritime power.

As America's territory gradually extended to the west coast, the Pacific Basin entered American history, and the ocean to the west allowed the American pioneers to explore yet another unknown world.[14] The official presence of the United States in maritime East Asia dates to the nineteenth century, after British gunboats blasted open the heavy, but not stout, gates of Imperial China between 1840 and 1842 during the First Opium War. As a Pacific state, America did not lag far behind its British friend in expanding into maritime East Asia. In 1844, American diplomat Caleb Cushing signed the Treaty of Wanghia with Keying, Viceroy of Liangguang. According to this treaty, the Americans were entitled to acquire property at the ports of Canton, Amoy, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai and to extraterritoriality in China; American missionaries were permitted to preach to the Chinese people without any restriction; and the US Navy was allowed to operate near treaty ports for commercial

[12] Sergey G. Gorshkov, *The Sea Power of the State* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979), 1.
[13] Ibid., 58.
[14] Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 197–215.

inspection. However, these privileges did not satisfy America's ambition to extend its influence over the western Pacific. It required a supply point for its commercial links with China. The next such supply point ended up being Tokugawa, Japan. As a consequence of the world-renowned Perry Expedition, Japan was forced to sign the Kanagawa Treaty, which opened up the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to commercial activities with the United States. Matthew C. Perry's *Kurofune* (black ship) brought to an end of Tokugawa's policy of isolation and integrated Japan into the United States' trading network in maritime East Asia. In order to protect its East Asian business interests, the United States established a standing naval force there in 1868 – the Asiatic Squadron – which eventually developed into the Asiatic Fleet in 1910.[15] The United States was gradually on the way from a maritime state to a sea power. Norman Friedman's research unveils this transformation in the context of evolution of national/naval strategy. Before 1880 America's naval strategy was 'designed to deter Britain through the threat of trade warfare'. Along with the advance of science and technology, the United States perceived that individual European countries could also pose a threat to US territory. From 1889 onwards, by building an offensive fleet which could attack on adversaries, the United States attempted to deter any European careerists from 'operating in the New World'.[16] America's naval development was thereafter in line with this national strategy.[17] Given America's involvement in the 1898 Spanish–American War, the 1899 Philippine–American War, and the 1900 Boxer Rebellion in Qing China, one could argue that, prior to the twentieth century, it viewed the maritime space as a blue highway to cultural interaction, immigration, trade, and war. Gradually, however, American history was interwoven with the historical evolution of the western Pacific.

WHY DOES MARITIME EAST ASIA MATTER?

The maritime space is depicted through regional developments in which the language used by different individuals in different contexts has different meanings. A growing number of historians are beginning to connect maritime issues with other disciplines and are taking a transnational

[15] Alfred Emile Cornebise, *The Shanghai Stars and Stripes: Witness to the transition to Peace, 1945–1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 21.
[16] Friedman Norman, *The US Maritime Strategy* (London: Jane's, 1988), 42.
[17] Ibid., 42.

approach to depicting maritime history and observing interaction between empires and locals on a global scale, which allows for an understanding of the dynamics between oceans and continents.[18] However, as Amélia Polónia reminds us, maritime history can be categorised as transnational or global history but not always, because local and national biases still have influence on analytical framework.[19] For Europe, including Scandinavia and the areas along the Mediterranean Sea, the sea has served as a stage on which the powers have competed over politics, business, and culture, which has led to the historical emergence of sea power states in these areas. East Asia, however, has had a different experience. Unlike other seas, including the Central Pacific, the western Pacific rim has not received the scholarly attention it is due. Historian Barak Kushner draws on Tony Judt's concept of edges of empire to make us rethink the intricate fallout of the dissolution of Imperial Japan.[20] This approach may also enrich our understanding of the historical evolution of maritime East Asia. Maritime East Asia, which underwent profound changes in leadership as hegemony passed from China to Japan and then to a US-backed alliance system, was a space shaped both wittingly and unwittingly on the periphery of successive empires and by successive rulers.

Prior to the intrusion of the Western powers with their brand of gunboat diplomacy in the middle of the nineteenth century, the region's international order was based on the imperial Chinese tributary system. Whichever the dynasty, the Chinese emperor was the supreme leader of all of the countries surrounding China, including Japan (until 1540, when Japan ended this relationship), Joseon Korea, Vietnam, the Ryukyus, Burma, and so on. The maritime space served as a channel through which neighbouring countries could send their tribute to China and receive the Chinese emperor's conferment of kingship in recognition of the sovereign powers of these client states. Moreover, the oceanic space offered a means of learning about Chinese culture. During the Sui and

[18] Amélia Polónia, 'Maritime History: A Gateway to Global History', in Maria Fusaro and Amélia Polónia, eds., *Maritime History as Global History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 1–2 & 13. Maria Fusaro, 'Maritime History as Global History? The Methodological Challenges and a Future Research Agenda', 267–8.

[19] Amelia Polonia, 'Maritime History', 5. Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, 'Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization', *Journal of Global History* 5:1 (2010), 160.

[20] Barak Kushner, *Men to Devils, Devils to Men: Japanese War Crimes and Chinese Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 6.

Tang dynasties, when Imperial China was at its peak, Japan sent missions consisting of scholars, monks, and students to acquire knowledge about Chinese culture and civilisation. The East China Sea in East Asia was analogous to 'an East Asian Mediterranean'.[21] In the centuries that followed, as Japan continued to maintain loose relations with China under the tributary system, the sea presented the only channel for close commercial links with China.

Imperial China still faced outside threats, however, the most frequent being challenges and harassment by northern and western nomads, who had tormented the emperors of previous dynasties. Unlike continental East Asia, Imperial China faced little if any threat from the seas. Although pirates and smugglers were engaged in harassment and looting along the Chinese coast, this activity – unlike the riots of the peripheral *barbarians* in continental Asia – was of only marginal significance and was incapable of subverting an entire empire. In the circumstances, Imperial China, as the dominant power in East Asia, did not develop into a maritime power as the European countries did. If we apply the definitions of maritime state and maritime power to Qing China, we find that, to borrow historian Ronald Po's words, China's Manchurian court regarded the maritime space as little more than its blue frontier.[22] As for Japan, although Western ideas, knowledge, and weapons had been introduced there via the seas, the *Daimyo* (powerful Japanese magnates) preferred to conquer others and consolidate their power on the Japanese archipelagos rather than expand Japan's influence in maritime East Asia. If we shift our attention to the Korean Peninsula, we can find that the main foreign policy goal of Joseon Korea, long a client state of Imperial China, was to strike a balance between China and Japan. The maritime space served as a means of access that allowed Joseon Korea to maintain its subtle relations with its two stronger neighbours.[23] Thus, despite China's long coastline, Japan's archipelago, and Korea's peninsula providing these countries with suitable geography

[21] Naoko Sajima and Kyochi Tachikawa, *Japanese Sea Power: A Maritime Nation's Struggle for Identity* (Canberra: Sea Power Center, 2009), 1.

[22] Ronald C. Po, *The Blue Frontier: Maritime Vision and Power in the Qing China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 23–4.

[23] Hoon Lee, 'The Repatriation of Castaways in Chosŏn Korea–Japan Relations, 1599–1888', *Korean Studies* 30:1 (2006), 67–90. Jung Mee Park and Chun-Ping Wang, 'Interpreting the Maritime and Overland Trade Regulations of 1882 between Chosŏn and the Qing: How logics of appropriateness shaped Sino–Korean relations', *International Area Studies Review* 23:1 (2020): 114–32. Kenneth R. Robinson, 'Centering the King of Chosŏn: Aspects of Korean Maritime Diplomacy, 1392–1592', *Journal of Asian Studies* 59:1 (February 2000), 109–25.

for becoming sea powers, their land-oriented approaches meant they did not evolve into maritime powers prior to the Western invasion from the seas in the nineteenth century. The maritime space provided a platform for interaction between these maritime states and a window on Western ideas. No one was attempting to corner leadership of maritime East Asia. Within the context of Imperial China's tributary system, the western Pacific rim represented the periphery of the *civilised world*.

At one point, the western Pacific rim might have become the focus of competition between two local empires, Qing China and Meiji Japan, but this did not occur. It was because China was languishing following its rout at sea by Japan in the First Sino–Japanese War in 1894–1895, as a consequence of which it abandoned its management of the seas and did not revive its naval forces. Without serious competitors, the ocean could not function as a key platform for the pursuit of power. What did happen is Japan obtained the colony of Taiwan, which occupies a geographically critical position in maritime East Asia. Then, following Japan's victory in the Russo–Japanese War in 1905, Japan's hegemony in maritime East Asia was complete. On the strength of these victories at sea, we are more often than not inclined to regard Imperial Japan as a maritime power. If we look at its expansion in the twentieth century from the Korean Peninsula to Manchuria and then to north and east China, we can see that, although it was an empire that controlled both land and sea, Japan's development was obviously land-oriented. This warrants a brief look at the history of Imperial Japan's navy so that we can better understand the reasons behind its land-oriented development. Meiji Japan established its first fleet in 1889 and the second five years later, but these did not satisfy Emperor Meiji's ambition to create a fully Westernised Japan.[24] His government imitated the British Navy and learnt the naval doctrine from the United States, taking its greatest inspiration from the theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan.[25] However, in the making of Meiji Japan, despite being an island country, the navy came not first but second in terms of national defence. This is because the naval clan composed of the Satsuma Domain was suppressed by the budding Japanese army during the 1877 Seinan War.[26] Japan's naval officers did

[24] David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 1–31.
[25] Sarah C. Paine, *The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 9.
[26] Ian Nish, 'Japan and Sea Power', in Nicholas Andrew Martin Rodger, ed., *Naval Power in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 78.

not expect to have an offensive navy but rather a defensive naval force in defence of Japan's coasts.[27] The Japanese Empire realised that its geographical proximity to Continental Asia was similar to Britain to Europe. Japan regarded Britain as its national model and expected to become 'the Britain of the East'.[28] Nevertheless, Imperial Japan developed into a land-oriented empire. The Japanese scholar Shiraishi Takashi says that Imperial Japan's continent-oriented policy was formed after it obtained interests in Manchuria following the 1905 Russo–Japanese War and the 1910 Japanese annexation of Korea. Shiraishi suggests, however, that we would be wrong to conclude that Japan was not interested in maritime Asia. It had considered incorporating maritime Asia into the Japanese Empire, but these areas were already occupied by Western powers such as Britain and the Netherlands: Japan had come too late to the game of colonial chess.[29] Imperial Japan thus did not develop like its Anglo–Japanese Alliance fellow Britain into a maritime power establishing colonies on the other side of the planet in order to project its military, political, economic, and cultural influence. Instead, its land-oriented strategic thinking shaped Meiji Japan into what Sarah C. Paine would call a continental rather than a maritime power,[30] in which the geographical space of the ocean connected the centre of the empire with its imperial periphery in the East Asia region. I do not deny the formidable strength of Imperial Japan's naval forces, which, prior to the outbreak of World War II, were ranked third in the world after those of the United States and the United Kingdom. However, we should not equate a country with a strong navy but which emphasises 'land territorial control or conquest' with a maritime power.[31] As Paine elaborates, a maritime power cannot disconnect itself from global affairs that are linked to the maritime space. This notwithstanding, Japan did challenge the existing contours of the global maritime order. It not only withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933, thus undermining the military balance of power in the Asia–Pacific area, but it also attacked it commerce fellows, including the United States, which had a preponderant navy.[32] In the

[27] Eiichi Aoki, *Shīpawā no sekaishi Volume 2* [The World History of Sea Power] (Tokyo: Shuppan kyōdō-sha, 1983), 355, as quoted in Ian Nish, 'Japan and the Sea Power', 78.
[28] Grace Fox, *Britain and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 532.
[29] Takashi Shiraishi, *Umi no teikoku* [Empire of the Seas] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2000), 187–8.
[30] Sarah C. Paine, *The Japanese Empire*, 187.
[31] Henry J. Hendrix, *To Provide and Maintain a Navy: Why Naval Primacy is America's First, Best Strategy* (Annapolis, MD: Focsle, 2020), 46–7.
[32] Sarah C. Paine, *The Japanese Empire*, 179.