公益財団法人日本国際問題研究所
The Japan Institute of International Affairs

POLICY BRIEF

Nov 12,2025

The History of Japan's Sea Routes and Maritime Trading

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The story of humanity is interwoven with the seas in all the centuries gone by. The primacy of the vast and seemingly endless seas and oceans has rendered it as ground zero for contemporary globalization. Emphasizing the importance of trade, and the need to maintain a strong navy to defend that trade is a school of thought which regards commerce as the cornerstone strategy of many island nations, including Japan. Without adequate sea power, reach, and influence, Japan, or any other maritime island nation for that matter, could possibly not have hoped to carry out their continental policy, leave aside their maritime ambitions. More specifically, Japan's maritime history reflects its foreign and security policies, from 19th-century sea-borne motivations to the establishment of modern trade routes. Maritime spaces display a complex interplay of culture, language, economics, politics, and their consequent geo-economic, and geopolitical significance. The story of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and the roots of their placement in Japan's history remains intriguing. Notably, nearly all of Japan's foreign trade remains sea-borne with a large part of it flowing along two major sea routes.

Early Modern Japanese Maps: Emphasizing Maritime Integration, Not Maritime Seclusion

In the said reference, East Asia's historical cartography observes that many early modern Japanese maps, displayed a network of lines surrounding the archipelago. These lines designated routes that could be taken from one harbor to another. This was quite in contrast to the roads on land, given that there are no physical remains of a sea route.[1] Ships and maritime vessels chart their course depending on the weather or other environmental conditions. According to Roderich Ptak, sailing routes need to be considered as "mental

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1 For more details see on this, Elke Papelitzky, "Red Lines in the Ocean: Sea Routes on Early Modern East Asian Maps," *Imago Mundi*, vol. 75, no. 2, 2023, pp. 293–299.

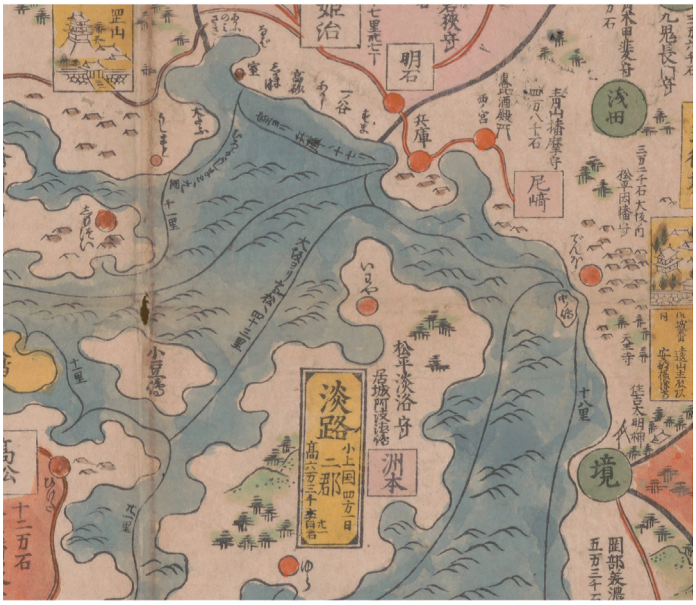

Image courtesy: Detail of Ishikawa Ryūsen's *Nihon kaisan chōrikuzu*, (Map of the sea and mountains, tides, and lands of Japan), 1691 edition published by Sagamiya Tahē, public domain image of the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, G7960, cited in Papelitzky, n. 1; the route lines connect harbors and islands and are annotated with the distance calculated in *ri* for each segment.

constructs."[2] In the field of cartography, drawing lines on a map is a tool for mapmakers to make a statement by fixing the route in relation to specific geographic locations, defined by islands and other waypoints.[3]

The oldest extant dated map of Japan, circa 1306, displayed sea route lines worldwide. It also depicted a schematic representation of the Japanese provinces. Routes branching out from the capital region around Kyoto were marked in red, prominently on land, with a line connecting Shikoku with Honshu.[4] By this depiction, the islands are visually shown to belong together, linked to the seat of the emperor.

Since time immemorial, sea power played a fundamental part in the life of Japan, given that it is surrounded on all sides by water. Japan had no option, but to proceed primarily by maritime routes. Apart from the extensive use of warships and transport ships in the many expeditions to the mainland, the Japanese displayed an aptitude for the development of commerce with lands both far and near. Japan's inhabitants responded to the attractions of the sea and proved to be good sailors. Adventuresome Japanese traders took their merchantmen to distant points including India and the islands now known as the Dutch East Indies.[5] In their conception of water-borne commerce, one of

2 Roderich Ptak, "Sailing Routes as Mental Constructs: Preliminary Notes on Their Semantic Dimensions and Assumed Functions," *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2018, pp. 235-257.

3 See Papelitzky, n. 1.

4 This 1306 map is held by the Ninna Temple in Kyoto; for related reading see, Nakamura Hiroshi, *Nihon kochizu taisei*, (Tokyo: Kōdansha {new edition} 1974), plate 1; cited in Papelitzky, n. 1.

5 For more details see, James K. Eyre, Jr., *Sea Power and the Growth of Japanese Imperialism,* vol. 69, no. 7, July 1943, United States Naval Institute Proceedings, available at https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1943/july/sea-power-and-growth-japanese-imperialism

the most logical routes lay to the southward, where the Philippines constituted the first great archipelago encountered when sailing from the Japanese mainland in that direction. Beginning with the 12th and 13th centuries, a flourishing exchange of goods materialized between the two countries.[6] Long before Magellan explored the western Pacific, traders from the northern kingdom were making excursions to the coasts of the Philippines, where they gave cloth, arms, and trifles of various sorts for gold which the natives brought from the mountains.[7]

From the 17th century onwards, mapmakers not only visually connected the major islands of the archipelago, but also indicated routes between cities and harbors. Commercially successful maps such as those by Ishikawa Ryūsen cited above marked such routes.[8] In addition to drawing lines, these maps mark the distance for each segment in *ri* 里 (with one Japanese *ri* being slightly less than 4 kms). Moreover, Ryūsen also added notes on distances of land-based travel between cities in the margins of his maps. Maps of Japan with routes were extremely common in early modern Japan and map readers remained quite familiar with this practice.[9]

Subsequently, from the late-18th century onwards, more systematic mapping of trans-oceanic routes on printed maps began gaining publicity. In Japan, mapmakers such as Shiba Kōkan (司馬江漢) created world maps in two hemispheres.[10] The primary sources for Japanese mapmakers were European maps that included track lines. Kōkan and his contemporaries clichéd these routes in their own maps. When these map images travelled between places, the function of the route lines were subject to change.[11] Within East Asia, the lines stayed consistent. European maps of Japan followed Japanese maps for most of the outlines.[12]

Mapmakers within East Asia shared an understanding of what functions the route lines could assume. East Asian maps rarely highlighted past, concretely travelled routes. Instead, they showed a present network as the preferred function of routes on East Asian maps.[13] This view of the world, which had its roots in the 17th century and then became popular in the 18th century, exhibited a clear narrative desire to be part of the global world, already before the mid-19th century Opium Wars and the Meiji Restoration.[14] Both these historical events are often considered key turning points in East Asian history.

Japanese-Dutch Trading Ties in the Edo Period

In 1600, a foreign ship ran aground on the coast of Usuki in the Bungo Province (now Usuki City, Ōita Prefecture). This ship was *de Liefde* –the first Dutch ship to reach Japan. Five ships including *de Liefde* set sail from Rotterdam for the East in June 1598. The fleet followed a course that took it through the Strait of

6 Ibid.
7 As cited in, Report of the Philippine Commission to the President 1900, Washington, 1901, p. 340.
8 Papelitzky, n. 1.
9 Ibid.
10 For further details see, Richard A Pegg, *Cartographic Traditions in East Asian Maps,* (Honolulu: MacLean Collection, University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), pp. 35-42.
11 Papelitzky, n. 1.
12 Jason Hubbard, *Japoniæ Insulæ-The Mapping of Japan: Historical Introduction and Cartobibliography of European Printed Maps of Japan to 1800,* (Houten: Hes & De Graaf, 2012).
13 Papelitzky, n. 1.
14 Ibid.

Magellan, on to the Pacific.[15] Following storms and attacks from Spanish and Portuguese ships, only *de Liefde* was able to reach the Far East. The few remaining survivors included Captain J. Quaeckernaeck, Officer Jan Joosten van Lodensteyn, and English ship's pilot William Adams. These men were summoned to Ōsaka on the orders of Tokugawa Ieyasu. Lodensteyn, an active trader, was granted a vermilion-seal certificate. The area he lived in Edo came to be called Yaesu-gashi after him.[16] William Adams gained the confidence of Ieyasu and served as his foreign affairs' advisor. He was given the Japanese name Miura Anjin, because he was granted a small fief on Miura Peninsula and Anjin means "ship's pilot."[17]

At the time, most trade with Japan was done by the Portuguese. Ieyasu granted a "red-seal" pass, which permitted trade with Japan to J. Quaeckernaeck to create a counterforce to the Portuguese. In response, a Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or VOC) ship docked at Hirado in Kyushu in 1609 and brought a personal letter and gifts from Prince Maurice of Nassau for Ieyasu.[18] Ieyasu received the emissary to Sunpu and consigned a letter and a red-seal pass granting trading rights. This prompted the establishment of a Dutch factory at Hirado and trade between Japan and the Netherlands began. The Netherlands at the time was an emerging nation that had declared its independence in 1581, following a rebellion against Spain in 1568 by the Protestants. The Netherlands was no longer able to rely on Spanish ships for trade and so actively engaged in maritime pursuits to establish commercial viability.

The VOC was established in 1602 through the merger of several trading companies and was given a trading monopoly by the government for areas east of the Cape of Good Hope, with broad authority to form agreements with foreign countries. The company established headquarters at Batavia (now Jakarta) on the island of Java where the Governor-General of East India resided. The factory in Japan was also under the jurisdiction of the Governor-General. Initially, Japanese-Dutch trade was unrestricted but after 1616 all foreign ships except those from China were restricted to docking at either Hirado or Nagasaki. This was interrupted temporarily due to a trade dispute. Ultimately, trade reopened in 1633. In appreciation for permission to trade, the chief of the Dutch factory was required to regularly journey to Edo to present himself at court.

Kitamaebune: The Essence of Japan's Merchant Ships

Any discourse on Japan's merchant shipping history cannot be complete without mentioning the *Kitamaebune*, often referred to as the essence of Japan's merchant ships that cast a lasting influence nationwide. *Kitamaebune* were merchant ships that sailed between northern Japan and Ōsaka beginning from the Edo period (1603–1867) to the turn of the 20th century.[19] They followed a route along the Sea of Japan's coast and around the southern tip of the main island (Honshu), stopping to trade at the ports along the way. The goods they transported, from kelp to crafts, were integral to daily life and contributed greatly to Japanese culture. The roots of *Kitamaebune* ran deep from present-day Ishikawa, as they first sailed around the

15 For further details see, "Beginning of Exchange between Japan and the Netherlands," *National Diet Library*, Japan, 2009, available at https://www.ndl.go.jp/nichiran/e/s1/s1_1.html
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 For details see, "Kitamaebune: Transporting the Essence of Japan," available at https://www.ishikawatravel.jp/en/stories/kitamaebune-transporting-the-essence-of-japan/

southern tip of Honshu in 1639 to trade rice in Ōsaka.[20] This was considered to be a beneficial route at a time when overland transport was extremely time-consuming and expensive. A few decades earlier, sailors from this region were key crewmembers in expeditions to explore the northern island of Hokkaido led by wealthy merchants from Ōmi (present-day Shiga Prefecture). Many of these sailors became owners of *Kitamaebune* when the Hokkaido ports became important stops along the shipping routes.[21]

Early *Kitamaebune* were small, single-sail boats that could only make one round trip between northern Japan and Ōsaka per year. By the 1870s, they had up to four sails, by means of which they could transport hundreds of tons of goods, and made three or four return journeys annually. *Kitamaebune* carried both everyday necessities such as rice and salt as well as luxury items along the Sea of Japan coast. Many of the commodities they transported became part of the local culture far from where they were made or harvested. By the mid-1800s, *Kitamaebune* owners were among Japan's wealthiest merchants given that the boats began to trade crafted products such as Wajima lacquerware that had become very popular beyond Ishikawa. Among the most profitable goods from Hokkaido were herring, used for oil and fertilizers, and kombu kelp, used for the dashi cooking stock. Kombu kelp was transported by *Kitamaebune* to almost all of Japan from Hokkaido and became an essential ingredient in Japanese cooking throughout the country. Besides, the production of candles in Nanao, on the Noto Peninsula, relied on the *Kitamaebune* that docked there for materials such as wax and washi paper. Nanao's Ipponsugi-dori shopping street thrived because of the *Kitamaebune* that docked and traded at the nearby port. Even today, few buildings on this street, are dated from the late 1800s.

Kitamaebune went into decline around the turn of the 20th century. The development of the telegraph rendered the commodity prices that could be communicated speedily across the country, limiting the freedom of *Kitamaebune* owners to mark up their goods. Meanwhile, the spread of railways too, introduced competition in the market for transport along the Sea of Japan coast. The decline notwithstanding, *Kitamaebune*'s influence on Ishikawa's heritage is evident at sightseeing spots around the prefecture. This is most evident in the *Kitamaebune* Ship Museum in the city of Kaga. The museum is set in the spacious 1878 home of a prosperous shipowner, with exhibits including navigation tools, ship cabinets, and scale models of the boats. The museum preserves the feel of the historic residence, with tatami flooring and an irori sunken hearth. Stout pine beams and lacquered wood surfaces add to the luxurious air of the interior. The surrounding Hashitate district was the home of many *Kitamaebune* owners, some of which have been preserved with their distinctive red-tiled roofs.[22] Notably, many other *Kitamaebune* owners hailed from the Kuroshima district of Wajima, which looks much like it did during the Edo period, with black-tiled roofs, wood-paneled walls, and lattice doors.

Tracing the History of Japan's Sea Routes

The history of Japan's sea routes showcases two distinct routes. The first being the Pacific route, wherein its central lane links Japan with Canada and the United States; the southern lane links Japan with Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands; and the southeastern lane with South America. The second sea route for Japan's trade flow is the Indian Ocean route. It connects Japan via the East and South China Seas and the Strait of Malacca with the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and Europe, stretching to the

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.

east coast of Africa. Nearly one-half of Japan's seaborne trade is carried along the Indian Ocean route, and thus remains vital for Tokyo's tanker fleet in particular—given that it is the only economical route available to Japan.

The post-1945 decade saw a rapid dissolution of European empires across the Indian Ocean. Though Japan was a notable sea power pre-1945, it did not exercise a telling influence in the Indian Ocean area during peacetime.[23] Tokyo's influence in the Indian Ocean began in terms of pursuing naval and aerial supremacy over what was termed the "Southern Resources Area." This region essentially was a broad arc stretching from the Andamans in the Bay of Bengal to the Bismarck Archipelago in Southeast Asia.[24] Japan announced the "Southern Expansion Doctrine" or *Nanshin-ron* (南進論) in the late 19th century. It was the Empire of Japan's political doctrine that earmarked Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands as its predominant spheres of interest.[25] In Japanese historiography, *Nanshin-ron* has often been used to describe the significance of the "South Seas" region. Following the 1868 Meiji Restoration, the *Nanshin-ron* policy gained primacy for trade and emigration in Southeast Asia around the late 1920s.[26] During its initial phase, the South Seas mandate essentially identified economic and military development of the region to being the mainstay for Japan's security. By 1939, the policy evolved to becoming a basis of Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.[27]

Naval and Commercial Elements of Sea Power: The Circular Co-relation

Writing around the turn of the 19th century, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan of the US Navy exhorted an America long disdainful toward foreign political entanglements to amass a kind of "sea power" built on the "three pillars" of overseas commerce, naval and merchant fleets, and naval bases arrayed along the sea lanes to support fuel-thirsty warships.[28] While there was a circular quality to his theorizing that the navy protected a nation's trade, which in turn generated tariff revenue to support the navy, the commercial element of sea power seemed to be uppermost in his thinking. Mahan's self-perpetuating logic beguiled advocates of sea power in his day, and seemingly has a timeless quality.[29] Mahan affirmed that the basis of prosperity and power for a country is the monopoly of the command of the sea by force[30]:

> If you wish to govern the whole world at all, try to control all wealth in the world; if you desire to control all wealth in the world, try to control the trade in the entire world at first;

23 For details see, Monika Chansoria, "Japan's Maritime Journey from its Expansion Doctrine to Global Trade," *Japan Forward*, June 4, 2024, available at https://japan-forward.com/japan-maritime-history-sea-trade-route-pacific-indian-ocean-monika-chansoria/

24 For further reading and references on the subject see, P.K.S. Namboodiri, J.P. Anand, and Sreedhar, *Intervention in the Indian Ocean,* (ABC Publishing House, 1982).

25 Chansoria, n. 23.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 For details and further references see, Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, "Japanese Maritime Thought: If Not Mahan, Who?" *Naval War College Review*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2006, p. 5; also see, Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1890), p. 71.

29 Margaret Tuttle Sprout, "Mahan: Evangelist of Sea Power," in Edward Meade Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1943), pp. 415–445; also see James R. Holmes, "Mahan, a 'Place in the Sun,' and Germany's Quest for Sea Power," *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2004, pp. 27-62.

30 Yoshihara, n. 28.

> if you want to control the trade in the entire world, be sure to get the exclusive possession of the sea in the world at first; if you wish to get the exclusive possession of the sea in the entire world, try to win all conflicts at sea in the world by all means; and if you want to win all conflicts at sea in the world by all means, provide strong naval forces by any means… A command of the sea by force is the basis of prosperity and power.[31]

Japanese strategists leapt at Mahan's theories, as Mahan recalled that his works had been more widely translated into Japanese than any other language.[32] In 1902, Admiral Yamamoto Gombei paid tribute to Mahan's analytical skills, offering him a teaching post at Japan's Naval Staff College.[33] Captain John Ingles, a British officer who taught at the Naval Staff College for six years recalled, "Japanese naval officers were much impressed with the advantage in a land war of superiority at sea. They have been, I think, faithful students of the American naval historian, Captain Mahan."[34]

However, the exact nature of Mahan's influence on the Japanese naval establishment remains a matter of debate.[35] One seemingly predominant view among contemporary scholars, draws a straight line between Mahanian precepts and pre-war Japanese ideas about sea power. Ronald Spector described the Japanese as "true disciples of Mahan."[36] Peter Woolley noted, "Japan took Mahan quite seriously. His books were carefully studied. His proclamation that navies were strategically dominant in the modern world was strongly embraced."[37] Richard Turk affirmed that the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) imbibed Mahanian sea power theory "in purer form" than did any other navy.[38] Clearly, a sizable body of scholarship accepts the notion that Alfred Thayer Mahan lent Japanese naval strategy its founding precepts and doctrine.[39]

Historical Vision of Japan as a Maritime Trading Nation: Maritime defense in the late Tokugawa (Edo) Period

In his 1833 book, *History of Inland Sea*, Sin-en Sato pointed out a risk of a potential blockade the Bay of Edo (Tokyo Bay). He recommended developing canals connected to the Bay of Edo as a preemptive alternative measure. Sato wrote, "It is unimaginable what serious affairs might arise, if an incident happened at sea, and the rice and salt could not be shipped from western and eastern parts of Japan, and such stalemate of shipping lasted more than a year… If foreign invaders use their warships to shadow and plunder cargo boats at Edo (the Eastern Metropolis, meaning Tokyo Bay) the metropolis will be surely thrown into immediate

31 Tetsutaro Sato, *Teikoku Kokubo-ron Kan*, (The Theory of National Defense of the Japanese Empire, Complete edition), (Suiko-sha, 1902), pp. 27-28.
32 Alfred Thayer Mahan, *From Sail to Steam: Recollections of Naval Life*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907).
33 Shinohara Hiroshi, *Kaigun sosetsu shi,* [History of the Navy's Establishment] (Riburo-poto, 1986), pp. 409-413.
34 "The Chino-Japanese War," *Pall Mall Gazette* (London), August 18, 1894, p. 7.
35 Yoshihara, n. 28.
36 Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle against the Sun: The American War with Japan*, (New York: Free Press, 1985), p. 293.
37 Peter J. Woolley, *Geography and Japan's Strategic Choices: From Seclusion to Internationalization*, (Dulles, Va.: Potomac Books Inc., 2005), pp. 11-17.
38 Richard W. Turk, *The Ambiguous Relationship: Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Thayer Mahan*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1987), p. 4.
39 S.C.M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), p. 150; also see, George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890–1990,* (Stanford, California.: Stanford University Press, 1994); see also, Pekka Korhonen, "The Pacific Age in World History," *Journal of World History*, vol. 7, no. 1, Spring 1996, University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 41–70.

confusion."[40] In response, the Tokugawa leaders reclaimed lakes and marshes on the coast of Edo Bay and the adjoining Kazusa District and developed alternate transportation routes by water from the Tonegawa River to the Bay of Edo through the Inbanuma Marsh and the Kemigawa River.[41]

Further, in a book published in 1837, Tokizo Matsumoto, foreman of a large group of shipping laborers, pointed out the vulnerability of the Bay of Edo to blockade. Later, in 1850, Shozan Sakuma, the famous thinker and strategist, emphasized the importance of protecting the Bay of Edo from blockade, and recommended that the government must construct rigid iron warships, and use them to ram approaching foreign vessels. The Imperial Japanese Navy had both, a homeland defense mission, and a mission to protect trade.[42] Kōsaka Masataka's book, *The Vision of Japan as a Maritime Nation*[43] was critical in advocating the unarmed neutrality narrative that dominated the post-war intellectual scene in Japan. Kōsaka argued that Japan should strive to develop itself essentially as a maritime trading nation.[44] The vision of a maritime trading nation goes back to the pre-1945 years.[45]

As per Shinichi Kitaoka, this was because historians tended to focus on the contrast between realism vs. idealism, expansionism/imperialism vs. "little Japan-ism"/anti-imperialism, and the argument of whether the army should be given preference over the navy, or vice versa. Pre-war views of Japan as a maritime trading nation thus largely fell between the cracks.[46] The topography and socio-economic conditions of Japan made it highly vulnerable to Western naval power.[47] Western intrusion and the strength of modern naval power during the end of the Edo period was a big reality check for Japan. At the time, Japan already possessed a highly integrated national market, and the whole country was united by means of a series of coastal navigation routes converging on Ōsaka.[48]

Modern Shipbuilding in the Meiji Period and Beyond

The Meiji Restoration years saw the Japanese shipping industry being released from its national isolationism policy and getting diverted from conventional coastal navigation to ocean-going shipping. At this stage the Japanese economy was just beginning to industrialize, rendering Japan heavily-dependent on foreign

40 As cited in, Arakawa Kenichi, "The Maritime Transport War: Emphasizing a strategy to interrupt the enemy sea lines of communication (SLOCs)," *NIDS Security Report*, no. 3, March 2002, p. 98, available at https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/bulletin_e2001_5.pdf

41 Tonegawa River runs toward the Pacific coast from the west to the east about 30 kms north of Edo; for further reference see, Takeshi Hara, *Bakumatsu Kaibo-shi no Kenkyu* (A Study on Maritime Defense in the Closing Days of the Tokugawa Shogunate Government), (Meicho Shuppan, 1988), p. 126.

42 Arakawa, n. 40, pp. 98-99.

43 Masataka Kōsaka, *Kaiyō Kokka Nihon no Kōsō* (The Vision of Japan as a Maritime Nation) (Chuōkōron-sha, 1965).

44 Shinichi Kitaoka, "The Strategy of the Maritime Nation Japan: From Yukichi Fukuzawa to Shigeru Yoshida," in Williamson Murray and Tomoyuki Ishizu, eds., *Conflicting Currents: Japan and The United States in the Pacific,* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International 2010), available at https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/event/forum/pdf/2003_01.pdf, p. 225.

45 Akira Irie, *Heiwateki Hatten Shugi to Nihon*, (The Ideology of Peaceful Development and Japan) (Chuōkōron-sha, 1969).

46 Kitaoka, n. 44, p. 225.

47 C.M. Cipolla, *Guns, Sails and Empires: Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion*, (Pantheon Books, 1965).

48 Kitaoka, n. 44, p. 226.

trade.[49] The modern Japanese merchant period is highlighted from 1884-1914, wherein it had little, or no experience in foreign trade, nor in the organization of ocean-going shipping industries. Moreover, at that time, European and American shipping companies, such as the Peninsula and Orient (P. & O.) and the Pacific Mail Steamship had started operating in seas near Japan.[50] With the beginning of the Meiji era, the development of the Japanese merchant marine started from nothing, and achieved remarkable growth in the internationally competitive market, becoming the third-largest shipping power in the world.[51]

Japan began investing considerable resources into purchasing and building modern ships. Japan's first modern vessel, the *Kankōmaru*, was a gift from the Netherlands and weighed 400 tons; the *Kanrinmaru*, which crossed the Pacific, weighed 250-350 tons. By the end of the Edo period, at least one vessel, the *Kaiyōmaru*, reached 2,700 tons. Subsequently, modern ships continued to play a key role in the politics of the early Meiji period (1868-1912). The Meiji government gave priority not just to constructing modern vessels but also to encouraging development in the related fields of sea transport, trade, and industry.[52] In November 1890, then Prime Minister, Aritomo Yamagata delivered a policy speech during the first session of the Imperial Diet, wherein he famously remarked that Japan needed to assert influence over its "line of interest" as well as defend its "line of sovereignty."[53]

In all, the case for naval expansion in the mid-Meiji period was inextricably bound with the vision of Japan as a trading nation. By the 1920s, the vision of Japan as a maritime nation came to predominate its commercial interests being the most profitable of all its overseas interests.[54] This was also the period when the progress of the Chinese revolution had begun to impact on the view of Japan as a trading nation. Shigeru Yoshida, who was appointed vice-minister of foreign affairs in Tanaka Giichi's Seiyūkai cabinet, argued in favor of adopting a hard line against China.[55] The policy that Yoshida established of possessing limited military forces, and giving high priority to economic development, came to be known as the "Yoshida line." It is debated as to how long that policy lasted. By the beginning of the 1960s, Yoshida switched his own position and began arguing that Japan should contribute more actively to global security. The "Yoshida line" regained limelight in the late 1970s, when the Cold War re-intensified.[56]

Conclusion

Interestingly, research on 20th-century Japanese military history reveals an essay titled "From the Offensive to the Defensive: Japanese Strategy During the Pacific War, 1942-44" by Shindo Hiroyuki where he argues that by mid-1940, Japan had adopted a national policy

49 Tadaaki Shindo, "A Brief History of the Japanese Merchant Marine Fleet," *Keio Journal of Economics*, vol.75, 1983, pp.118-139.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Kitaoka, n. 44, p. 228.
53 Ibid.
54 Letter of July 25, 1916, to Makino Nobuaki, cited in Yoshida Shigeru, *Kinen Jigyōkai,* (Yoshida Shigeru Commemorative Project Committee), ed., *Yoshida Shigeru Shokan*, (Letters of Yoshida Shigeru) (Chuōkōron-sha, 1994).
55 Kitaoka, n. 44, p. 235.
56 Ibid., p. 239.

of expanding southwards.[57] Adoption of this "Southward Advance" policy was noteworthy since it marked the first time when the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) agreed to such an advance into Southeast Asia. Traditionally, the region was considered the Imperial Japanese Navy's geographical area of responsibility.[58]

The term "South Seas" ceased to be used in post-war Japan. Literally, it meant the southern seas as seen from Japan. Specifically, it evoked the images of islands in Southeast Asia and the Pacific rather than the seas there—being a shortened version of the term "South Sea Islands." Therefore, the term "South Seas" corresponded to the contemporary term "South Pacific."[59] Following the 1990s, the Pacific Island countries were not inclined to be referred to collectively as the "South Pacific." Thus, these countries began to be referred to as the "Pacific Island Countries."

Yoichi Funabashi implicitly endorsed Mahan's view that national will is a key determinant of sea power. Despite the nautical character of Japan's geography, Funabashi underlined maritime matters, and implored Japan "to once again devise a maritime strategy aimed at opening up the four seas that surround it, and take advantage of the blessings of the oceans." The historical relationship between globalization, maritime trade and geopolitics, as this paper elucidates, remains intrinsically tangled. The development of global and regional maritime trade concurrently has prompted foreign and security policies of nations to ensure security of sea lanes to sustain that trade and maritime commerce.

Asia's journey through the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean broadens the horizon of Japan's foreign and security policy as a comprehensive conceptual construct,[60] given that its maritime geopolitics is imprinted on an inevitable geographic calling. This journey has navigated an extensive path to reach where it stands today, enhancing and improving connectivity across Asia through a free and open Indo-Pacific. This contemporary reality has emerged from many centuries of history lived through these oceans, with Japan's recognition and enhancement of trading ties with the region and beyond since the 19th and 20th century.

57 Shindo Hiroyuki, "From the Offensive to the Defensive: Japanese Strategy During the Pacific War, 1942-44," *Sharing Experiences in the 20th Century*, NIDS-ZMSBw Joint Research Project, NIDS Joint Research Series No. 19, National Institute for Defense Studies, Tokyo, 2019-2021.

58 Chansoria, n. 23.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.