

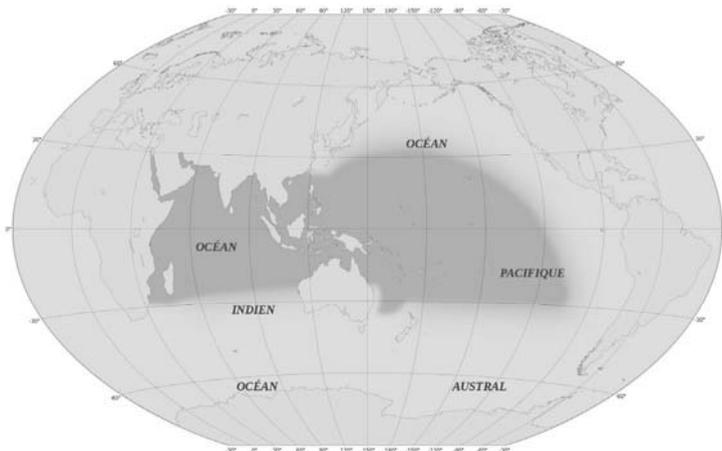
# Introductory Remarks: What Is the “Indo-Pacific”?

Angela Schottenhammer

Since 2011, the term “Indo-Pacific” is being used more and more frequently in global strategic and geo-political discourse. Although not new,<sup>1</sup> the term has recently enjoyed increasing popularity, above all among US, Australian, and Japanese officials and politicians. Viewed from an etymological perspective, “Indo-Pacific” describes a large oceanic macro region, a body of water. In this context, Wikipedia explains the expression as follows:

The Indo-Pacific, sometimes known as the Indo-West Pacific, is a biogeographic region of the Earth’s seas, comprising the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Ocean, and the seas connecting the two in the general area of Indonesia.<sup>2</sup>

Map 1 shows which regions are covered by this term.



Map 1 “Indo-Pacific”<sup>3</sup>

- 1 The term was apparently first used in an article by Gurpreet S. Khurana (2007). “Indo-Pacific” refers in this case to the maritime space stretching from the East African and West Asian littoral across the Indian and western Pacific Ocean to the littorals of East Asia.
- 2 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pacific](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pacific), acc. Nov. 23, 2017.
- 3 Map by Eric Gaba (Sting), from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pacific#/media/File:Indo-Pacific\\_biogeographic\\_region\\_map-en.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pacific#/media/File:Indo-Pacific_biogeographic_region_map-en.png). Own work coast lines: U.S. NGDC World Coast Line; Reference for the limits of the Indo-Pacific biogeographic region: Spalding *et al.* 2007.

The Indo-Pacific stretches from the east coasts of Africa across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, as far as the American mainland. But rather than strictly denoting a biogeographic oceanic macro region, the term is primarily being used for geopolitical, that is, strategic and economic purposes and claims, especially by the more powerful and ambitious countries neighbouring the macro region. The Australian Defence Department's *Defence White Paper 2013*, for example, dedicated whole sub-chapters to considering the growing military-strategic and economic importance of the macro region. The following quotations are typical of the discussion:

The 2013 White Paper addresses the range of significant international and domestic developments since 2009, which influence Australia's national security and defence settings, [...]. These include the ongoing economic strategic and military shift to the Indo-Pacific [...].

1.12 China's continued rise as a global power, the increasing economic and strategic weight of East Asia and the emergence over time of India as a global power are key trends influencing the Indian Ocean's development as an area of increasing strategic significance. In aggregate, these trends are shaping the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a single strategic arc.

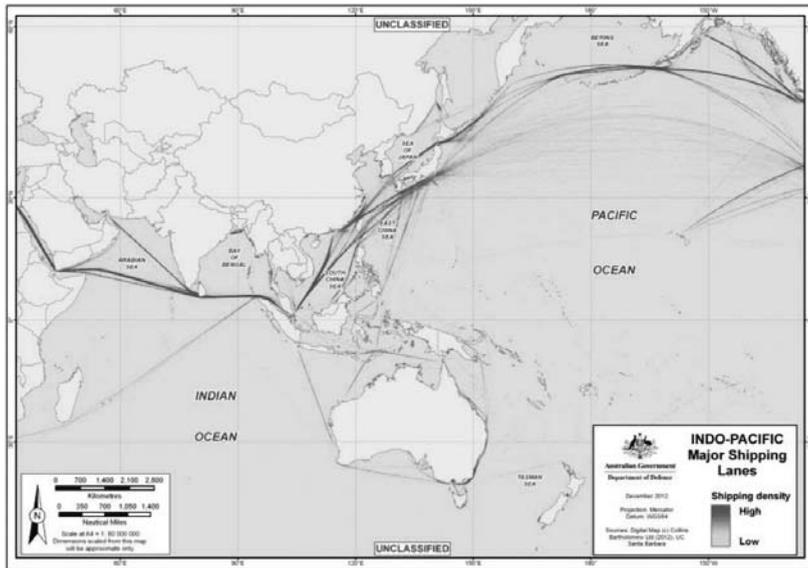
2.4 Second, a new Indo-Pacific strategic arc is beginning to emerge, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia. This new strategic construct [...] is being forged by a range of factors. Notably, India is emerging as an important strategic, diplomatic and economic actor, "looking East", and becoming more engaged in regional frameworks. Growing trade, investment and energy flows across this broader region are strengthening economic and security interdependencies. These two factors combined are also increasingly attracting international attention to the Indian Ocean, through which some of the world's busiest and most strategically significant trade routes pass.

2.5 [...]. The Indo-Pacific is a logical extension of this [i. e. the Asia-Pacific, A.S.] concept, and adjusts Australia's priority strategic focus to the arc extending from India through Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia, including the sea lines of communication on which the region depends.

2.9 The emerging Indo-Pacific system is predominantly a maritime environment with Southeast Asia at its geographic centre. The region's big strategic challenges will last for decades and their mismanagement could have significant consequences. [...].<sup>4</sup>

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4 *Defence White Paper 2013*, 1, 2, 7, 8.



Map 2 Major Shipping Lanes in the “Indo-Pacific”<sup>5</sup>

The *White Paper* quite directly expresses the ideas behind the usage of the term “Indo-Pacific” as a “new strategic construct” aimed at stressing one’s own influence and interests in the macro region.

The concerns of the Australian government are still more of interest to the world’s leading global power, the USA, which considers itself as a region adjacent to the immense “Indo-Pacific” macro region with all its associated countries. It sees itself as “a Pacific nation with deep, enduring, and long-standing ties to the countries of the Pacific region.”<sup>6</sup> The USA also claims vital political-economic interests there. US involvement in the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific has of course a longer history – if we think, for example, of the annexation of Hawai’i in 1898,<sup>7</sup> the Spanish-American War, or US engagement in

5 *Defence White Paper 2013*, 13.

6 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Fact Sheet, “U.S. Engagement in the Pacific”, Washington, DC, Jan. 17, 2017 [[www.state.gov/p/eap/tls/2017/267084.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/eap/tls/2017/267084.htm), accessed on November 24, 2017].

7 “America’s annexation of Hawaii in 1898 extended U.S. territory into the Pacific and highlighted resulted from economic integration and the rise of the United States as a Pacific power. For most of the 1800s, leaders in Washington were concerned that Hawaii might become part of a European nation’s empire. During the 1830s, Britain and France forced Hawaii to accept treaties giving them economic privileges. In 1842, Secretary of State Daniel Webster sent a letter to Hawaiian agents in Washington affirming U.S. interests in Hawaii and opposing annex-

World War II – but it is not the purpose of these brief introductory words to recapitulate the history of US-America’s engagement in this oceanic space. In fact, I would like to focus on the recent political debate on the “Indo-Pacific”, seeking to show why suddenly this term has become so popular.

The USA sees the entire Pacific and Indian Ocean as a US-dominated sphere of economic growth and political-military control. The idea of focusing policy more on the Pacific region was already part and parcel of Barack Obama’s approach, when his administration announced the 21st century as America’s “Pacific Century”. A whole security strategy was developed for the Obama administration:

The Asia-Pacific region is more important to the United States today than ever before. A geopolitical shift toward Asia is underway which could easily be accelerated as a result of the ongoing global economic crisis. The region is re-emerging as a central political and economic player and is already an engine of the global economy.<sup>8</sup>

Drawn up in 2009, this security strategy spelled out the urgent interest to focus more on the Asia-Pacific region rather than Afghanistan and Iraq. In any case, one thing is obvious, whether we look back to America’s engagement in the Pacific in the nineteenth century or concentrate on current politics – the USA considers its engagement in this macro region essential and what is happening there is regarded as directly linked to its economic, political and strategic interests. In the words of the 2009 security strategy this reads as follows:

American engagement with and commitment to Asia is not a recent phenomenon or passing fancy. From its earliest days, the United States has been deeply involved in Asia. In February 1784, The Empress of China left New York harbor, sailing east to China and arriving in Macau in August of that year. It returned to the United States the following May carrying a consignment of Chinese goods that generated a profit of \$30,000.<sup>9</sup>

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ation by any other nation. He also proposed to Great Britain and France that no nation should seek special privileges or engage in further colonization of the islands. In 1849, the United States and Hawaii concluded a treaty of friendship that served as the basis of official relations between the parties. [...]. Spurred by the nationalism aroused by the Spanish-American War, the United States annexed Hawaii in 1898 at the urging of President William McKinley. Hawaii was made a territory in 1900.” See U.S. Department of State, Archive, “Annexion of Hawaii, 1898” [2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/gp/17661.htm, acc. on Nov. 24, 2017].

8 Cossa *et al.* 2009, 9 (Introduction).

9 Cossa *et al.* 2009, 10 (Enduring U.S. Interests).

In 1835, the US Navy’s East India Squadron was established and initiated US military presence in the Pacific. In 1844, China was forced to sign the Treaty of Wangxia 望廈 with the USA, officially entitled “Treaty of peace, amity, and commerce, between the United States of America and the Chinese Empire” (dated July 3, 1844).<sup>10</sup> Well-known are also the developments related to the forceful opening of Japan by Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858), who threatened to bombard Tōkyō if the country would not open itself to trade with the USA. As a result, on March 1854, the Treaty of Kanagawa 神奈川 was concluded. In 1898, also a result of the Spanish-American War, Guam and the Philippines were ceded to the United States as prizes. US interests in the region, thus, have a long history.

Today, as in these historical times, the United States not only wants to use the macro region economically but also to control it strategically. But it has become much more ambitious and coercing. Its policy is now directed above all against an increasingly powerful competitor and rival – China. Already under Obama, the USA was expanding its relations with the Asian-Pacific Economic Forum (APEC). It joined the “Trans-Pacific-Partnership” (TPP) free-trade agreement.

The primary purpose of the new arrangements and contacts has consisted in keeping China — which unlike Japan has not been invited to participate — away from the intensified trade that the USA expects to take advantage of. On the one side, America wants to use China and the region economically, on the other, it is America’s policy to control the complete hemisphere strategically, clearly containing the political and military ambitions and capacities of China. As it is evident that China cannot be permanently excluded from the region, its exclusion is rather aimed at providing a basis to coerce China into fulfilling US conditions so that the country can be integrated into the system and exploited to the benefit of US interests. This was expressed in the following terms at the time of Obama’s state visit to Australia:

Barack Obama’s visit to Australia carries an invitation. It’s an invitation to take America’s side in its rivalry with China.

[...]. The wise and far-sighted US policy for the past couple of decades was to work hard to bring China into the global rules-based system. Rather than having a rising giant outside the system breaking the rules, Washington wanted China in the system, playing by the rules.

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10 For a scan, see [babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hncv31](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hncv31), acc. Nov. 24, 2017.

It worked. China signed up to, among other things, the World Trade Organisation. But now the Obama administration is seeking to shift the ground rules, moving the goalposts.

A bizarre contrast presented itself in Hawaii at the APEC gathering at the weekend – the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, argued world trade agreements should be based on the global WTO system, while the US president recruited other countries, including Australia, for his little regional trade sub-group, the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

[...]. The White House is hoping that if this thing gets big enough, China will one day want to join. The hidden agenda is that they will only admit it if China accepts a high standard of policing for its state-owned enterprises.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the political message was clear. In terms of geopolitical and strategic interests, America considers any military activities of China as a challenge to itself, and seeks to guarantee the “freedom of the seas”, that is, its own interests in and control of the gigantic macro region. Already under Obama, the USA consequently launched a strategic reorientation of its plans and armaments in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The US military is establishing a network of military “bases” for air and sea forces at various strategic points across the oceans in order to contain China, for example, joint bases at the coasts of Australia. Officially, most of these are called “joint facilities”, such as the Pine Gap defence facility, run by the NSA and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) along with the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD).<sup>12</sup> This new strategic policy includes a “shift in US military assets to the region, the extension of US defence ties, an increase in US defence exports and foreign military training programs, more frequent US warship visits and the expansion of joint military exercises”.<sup>13</sup> The fact that US government has assigned an entire century, the 21st, to the political-economic and military-strategic control of the Pacific region demonstrates the essential role and dimension the USA attaches to it:

It is becoming increasingly clear that in the 21st century, the world’s strategic and economic center of gravity will be the Asia Pacific, from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas. And one of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decades will be to lock in a substantially increased investment – diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise – in this region. [...].

Events elsewhere in the world have also lined up in a way that helps makes [sic!] this possible. The war in Iraq is winding down. We have begun a transition in Afghani-

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11 Hartcher 2011.

12 Scappatura 2014, 14; see also Reynolds 2016.

13 Scappatura 2014, 1.

stan. [...]. We now can redirect some of those investments to opportunities and obligations elsewhere. And Asia stands out as a region where opportunities abound.

[...]. The 21st century will be America’s Pacific century, [...].<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, under President Trump, America’s claims and goals have become even more ambitious, and the intention to include the Indian subcontinent and beyond in them have become still more pronounced. The new US president, Donald Trump, repeatedly speaks of the “Indo-Pacific” instead of the “Asia-Pacific” region – extending America’s political, economic and geo-strategic vision to an even larger, a gigantic world region:

Throughout his tour of five countries, Trump made a point of labelling the region the “Indo-Pacific.” Not “Asia.” And not the more common “Asia-Pacific,” which was what predecessor Barack Obama mostly used.

In a speech to business leaders on Friday in Vietnam, Trump repeatedly called for a “free and open Indo-Pacific,” describing a region where independent nations could “thrive in freedom and peace” and all states “play by the rules.” He also used the phrase repeatedly at the start of a meeting Monday in the Philippines with President Rodrigo Duterte.

His choice of words reflects the desire of the U.S. for India, the region’s third-largest economy, to play a bigger role in its security matters. As China expands its economic and military clout, India could offer a potential buffer for smaller states, especially in Southeast Asia.<sup>15</sup>

This new terminology is said to reflect the US desire to pay still more attention to India and the increasingly responsible role India would play in the “security matters”<sup>16</sup> of the US, in other words, in the geopolitical confrontation with China. But, at the same time, this new merger of what was formerly separated as Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific also brings together US essential interests in both macro regions, stressing that these are in all respects inseparably linked with one another and constitute an entire world region that has to be made subject to US control and influence. The use of the term “Indo-Pacific” implies the emphasis of US politicians no longer to intend to treat China, India, or Southeast Asia as separate bilateral cases. The enforcement and implementation of their political and economic interests in the huge “Indo-Pacific” macro region and its bodies of water can only be efficiently guaranteed when even mi-

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14 Clinton 2011.

15 Peter Martin *et al.* 2017.

16 *Ibid.*

nor concerns with one or the other country are subordinated to the major US concern: guaranteeing freedom for US military and politico-economic purposes, especially against and in face of the increasing influence of China, its largest competitor in the region. In this respect, the term “Indo-Pacific” is both ambitious and demanding: no less than the entire oceanic space including all maritime routes and strategic crossroads from the US west coast to the African east coast have to be subdued to American geopolitical interests. President Trump stresses this not only by his consciously frequent use of the term “Indo-Pacific”; asked about the difference to Obama’s “Asia-Pacific”, for example, Trump stated that “he would not tolerate the ‘chronic trade abuses’ by Asian nations and would ‘always [...] put America first’”.<sup>17</sup> He clearly pronounces that America’s economic (and political) interests have to be served first. To many Asian countries this is an unambiguous, explicit rejection of multilateral trade liberalisation.<sup>18</sup> And in this respect, one may perhaps compare the conscious use of this term to other expressions used in similar contexts by former US presidents, launched to send a message to the world, announcing a new focus of political strategy with a catchy phrase. Such phrases included, for example, Barack Obama’s “pivot of Asia”, Georg W. Bush’s “axis of evil” or Ronald Reagan’s “evil empires”.

Against this background, the *Washington Post* recently even issued warnings of a new Cold War.<sup>19</sup> Speaking of a Cold War, however, misses the point – after all the USA wants to use China and other “Indo-Pacific” countries economically. And unlike the Soviet Union in the past, the modern PRC does not abscond from mutual business – on the contrary. In this respect, there is a common basis for both the USA and China. But in face of China’s increasing

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17 In Sevastopulo 2017, Trump is also quoted with the words: “I’ve had the honour of sharing our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific,’ Mr Trump told delegates at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum in Da Nang, Vietnam. The US Congress had approved the first deployment of an American warship to the Pacific in 1817, he added. ‘We have been friends, partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific for a long, long time, and we will be friends, partners and allies for a long time.’”

18 Ibid.

19 Khurana 2017: “The new term changes the mental map that has prevailed since the end of the Cold War and since China’s ‘reform and opening’ policies in the 1980s. ‘Asia-Pacific’ invoked an image of a community of interests that linked America and East Asia. ‘Indo-Pacific,’ as Trump uses it, implies a new configuration in which India and America, along with the other major democratic nations in Asia – Japan and Australia especially – join to contain China’s growing influence in an updated version of the Cold War.”

economic and political success, a China that steadily increases its own sphere of influence, also into regions that the US used to claim as influence spheres for itself, the final message is clear. China and its periphery has, on the one hand, to be forced to accept the US political-economic rules of business to guarantee America’s economic success; on the other hand, China’s on-going economic success and political-military engagement and growing influence in the region is increasingly considered a risk and threat to US interests. Just a few days ago, a new US American strategy document designated Russia and China as “revisionist powers” working to undermine and roll back US interests. At the same time, Donald Trump seeks strong relations with China and welcomed, for example, anti-terror cooperation with Moscow.<sup>20</sup> Still more efforts have to be invested to control the entire macro region and to launch a kind of arms diplomacy, involving partners from Japan to Australia, and India, in order to contain China. And the US government has decided to even more firmly integrate India – China’s old rival with also a continental land access to its neighbour – into this anti-China alliance. The entire “Indo-Pacific” sphere has thus gained in geo-strategic importance.

In this present special issue of *Crossroads*, we introduce one contemporary and five historical examples of human, cultural, commercial and political confrontations and encounters between Asian and European peoples at what might be called the “Indo-Pacific” crossroads. At first sight, the Spanish long seemingly dominated large parts of America and the Pacific<sup>21</sup>, although in reality many more actors were operating in these waters.<sup>22</sup> Against this background, the Pa-

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<sup>20</sup> “China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity”, the document says. It warns that “Russia aims to weaken US influence in the world and divide us from our allies and partners”, while Russian nuclear weapons are deemed “the most significant existential threat to the United States”. It accuses China of seeking “to displace the United States” in Asia, listing a litany of US grievances, from deficits, to data theft to spreading “features of its authoritarian system”. “Contrary to our hopes, China expanded its power at the expense of the sovereignty of others”, it says. This is quoted from [www.dailysabah.com/americas/2017/12/18/new-strategy-document-calls-russia-china-revisionist-powers-working-to-undermine-us-interests](http://www.dailysabah.com/americas/2017/12/18/new-strategy-document-calls-russia-china-revisionist-powers-working-to-undermine-us-interests) (acc. Dec. 24, 2017); but many newspapers worldwide quote essential parts of the new strategy paper.

<sup>21</sup> A recent publication investigating the Spanish presence in the Pacific is Slack *et al.* 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Bonialian 2012; Bonialian 2014; Crewe 2017. This later article is specifically of interest because it reconsiders the place of colonial Latin America in global history by examining historical trans-Pacific interactions, conflicts, and exchanges between Latin America and Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As the author stresses, he conceptualizes a “Hispano-Asian Pacific World that was forged by a myriad of actors in and around the Pacific basin. In-

cific has at times even been designated as a “Spanish Lake”<sup>23</sup>, a misnomer, as Ryan Dominc Crewe emphasizes, “since far-off imperial Spain was ambivalent, and at times even hostile, regarding Asian ties to its Latin American colonies”.<sup>24</sup> He introduces the trans-Pacific trade as a vivid multi-cultural and multi-ethnic interaction network:<sup>25</sup> Mexican creoles, Chinese traders, Japanese Christians, Filipino mariners, Spanish friars, and *mestizo* soldiers from both American and Asian coastal regions, among others. Although the trans-Indian-Ocean passage remained important for Spain, they started to cross the Pacific and initiated a lucrative trans-Pacific trade between Asia and Mexico (New Spain) that has become known as “Manila galleon trade” (1565–1815) in order to pursue their interests in Asia. While later also other European nations used the trans-Pacific passage more frequently, especially in the early eighteenth century the French via Peru,<sup>26</sup> the Spanish remained America’s major counterpart in the Pacific region between the Philippines and Latin America<sup>27</sup> but also a not unimportant trading partner.<sup>28</sup> Other Europeans, such as the Dutch and later the British, made their way to East Asia primarily by crossing the Indian Ocean. And already in these early times, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific were interconnected. Armenian merchants, for example, brought through their networks Persian rugs and Bengalese cotton from the Indian Ocean all the way to Mexico City.<sup>29</sup>

In the early modern period it was primarily commercial interests – spices and the lucrative China trade – that shaped the motivation of Europeans in Asia (although especially the Portuguese and the Spanish were also driven by religious, missionary purposes). And many of the encounters between Europeans and Asians in Asia were anything but peaceful. A severe competition for access to and control of spice growing islands and Asian markets evolved. Port

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stead of a Pacific dominated by far-off Spain, my research reveals a Transpacific world that in fact defied imperial efforts to claim, regulate, or convert it. I structure this study along three broad lines of inquiry: the economic ties that made the Asian-Latin American ‘Rim’, the consequences of human transits and cultural exchanges along new Transpacific conduits, and the barriers of distance and culture that limited both cosmopolitanism and imperialism.”

23 E. g. Spate 1979.

24 Crewe 2017.

25 See also Pierce and Otsuka 2009.

26 See, e. g., Bonialian 2012, esp. 228-258.

27 Vives-Anzacot 1991.

28 See, e. g., García Fuentes 1980.

29 Crewe 2017, with reference to Aslanian 2011, 254-257, and Schurz 1939, 136-138.

cities like Macao, Canton, Manila or Nagasaki in particular were places of cross-cultural and commercial encounters, but simultaneously places of conflict.

While the Portuguese, as well as later the Dutch or the British came to East Asia primarily by crossing the Indian Ocean, the Spanish preferred to come from the opposite direction as much as they could – a result of the Treaty of Tordesillas (June 1494) through which Pope Alexander VI (1431–1503) divided the world outside Europe between the Portuguese Empire and the Spanish Crown, granting the Indian Ocean to the Portuguese generating a tension only softened by the Spanish rule over Portugal as well as Spain starting with Philip II (King of Spain 1556–1598; King of the Portuguese 1580–1598).

The focus of the first five contributions is historical. The first article sheds light onto an important and very interesting chapter of the history of the Philippines, a country and region actually lying at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, and at the same time revealing a rich history of interaction, both violent and peaceful, between Asia and a European people, the Spaniards. Omri Bassewitch Frenkel discusses the colonization of the Philippines and the shift from a colonization concentrating on land control to one focused on trade, a shift that, as he expounds, created various social tensions and disappointments. Contrary to Spanish expectations, spices or precious metals were not abundant in the Philippines. In addition, the geographical dispersion and social organization of the local population made the islands hard to control. Bassewitch Frenkel argues that the Spanish plans for the invasion of China may have arisen out of Spanish society’s inability to adapt itself to the conditions of the Philippine Islands, and its failure to adopt new ideals of prestige and models of status.

Ubaldo Iaccarino subsequently focuses on the commercial role of Manila, making it a place of encounter for people from very different world cultures. Writing in the late 1610s, the Spanish cosmographer and *arbitrista* Hernando de los Ríos Coronel (ca. 1559–1624) stressed the position of Manila as the “centre of a circle” whose circumference included China, Japan, Indochina and insular India. Due to its favourable geographical position – as well as to political and economic factors – Manila created its wealth thanks to the commerce of such overseas merchants as the Chinese “Sangleys” from Fujian, the Portuguese ship-owners of Macao and Nagasaki, the Japanese *daimyō* of Kyūshū, as well as traders from Borneo, Siam and Cambodia. Iaccarino investigates foreign trade in the Philippines at the beginning of the seventeenth century, analysing exchanges of silver, gold, silks and cottons, porcelains, sulphur and quicksilver – as well as wax, honey, deer skins, turtles, *etc.*, with the aim of clarifying the role of Manila as an *entrepôt* situated between the Americas, East and Southeast Asia.

Cheng Wei-chung shifts to Taiwan as another crossroad of human encounter between Asians and Westerners, in his case the Dutch. In 1662, Taiwan was taken over from its former ruler, the VOC (Dutch East India Company), by the Chinese warlord Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (in the West better known as Co-xinga, 1624–1662). One of the deserters during the siege of the Dutch castle Zeelandia on Taiwan, Hugo Rozijn, survived under the Zheng regime, for more than twenty-one years. He established a family and was hired as a translator and medical practitioner. Later when the Zheng regime fell to the Manchus in 1683, Hugo Rozijn was released and returned to Batavia as a ship's surgeon. He then served again on the Company's ships, applying his knowledge in local languages and herbs, sailing from Batavia to Japan, China and the coast of Bengal in the 1690s. Cheng Wei-chung introduces his interesting life story here in detail.

Lee Chi-lin then sheds light on a special area of China's late imperial history Qing dynasty (1644–1911) shipbuilding. This case is particularly interesting, because the Qing are generally conceived as not having been very much interested in maritime space, especially not after the Kangxi 康熙 reign (1662–1722). Consequently, shipbuilding in Qing China has been almost absolutely neglected in scholarly research. Lee Chi-lin concentrates on the eighteenth century, that is, on a time when China had supposedly already retreated from the seas. He introduces various types of ships and analyses the policies according to which the Manchus established their shipyards. The chapter also pays special attention to the construction of warships.

Wim De Winter finally looks at cultural interactions between Europeans and Japanese in seventeenth-century Japan. He provides vivid examples of early encounters between Europeans and Japanese, discusses the crucial role of specific ceremonies and symbolic behaviour – banquets as tokens of hospitality were, for example, part and parcel of such intercultural encounters – and various visions of the “Other”.

We conclude this issue with a modern topic. It is of course related to the history described above, but brings a new perspective into the “Indo-Pacific” macro region, namely China's actual intention to integrate some Latin American countries into its One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. Whereas official imperial China in the past seems to have had little to no interest in establishing relations with the world on the other side of the Pacific, the PRC now is very keen on building up relations with Latin America. Leaders from Latin America were included in the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017 and some Latin American countries received access as prospective non-regional members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Fabricio Fonseca analyses the implications for Latin America emerging from the possible expansion of the OBOR in this direction. The article also considers the evolution of the initiative, some of the motivations behind it, and its gradual institutionalization. In a brief historical analysis, Fonseca demonstrates the potential for transformation offered by China, after centuries of bilateral trade being carried out mainly through the intermediation of Western powers.

In present times the area and the countries located at the crossroads of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans – larger parts of Southeast and East Asia – have again moved into the centre of global geopolitical and economic interests. Needless to say the politico-economic circumstances today differ in many respects. But today as in the past it is the most powerful countries that seek to implement and guarantee claims in the region in various ways.

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