The Great Wall of Sand at Sea:
Chinese Sea Power and Power Projection in the East and South China Sea

A case study of the Senkaku Islands and the Spratly Islands
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Executive Summary

The topic of this thesis is the strategic concept of sea power of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), as applied in two cases, in the South China Sea and in the East China Sea, respectively. The concept of sea power that is used in China helps in explaining the policies and maritime strategic implications regarding the conflicts on the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Based on an analysis of these two cases, a discrepancy between the Western concept of sea power and the Chinese concept of sea power becomes clear.

The two case studies show that China originally had a very continental view in terms of its maritime strategy. All the way up to Admiral Liu Huaqing’s rise to power in the 1980s, this continental-based strategy was predominant. Liu started the development of a new strategic outlook, based on new Chinese technological, economic and doctrinal developments. It was also Liu who came up with the concepts of the ‘First Island Chain’ and the ‘Second Island Chain’. These were Soviet-inspired zones in which China would have to obtain control of the sea (First Island Chain) or be able to contest control of the sea by others (Second Island Chain). The doctrine in support of sea control was called ‘active-defence’, where an assertive defensive stance was taken. After Liu retired, the Chinese navy continued to make a turn towards the ideas and concepts of classical Western maritime strategists like Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Julian Corbett. Mahan’s strategic thinking developed in the late nineteenth century and called for the use of so-called capital ships (in those days battleships; nowadays submarines and aircraft carriers) in maintaining control of the sea and the sea lines of communication (SLOC). Key in Mahan’s ideas were the so-called six constituents that made a country a sea-going nation as well as a successful naval power. In comparison to Mahan, Corbett put more emphasis on the cooperation between land and sea forces. His focus on the ‘fleet-in-being strategy’, in combination with anti-access/access denial capabilities, perfectly suits the present Chinese situation, since the Chinese are still developing their navy and therefore cannot contest control of the sea.

Non-Western influences can also be found in the Chinese concept of sea power, in particular through Sun Tzu. Sun Tzu emphasized deception in warfare, claiming that “all warfare is based on deception”. According to Sun Tzu, the acme of skill is defeating the enemy without fighting by means of using lies and deceit.
In the cases of the Senkaku Islands and the Spratly Islands the Chinese concept of sea power has been put into practice in a series of events, ranging from intrusions by fishermen and civilian institutions like the Chinese Coast Guard, being a part of ‘hybrid warfare’, but also by land reclamation projects, the building of secret radar installations on gas rigs and cyberattacks. The creation of artificial islands in the South China Sea is part of a Mahanian line of thinking where naval bases – which these islands have become by now – are of huge importance to a navy’s operational power, and (potentially) limit the control the other parties have over that specific area. The declaration of a Chinese Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) contributes to the control over that area through control over the airspace. With these actions, China hopes to gain control over the waters it claims in the East and South China Sea and it often refers to international maritime law for legitimizing its claims.

The Chinese attempt to claim the South and East China Sea has drawn American attention. The Americans hope to uphold the freedom of navigation and freedom of overflight by regularly conducting operations that challenge Chinese claims. However, since the US has a typical Mahanian approach to sea power, whereas China has given its own twist to this approach, confrontations between the two often result in (political) outcries and sometimes even tense situations that might easily escalate to direct violence. Moreover, the US, while adhering to strict (international) rules, has difficulties in determining how to deal with proxy militias like the Chinese fishermen and Chinese civil maritime institutions. For now, however, the US is trying to maintain the status quo.
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A2/AD</td>
<td>Anti-Access/Area Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Anti-Aircraft</td>
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<td>ADIZ</td>
<td>Air Defence Identification Zone</td>
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<td>ASAT</td>
<td>Anti-Satellite Weapon</td>
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<td>ASBM</td>
<td>Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
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<td>ASW</td>
<td>Anti-submarine Warfare</td>
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<td>CCG</td>
<td>Chinese Coast Guard</td>
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<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
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<td>CMS</td>
<td>China Marine Surveillance</td>
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<td>EEZ</td>
<td>Exclusive Economic Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLEC</td>
<td>Fisheries Law Enforcement Command</td>
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<tr>
<td>FON</td>
<td>Freedom of Navigation</td>
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<tr>
<td>FONOP</td>
<td>Freedom of Navigation Operation</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOO</td>
<td>Freedom of Overflight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPCO</td>
<td>Fish, Protect, Contest and Occupy</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>Maritime Safety Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>NM</td>
<td>Nautical Mile</td>
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<td>NMW</td>
<td>Naval Mine Warfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCA</td>
<td>Permanent Court of Arbitration</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLAAF</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army Air Force</td>
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<td>PLAN</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army Navy</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROC</td>
<td>Republic of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAM</td>
<td>Surface to Air Missiles</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEZ</td>
<td>Special Economic Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLOC</td>
<td>Sea Lines of Communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>TPP</td>
<td>Trans-Pacific Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>USN</td>
<td>United States Navy</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>WWI</td>
<td>World War One</td>
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</table>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The economic rise of the People’s Republic of China (hereafter referred to as ‘China’), accompanied by a growing political and military influence, is on the agenda of most countries around the globe. In particular during the last decade this development has taken flight with huge military modernization programmes being undertaken; not only in China, but also elsewhere around the world. Based on its rapid economic growth, China has been able to develop its armed forces – army, navy and air force – in a bid to assert its position as a world power. With its land borders more secure than since the height of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) in the eighteenth century, China can and does project its power elsewhere (Kaplan, 2011, p. 78). Relatively close to home, in the South China Sea and East China Sea, the Chinese are getting into conflict with neighbouring countries, since China lays territorial claims to a wide crescent in the South China Sea, more commonly known as the Cow’s Tongue or Nine-dash line (Map 1; Kaplan, 2011, p. 82). This area stretches from Hainan Island, part of China and the location of China’s large naval bases, all the way to Singapore and Malaysia, 2,000 kilometres to the south. In response to these Chinese territorial claims, the nine other states that border the South China Sea are driven in each other’s arms by China’s moves and they look to the United States for support in voicing their discontent. Given the various security agreements between the United States and regional states – for example Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (Republic of China) – the United States is considered an important actor in the region as well.

The importance of the South China Sea and East China Sea is given by the many natural resources located underneath the seabed. An estimated eleven billion barrels of oil could potentially be extracted from the seabed, along with a projected 190 trillion cubic meters of natural gas (Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), 2016). In addition to the presence of natural resources, the South China Sea is one of the most important seas in terms of shipping routes.
Half of the world’s annual merchant shipping worth $5.3 trillion passes through this sea (CFR, 2016); thus the sea itself and a potential increase of the territorial waters are important to all ten countries in the conflict.¹ For instance, sixty percent of Japan’s energy and eighty percent of China’s oil come through the South China Sea (Kaplan, 2011, p. 80-81). Due to the importance of the sea to all bordering countries, China, fuelled by nationalism, has begun building up its naval fleet. In response, neighbouring countries have increased their military budgets as well; in some cases the military budget has been raised seven times over (Kaplan, 2011, p. 83).

Over time there have been quite a few disputes regarding ‘territory’ in the South China Sea and East China Sea. In some cases China has sent its military to islands in order to ‘settle’ the conflict, but in other cases it was willing to settle disputes in a non-military, peaceful way (Hyer, 1995, p. 34). Examples of territorial conflicts in the South China Sea are disputes involving the Paracel Islands, Macclesfield, Scarborough, Dongsha Pratas, Natuna, Anambas, and the Spratly Islands. In particular the last one is quite infamous, as there are up to five other countries laying claims to those islands. During recent years China has literally begun ‘cementing’ its position by building artificial islands close to the disputed territories and warning other countries to stay away (Guardian, 2015a, 2015b). In the East China Sea the most important territorial conflict involves the Senkaku Islands, with the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of China and Japan as the actors most involved.

Key to ‘cementing’ the Chinese position in both regional seas, is the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and its maritime strategy. Regarding the latter, one could state that the importance attached to the navy and naval strategies has been of all times, although it was not until the nineteenth century that it took flight in the West (in particular among the major European powers of that time, Germany and Great Britain, and the United States). Influential and well-known Western maritime strategists dealing with the issue of sea power during the nineteenth century were the American Mahan (1840-1914), the Brit Corbett (1854-1922) and the German Von Clausewitz (1780-1831), though the latter did focus more on the army. Both Mahan and Corbett published influential works, partly influenced by Von Clausewitz, which have been at the base of military naval thinking from the eve of World War One (1914-1918) all the way up to the present day (Gompert, 2013, p. 187). When Mahan published his most famous book, *The

¹ These countries are: People’s Republic of China, Republic of China (Taiwan), Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand and Japan.
Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783 (1890), the golden age of naval philosophy had already dawned (Reynolds, 1994, p. 106). Countries as diverse as Japan, Germany, Britain and the United States all adopted Mahan’s ideas. Corbett published his magnum opus, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy, in 1911 (Reynolds, 1998, p. 140). After World War Two, and up to today, naval philosophies based on the ideas of Mahan and Corbett and contributed to by strategists like Admiral Sergei Gorshkov and Admiral Raoul Castex, remain important to the United States and Russia and as such they have been influential to all naval philosophies and strategies around the world.

In this research the ideas of Mahan and Corbett will be central in examining how present-day China has adopted these important notions on maritime strategy within its own naval policies, in particular regarding its policies towards the disputed island territories. As such the main question posed in this thesis is: What is the effect of the Chinese concept of sea power, compared to the Western concept(s) of sea power, upon the territorial disputes in the East and South Chinese Sea in relation to the Japanese-Chinese conflict over the Senkaku Islands and the multinational conflict over the Spratly archipelago during the twenty-first century?

In order to be able to answer this central question, it is useful and necessary to split the central question up into sub-questions. The following sub-questions will help in answering the main question and try to break up the Chinese concept of sea power in order for it to be analysed and understood in the context of the two cases as discussed in this thesis.

1. What is the context of the rise of China and how can the present-day nationalistic stance of China be understood?
2. a) What are the Western perspectives on sea power as posed by the theories of Mahan and Corbett and how have these perspectives developed throughout the years?
   b) How does the current Chinese concept of sea power relate to the more ‘classical’ Western concept of sea power?
3. What is the essence of the Chinese maritime strategy and foreign policy in the case of the disputed territory of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and in the case of the disputed territory of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, respectively?
4. What is the role of the United States, as an important actor with huge interests in the region, in these territorial disputes or conflicts?
1.1 Scientific & Societal Relevance

Based on the research question as posed above, this thesis hopes to contribute to the (on-going) debate about the influence of sea power. The relevance of sea power as a strategic and geopolitical notion has been widely discussed throughout the twentieth century up into the start of the twenty-first century. Most of the relevant literature focuses on Western states and their concept(s) of sea power; not in the least because their navies used to be the strongest in the world. With the rise of China during the last couple of decades, however, a shift in research in this area has become visible. Nevertheless, most of the literature still focuses on the US Navy, as the largest naval power, and/or on the historic developments since World War Two, but more and more research is focussing on China. This thesis will, based on an analysis of the two disputed archipelagos or groups of islands, reflect on China’s naval power in two settings.

To further examine the use of the Chinese Navy, it is good to take a closer look at the cases chosen for this thesis. The Senkaku Islands are controlled by Japan, yet China also claims them, resulting in Chinese assertiveness, even aggressiveness. The Spratly Islands, on the other hand, are partially controlled by China, which results in a different Chinese approach, namely more ‘defensive’ instead of ‘offensive’. In both cases, the use of the Chinese Navy will be examined in light of the concept of sea power, in order to determine the role of China regarding these disputed islands. By comparing the two cases, this research has gained new insights in the Chinese strategy regarding the use of its navy, in particular by identifying (mis)matches in the concepts of sea power as used by the West (the United States in particular) and China.

Throughout the centuries, the use of sea power has been widely understood as important. As mentioned before, China is on the rise, not only economically but also militarily; this might frighten people in the West, but even more so in the East. Recently, tensions have increased as more intrusions into territorial waters and airspaces have occurred. These intrusions do not only take place where China enters the territorial waters or airspaces of countries in the region – or vice versa –, but in some cases it even involved the United States. Seen from a Western perspective, territorial conflicts in the South China and East China Seas might seem to be remote – albeit potentially violent – conflicts, chances are nevertheless that the East Asian region is the location of a next ‘Great Game’, or even ‘Great War’ (Kaplan, 2011). If that were to happen, the West would directly be affected by its consequences; not only because the United States will most likely be involved, but also because many of the world’s trade routes will be disrupted,
resulting in a plunge of the world economy. It is therefore in everyone’s interest to look at the Chinese concepts regarding sea power in relation to Western thinking, since without proper knowledge and insight it might lead to misunderstandings or misconceptions between the West and China. It is, moreover, important to analyse how the Chinese Navy is used, examine which strategies are behind it deployment and assess the potential dangers to the stability of the region as a result of the Chinese policies regarding the cases addressed in the thesis. Based on the two case studies, more insight can be gained as to how far China is willing to go in asserting its (regional) dominance in the cases of the Senkaku Islands and Spratly Island. And, finally, it will also shed light on the (potential) role of the United States regarding modern conflicts at sea.

1.2 Methodological Approaches

In order to be able to answer the secondary questions, and therefore eventually the central question, this thesis has used two methodological approaches to examine the Chinese concept of sea power in relation to the cases of territorial disputes in the East and South China Sea: literature study and qualitative methods. Based on the theoretical frame as offered by the concept of sea power (see next section), it has been possible to analyse the use of the Chinese Navy by setting up a framework in which to place Chinese sea power at this point in time. In setting up this frame, it has been necessary to start with a literature study regarding the historical development of (Western) concepts of sea power. Based on qualitative methods and the two case studies it has been possible to place the Chinese activities and approaches in the wider concept of sea power. Moreover, discrepancies between the use of sea power by China and that by other states have been identified as well. For this thesis academic literature as well as news articles, websites and information available through the internship at the Dutch Ministry of Defence have been used. Archival research was, though possible, focussed exclusively on the Dutch military and therefore of little interest for this thesis.

The second method used consisted of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with experts on notions of sea power in relation to China. To find the right persons for the interviews, a snowball technique has been used, meaning that through asking around the right persons have eventually be found. Since an internship at the Chinese Navy, or the American Navy for that matter, was impossible, this thesis has in part been based on interviews with people from the Dutch Navy (Koninklijke Marine) with whom I got into contact through my internship. These combined research methods have provided the necessary tools to analyse the recent use of the navy by
China when challenged to defend its (claimed) territory against intrusions by other nations, but also Chinese intrusions into other countries’ territories. In sum, they have provided the thesis with a deeper understanding of the two important and central theoretical concepts, sea power and territorial disputes, respectively, as mentioned below.

1.3 Conceptual Framework & Literature Review

The central question in this thesis is: *What is the effect of the Chinese concept of sea power, as compared to the Western concept(s) of sea power, upon the territorial disputes in the East and South Chinese Sea in relation to the Japanese-Chinese conflict over the Senkaku Islands and the multinational conflict over the Spratly archipelago during the twenty-first century?* In order to be able to put this question into a conceptual frame, it is necessary to address the various dimensions that make up this frame. The first dimension, and arguably the most important one, is the notion of sea power. The second one refers to the territorial claims through the concept of territorial disputes.

1.3.1 Sea Power

Before the academic analysis of the navy actually took off, the roles and missions of a navy were primarily determined by politicians and maritime commanders, as well as by the roles it has had under naval predecessors (Reynolds, 1998, p. 2). It was not until the late 1800s that research into the use of the navy by various nations throughout history really began. Although it might seem less relevant to go back all the way to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, it is necessary since around that time the foundations were laid for the modern naval philosophies and strategies that are still in use today. The great nations of that time – England, France, the United States, Germany and Japan – did rely extensively on the sea routes for exporting (and importing) their industrial goods (Gompert, 2013, p. 25). Against this background, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan referred to these sea routes as the world’s water highways. In the race to industrialize and expand the market shares abroad, new naval technologies were developed, for instance the steam ships with steel armour. It was at this point in time that the great maritime strategist, Mahan, defined the necessary ingredients for national greatness and military success, namely sea power. His prime example of this idea in action was the British Royal Navy, as it provided Britain economic success and strategic advantages (Gompert, 2013, p. 27). In analysing the British naval fleet throughout the ages, Mahan, in his famous work *The Influence of Sea Power upon History: 1660-1783*, concluded that modern navies should be built around the so-
called capital ship, just as it had been back in the days when fleets were built around the sailing capital ship (Garcia & Robertson, 1987, p. 540). Prior to World War One, these capital ships could be divided into three classes: the battleship with the heaviest armour and the most guns, the battle cruiser with medium armour but a higher average speed, and the pre-dreadnoughts which are mostly smaller than the capital ships and built before 1906 (Garcia & Robertson, 1987, p. 540). At the core of his theory was the assumption that the mustering of the fleet into a concentrated fleet would result in the greatest offensive potential that would accumulate into a battle and lead to command of the sea. Sea power therefore was defined as the means to move about freely across the oceans while at the same time denying the enemy the same.

Writing in the same era as Mahan, Corbett argued that only strong naval powers could develop a coherent maritime strategy as only they (1) were capable of creating a strong enough navy to prevent war in Europe and at the same time protect the homeland, and (2) were able to isolate disputed overseas objectives from outside interference, which would then enable the navy to support the army on land (Reynolds, 1998, p. 140-141). Like Mahan, Corbett failed to take into account the threats as posed to commercial shipping by torpedoes. Both men also emphasized heavy guns.

After the First World War, the French Admiral Raoul Castex argued that the navy and the army (and thus the air force) should work more closely together to achieve a grand strategy rather than merely a maritime strategy (Vego, 2009, p. 9). It was not until the beginning of World War Two that Mahan’s and Corbett’s theories were actively revived. During and after World War Two, Mahan’s theory was updated by Potter and US admiral Nimitz (1885-1966). They defined sea power as: (1) the ability to defend one’s own sea lines of communications (SLOCs), combined with (2) the ability to deny the enemy the same sea communications. Naval bases are key, both for logistical and strategic reasons, just as aircraft carriers are important (Potter & Nimitz, 1981, in Gompert, 2013, p. 32). They attached great importance to allies, which can be ascribed to the fact that they were developing their naval philosophies during the Cold War period. During the Cold war the Soviets, under the supervision of Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, also updated their ideas regarding sea power and how to use it. They ended up giving their own twist to the Western idea of sea power. According to Kipp, Soviet sea power under the supervision of Soviet Admiral Gorshkov had to be planted, nurtured and guided by the state, in a historically continental power, with mixed results, as the Soviet Union had extremely unfavourable geographical positions for ports (Kipp, 2012, in Ericson, Goldstein & Lord, 2012, p. 150). These various
philosophies (both Western and Soviet) and their ideas regarding sea power are nowadays being studied in China in searching for a blueprint that will fit Chinese notions of sea power (Woudstra, 2011, p. 25; Woudstra, 2016, interview; Van der Peet, 2016, interview).

Many of today’s authors writing about sea power focus on US-China relations, as China is becoming more dominant on the world stage. According to Pruitt, the economic and political interdependence caused by globalization requires a flexible navy that is able to combat a whole series of threats rather than one big threat (Pruitt, 2000). He therefore argues for what is called a ‘balanced fleet’. Swartz (2011) addresses various important issues regarding sea powers: (1) rising sea powers are a feature of rising political, military, and economic powers; (2) when a rising economic and political power decides to build a formidable navy, it usually is able to do so; (3) a country has to be rich and inventive in order to be a rising sea power; (4) all rising sea powers have eventually collided with other naval powers in combat – sometimes with other competing rising powers, sometimes with powers that had already achieved supremacy; (5) when a rising power builds a strong navy, other strong powers strengthen their own navies; (6) technological superiority matters in the short run, but in the long run naval technology flows more or less freely across borders among the world’s most powerful nations (Swartz, 2011 in Saunders et al., 2011, p. 12-15). Geoffrey Till updated the idea of sea power in 2009, in which he explained all the constituents of sea power and how they interact with each other. His book _Seapower: a guide for the twenty-first century_ is considered to be one of the key works on the concept of sea power.

Over the years lots of research has been done on China’s progress in the field of naval development, with the famous monograph by Cole, _The Great Wall at Sea_ (2010), as a prime example. In her study, Kirchberger sums up the relevant Chinese works (in Mandarin or Cantonese) on modernization of the Chinese Navy: Lin (A Maritime Border of Ten Thousand Miles, 2008), Yi (Casting Swords: The Birth of China’s First Aircraft Carrier, 2011), Wu (China’s Sea Power and Aircraft Carrier, 2010), Ping (China Constructs Aircraft Carriers, 2010) and Hu (China’s Sea Power Strategy, 2012) (Kirchberger, 2015, p. 8-11). From a Western perspective there is a focus on various technological and military developments regarding China: Ericson and Goldstein on the development of the aircraft carrier in _Chinese Aerospace Power_ (2011), Howarth on _China’s Rising Submarine Power_ (2006) and Ericson (et al.) on the nuclear submarines in _China’s Future Nuclear Submarine Force_ (2007). What these have in common is that they all tend to look at the modern Mahanian capital ships, the submarine and the aircraft carrier. In addition, there
is a focus among Western scholars on the Chinese naval strategy, for instance in Holmes and Yoshihara’s *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21st Century* (2008). It must be noted and stressed, however, that many of the widely accessible works on Chinese maritime studies are being written from a US or Western perspective, with a focus on a potential conflict in Taiwan or a potential clash between the United States and China; this often results in a bias of the scholars, in particular when their research is being funded by the government (Krichberger, 2015, p. 12).

In conclusion, the concept of sea power, as originally devised by Corbett and Mahan and as gradually adapted over time by people like Castex and Gorshkov, will be used in this thesis to gain more insight in the use of the navy in Western strategy. These insights will then be the basis to compare them to the Chinese use of its navy, especially with regard to the two cases that are being discussed in this thesis. Based on that, a comparison can be made regarding the discrepancies between the two (regional) interpretations of the concept of sea power, which will be used for an explanation of the interaction between the two. As such, the Chinese concept of sea power will be identified and described. This concept can then be applied to the two cases, as well as to how this affects the policies, not only regarding the territorial conflicts but also regarding the naval build-up.

1.3.2 Territorial Disputes

The second theoretical frame used in this thesis is the notion of territorial disputes. Territorial disputes are notoriously hard to solve, as neither of the leaders of the parties involved is willing to surrender the sovereignty to the other. In these cases arbitration or mediation could prove useful (Carter Centre, 2010, p. iii).

A territorial dispute is a dispute between two sovereign nation states where officials from one state lay claim on territory of the other state (Wiegand & Powell, 2010, p. 129). A maritime territorial dispute revolves around the question ‘who owns what island and what part of the sea comes with that ownership’? Within international law territorial disputes clash with Art. 1 of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, which entails that a state should have a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states (Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, 1933). The latter condition is not a necessary condition, however, as Hille states:

“Even if a state is not recognized, it will have international rights and duties opposable to the international community. Whether an entity is a state is a matter of fact, not recognition.” (Hille, 2010, p. 31)
International law and territorial disputes cannot be seen separately, as the disputes involve state borders and its settlement involves international law as well. According to Vasquez (Vasquez, 1995), literature on territorial disputes claim these are the most important cause of war. They attribute this finding to the geographical proximity of the territory to the states. This proximity will enable them to go to war more easily, as salience will be relatively high (Carter, 2010, p. 970). Nevertheless, most states will obviously try to resolve these territorial disputes peacefully, as Simmons argues, mostly through bilateral negotiations (Simmons, 2002). Moreover, the fact that, according to Huth in his Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict (1996), over half of the conflicts do not experience violence as a means to end the dispute, further underlines this argument. Huth and Allee (2002) analyse important territorial characteristics and the effect they have on the initiation and escalation of a dispute (Huth & Allee, 2002; Carter, 2010, p. 971). Senese (2005), building on Huth and Allee’s analysis, takes the contiguity – borders of countries not being interrupted by oceans or other countries but rather being on a contiguous landmass – and territory explanations for conflict and concludes that they both are important lenses for looking at the cause of conflict and its (uneven) distribution across the phases of conflict (Senese, 2005; Carter, 2010, p. 970). This means that territory holds greater value among non-contiguous countries than it does with contiguous countries (Senese, 2005, p. 778). Contiguous rivals are also less likely to go to war with each other than non-contiguous rivals (Senese, 2005, p. 778). In his discussion on the various studies and theories regarding the origins and settlements of territorial disputes, Carter concludes that there is a gap, however, that has not been addressed by the various authors – the fact they do not take into account the power the disputed territory has in itself. This means that territorial characteristics (i.e. location) are usually viewed as increasing a state’s salience of said territory and not viewed as a state’s means to project power or to obtain new territory (i.e. through the creation of naval bases) (Carter, 2010, p. 971). Fearon (1995) did argue for this, by stating that if a (disputed) territory contains a source of military power, it could be a source of conflict.

In the thesis the notions mentioned above – especially Senese and Carter– will be used for a better understanding of the territorial claims that are laid on the islands as ‘non-contiguous (Chinese-claimed) territory’. This thesis will also examine how China, as a regional power, uses its (military) power to assert its claims in both seas central in this thesis. The concept of territorial claims will play a subordinate role in relation to the concept of sea power, however. This is because the territorial claims illustrate or highlight the role as played by the Chinese Navy.
Partly based on an analysis of the territorial disputes, the Chinese concept of sea power will become clear. However, the importance of territorial claims lies in the fact that claims on territory could be used as a casus belli, as reason(s) to go to war; hence these territorial claims will have to be examined. It will, moreover, give an insight in the Chinese assertiveness in international politics.

1.4 Structure
This thesis has been structured in line with the research questions. This means that Chapter 2 will look at the main events in modern Chinese history that define its policies today. These events often regard international actors and their (perceived) humiliation of China. The importance of this chapter lies in that it defines China to what it is today.

Chapter 3 will examine the concept of sea power as it was originally developed in the West. The main thinkers, Mahan and Corbett, as well as Castex and the Soviet Admiral Gorshkov are discussed here, before moving on to the Chinese interpretation of the concept.

Chapter 4 will look at the territorial disputes. First, a short overview of the dispute will be given in which a brief history is central. Second, the Chinese navy and its maritime strategy in these conflicts will be examined.

Chapter 5 will focus on the American involvement in the disputed islands. As the world’s sole superpower at this moment, the US is present worldwide. That is no different in East Asia, where the US policy is aimed at limiting Chinese assertiveness.

The final chapter will bring all the previous questions back together in order to answer the central question in this thesis. It will also reflect on the research done in this thesis.
Chapter 2: The Rise of China

“The study of history lies at the foundation of all sound military conclusions and practices.”
– Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan, 1890.

As addressed in the introduction, looking at the economic and political aspects of Chinese history is important in order to better understand where present-day Chinese nationalism regarding conflicts in the East and South China Sea is coming from. This chapter will therefore go back in time to examine key (turning) points in modern Chinese history. Following this brief historical narrative, various elements, such as the economy and international relations, of modern China will be examined. The focal point of this chapter’s events will be the foreign interventions in Chinese affairs, as they have helped in shaping Chinese foreign policy, and thus the use of the navy as a subset of said policy, to what it is today. The central question in this chapter is, what is the context of the rise of China and how can the present-day nationalistic stance of China be understood?

2.1 Pre-World War Two China

The loss of sovereignty to Western powers is a recurrent theme that lies at the basis of the current Chinese policy. It started in the wake of the First (1839-42) and Second Opium War (1856-60), when Western powers defeated the Chinese navy and opened up China to trade through the establishment of trade colonies on the Chinese mainland. These treaties not only meant the Chinese loss of territories, but also the loss of control over foreigners, as Chinese law was no longer applicable to them. The Chinese also lost their right to raise or change tariffs (Perkins, 2013, p. 55; Schoppa, 2008, p. 43).

2.1.1 Chinese Concessions

To the Chinese, the loss of territory and sovereignty to Western powers was an enormous blow, especially to the Qing dynasty. It did not take long for the consequences of the defeat in 1842 to come to the surface. Already in 1851 disgruntled Chinese peasants rose in rebellion against the Qing’s poor military performance during the First Opium War, as well as against the permanent presence of foreigners in China. This rebellion became known as the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) and was ultimately put down by the Qing with help of Western powers (Perkins, 2013, p. 2).

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2 These wars were fought between China and (mainly) Great Britain over British (opium) trade in China and Chinese sovereignty.

3 Concessions in 1842: Hong Kong, Shanghai, Hankou, Tainjin, Canton (Guangzhou), Beijing and Xiamen.
Not only in the eastern part of China were its borders threatened by Western powers and the consequent loss of concessions after the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion, but in the north as well. Ever since the 1698 and 1727 treaties between China and Russia, a special relationship between the two countries had been fostered. China allowed a permanent Russian ambassador at its court in Beijing and the Russian envoys were allowed to learn Chinese. Both these privileges were denied to other Western powers before the end of the Opium Wars. As the Russians pushed into eastern Siberia, however, they set up garrisons along the Amur River. The 1860 treaty between China and Russia showed that the Russians were just as hungry for land as the Western powers were (Russian Embassy in China, 2016). This treaty stated that the Russians would take over control of the province of Ussuri, which then became known as Russia’s

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4 The Taiping Rebellion was a Christian-inspired rebellion of the Han Chinese (former Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644) who were plagued by famine, disgruntled with the Manchu tribe of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and their (forced) acceptance of Western presence in China.
maritime province (Schoppa, 2008, p. 61). China’s western borders were no safer than the eastern and northern ones, as even up into the twenty-first century it remains extremely hard to monitor who enters and leaves the country, given the vastness of its deserts and steppes. The loss of territory to the Russians was only the beginning of a series of humiliating treaties. Between 1885 and 1895 China lost its most important tributary states, Vietnam, the Liuqiu Islands and Korea, to foreign powers (Schoppa, 2008, p. 62). Soon after, Germany joined in the scramble for concessions in China, which ultimately resulted in the loss of large parts of Manchuria to Russia, Qingdao and its surrounding lands to Germany, and Taiwan and the Pescasdores to Japan (Perkins, 2013, p. 41). By that time the British had control over Hong Kong, Shanghai and Wihaiwei; the French controlled Indo-China and Guangzhouwan, while the Portuguese remained in control of Macao which they had owned since 1557 (Map 2; Schoppa, 2008, p. 67).

2.1.2 The Boxer Rebellion and its aftermath
The loss of territories to foreign powers, combined with the consequences of natural disasters such as droughts and floods, gave rise to the so-called Boxer movement (Schoppa, 2008, p. 71). The name derives from the martial arts rituals, or boxing, they practised. As the natural disasters continued, millions of Chinese tried to escape the affected areas. These natural disasters, in combination with anti-Christian sentiments among the Chinese in response to the activities of European missionaries and foreign presence in general, led them to turn on Chinese converts, Christian properties and foreign missionaries (Perkins, 2013, p. 41-42). Since the Qing Empress Dowager Cixi (r. 1861-1908) supported the Boxers in their demands, the Western states and Japan saw themselves forced to intervene in order to halt the bloodshed against Christian missionaries, especially after the Qing murdered the German ambassador, defeated an British relief force and declared war on eight foreign nations on June 10, 1900 (Xiang, 2003, p. xi). By the end of 1900, more than 45,000 foreign troops were present in China, on a ‘search and destroy’ mission. By 1901 the Chinese were defeated and they felt humiliated by the foreign powers. Whereas a century before the Chinese state had been at the height of its power, now it was at an all-time low and beaten time and again by the Western powers (Schoppa, 2008, p. 75).

The decade following the end of the Boxer Rebellion saw outbursts of nationalism, mainly in the cities. As a consequence of contact with foreigners, the Chinese became more self-aware and concerned about their own national sovereignty. The British threat to Tibet and Russian influence in Mongolia prompted many Chinese to go out and join demonstrations against
foreigners. From 1911 up to the beginning of World War Two in Asia in 1937, China was almost in constant turmoil and anarchy due to the many rebellions plaguing the country, among them a communist rebellion (Schoppa, 2008, p. 202-229). When the Japanese invaded, China was ruled by a nationalist government of the Guomindang, whom as of 1949 would rule Taiwan.

2.2 Post World War Two: Cold War and the Communist regime

World War Two left China in ruins. Much of its economy was destroyed, millions lay dead and many more were wounded or maimed. For the communists in China, however, World War Two offered some breathing space, as the purges by the nationalist Guomindang, intended to obliterate the communist movement, came to a grinding halt since they had to fight the Japanese instead of the Chinese communists (Schoppa, 2008, p. 312). Indeed, the Japanese invasion is another example of unwanted foreign presence in China that caused strained relations with Japan up to this day. When the war was over, the nationalist Guomindang regime and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continued to fight one another during the Chinese civil war from 1947 to 1949. The Guomindang, weakened by nine years of war against Japan, had more troops, but they were ill-equipped and badly trained in comparison to the communists. As a result, the communists gained ground and by 1949 they had conquered all of mainland China, which left the Nationalist Guomindang no choice but to retreat to the island of Taiwan. On October 1, 1949, the communist leader, Mao Zedong, proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (Perkins, 2013, p. 539). To the West this rapid victory by the communists, followed by the onslaught of the Korean War (1950-1953), posed a serious threat. In response the US sent its Seventh Fleet to protect Taiwan, declared it did not recognize the communist regime in Beijing and banned all trade from and to China (Qingguo, 2005, p. 18). These actions by foreign nations convinced many Chinese once again that the outside world was hostile to the Chinese nation, meaning that in order to survive they had to become largely independent and self-sufficient (Qingguo, 2005, p. 18).

Mao Zedong, in his more than twenty years in power, reformed the country along Communist lines of thinking, though his revolutionary romanticism had a tendency to spiral out of control (Schoppa, 2008, p. 323). An example of this romanticism was the alternative to the Soviet five-year plan, called the Great Leap Forward of 1958, intended to speed up China’s development (Perkins, 2013, p. 314). In practice it meant that in rapid succession over 12,000 blast furnaces were built in Hunan province alone to increase iron production, but also that mainly rural people
were put together in so-called militarized *commune* structures, containing up to 5,000 people each. In these commune structures people were supposed to live and work together (Spence et al., 1991, p. 405). The results were catastrophic: famine, a collapse of the steel making infrastructure and poor harvests, left millions starving to death (Schoppa, 2008, p. 330). The Great Leap Forward also contributed to the Sino-Soviet split (1960-1989), because it meant breaking with the Soviet interpretation of communism (Schoppa, 2008, p. 332). In practice it meant that rather than having a five-year plan with a focus on heavy industry, the Maoist interpretation put an emphasis on the farmers. Another factor contributing to the split resulted from the death of Stalin, who was the undisputed leader of the communist world (CIA, 2008). His successor, Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971) believed that peaceful coexistence, a more moderate stance towards the West, was needed in order to prevent a (nuclear) war. Mao, however, disagreed with him and challenged Khrushchev’s right to lead the Communist world (Schoppa, 2008, p. 332). This was then followed by a series of accusations and incidents on the diplomatic level and the withdrawal of Soviet support, which in the short term had devastating consequences and left millions dead. The Sino-Soviet Split almost became a ‘hot’ war when in 1969 border clashes between Soviet and Chinese military occurred (Lüthi, 2008, p. 340). The split between the USSR and the PRC is again an example of foreign intervention in Chinese affairs, since the USSR withdrew its support when the Chinese diverted from the Soviet path towards communism. The US used this split to its advantage by adopting a policy of rapprochement between the US and China (Qingguo, 2005, p. 18). For US President Nixon the rapprochement meant a way to accomplish ‘peace with honour’ in the Vietnam War and for the Chinese it meant international recognition, as they received the Chinese permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, which up until that time had been taken by Taiwan (Office of the Historian, 2016). It again shows how much outside forces influence policy in China.

From 1978 on Deng Xiaoping, sometimes referred to as the father of Chinese capitalism, made China to what it is today. His goals were to modernize Chinese agriculture, industry, science and technology and national defence. Economic liberalization was a cornerstone of this policy, which basically meant adopting capitalist measures through the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) (Marti, 2002, p. 13). These SEZs soon proved to be a stunning success. From the 1970s on, China also opened its windows to the rest of the world, establishing diplomatic relations with almost every other nation (Schoppa, 2008, p. 422). The Chinese allowed foreign investment in

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5 Basically it provided the US with an exit strategy.
the country as well, as began investing in other countries and joining international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in 1979 (Jacobson & Oksenberg, 1990, p. 66). All these factors contributed to the economic rise of China, as well as to a greater Chinese influence in international politics. At the turn of the millennium, the CCP was opened up to capitalists and technocrats, which defined a clear break with former party policy (Marti, 2002, p. 175).

2.3 Chinese Economy

Prior to 1979 the Chinese Communist economy was directed by the state, which resulted in a backward economy, limited economic growth and many state-owned companies. As the Chinese economy was reformed and liberalized in the late 1970s with the creation of SEZs, the effects were felt almost immediately. By the late 2000s the Chinese economy had more than quadrupled (Ikenberry, 2008, p. 26), with an annual growth rate in double digits and China has become one of the most important centres of production, consuming one third of the world’s coal, iron and steel production (Morrison, 2013, p. 3-5). With the Chinese admission to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, the economic growth was enhanced even further. By 2006 the Chinese foreign reserves had therefore risen to a staggering $1 trillion and ten years later over $3 trillion (Trading Economics, 2016).

The rapid growth of the Chinese economy, caused by an influx of foreign capital and a higher economic efficiency, has increased China’s hunger for energy (Morrison, 2013, p. 5, 17). As of 2009, for instance, China overtook the US as the largest energy consumer and in 2014 it was the largest consumer of oil products (Morrison, 2013, p. 25; EIA, 2014). Since China itself lacks oil reserves vast enough to be self-sufficient, it therefore has to rely on oil imports mainly by sea. From 1993 onwards China has become a net oil importer, with most of the oil coming from the Middle East (IAGS, 2004). As a net importer of fossil fuels, as well as being resource-deficient, the importance of merchant shipping becomes apparent. Global shipping in 2002 amounted to 5 billion tons annually, of which approximately 33 percent sails through Southeast Asia via the South China Sea (Guoxing, 2002, p. 8). In 2015 this annual shipping in the South China Sea was worth over $5 trillion, and made up over half of the world’s merchant fleet tonnage and 33 percent of all maritime traffic (CNBC, 2016; National Interest, 2016b). Other important sea lines go through the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan to the Pacific Ocean. China’s most important ports are located along these so-called sea lines of communication (SLOC); seven of them
ranking among the ten largest in the world. As the trade by sea expanded, a larger merchant fleet was required. In 1997 China’s merchant fleet amounted a dead-weight tonnage of 50 million (Guoxing, 2002, p. 13). By 2014 this had increased to over 150 million tonnage (Economist, 2015). As will be shown in the next section, the Chinese take great pride in their economic rise.

2.4 Chinese Nationalism
Nationalism, as a phenomenon, is a powerful force that holds a group of people together by creating a feeling of belonging together. In China the past decades gave rise to two types of nationalism: the popular, cultural or civic nationalism and state nationalism. The latter serves the party’s interest and is pragmatic in its use, since it would guarantee loyalty of its subjects to the state. It thus cannot be seen separately from the state’s ideology (Zhao, 2013, p. 31). The former is influenced by the state’s nationalism, but the state derives its legitimacy from the state’s active interaction with the people (Harris, 2006, p. 150). The nature of civic nationalism can be described as emotional. As China is developing itself and its civilians become more informed through the use of social media and thereby become aware of the surrounding world, they are showing signs of pride, patriotism and nationalism (Gompert, 2013, p. 110). It is thus based around both political autonomy and morally and self-aware community with a shared history and norms and values (Harris, 2006, p. 150). An awareness of what has happened to China in the nineteenth and twentieth century when foreign powers decided upon China’s fate, gives the Chinese a stronger feeling of that never happening again and, moreover, to reclaim what has been lost.

When it became apparent that the CCP’s authority declined due to the fact that socialism and the communist economic model were no longer regarded by everybody as the main modernising force, the CCP had to create a new legitimizing factor. What the CCP successfully did was linking economic expansion and economic growth to nationalism instead of communism. (Hughes, 1997, p. 157; Christensen, 2015, p. 28). This newly-created link reinforced the legitimacy and authority of the CCP as the ruling party and made sure calls for political change were prevented (Zhao, 2013, p. 22). As a result of this link between economic growth and nationalism, internally the Chinese started taking pride in China and in being Chinese, which in the early
2000s led to the reversal of the brain-drain\(^6\) that had characterized China in the 1980s and 1990s (Schoppa, 2008, p. 434).

On the international stage China acted more mature. Chinese nationalism was both strengthened and weakened due to the Chinese interaction with other countries. It has on the one hand created a feeling that relations with the outside world are not necessarily zero-sum games. In turn China joined, as described above, the IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO)\(^7\) and especially the UN. This embedding in international institutions has somewhat weakened Chinese nationalism in the early 2000s (Qingguo, 2005, p. 19). On the other hand, increased presence on the world stage has also made the Chinese more aware of the Western dominance in world affairs (Qingguo, 2005, p. 19). This Western dominance in world affairs combined with negative Western news coverage regarding China – resulting in a feeling that the entire world was against China – promoted anti-Western sentiments as of the 1990s, especially after the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade (Economist, 2014; Lim, 2013, p. 36). These feelings were reinforced by the release of books like *China Can Say No* (1996), which ‘confirmed’ many of the feelings among the Chinese regarding the West (Economist, 2014; Qingguo, 2005, p. 20). The expectation that China could say ‘no’ increased up until today, as the country develops itself economically and militarily. As such the ‘China can say no’-mentality has caused increased deadlocks regarding for instance the disputes in the South China Sea. Resulting from the ‘China can say no’-mentality, but also from issues of sovereignty regarding for instance the US involvement in Taiwan and China’s general success in the world, is a source of growing nationalistic sentiment (Gompert, 2013, p. 110). At times this increased nationalism resulted in strained relations with neighbouring countries, especially with Japan, when it came to the disputed territories in the South and East China Seas (National Interest, 2015). These nationalistic outbursts increase the CCP’s legitimacy and legitimize its policy.

2.4.1 Chinese Naval Nationalism

Zooming in from a nation-wide perspective of nationalism to one focussing on the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), there is increased popular support for the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) whereas before the support was only centred around the navy itself (Ross, 2009, p. 61). This increasing support is the result of both forms of Chinese nationalism and twofold in its

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\(^6\) Emigration of the educated or skilled individuals to another country.

\(^7\) China joined the WTO in 2001. It had by 1979 already joined the IMF and the World Bank and the UN in 1971.
On the one hand it is argued that China needs a strong navy because of its dependence on foreign trade and for deterrence against outside forces. In this view the CCP is the vanguard against outside threats and there is a strong emphasis on standing up against the outside world – ‘China can say no’ (Gerard, 2011, p. 46).

On the other hand there is the search for the great power status by the Chinese government, a prestige project. The way it tries to achieve this is through the PLAN’s active participation in international missions, as for instance in 2008 when China joined the anti-piracy mission off the Horn of Africa (Saunders et al., 2011, p. 101; Ross, 2009, p. 54). These international operations sought to promote the PLAN’s (and in turn the CCP’s) domestic popularity by seeking international successes, in a sense using the navy for showcasing Chinese naval power (Patalano, 2016, interview). And it worked: in 2006, during the Lunar New Year Holiday, over 300,000 Chinese made a tour on a Soviet-era carrier, debates are being held about Chinese maritime policy at universities and think-tanks and the immense popularity of a TV talk show on the benefits of an aircraft carrier has prompted the broadcasting agency to produce more programs on the topic (Ross, 2009, p. 61-62). It was even possible to go and visit (‘a patriotic duty’) the disputed Paracel Islands, claimed by China and Vietnam (BBC, 2016a). The international successes fostered the CCP’s legitimacy among the public. However, there is a strong civic nationalist element to the latter. Since the idea of a native-built carrier was developed in the late 1980s, the idea has become more and more mainstream (Gerard, 2011, p. 45). As a result, people from all the different levels of society offered their own personal funds in support of the creation of China’s own aircraft carriers (Ross, 2009, p. 62). The result of the huge popular support for the carrier program was that the government had to give in to the overwhelming nationalistic sentiment (Gerard, 2011, p. 45).

In sum, the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is in China considered to be the defender of the Chinese maritime interests abroad. The demands of the nationalists could therefore be split into two: on the one hand they require the building of an aircraft carrier, as they believe it will restore lost prestige and make them a more important player on the world stage. On the other hand, the naval nationalists argue that owning an aircraft carrier, as part of a blue water fleet (surface fleet), is vital to securing the Chinese sea-lanes of communication and defending the Chinese expats living abroad (Ross, 2009, p. 67).
2.5 China and its Relations with other Regional Powers

The recent growth of nationalism has had its effects on the politics in the East Asian region. As China becomes more and more assertive due to its growing self-confidence, the Chinese-Japanese relations, and even the Chinese-US relations, are again more and more viewed as a zero-sum game, meaning that a Japanese loss is a Chinese gain and vice-versa. In turn it means that the Chinese policy leaves very little room for US ambitions as the most powerful actor in the theatre, or any other for that matter, without upsetting the Chinese (Lim, 2014, p. 36-40).

Between 2001 and 2008 the US and China got along fine, mainly due to the 9/11 attacks and Bush’s strategy of encouraging China’s political and military rise within the established rules (Wall Street Journal, 2009). When Obama got into office he adopted a softer stance towards China through a policy that was to become known under then name ‘strategic reassurance’. This policy was an attempt to bring about a change in China’s attitude towards the US (Wall Street Journal, 2009). The Chinese, however, saw this as a sign of American weakness which they could exploit; this example shows that their relationship is ultimately still characterized by mistrust (Lim, 2014, p. 36-40).

The level of mistrust between China and Japan is even higher than with the US, as China sees a ‘normalized’ Japan as a potential rival in becoming the regional hegemon, as it would hinder the Chinese ambitions in East Asia (Lim, 2014, p. 44). The mistrust between both countries has its roots in the Second World War and resurfaces quite often. In 2005 for instance, Japan made a bid for a permanent seat in the Security Council. Thousands of (young) Chinese people voluntarily took to the streets in protests that were stage managed by the Chinese government. This meant that the Chinese government provided buses for those protesters who wished to return back home or to work (Tam, 2007, p. 281-2, 296). The same happened in 2012, although this time the reason was the escalation of the conflict over the Senkaku islands (BBC, 2012).

The Chinese relations with India continue to be marked by suspicion and distrust. A main reason of this distrust is their border dispute in the Himalayas, which reached a highpoint in 2009 when border intrusions occurred on a daily basis (Reuters, 2009). Brahma Chellaney, an Indian strategic thinker, called the situation between China and India ‘hotter’ than the situation between India and Pakistan, a country India has had issues with ever since the country’s

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8 To normalize its status on the international stage means that Japan seeks to become a full member of the international community, not affected by what happened in history. This also includes the military and its ability to defend its own people.
founding (Lim, 2014, p. 44). The Chinese intrusions into Indian territory continue to occur on a regular basis up until today (The Hindu, 2016). Moreover, as China pushes its maritime interests into the Indian Ocean, for instance in Sri Lanka, India responds by improving its position in East Asia, for instance by reaching an agreement with Vietnam regarding exploration of the seabed in Vietnam’s claimed territory (Lim, 2014, p. 44, 47). This competition for influence led to an increase in the level of distrust among both nations.

Although during the Cold War China was opposed to regional institutions, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), during the 1990s it changed its position. By 2002 China signed an agreement with ASEAN regarding the South China Sea⁹, followed by an upgrade in China’s relations with ASEAN to ‘strategic partnership for peace and prosperity’ (ASEAN, 2012a). In doing so, China became a partner of ASEAN and soon afterwards became its largest trade partner. Despite China’s more assertive stance regarding the South China Sea in the late 2000s, it still voiced its commitment towards the 2002 agreement regarding the South China Sea. As the 2000s progressed, China let ASEAN be more in charge when it concerned East Asia Summits (Lim, 2014, p. 50). This meant that China let ASEAN officially be more in charge while at the same time allowing China to push for a more obscure form of regionalism through ASEAN by not only excluding the United States from East Asia Summits, but also Australia, New Zealand and India. In that view, China’s participation in regional institutions should be seen as a means to becoming a potential hegemon (Lim, 2014, p. 47-51).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter sought to set the stage for the Chinese rise to power and to put its nationalism into context by answering the question “what is the context of the rise of China and how can the present-day nationalistic stance of China be understood?” Regarding the former, a recurring theme in modern Chinese history is the foreign intervention in Chinese internal affairs. The many wars waged in the nineteenth and twentieth century against China, from the Opium Wars to the Korean War, has given many Chinese the perception of the outside world as a threat. With the rise of communism, the loss of Taiwan and the Sino-Soviet split, this has not dwindled: rather the opposite is true. The ‘loss’ of Taiwan has made the Chinese more determined to keep its territorial integrity, to limit foreign influences and to build an army and fleet that is capable of

⁹ The so-called ‘Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea’ which aims to provide a Code of Conduct regarding the South China Sea and especially the territorial disputes there (ASEAN, 2012b).
defending the homeland and its interests elsewhere around the globe. In this light, Chapter 4 will examine the territorial disputes in China’s near-seas and Chapter 5 will explain the continued foreign presence and involvement in ‘Chinese’ affairs.

As the Chinese economic liberalization caused a rapid economic development, the CCP had to look for a new basis of legitimacy, as socialism was no longer deemed as a legitimizing factor. The CCP therefore decided to turn towards nationalism as its legitimizing factor. Internally this turn created more cohesion among the Chinese, whereas on the international stage it made the CCP adopt a more assertive position. The two forms of Chinese naval nationalism make for a complex interaction between state-led and civic nationalism. Among the Chinese population, nationalistic outbursts become visible, for instance when it comes to the building of an aircraft carrier, but also when China perceives its interests are threatened by other regional actors as is the case with Japan’s Senkaku Islands.

The next chapter will look at how the Chinese maritime concept of sea power, within the historical context explained in this chapter, differs from the Western concept.
Chapter 3: The Concept of Sea Power

Whereas the previous chapter sought to explain where China’s nationalism and its more assertive stance on the world stage originates from, this chapter will look at how the naval concept of ‘sea power’, being a Western concept, has been developed within the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). The question this chapter seeks to answer is twofold. The first part will look at the question: what are the Western perspectives on sea power, based on the theories of Mahan and Corbett and how have these perspectives developed throughout the years? The second part, will look at the question: how does the current Chinese concept of sea power relate to the more ‘classical’ Western concept of sea power?

3.1 The Western concept of Sea Power

In the introduction the concept of sea power has been briefly introduced. This section will elaborate further on the concept as it has been developed by Western (and Soviet) maritime nations at the turn of the century. Nowadays strategists face similar problems as the great Western powers faced over a hundred years ago: limited wars and the challenges of developing and maintaining an adequate navy, under circumstances of a rapid changing technology, while international law restrains the use of that very same navy (Stevens, 1997, p. 7-8).

In going back to the origins of naval thought, one ends up having to go back to the 1870s and 1880s, when a new method of propulsion was developed (Stevens, 1997, p. 11). This development meant that thinking about maritime strategy – not only on a strategic level, but on a lower operational and tactical level as well – became possible as one was no longer directly dependent upon the weather. Pioneers in this field were the American Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan and the Brit Sir Julian S. Corbett, who were involved in two established academic fields: the study of history and military strategy. Based on these two disciplines they developed their strategic (naval) thinking. Initially the focus was on the naval use (ships using sails) during wartime (Stevens, 1997, p. 12), but as time passed on new technologies and experiences stimulated the expansion of the field, with other strategists such as Raoul Castex and Sergei

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10 The three main levels of war are the strategical, operational and tactical levels. The tactical level is the lowest level in which changes fast. The operational level already changes much slower, while the strategic level is the highest level in which hardly changes throughout time. This thus explains why nowadays strategic concepts of one hundred years ago are still relevant (Woudstra, 2016, interview). For a detailed explanation of how the different levels work and interact see: http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/politics/news/a39985/four-levels-of-war/. The strategic level can traditionally be subdivided in between military strategy and political or grand strategy, hence the article refers to four levels of war (though there is also a fifth level called the technical level, which is the lowest level).
Gorshkov adding their thoughts to the field. Naval and maritime strategy, as well as its historical analysis, came to be a sub-set of a country’s overall national strategy and involved not only the navy, but also other functions of state power (Stevens, 1997, p. 13). These include for example diplomacy, the shipping industry, (offshore) fishing, coastal defence, defence of the merchant fleet and later the defence of economic exclusive zones (EEZs). Other elements relevant for maritime strategy and sea power are geography, resources, technology and the way of organizing society. Also, sea power always has been a relative term, meaning that sea power has always been defined in relation to the other (Till, 2009, p. 22-3). Whether or not a nation will be a maritime nation depends on its sea-borne trade and also on whether or not a nation has enough economic, industrial and technological means at its disposal, i.e. incentives to head to sea (Gompert, 2013, p. 60).

The navy’s activities can be divided into two categories: the first being related to issues regarding national defence, the second is concerned with a broad spectrum of civil duties relating to the sea (Stevens, 1997, p. 18). Although the so-called Corbettian and Mahanian lines of thinking are the most dominant, other strategists like Raoul Castex and Sergei Gorshkov and strategies and concepts like the ‘naval blockade’, the French concept of ‘guerre de course’ (a focus on the sinking of merchant ships while avoiding the enemy’s surface fleet), and the ‘Coastal Defence Theory’ (the creation of fortifications along the coast and the building of a small war fleet to help defend it) have also put their mark on history and have influenced the Mahanian and Corbettian maritime strategic thought.

3.1.1 Mahan
Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) published his magnum opus, The Influence of Sea Power upon History: 1660-1783, in 1890 and thereby became the ‘grandfather of naval strategy’. Central to Mahan’s thinking was the idea of ‘command of the sea’, meaning a dominant navy that was able to control and use the sea, not only by denying other navies access to the oceans, but also by controlling the flow of goods through trade (Tangredi, 2013, p. 35; Till, 2009, p. 146). Control of the flow of goods and access to foreign markets resulted in a stronger navy (Paret, 1990, p. 451). An important way to achieve this command of the sea was through a decisive victory in battle. The number of capital ships, battleships at that time, was key to his thinking as they, combined with training, morale, tactical disposition and an offensive spirit, determined the outcome of battle (Paret, 1990, p. 458). For a battle to be ‘decisive’, it had to have effects on the three different levels of war: on the tactical level the battle had to be won, on an operational
level it had to determine the events at sea, while on a strategic level the battle had to determine the events on land. Thus, decisive battles prevent the opponent from changing the geo-strategic situation to its own benefit (Till, 2009, p. 159; Marineschepen, 2016). The prime example where these elements came together, was the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 between the British and the French in which the French were decisively defeated.

Mahan acknowledged, however, that well-placed numerically inferior forces (‘fleet-in-being’ strategy, see Corbett) could still have a devastating impact on an enemy fleet. If a decisive battle was avoided by the other party, then a naval blockade could be instituted to ensure victory (Vego, 2009, p. 4). A naval blockade is a tactic used by a superior navy in response to the adoption of a fleet-in-being strategy by the other party, but also to keep a fleet from assembling by keeping the smaller sections locked in port. By preventing the enemy fleet from actively moving about as they otherwise would have done, and at the same time preventing commercial shipping from making port, the superior fleet tries to neutralise the inferior fleet (Till, 2009, p. 178). The blockading fleet would, behind the blockade, be in command of the sea, which was exercised by those ships not actively involved in the blockade. According to Mahan, in times of war coastal defence was the defensive element, whereas the naval strength was the offensive one; each should therefore be used accordingly (Paret, 1990, p. 458-459).

In determining naval strength some key factors can be identified. These factors are geography (access to open oceans), physical configuration (ports and access to resources), size of territory and a population large enough to defend the territory, character of the people and the government within that territory (Till, 2009, p. 52). In light of the geographical and character factors, a continental power with an equally continental outlook, could never become a naval power. Another important element were the sea lines of communication, or SLOC, (fuel, ammunition, troops and food) available to a country, based on the availability of proper naval bases around the globe (Paret, 1990, p. 460). Apart from the emphasis on trade, Mahan also acknowledged that access from land to sea and vice-versa were very important to a navy (Tangredi, 2013, p. 35). He therefore acknowledged the importance of the land based military in relation to the navy. In his view, command of the sea could indeed have significant impact upon the situation on land. Corbett famously commented that

“Since men live upon land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided – except in the rarest cases – either by what your army can do
Many have supported this view, which has led to the institutionalization of this idea, especially after the re-invention of amphibious warfare – after the failure of Gallipoli, amphibious warfare was regarded as impossible in the modern era, it only became instituted again in 1944 with the landings at Normandy (MacGregor, 1992, p. 606-608). Even if many countries have given their own twist to Mahan’s ideas, it remains clear that his influence of Mahan upon history and naval strategy has been huge. What these countries’ strategies all have in common is the offensive spirit that was a key feature of Mahan’s thinking (Till, 2009, p. 54). After World War Two Mahanian principles were almost one-on-one applied by both the US and the UK. Even as recent as 2007, with the adoption of the new US maritime strategy, ‘A Cooperative Strategy for the 21st Century Seapower’, the Americans turned once again to Mahan for their maritime strategy, by stating for instance that “maritime forces must contribute to winning wars decisively” and “secure the US from direct attack; secure strategic access and retain global freedom of action” (US Department of Defense, 2007, p. 5). It is therefore no small wonder that even today the US navy is still characterized by its Mahanian outlook (Krepinevic, 2010, p. 25).

That is not to say that Mahan’s ideas remained unchanged throughout time. During the Cold War, the Mahanian term ‘command of the sea’ was replaced by ‘sea control’, which came down to the navy’s goal of trying to prevail in battle and then use its command of the sea (and air) to its advantage. The term ‘sea control’ itself encompasses several degrees of control, ranging from ‘absolute control’ to the ‘enemy’s absolute control’. In-between those two extremes are (enemy’s) ‘working control’ and ‘control dispute’ (Till, 2009, p. 152). ‘Sea denial’ is a concept used by smaller navies, which boils down to denying the opponent’s navy access to, or control of, the sea and thus create a no-man’s land (Tangredi, 2013, p. 36). Against that background, US Admiral Turner’s (1923-) remark that ‘sea denial’ is essentially “guerrilla warfare at sea” seems accurate (Till, 2009, p. 153).

3.1.2 Corbett

Sir Julian Stafford Corbett (1854-1922) was a British lawyer and lecturer at the British Naval War College. He was mostly interested in the maritime principles behind maritime operations. In 1911 Corbett published his best-known book, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy. What makes

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11 An allied landing in 1915-16 at Gallipoli (Ottoman Empire) during WWI that failed miserably.
him stand apart from Mahan, is the fact that he emphasises the importance of putting naval operations in a broader perspective, thereby to some extent relativizing Mahan’s ideas (Van der Peet, 2016, interview). The maritime strategy, the use of the sea, has to be in synch with the national foreign policy (Till, 2009, p. 59). As such the maritime strategy should reflect the states’ interests in both times of war and peace. Corbett, like Mahan, held the idea that the navy could have significant impact on the war on land. However, he took this one step further by stating that the combination of land and sea power was how one could win a war and how Britain conquered most of the world; Mahan, as explained, almost exclusively focussed on the navy.

In talking about the strategy of sea power, Corbett preferred to refer to the term ‘maritime’, as it was way broader than the narrow term ‘naval’, as was used by Mahan (Till, 2009, p. 59). According to Corbett, the naval strategy was all about the movement, disposition and immediate purpose of a fleet (Till, 2009, p. 59). ‘Maritime’ meant the role of the navy in relation to the army on land. When in 1992 the US adopted the ‘from the sea’ strategy (the Navy in a supporting role from the sea, i.e. logistics, fire support and transportation, for the Marines Corps on land), this Corbettian idea became official doctrine (O’Keefe, 1992; Tangredi, 2013, p. 40; Lemmers, 2016, interview). The balance between land and sea forces was determined by national circumstances, as some nations were more sea-going than others. In the end all naval operations had a role in support of a country’s policy on land. Corbett also emphasised the importance of disrupting the enemy’s sea lines of communication for winning a war (Lemmers, 2016, interview).

In the eyes of Mahan ‘command of the sea’ was, ideally, won through a decisive battle. However, if the enemy refused to fight such a battle, it was the task of the navy to either set up a blockade or to bring the battle to the enemy (Till, 2009, p. 60). Once command of the sea had been established, one’s own merchant shipping fleet could safely travel while the enemy’s merchant fleet could not. Corbett, however, thought that pushing too hard in order to force a battle, could result in unwanted outcomes and distraction from the main war aims. Therefore Corbett argued more for the preservation of the SLOCs (Marineschepen, 2016). Corbett rightly noticed that it is extremely difficult to bring the various elements for decisively winning a battle together at the right time, especially since the inferior fleet would probably want to avoid such a battle (Woudstra, 2011, p. 26). As noted before, however, if one were to face an enemy who refused to battle, a naval blockade should be instituted.
Command of the sea, according to Corbett, was a relative, very fluid, term. This means that no sooner than command of the sea was won, upon setting sail it was gone again because one cannot occupy water in the same way one can occupy land (Till, 2009, p. 147). This makes command of the sea very fluid. In geographic terms it is also relative, meaning command could be local, general (global) or anywhere in-between.¹² Mahan himself said that no command of the sea is absolute; even the tiniest navy has at some point the opportunity to set sail and harass the stronger opponent (Till, 2009, p. 147). Corbett concluded that it might not even be necessary to have complete command of the sea, as many military manoeuvres could be performed without it (Till, 2009, p. 61). Yet, his criticism of these two key concepts, ‘command of the sea’ and ‘decisive battle’, did not mean that he rejected them altogether. In fact, he concluded that in most cases both were valid.

Moreover, if one were to face an enemy who has supremacy in another dimension¹³ (air, surface or sub-surface and in the current era: space or cyberspace), the effects of sea power would be limited and a balance of command could be the result. To combat the effects of a superior enemy, Corbett argued one could resort to the ‘fleet-in-being’ strategy (Woudstra, 2011, p. 27). The ‘fleet-in-being’ strategy, a strategy that goes all the way back to 1690, refers to a strategy where an inferior fleet adopts a defensive posture, in order to preserve itself vis-à-vis a superior (either in quality or quantity) enemy (Till, 2009, p. 173; Van der Peet, 2016, interview). This defensive fleet is comprised of fast ships that pose a continuous threat to the enemy’s interests through offensive actions, as the enemy never knows when or where this inferior fleet might strike next (Reynolds, 1994, p. 110; Lemmers, 2016, interview). A defensive stance in one place could even be combined with being offensive somewhere else. An example of the ‘fleet in being’ approach is the US Pacific Fleet during World War Two. When the Japanese in 1941 had destroyed the US battleship fleet in Hawaii, the US Pacific fleet became the weaker of the two. US Admiral King therefore had to resort to a fleet-in-being approach, using its fast carriers as the prime tools, in combination with a guerre de course using submarines, to deter a Japanese advance, and even actively seeking out and engaging the Japanese strongpoints and ships, and fight them where they were found (Reynolds, 1994, p. 111-2; Till, 2009, p. 177). This forced the

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¹² An example of this is WW1: despite that the North Sea remained disputed in terms of command because the Germans had command of the subsurface. The British, however, soon established command of the sea globally outside of the North Sea basin.

¹³ Also called ‘common’.
Japanese navy to preoccupy itself with other issues, such as the occupation of Port Moresby, thus extending its own SLOCs and increasing its vulnerability (Reynolds, 1994, p. 115).

3.1.3 Castex

Raoul Victor Patrice Castex (1878-1968), a French admiral, was not interested in naval strategy as such, but in strategy in general. He proclaimed that in his time the French navy had been reduced to a secondary naval power and thus it should not aspire (absolute) control of the sea (Lemmers, 2016, interview). In his works Théories Stratégiques, written between 1927 and 1935, he argued for a general strategy (Vego, 2009, p. 10). The novelty of this idea was that he argued that the various branches of the armed forces should work closely together. Castex agreed with Mahan that the goal of maritime operations is to obtain or dispute command of the sea (as far as absolute control is even possible) through the control of the essential sea lines of communications (SLOCs). According to him, control of the SLOCs was essential to winning or losing the war (Vego, 2009, p. 11). Based on his experiences during World War One, Castex considered the interaction of the navy and (what was to become) the air force to be essential. He examined the effect air power could have on war at sea by spotting and attacking convoys or ships lacking proper air defence.\textsuperscript{14}

The German U-boat campaign of the Great War (1914-1918) let Castex to believe that Guerre de course, a typical French strategy which aims to destroy the enemy’s commercial shipping, was a strategy that in itself could not win you a war (Castex, 1994 [1935], p. 359-360). A decisive battle or naval blockade would still be required to win a war, although he acknowledged that a decisive battle is very unlikely to occur, since most of the war will be made up of small skirmishes and raids (Van der Peet, 2016, interview; Vego, 2009, p. 10). As such, command of the sea is defined by Castex as

\begin{quote}
“a military struggle between the belligerent’s fleets, that is to say, between the ensemble of their combat resources, including both naval and air forces under a single chief.” (Castex, 1994 [1935], p. 359).
\end{quote}

‘Strategic manoeuvring’, which meant a fleet ought to seek a decisive battle only after using manoeuvring (mainly through movement, but also through unceasing harassment of the enemy) of the fleet to create a favourable shift in the naval balance, was key in Castex’ thinking (Vego, \textsuperscript{14} World War One had already seen the introduction of the aircraft carrier, enabling the use airplanes in naval operations.)
2009, p. 12; Till, 2009, p. 169). To this idea he once again added that the importance of a decisive battle should not be overestimated, though he also clearly stated that destruction of the enemy’s fleet always is the first objective (Till, 2009, p. 162; Widen, 2016, p. 97). Since manoeuvring requires space, it can only be done at sea or in the air. Castex agrees with Corbett when it comes to control of the sea, which according to him is relative and only temporarily achieved. Due to the difficulty of anti-submarine warfare (ASW), Castex would rather use the term ‘mastery of the surface’ and even that is relative (Castex, 1994 [1935], p. 53). Air power in this respect is even more relative, as an enemy can hardly be prevented from taking off and bombing a city, or attacking a convoy, before disappearing again (Vego, 2009, p. 12). Convoys would therefore need some serious air defences. Finally, he argued that the army\(^\text{15}\) and navy should would work very closely together, just like the artillery works with the infantry, supporting one another in accomplishing their objectives. As such, he has relativized the idea of sea power even more so than Corbett has done (Van der Peet, 2016, interview).

3.1. 4 Gorshkov

Sergei Georgiyevich Gorshkov (1910-1988), a Soviet admiral, became Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet fleet in 1956 (Neerly, 1974, p. 143). He is famous for his book *The Sea Power of the State*, in which he explained the role and character of the state in developing sea power. Sea power, according to Gorshkov, is the

> “ability of the state to study (explore) the oceans and harness its wealth; the merchant and fishing fleet in their ability to meet the need of the state and a navy matching the interests of the state” (Gorshkov, 1979 in Sahuja, 2011, p. 11).  

Sea power was key in determining political goals, means and tasks of the navy (Sahuja, 2011, p. 11). He was convinced the Soviet Union required a large surface fleet with large missile-equipped destroyers and cruisers, combined with airplanes and submarines, with battle-winning firepower to defend the SLOCs of the state (Till, 2009, p. 170; Vego in Ericson, Goldstein & Lord, 2012, p. 218).\(^\text{16}\) The state thus played a central role in the development of the Soviet navy and maritime shipping because of its need to strengthen the economy, export communism and

\(^{15}\) In many countries the air force was until at least the 1930s part of the army, which is also why Castex is speaking only about the cooperation between army and navy.  

\(^{16}\) For an explanation on the types of naval ships see: http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/UsefulNotes/TypesOfNavalShips?from=Main.TypesOfNavalShips
secure the SLOCs with friendly countries and because the Soviets viewed military and economic interests as unified\(^\text{17}\) (Van der Peet, 2016, interview; Regan, 1980, p. 500). The latter is illustrated by the fact that the Soviet Merchant Marine Ministry, despite being a civil institution charged with shipping and creating ports, had its employees, who were all civilians – called merchant marines – wear uniforms with ranks etc. (Global Security, 2011).

The influence of sea power upon a conflict is, however, limited to the targets the fleet can strike on land as well as by the strategic nuclear potential of the enemy at sea (Gorshkov, 1979, p. 297). Thus, fleet against fleet action yields a poorer result than fleet against land actions, because it creates a direct result rather than a prerequisite for a good result on land (Till, 2009, p. 184). The main task allocated to fleets therefore has become to strike targets on land, rather than at sea (Gorshkov, 1979, p. 283). This idea of the navy as the army’s little helper, is typical for a continental power. Gorshkov did not, however, advocate for carriers the way the US did, although he was aware of the need for air cover at sea. He emphasized the changes in technology and science, especially the nuclear missiles, which changed the outlook of the navy. Submarines, according to Gorshkov, had become the perfect carriers of modern weapons and had an impact on every ocean and landmass in the world (Gorshkov, 1979, p. 279); as such, they could change the course, even the outcome, of a war on all three levels of planning (strategic, operational and tactical).

The introduction of new ballistic missiles and the introduction of the Delta IV submarine as its launching platform in the mid-1970s made it possible for the Soviet submarines to remain closer to home, in the Norwegian Sea and Artic Sea for example. Here they were protected by the environment and covered by planes and yet posed a threat. This was the first zone of about a 100 miles, in which they had command of the sea using their surface fleet, air power and even land based artillery. In the second zone, which included the Sea of Japan, the Barents, the Baltic and the Black Seas, they could hope to contest command of the sea. Beyond that zone they would have to resort to sea denial, since the Soviets no longer could support their own submarines there (Till, 2009 p. 158, in Lim, 2013, p. 66). This idea as devised by Gorshkov became known as the ‘concentric circle strategy’. Throughout the Cold War, the Soviets were convinced that absolute command of the sea, or sea dominance, was a valid concept. As the Cold War progressed into the 1970s, the Soviet strategy grew even more Mahanian when

\(^{17}\) Of course this also had to do with the fact that in communism everything is state directed.
Gorshkov stated dominance at sea was “their main vehicle to allow their forces to complete their task” (Till, 2009, p. 152).

3.1.5 Sea Power in the West

In sum, according to Western (and Soviet) maritime strategists, command or control of the sea, once obtained, can be exploited by the party in control. Exploiting control can be done in various ways, for instance by determining outcomes of conflicts on land as the US did in World War Two in the Pacific, by opening up new fronts through amphibious operations as was done in the D-Day invasion of Normandy in 1944, or by directly supporting land forces for instance by providing (missile) fire support for the forces on shore. Other examples of the utilization of command of the sea are troop transportation, thereby threatening the other party, or economic warfare: the seizure of colonies, ports and resources will damage the enemy’s prosperity and enhance one’s own (Till, 2009, p. 186-189).

The views of Mahan, Corbett and others have been used in the West throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. Although the traditional battleship, key in Mahanian and Corbettian thinking, is no longer in service, it has since been replaced by the aircraft carrier and the SSBN (ballistic missile) submarine as the fleet’s new capital ship (Van der Peet, 2016, interview). The concept of the decisive battle is also no longer as relevant as it used to be because one would have to win a decisive battle not only on the water, but also underwater and in the air (Marineschepen, 2016). Yet, a victory at sea can still cause the enemy to surrender, but it does not necessarily involve the destruction of the enemy’s fleet (Marineschepen, 2016). Moreover, from the 1990s on, the Corbettian thinking has seen a huge revival and even nowadays the key principles of Mahan’s and Corbett’s theories, and to a lesser extent Gorshkov and Castex, remain true and therefore they are still studied today (Van der Peet, 2016, interview).

3.2 The Chinese concept of Sea Power

The previous sections addressed the views of some main Western maritime thinkers that have determined Western maritime thinking up until today. With the Chinese naval build-up, a maritime strategy and subsequently the concept of sea power had to be given a place within Chinese grand strategic thinking. The naval build-up is a direct consequence of the fact that 97 percent of all Chinese foreign trade goes by sea (Lim, 2013, p. 53). Borrowing from traditions
that have been developed in the West, the USSR and in China itself, China is now creating its own military doctrines and strategy (Aiguo, 2013, p. 532). Central in this section will therefore be the question: how can the current Chinese concept of sea power be related to the more ‘classical’ Western concept of sea power?

3.2.1 Chinese strategic thinking

A few years after the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) began studying the USSR’s military operational theories. Later, with the translation into Mandarin of major articles and books published in the US, the UK, Germany, France and Japan, foreign ideas and information became accessible to the Chinese. But the Chinese were not only depending on foreigners for their military thinking. They also studied their own military traditions and experiences (Aiguo, 2013, 528-32).

In order to understand the current Chinese maritime strategy, one has to go back to the early days of Chinese Communism. In the early days the Chinese navy, officially founded on April 14, 1950, was only used as a form of active defence. This meant that the Chinese would “resist imperialism, hegemonism and power politics through active measures and positive actions” (Lim, 2013, p. 55) in a 200 nautical mile (NM) zone off the coast of mainland China (Map 3). The focus was on coastal defence by means of a small blue-water navy (Lim, 2013, p. 55). As such, the navy was merely a sub-set of the army and therefore lacked any form of naval doctrine, unlike the Western and Soviet navies. The focus of the Maoist ‘People’s war’ was a war to be waged on land. The Korean War (1950-53) and the armed conflict with India (1962), however, required the Chinese to adapt to the new realities. Not only would the PLA have to prepare for total war in case of a war with a superpower, it also had to prepare for limited local wars (Lim, 2013, p. 55). Due to the growing tensions with the Soviet Union in the 1960s (see Chapter 2) though, the focus on a superpower war became more acute. The 1970s saw small-scale skirmishes with the Vietnamese at sea (BBC,
These skirmishes laid bare the limitations of the Chinese navy, even though China managed to capture the Western part of the Paracel Islands (Yoshihara, 2016; Lee, 2003, p. 74). These developments eventually resulted in a change in the views of the Chinese armed forces in general, and of the PLA Navy (PLAN) in particular. The goal was no longer to let the enemy get lured into attacking the mainland and then beat them, but the PLA would rather sally forth and meet the enemy at the gate (Lim, 2013, p. 56; Saunders et al., 2011, p. 115). Changes were possible after Deng Xiaoping came to power; he called for “the creation of a powerful navy with the men and capacity to wage a modern war” (Lim, 2013, p. 63), in the process re-examining the Maoist doctrines.

3.2.2 Liu Huaqing
During the first thirty years of the PRC, the Chinese relied mainly on the Soviet ‘Young School’ of maritime strategy, which argued for a small blue-water navy supported by submarines, which main task was to defend the coast (Cole, 2010, p. 171; Cole, 2014, p. 2). The main strategy for winning a war was based on a ‘naval guerrilla warfare at sea’, only striking the enemy when conditions were in favour of China. This strategy thus contained elements of the fleet-in-being strategy, as devised in Europe in the seventeenth century. An example of the fleet-in-being strategy as adopted by China in the first thirty years is the clash between China and (South) Vietnam in 1974 during which the Chinese seized the Paracel Islands from South Vietnam using a mixture of regular, paramilitary and civilian vessels (Yoshihara, 2016, p. 42; Lim, 2014, p. 131).

When Admiral Liu Huaqing (1916-2011) became head of the PLAN (1982-1988), he stimulated the formulation of a separate view for the navy, detached from the army (Lim, 2013, p. 64). Because of this rather radical break with the past, he is often portrayed as the Chinese Mahan or China’s Gorshkov (or Tirpitz), although he wanted none of that. The separation of the navy from the army was made possible by the new economic policy of Deng Xiaoping, which resulted in huge economic growth (Chapter 2). According to Liu Huaqing the PLAN had four main tasks to fulfil in order to ensure China’s security, which resemble Mahan’s description of the Caribbean around 1900 as will be explained next chapter:

1) preserving the security of China’s borders at sea;
2) protecting China’s maritime (economic) trade and preserving China’s sovereign rights at sea;
3) supporting onshore operations such as amphibious landings etc.;
and finally deterring enemies from acting against China (Lim, 2013, p. 64).

The focus of the PLAN was no longer solely on active defence, but near-seas operations were included as well. To the active defence strategy, Liu added an offensive twist by stating that if an enemy “carried out an attack against our [China’s] shores, we will carry out counter-attacks against the enemy’s rear” (Liu, 2007, p. 434, in Lim, 2013, p. 64). However revolutionary this idea might have been, Liu remained a true Maoist in the sense that he did put emphasis on those waters ‘close’ to home. Coastal defence, war of movement (both offensive and defensive operations in the proximity of the Chinese coast) and a guerrilla war at sea thus remained important to the PLAN, especially in fighting a superior enemy (Lim, 2013, p. 65).

This minor shift at the operational level was overshadowed by a larger change at the strategic level. In the past the near-seas had been defined as a 200 NM zone off the coast. In the new definition, the South China Sea, the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea were also included by China in the definition of near-seas, an area also known as the Nine-Dash Line. The ‘middle sea’ includes the Philippine Sea and the ‘far sea’ includes everything outside the second chain of islands (see Map 4; Cole, 2014, p. 1). Since the near-seas line was not a fixed line, it remained unclear which parts of the seas were included; the answer of what was included often depended on the circumstances. In his 1980s modernization plan for the navy, Liu stated that China had to have sea control of the First Island Chain by 2000, sea control of the Second Island Chain by 2020 and have battle groups operations on a global, worldwide scale by 2050 (Cole, 2014, p. 3; Saunders et al., 2011, p. 100). Although the Chinese navy did not manage to reach its 2000 goal, it did manage in gaining support from the Chinese government in the form of an increased naval budget and people’s own personal funds (Chapter 2). It also meant that the PLAN could operate more assertively in the First Island Chain.
Despite a focus on these island chains, Liu’s view was still a continental one, as he called it a ‘maritime buffer’. This focus on land areas has often been ascribed to the influence Admiral Gorshkov had on the Chinese maritime development (Lim, 2013, p. 66). The notion of the Island Chains is indeed almost an one-on-one copy of Gorshkov’s concentric circles-strategy (Map 4; Lim, 2013, p. 66). Reason for this is that many strategists had some form of education in the Soviet Union. The way the PLA’s strategists’ divided the battlefield in two theatres (like Gorshkov’s concentric circles) is very clear in this strategy (Map 4; Saunders et al., 2011, p. 123). In the near-theatre there is a clear front, unlike in the second where there is more room for manoeuvre. This central idea of an ‘offshore defence strategy’ – meet them at the gate – remained an integral part of the Chinese naval doctrine for most of Liu’s time (Lim, 2013, p. 67).

3.2.3 After Liu

Around the time Liu retired, China increasingly turned towards Mahan for its maritime strategy because of the continued growth, and thus importance, of the Chinese maritime trade and its subsequent need for a stronger navy (Rajasimman, 2009). Mahanian strategy becomes visible through the creation of Chinese forward bases in the near-seas, but also in for instance Cambodia, Pakistan, Ethiopia (Japanese Times, 2016b), Djibouti (MIVD, 2015, p. 32) and more recently China started building a large port city in Sri Lanka, while maintaining a strong naval fleet as well as a strong commercial fleet (Woudstra, 2011, p. 26). Mahan once stated that “the necessity of a navy [...] springs from the existence of a peaceful shipping, and disappears with it” (Mahan, 1960 [1890], p. 34), which also explains the focus of China’s need to protect its SLOCs. According to Liu, central to obtaining and maintaining control of the Island Chains and asserting China’s rights at sea, were the carrier and the SSN submarine.18 This focus on ‘capital ships’ was continued after Liu retired and can be seen as typically Mahanian. Admiral Huang Jiang explained that there are four ways in which the Chinese navy could best defeat an enemy, namely through:

1) The destruction of the opponent’s fleet;
2) The destruction of the opponent’s coastal defences, naval bases, (air)ports near the coast;
3) By occupying the enemy’s forward bases and other geographical positions important to the opponent;

18 The carrier program as we have seen in Chapter 2, started in the late 1980s.
4) Through a naval blockade (Lim, 2013, p. 70).

These four ways are arguably also reflecting Mahan in some key aspects; therefore it can be stated that the Chinese maritime strategy is characterized by a Mahanian perspective.

More recently, the Chinese navy started to shift its views from Mahan to Corbett, mainly because Mahan’s concept of command of the sea is not really feasible for the Chinese navy at this point in time (Woudstra, 2011, p. 26). Rather than focussing on obtaining command, China focuses on denying command to ‘other powers’, i.e. the US, (Woudstra, 2011, p. 26), made more easy because the US has dispersed its naval forces all around the globe (United States Naval War College, 2012). By doing so, it manages to secure Chinese interests in the seas close to China. This means that for the time being China is adopting a fleet-in-being strategy in order to avoid a symmetrical confrontation with a superior navy, i.e. the US Navy. The focus on sea denial can also be recognized when looking at the Chinese equipment, which focuses on torpedoes, submarines and anti-ship (ballistic) missiles (ASBM) (Woudstra, 2011, p. 27; Tangredi, 2013, p. 33). Submarines, by their very nature, are only useful for sea denial and not for sea control, since using them always has irrevocable consequences and using them on the surface makes them vulnerable (Sheng, 2006, p. 528). Moreover, sea denial, or anti-access/area denial (A2/AD), denying the enemy access to an area using for instance mines, (ballistic) missiles and submarines to prevent the other from obtaining command of the sea creating a no man’s land, in general no longer focusses exclusively on the sea but also includes the airspace, space and cyber/information theatres (Tangredi, 2013, p. 92, 101). The focus on multiple commons rather than merely the common sea is more of a Corbettian nature than Mahanian (Crisp, 2010, p. 205). The fleet-in-being strategy also entails that one has to keep the initiative, which is mirrored in contemporary Chinese operational goals, known as ‘active offense’. Therefore the ‘Military Campaign Studies’ state that

“[…] carrying out offensive operations actively is made necessary […] by the fact that the destruction of enemy forces and the efficient protection of our own forces are an objective requirement to obtain the initiative in the naval theatre“ (Zhang, Yu & Zhou, 2006, p. 507 in Lim, 2013, p. 69).

By actively seeking the offensive and fighting the enemy to the total destruction of its forces, its coastal defences and occupying its forwards bases, the Chinese are once again turning to Mahan
and his offensive outlook (Lim, 2013, p. 71). The informationalization – the introduction of high-tech weapons and equipment, battlefields and command and control in (local) wars (Lindley-French, 2012, p. 293) – is driving this change. This is because having information superiority creates the potential for pre-emptive attacks, as waiting for the enemy to land its first blow will have devastating consequences to one’s own fleet (Lim, 2013, p. 59). And yet, the informationalization has also made it far more complex to take the initiative at sea, let alone control at sea, as one needs to have (some) control regarding at least four dimensions – sea, air, cyber/information and space – given its interconnectedness (Lim, 2013, p. 69).

### 3.2.4 Sun Tzu

For its maritime strategy, China does not only turn to Western thinkers like Mahan. It also turns to its own roots, to Sun Tzu (also spelled as Sunzi) (544-496 BC). Sun Tzu’s most widely read book, the *Art of War* (±500 BC), has been influential all over the world, even well into the modern era. His importance to the Chinese is illustrated by the fact that allegedly every soldier in the Chinese army and navy knows Sun Tzu by heart (Ota, 2014, p. 77). For the PLAN’s maritime strategy the focus on a local limited war stems from Sun Tzu’s views as he has once stated that one ought to seek victory in the shortest time span possible, with as little effort as necessary and with as few casualties for the enemy as possible, since he is still your neighbour (Paret, 1990, p. 800). Sun Tzu had said that “*all warfare is based on deception*” (Sun Tzu, 1910). Currently, China is trying to mask its military rise by proclaiming the ‘peaceful rise of China’, which is in stark contrast with what they are doing in practice (Marineschepen 2016).

Sun Tzu’s most well-known quote, “*To win a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting, that is the acme of skill***” (Sun Tzu, 1910, p. 9) is based on so-called disintegration warfare, which includes politics, psychology, culture, economy, conspiracies, military threats, propaganda via the media, information and intelligence, and is aimed at deceiving and defeating an enemy without fighting (Ota, 2014, p. 78). This might, for example, be done by buying ports all over the world, not only in Ethiopia, as mentioned, and the so-called String of Pearls in the Indian Ocean (Map 5), but also in Piraeus (Athens), Gwadar

![Map 5: China's String of Pearls in the Indian Ocean.](https://example.com/string-of-pearls-map.jpg)
(Pakistan), Cambodia and even in Rotterdam, where Chinese companies own 25 percent of the port (Marineschepen, 2016). An important aspect of Sun Tzu’s manoeuvrist approach, avoid the enemy until you are ready, is to obtain the enemy’s plans of attack. China is doing this by focussing on the Western information and space theatres, as these are the West’s weaknesses, rather than focussing on the West’s strengths. According to Sun Tzu, one should avoid the enemy’s strengths and strike at its weaknesses (Ota, 2014, p. 79; Kirchberger, 2015, p. 317) as the enemy is only as strong as its weakest link (Marineschepen, 2016). That is also why China focusses on sea denial: to get to an enemy where it hurts.

One final aspect of Sun Tzu that is applied by the PLA(N) is the phase preceding a war. According to Sun Tzu one ought to pay heed to preventing war, since war is costly and has the potential to cause many casualties (Till, 2009, p. 265). However, if war is inevitable, one should take the initiative (even without the approval of the monarch or leader) and pre-emptively strike the enemy (Sun Tzu, 1910, p. 18-22). This is of course dangerous, in particular in combination with the view that “one can plan for every eventuality in war”. The PLAN has taken over this line of reasoning (Cole, 2014, p. 6).

3.3 Conclusion: Sea Power with a Chinese Twist

The first part of this chapter looked at the classical Western thinking and its main advocates, Mahan and Corbett, with later nuances being added by Castex and Gorshkov. The main aspects that make up Mahan’s concept of sea power are that of command of the sea and decisive battle. What makes a nation a maritime nation or a continental nation is determined by a series of factors, including trade and government outlook. As history has shown, according to Mahan, a forced naval build-up by a continental power is doomed to fail. France has tried this and failed. Germany has tried this in World War One and has also failed. The Soviet Union has tried this and has failed as well. This was partly because these countries were continentally focussed; they had to retain a large standing army in order to deal with threats coming from land, thus limiting the resources spent at maritime development.

Where Mahan has focussed almost exclusively on the navy, according to Corbett this is too narrow and other factors should be taken into account. The army, for instance, should be taken into the picture as well, since all wars are eventually determined by the events on land. Therefore Corbett opted for the broader term of maritime strategy rather than naval. Moreover, he downplayed the importance of the decisive battle by saying that one ought not to overly
pursue this. Finally, command of the sea was, according to Corbett, something relative; the moment it was won, it was lost again.

Castex, drawing from his experiences during World War One, included air power as an element of control of the seas. The navy and the soon-to-be air force should be working closely together, especially since command of the air is even more fluid than command of the sea. Castex moreover argued for strategic manoeuvring for creating the opportunities to destroy the enemy’s fleet. In this he echoed Mahan. He did add, however, that one cannot command the sea, but merely obtain mastery of the surface.

Soviet Admiral Gorshkov in his turn argued for sea power directed by the state. Furthermore, he argued that fleet on fleet action was not nearly as effective as fleet on land action. Therefore the fleet should always support the forces on land. As the technology advanced and new missiles and launching platforms became available, the Soviet fleet withdrew itself more to the inner circle of the concentric circles strategy. From there the fleet could still influence battles, or the outcomes of wars through its ballistic missiles.

Turning to China, from the founding of the PRC until the 1980s the navy was merely there to support the army. The only task allocated to the navy was to defend the coast up into a 200 NM zone, through what Mao called ‘active defence’. The strategy behind warfare at sea was the same as on land, namely a guerrilla warfare. When Admiral Liu came to office, he changed the outlook of the navy. Trained in the USSR, he claimed that China needed a chain of islands to defend itself and assert its presence. Moreover, drawing perhaps from Sun Tzu, he added an offensive twist to the ‘active defence’, by claiming that if an enemy attacked China would hit back where it hurt. As Liu retired and the Chinese economic growth took off, Mahanian thinking continued to gain in importance to the PLAN’s strategy. The creation of refuelling stations around the globe, for instance in what has been labelled the ‘string of pearls’, but also its focus on the modern ‘capital ships’, the aircraft carrier and SSN submarine attribute to this. The Chinese adoption of Mahanian thinking should be considered to be a consequence of the need for a larger fleet, which stems from the perceived need to protect China’s large commercial fleet. However, the present Chinese fleet is not strong enough to contest sea control, despite the fleet, in a Mahanian way, being located in one area rather than the Corbettian way, the way the Americans do it, of dispersing its naval forces all around the globe (Naval War College, 2012). The Chinese therefore follow the fleet-in-being strategy combined with sea denial. The fleet-in-
being states that one should keep the initiative; hence the policy that goes with this in China is called ‘active offense’.

Sun Tzu has also had his influence on Chinese maritime thinking. Keeping the initiative in the active offense and trying to deceive the enemy for instance are issues he advocated. Lastly, the Chinese are also influenced by land warfare during the early days of Mao (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 84), who was a huge admirer of Sun Tzu as well. However, for their maritime strategy China does tend to focus on Western thinkers, albeit giving it a Chinese twist. The next chapter will take the Chinese concept of sea power and examine to what degree the concept is being applied to the disputed territories in the East and South China Sea. By examining the Chinese concept, discrepancies between the traditional Western concept of sea power, and the Chinese version of sea power become clear and Chinese actions in both seas can be understood.
Chapter 4: Disputed Territory at Sea

Whereas Chapter 2 addressed the pretext for Chinese expansion, Chapter 3 explained current Chinese maritime traditions, and its relation to Western interpretations. This chapter will look at two cases, the Senkaku/Diaoyu/Tiaoyutai Islands (from here on referred to as ‘Senkaku’ Islands) case and the Spratly Islands case, respectively, in order to examine how the maritime strategy as examined in Chapter 3 is put into practice with regard to these disputed territories. The question central to this chapter is, “What is the essence of the Chinese maritime strategy and foreign policy in the case of the disputed territories of the Senkaku Islands and the Spratly Islands respectively?” The first part of this chapter will focus on the conflict between Japan, Taiwan and China over the Senkaku Islands, before moving on to the second part which will focus on the Spratly Islands.

4.1 The Senkaku Islands Dispute

The Senkaku Islands are made up of five little uninhabited islets and three rock formations and cover an area of only seven square kilometres (Map 6; Manicom, 2014, p. 1). They are located approximately 120 nautical miles (NM) from Taiwan and Ishigaki (Japan) and roughly 200NM from Okinawa (Japan) and from mainland China. The islands are claimed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan) as well as Japan. Consequently, they have each given a different name to the islets. The PRC refers to them as the Diaoyu Islands, the ROC refers to them as Tiaoyutai while Japan refers to them as the Senkaku Islands.

4.1.1 An Overview of the Dispute

The Japanese officially took control of the Senkaku Islands during the First Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895, stating they were uninhabited and there were no traces of human presence, and were commonly referred to as ‘terra nullius’. The island were put under the administration of Okinawa, a situation that remained unchanged until 1945. Between 1945 and 1971 the US administered the islands as part of the occupation of Japan after World War Two and used the islands for naval target practicing (Vutz, 2013, p. 1; Patalano, 2016, interview). During that time, the Senkaku Islands were part of the US administration of the Ryukyu Island chain, which lie
close by (Manicom, 2014, p. 44). Between 1945 and 1971, neither China nor Taiwan laid any claims on the islands and referred to them by their Japanese name ‘Senkaku’ rather than their current names ‘Diaoyu’ and ‘Tiaoyutai’. Tensions between Japan, China and Taiwan rose in 1969 when, the United Nations (UN) Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East concluded that, based on a study conducted by the Committee for the Coordination of Joint Prospecting for Mineral Resources in Asia Offshore Areas, that the seabed near the Senkaku Islands were rich in hydrocarbon deposits (oil and gas) (Manicom, 2014, p. 43). When the US handed over the control of the administration to the Japanese, both Taiwan and China laid claims on the islands as well.

The claim on the islands made by Japan is based on the fact that when it took over the islands in 1895, no traces of human presence were found on the island (terra nullius). China’s and Taiwan’s claim on the Senkaku Islands is based on a document originating in 1556 when the Qing dynasty allegedly annexed the islands (Vutz, 2013, p. 1). Because their fishing boats had already been present there before 1895, the Chinese and Taiwanese claim they own the waters, and the islands within these waters, which are also encompassed within the nine-dash line (explained further on). In order to re-enforce their claim, PRC and ROC coast guards escort their fish trawlers through the disputed seas. To get an idea of the number of vessels involved: in 1978, for instance, a Chinese flotilla of 80 to 100 fishing boats was send to the islands to bolster Chinese claims (Nikkei Asian Review, 2016). Apart from the presupposed economic advantage, the islands allegedly have a military and strategic advantage. Since the islands are located near the most important sea lines of communications (SLOCs) that run through the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean, the country in control of the islands in theory controls access to the open ocean as well. Allegedly for China controlling the area near the Senkaku Islands would furthermore complete the ‘encirclement’ of Taiwan (Vutz, 2013, p. 2).

From 1978 up until 1990 the number of incidents was limited, since Japan, the ROC and the PRC agreed to the status quo, meaning they would not let their actions be determined by nationalist movements (Manicom, 2014, p. 46). In 1990 an incident regarding the recognition of a lighthouse built by Japanese nationalists, sparked the first of many crises in the 1990s. The political elite of the countries involved did not want the conflict to escalate, however, and chose to adhere to the diplomatic solution of deescalating the conflict (Smith, 2012, p. 377). What

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19 There were stuffed birds, albatross feathers and guano found on the island that fetched a decent price.
these incidents until the 2000s all had in common is that they were sparked by popular nationalist movements, but then deescalated by the political elite that preferred to avoid conflict.

As of 2000, the number of incidents regarding the East China Sea has increased, not least because of the ratification of UNCLOS (see next section) in the late 1990s and increased nationalism (International Crisis Group, 2016). Most of the issues involve the fishing industry and who has the right to fish in the seas near the islands, but some include landing attempts from the sea by popular nationalist movements from all three sides as well (Smith, 2012, p. 381).

4.1.1 UNCLOS

The conflict became further entrenched since each country adheres to a different interpretation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS; see Figure 1) of 1982 (in effect since 1994 and ratified in 1996 by China and Japan) in bolstering its own claims. The UNCLOS provides rules to help define the extent of maritime territories, in relation to the coast and/or islands and other geographical features (Vutz, 2013, p. 2; Gerritsen-Schutmaat, 2016, interview; Schaart, 2015, p. 12-13). This means that seen from land the first 12 NM are the territorial waters, the next 12 NM from where the territorial waters end is the contiguous zone and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) reaches 200 NM from land. The continental shelf article in UNCLOS states that a state can extend its EEZ even up to 350 NM, if it is on the same continental shelf and does not exceed a depth of 2,500 metres (UN, 1982, p. 53-54). With regard to islands, the UNCLOS states that only islands that can support life can generate an EEZ. The Chinese use the UNCLOS by claiming that the islands are located on the same continental shelf as China and it is therefore a natural prolongation of China’s land territory (Manicom, 2014, p. 44; Vutz, 2013, p. 3; United Nations, N/A), in addition to the claim based on historic use during the Qing era. The ROC claims the islands on the basis of historical use going all the way back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) (Manicom, 2014, p. 44). Japan claims, using the UNCLOS EEZ stipulation and the terra nullius in justifying its claim, half of the maritime territory between the undisputed territory of Japan and that of China, known as the median line (Smith, 2012, p. 381). Should China’s claim be pushed, then this would also mean that, in accordance with Chinese policy, all military craft would have to ask for Chinese
permission to enter its EEZ, thereby impeding the UNCLOS’ freedom of navigation (FON) (Goldstein, 2013, p. 137). The FON means free access for all shipping (both military and civilian) to the EEZ, contiguous zone and territorial waters, though regarding the latter military ships have to adhere to certain rules (Schaart, 2015, p. 12). These rules state that military ships are not allowed to launch planes from their decks, are not allowed to conduct military exercises and submarines have to sail on the surface (Schaart, 2015, p. 12). Planes also would have to ask for permission (file their flight plan) before entering Chinese-claimed airspace when exceeding the boundaries that mark the territorial waters. This impedes the freedom of overflight (FOO).

4.1.2 Increased Salience

Following the ratification of UNLCOS in 1996 by both Japan and the PRC, from there on the focus of the conflict has shifted from merely owning the disputed islands to the maritime interests and rights concerning maritime space and sovereignty in the East China Sea (Manicom, 2014, p. 55). Yet, this shift did not diminish the interests in the islands, especially since, as mentioned previously, nationalist movements became actively involved, often followed by political tensions between China and Japan, since the political elites were no longer willing to compromise. The unwillingness to compromise is the result of the authority deficiency caused by the failure of Chinese communism (as described in Chapter 2) and the turn towards nationalism as the legitimizing factor for the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In Japan the unwillingness to compromise is reflected in the Japanese policy to use the navy rather than the coast guard to prevent intrusions into Japanese waters and, as explained further on, it also has to do with the

Figure 2: the number of intrusions in Japanese territorial waters (red) and the Japanese contagious zone (blue)
strength of the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) and a lack of trust among the Japanese in their government’s ability to handle the Chinese assertiveness (Smith, 2012, p. 374).

A change in Chinese maritime thinking was brought about by the 1994 UNCLOS and by China’s maritime rise, because actually owning the islands did not immediately translate into a larger EEZ since other UNCLOS stipulations would come first. Owning the islands can therefore be labelled as a political prestige project, making a statement, because they have no value in terms of economic value – nothing grows or lives there anymore. Nor in terms of strategy do the islands have much value, since the nearby Ryukyu are more important because they are located in the Strait of Japan (Patalano, 2016, interview). So, despite Chinese fears that Japan would use the Senkakus for military purposes, the Senkakus do not hold any strategic value nor any value in maritime law because other UNCLOS articles come first in determining the EEZ (Patalano, 2016, Interview). The Chinese unwillingness to compromise is reflected by the fact that the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has been spotted among the fishing vessels – which receives extra money if it participates in these intrusions – involved in entering Japanese waters (Nikkei Asian Review, 2016). Between 2008 and 2011 seven other PLAN destroyer flotilla intrusions into the Japanese EEZ have been registered, but also for instance in 2004, 2005 and 2007 when Chinese flotillas sailed close to the Okinawan waters (Sakhuja, 2011, p. 184; Lim, 2014, p. 121).

From 1990 on, the Chinese have also been prospecting the seabed for gas and oil deposits within

Map 7: Examples of intrusions into the Japanese Air Defense Identification Zones in 2015
the Japanese EEZ. However, Japanese concerns that China could be tapping resources from its gas fields (see Map 7 for the gas field’s location) only came to the fore recently, because with the growing importance of the nationalist movements incentives for cooperation have been diminished. Both countries have taken a harder stance towards each other. This is perfectly illustrated by an event in 2010, when a Chinese fishing boat collided with a Japanese Coast Guard (JCG) boat. As a result, the Chinese skipper was held by the Japanese for fourteen days (Manicom, 2014, p. 56). China responded with massive popular demonstrations in cities like Wuhan and the detainment of Japanese citizens who had allegedly filmed a Chinese military site (Manicom, 2014, p. 56). Moreover, during this time the Chinese intruded into the Japanese contiguous zone 124 times (see Figure 2). The contiguous zone is the area in between the territorial waters and the open sea where a country has some rights concerning tariffs etc. (see Figure 1; Japanese Ministry Of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), 2016; Gerritsen-Schutmaat, 2016, interview).

In 2012 the Japanese government purchased three islands (Uotsuri, Kitakojima and Minamikojima), which had been private property of several families since 1932, from the Kurihara family to prevent the right-wing nationalist governor of Tokyo Shintaro Ishihara from buying the islands (CCTV, 2012; Economist, 2013). Selling the islands to the Japanese state happened despite Chinese and Taiwanese objections (MOFA, 2016). Because the Chinese government has attached an identity-building factor to owning the islands (Patalano, 2016, interview), the results were massive demonstrations and anti-Japanese riots in China. These demonstrations show the connection between state and popular nationalism as stated in Chapter 2, but also intrusions of Chinese patrol ships into the Japanese contiguous and territorial waters on a massive scale (see Figure 2). The actions showed to the Chinese public that the government did care about the issue of sovereignty. The crisis deepened four months later when a Chinese ship locked its fire-control radar on a Japanese destroyer in early January 2013 (Patalano, 2013, p. 48; BBC, 2013). For the duration of the crisis, ships entered the waters around the islands every day (Curris, 2013, p. 82). In June 2016 a Chinese frigate entered the Japanese so-called contiguous zone; this did not happen before and therefore it marked a new chapter in their relationship (Diplomat, 2016a; BBC, 2016b; USNI News, 2016a).

However, the intrusions were not limited to the maritime sphere. The number of Chinese intrusions of Japanese airspace has increased dramatically since 2011 as well, from 156 to 571 in 2015 (Japanese Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 5). As of 2013 China has set up an Air Defence
Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea that includes the Senkakus and overlaps with the Japanese and Korean ADIZs, which forces all aircraft entering to identify themselves and follow certain rules, impeding the Freedom of Overflight (Map 6; BBC, 2016d). The freedom of overflight means that airplanes outside a state’s territory do not have to file their flight plan if they do not intend to fly over land (Schaart, 2015, p. 12). The declaration of an ADIZ came as a surprise to many (De Jong, 2016, interview), but in the end was not enforced by the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) when two unarmed US B-52 bombers challenged the Chinese declaration20 (USNI News, 2013; Patalano, 2016, interview). In the same year, Japan and Taiwan came to an agreement regarding fishing within the Japanese EEZ in designated areas around the Senkaku Islands. These designated areas, however, did exclude the 12 mile territorial waters (Japanese Times, 2015a). In 2014 Japan built a lighthouse and wharf on the Islands, which infuriated both the PRC and ROC (Japanese Times, 2015a). In response to the many intrusions by Chinese ships into Japanese territorial and contiguous waters, Japan said it will develop new land-to-sea missiles to “increase its defence of remote southern islands” (Guardian, 2016d).

4.1.3 Chinese Sea Power and the Senkaku Islands

In order to understand how the Chinese idea of sea power is being applied in this conflict, one has to go back to Mahan. China is, in a Mahanian fashion, asserting its claims based on the importance of coastal defences, its dependence on maritime trade and thus its reliance on secure SLOCs by means of a strong blue-water (surface) navy (Manicom, 2014, p. 19). In terms of strategy, Mahan once again proves key in Chinese thinking, as ownership of the Senkaku islands and more importantly the nearby undisputed Japanese-owned Ryukyu Islands would allow China to encircle Taiwan and to institute a naval blockade as well as to allow its broader maritime aspirations to take shape (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 63-64). This means that the Ryukyus form a gateway or vital sea passage between the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, preventing – or allowing – the Chinese Navy to head to open sea. The Senkakus alone, however, do not hold a major strategic importance (Patalano, 2016, Interview).

The Chinese seek, in a Sun Tzu-esque fashion where deception and strong rhetoric play an important role, to obtain control of the sea through intrusions. The intrusions are part of the larger Chinese maritime strategy called a hybrid warfare – coercive tactics short of armed

20 The US does not recognize the obligation to identify themselves or comply with other ADIZ procedures, if there is no intention to enter the national airspace of a coastal nation (USNI News, 2013).
conflict – by means of maritime institutions such as the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) and also using ordinary fishing vessels. According to author and consultant on counterinsurgency warfare retired US Colonel John McCuen, hybrid warfare can be defined as:

“Hybrid conflicts are full spectrum wars with both physical and conceptual dimensions: the former, a struggle against an armed enemy and the latter, a wider struggle for, control and support of the combat zone’s indigenous population, the support of the home fronts of the intervening nations, and the support of the international community. In hybrid war, achieving strategic objectives requires success in all of these diverse conventional and asymmetric battlegrounds” (McCuen, 2008, p. 108).

The CCG’s possession of relatively heavy weapons, for instance, 37mm guns but also powerful water cannons that can destroy the sensors of any ship with a range of over 100 meters, leads to the conclusion that the CCG is a coast guard ‘in colour’ (white) only (Müller, 2016, p. 3; Japanese Times, 2015b). The newly developed coast guard cutters will even have a water displacement of 12,000 to 15,000 tons and will be fitted with a 76mm naval cannon, two secondary cannons, anti-aircraft (AA) guns and will have a helicopter deck at the rear (Diplomat, 2016c). The CCG has been turned into a proxy militia of the Chinese navy (Ericson & Kennedy, 2016; Japanese Times, 2015b). This practice of using civilian institutions for military purposes (militias at sea, rather than on land) and not the actual military combined with unclear rules of engagement for paramilitary agencies and the intrusions into the territorial waters and the contiguous zones of other countries is called hybrid warfare (CFR, 2013).

The emphasis on hybrid warfare has its roots in Sun Tzu’s philosophy because of his strong emphasis on deceiving the enemy, using a mixture of regular and irregular troops, propaganda, diplomatic means and intelligence for undermining the enemy’s morale and win the conflict (the Diplomat, 2015a; Woudstra, 2016, interview). These notions on deception do not only apply to the CCG, but to other maritime agencies (under the control of a single organisation since 2013) such as the Marine Safety Administration (MSA), the Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC), and the China Marine Surveillance (CMS) as well. These organisations have their own paramilitary ships, with the FLEC and CMS even fielding well-armed decommissioned navy frigates and supply ships that are larger in tonnage than many PLAN ships (Dupont & Baker, 2014, p. 88-99; De Jong, 2016, interview). Moreover, China is also using fishing vessels – the fishermen are financially compensated – and merchant ships sailed by civilians and strengthened
by the recruitment of retired navy personnel, as a proxy militia (Nikkei Asian Review, 2016). These militias are known as the ‘blue men’ and are quite similar to the Russian ‘green men’ deployed in the Crimea; they do wear military uniforms though neither have military insignias and both can just as easily take these uniforms off and become ‘law-abiding citizens’. (DefenseNews, 2015; Guardian; De Jong, 2016, interview; Ericson & Kennedy, 2016). On numerous occasions these fishing boats are even shadowed by the PLAN, so as to assure their safety.

The aim of utilizing fishing boats as Chinese proxies of the PLAN, is to bolster Chinese claims, to take control of the fishing grounds, an important resource to many Asian countries, and to make charts for its submarine flotilla (Dupont & Baker, 2014, p. 80; Manicom, 2014, p. 96). This policy, also known as ‘fish, protect, contest, occupy’ (FPCO), seems to be an important part of the game Beijing is playing. By letting its fishing fleet enter the other’s EEZ, escorted by the maritime militias, China is resorting to a coercive strategy short of war (Ericson & Kennedy, 2016). The frequent intrusions into Japanese maritime space, or other countries’ maritime space in general, illustrates that Beijing has given the go-ahead to its fishing vessels to ignore maritime boundaries (Dupont & Baker, 2014, p. 87; Ericson & Kennedy, 2016).

Besides the fishing industry, China is also developing its own maritime fleet for extracting resources from the seabed using gas exploitation platforms. These platforms, however, are equipped with radar normally found on patrol ships and not on gas exploitation platforms (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI), 2016b). Japan therefore suspects that China, in Sun Tzu-esque tradition where all warfare is based upon deception, is using the platforms as military bases just like, as we will also see, in the South China Sea (Guardian, 2016c).

For supporting the development of the marine economy, a clear maritime strategy was necessary that deals with Chinese claims regarding contested areas (Manicom, 2014, p. 177). The elements incorporated in the maritime strategy are public administration, laws and legislation, defence, public opinion, and economic affairs (Manicom, 2014, p. 177-178). MSA, FLEC, CMS and other organisations have been charged with the task of enforcing China’s (claimed) marine territory on a structural basis (MIVD, 2015, p. 30). According to Japanese researchers, these actions might very well be coordinated by the PLAN (Manicom, 2014, p. 178), which seems very likely since the PLAN is charged with securing the SLOCs (Sakhuja, 2011, p. 83).
The current Chinese strategy of intruding Japanese waters in the East China Sea rests on the assumption that there are two possible responses to Chinese (blue water) vessels entering other country’s zones. First, the intrusion will be met by the coast guard of that particular country, which then provokes the paramilitary ships to come to the aid of the fishing vessels. This is then accompanied by Chinese outcries about the other country being aggressive (Sun Tzu said all warfare is based on deception), which, in turn, justifies the Chinese blue water presence and control in the area. In the second scenario the country in question does not respond to the Chinese provocations, which then leads to an effective Chinese occupation of the area, often followed by the construction of (military) fortifications and the deployment of military personnel (Dupont & Baker, 2014, p. 87). This second scenario in particular is built on Mahanian principles, since it allows China to take blue water control of the sea in the area and build military strongpoints, i.e. refuelling stations. In both scenarios the fishing industry reinforces the Chinese robust blue water maritime presence and underscores Chinese territorial claims.

And China is not just asserting itself in the blue-water sphere. Intrusions by Chinese nuclear submarines, the modern version of the Mahanian capital ship, contribute to the control of the underwater sphere and in turn to blue water control. The first ‘intrusion’ of a Chinese submarine into Japanese waters took place in 2003, although that Chinese pass-through was conducted surfaced and the submarine flew the Chinese national flag, making it technically legal according to international law; nevertheless, Japan considered it as a Chinese intimidation attempt (Wall Street Journal, 2013a). The second intrusion, by a Han Class nuclear submarine, in 2004 was conducted submerged in the Strait of Japan – Japanese territorial waters – and triggered heavy criticism, because submerged intrusions are illegal according to maritime law (Japanese Times, 2004). In 2013 another submarine (most likely Chinese) was pulsed near the Japanese territorial waters, raising alarm in Japan (Wall Street Journal, 2013a). These submarine intrusions are designed to achieve subsurface control and part of the bigger plan to take control to the First Island Chain (Manicom, 2014, p. 130), which is considered by the Chinese navy as essential for its freedom of movement (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 63).

The final common in which the Chinese seek their influence, linked to the common ‘sea’, is the common ‘air’. The declaration of an ADIZ is one way to achieve that, but intrusions to challenge other countries influence is another. As illustrated by Figure 3 and visualized in Map 7, the number of intrusions by Chinese airplanes into the Japanese airspace, and the scrambles to intercept them, have increased tremendously over the last couple of years (USNI News, 2016b).
The stark increase in scrambles of Chinese fighter planes in 2016 (200, as opposed to 114 in the same period in 2015) by the Japanese armed forces has prompted the Chief of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, Admiral Katsutoshi Kawano, to state that “the Chinese activity in the air [...] is escalating” (USNI News, 2016b).

4.1.4 Conclusion of Chinese Sea Power: the Senkaku Islands

Looking back at the question posed at the beginning of the chapter, “what is the essence of the Chinese maritime strategy and foreign policy in the case of the disputed territory of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea?”, this section has defined the East China Sea as a potential contested zone, where China can, in Mahanian terms, dispute command of the commons sea and air (Holmes and Yoshihara, 2008, p. 80; Saunders et al., 2011, p. 292). Securing the Senkaku islands will not, however, change the situation between China and Japan: there would be no change in terms of EEZ, either because other UNCLOS stipulations would come first in determining the EEZ, nor would there be a change to the airspace if the ownership of the island would be transferred, since China’s ADIZ already includes the Senkakus. The claim that ownership of the islands would allow China to build over-seas bases that help in asserting its control over the First Island Chain, appears weak since the islands have no economic or strategic value, especially when compared to the strategic importance of the nearby Ryukyu Islands in connecting the East China Sea with the Pacific Ocean (Patalano, 2016, interview). China claims it needs to have control over these islands; if not, hostile powers will take control over them for military purposes, which is considered to be a threat, given that they are located only 200 nautical miles from the mainland (Lim, 2014, p. 130). These islands would create a buffer zone between China and the outside world, and prevent the Japanese and US from patrolling close to the Chinese coast, let alone setting up missiles on the islands to threaten the PRC (Lim, 2014, p. 131). The Sun Tzu-esque elements of the current Chinese policy focus on deceiving the enemy by using civil institutions like the CCG and the FLEC as blue-water proxies for the PLAN in an offensive rather than defensive way. This leads to the conclusion that any version of Chinese maritime strategy does include the control over the East China Sea, as the potential military bases on the gas exploitation platforms indicate (Manicom, 2014, p. 98), though control over the Senkakus would be merely a political victory.
4.2.1 The Spratly Islands Dispute

The Spratly Islands are a group of islands located in the South China Sea, West of the Philippines. Apart from the Spratlys, the South China Sea is home to numerous other groups of (disputed) islands, including the Scarborough Shoal, Paracel Islands, Maccelesfield Bank and the Paratas Islands. Due to its shallow waters and its many reefs, the South China Sea came to be known as the ‘dangerous grounds’ and caused the stranding of many ships. The Spratly Islands consist of fourteen islands, islets and cays (Map 8). It also covers over one hundred reefs. In total the islands’ landmass rising above sea level covers an area of approximately three square kilometres. Due to their strategic location the islands are of interest to the neighbouring countries: the Philippines (nine or ten features owned), Taiwan (one feature owned), China (seven features owned), Vietnam (twenty-one features), Malaysia (five or eight features) and Brunei (no features owned) (Diplomat, 2016b); they all, except for Brunei, own one feature or another. For more information on who owns what in the Spratly Islands, see Appendix 4. The importance of the islands lies in the fact that the Spratlys are located along the major shipping routes that connect East Asia to India, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. This means that they are of great importance to the PRC’s resource security, or any other East Asian country’s resource security for that matter.

4.2.2 An Overview of the Dispute

Chinese sources claim that the earliest human contact with the Spratlys goes back in time over 2,000 years, when the islands were used for navigational purposes by fishermen and merchants; since then all major shipping routes went past the islands (Bouchat, 2013, p. 7; Tønnesson, 2002, p. 7). On occasion they also offered shelter to those same fishermen, but it never resulted in
permanent settlements until recently when military bases were constructed. In 1877 the first Western claims were laid on the islands by the British who were after the islands’ guano, an ingredient in the production of soap and fertilizer. The French soon followed. By 1933 the French, who actively pursued ownership of the islands, took over control of the islands until World War Two. The British, who ended up not actively occupying the islands, let their claim to go dormant (Bouchat, 2013, p. 37).

During World War Two the islands were occupied by the Japanese (Bouchat, 2013, p. 10). When they left after the War, the issue of ownership started. In 1946 the Chinese Nationalist military was the first to occupy part of the islands, but when mainland China was taken from the Guomindang (see Chapter 2) in 1949, the largest island ‘Itu Aba’ remained unoccupied by the ROC (or Taiwan) for six years, from the time the Guomindang withdrew its troops in 1950 (Tønnesson, 2002, p. 11). In 1951 Taiwan pushed its claims on the islands by cutting a deal with Japan in which Tokyo would renounce its claims on the islands and transfer ownership to Taiwan. Following a provocative move by the Philippines, in 1956 Taiwan reoccupied the island Itu Aba, which it had abandoned in 1950, and from then on permanently occupied it and claims the rest of the islands and features.

In 1947 the Philippines claimed most of the islands, although the Americans had advised against such a move, with the aim of building a fish cannery there (Bouchat, 2013, p. 8). The current Filipino claim is based on the assumption that, after the Japanese renounced any claims on the islands in 1951, the islands were effectively owned by no one (Terra Nullius) until 1956, when Filipino Tomás Cloma founded ‘Freedomland’ there, which was subsequently taken over by the Philippine government in the 1970s (Clarke, 2010, p. 73; Sakuja, 2011, p. 52).

France, who had owned the islands until the Japanese invaded during World War Two, held that the Paracel Islands were Vietnamese, whereas the Spratlys were French possessions and as such contested the Guomindang’s claim to the islands (Kivimäki, 2002, p. 535). The French possession of the islands is also the basis on which the Vietnamese claim is based, when the country became independent in 1954 (Bouchat, 2013, p. 33). The current Vietnamese claim is therefore also based on historical discovery and occupation.
Beijing’s claim on the Spratly Islands, or the South China Sea in general, goes back to 1947 when the nationalist Guomindang came up with the ‘dotted line’ (also known as the eleven-dash line in the ROC or the nine-dash line in the PRC), which came to be known as the ‘cow’s tongue’ (see Map 9). The exact demarcation of the nine-dash line remains unclear, as different versions show different lines, some closer to another country’s territory and others farther away. The fact remains, however, that through the nine-dash line China claims undisputable sovereignty over the islands and the waters in the South China Sea, declaring them to be internal waters (Lim, 2014, p. 117; Woudstra, 2016, interview). This shows that China still has a very continental outlook regarding maritime issues, by claiming the waters to be internal waters and in effect they would like to occupy it the same way one can occupy land. Both claims on the Spratlys made by Taiwan and China are based on historical discovery and occupation (Sakhuja, 2011, p. 52). The difference between the claims made by Taiwan and China, however, is that China claims all of the South China Sea, whereas Taiwan’s claim is limited to the Spratly Islands (Clarke, 2010, p. 73-4).

The British, as mentioned earlier, also had claims on the Islands, but did not really push it. When in 1963, the once British-held territories Sabah and Sarawak (Malaysian Borneo) became part of Malaysia, Malaysia started pressing these claims, which led to the occupation of several islands in the early 1980s. The current claims of Malaysia and Brunei are based on the UNCLOS continental shelf stipulation (Clarke, 2010, p. 75).

It was during second half of the twentieth century that American oil companies like Mobil began showing interest in the islands (Jian, 1997, p. 596). Oil became an important motivator for asserting claims on the islands, especially when the Americans got involved in the Vietnam War (1955-1975). In the wake of the Americans, these oil companies followed to extract oil from the seabed and therefore ownership of the islands became more important. In 1971 the Philippines claimed the eastern part of the Spratly Islands, followed by the occupation of four more islets in 1974 (Tønnesson, 2002, p. 15). Around the same time Malaysia moved in from the south and
claimed and manned two islands. The PRC, however, came late to the party, but as Vietnam became isolated as a consequence of the Vietnam War, in which the communist North supported by the USSR fought the capitalist South supported by the US, the PRC saw an opportunity to conquer the entire Paracel Islands and drive the Vietnamese out in 1974. The result was that the (South) Vietnamese troops that were ousted, moved to the Spratlys and permanently occupied islands there (Tønnesson, 2002, p. 16; Appendix 4).

When North Vietnam took over control of South Vietnam and thus control of the Vietnamese features in the Spratly Islands in 1975, it gradually expanded the number of islands under control of Vietnam. Hence, nowadays Vietnam controls more Spratly islands (21) than any other country. Until the late 1980s China and Brunei were the only two claimants that did not have possession of any feature in the Spratly Islands. For China the reason for this non-involvement had always been the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance, but when Soviet leader Gorbachev reduced his support to Vietnam (in combination with Vietnam’s international isolation due to its occupation of Cambodia between 1979 and 1989) the PRC saw its chances to take control of some reefs in the Spratly Islands. One of these reefs is located close to a Vietnamese island, which in 1988 resulted in an armed clash during which three Vietnamese ships were sunk, 70 men were killed and the Vietnamese forces were thrown out of Johnson Reef (Tønnesson, 2002, p. 17; Clarke, 2010, p. 82). Despite many attempts to resolve the conflict in the South China Sea, and the Spratlys in particular, these efforts have proven futile as incidents between naval forces, coast guards and fishermen continued (Tønnesson, 2002, p. 18): for instance, in 1994-1995, when China took Mischief Reef and built military structures on this reef, despite Philippine protests and again in 1999 when the Chinese constructed even more buildings on the reef. The conflict grew more salient from the 2000s on as two incidents in 2012 show: in July a PLAN frigate ran aground in one of the disputed areas and in April when the Philippines attempted to apprehend eight Chinese fishing vessels (Guardian, 2012a; Guardian, 2012b). It even involved the US, as a none-claimant in the dispute, when a Chinese fighter jet crashed with a US spy plane in 2001 (Tønnesson, 2002, p. 20; Beech, 2016, p. 24).

On July 12, 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague concluded, three and a half years after the Philippines brought it to court, that China had no (historical) right to the entire South China Sea, including the Spratly Islands (BBC, 2016c). China (and Taiwan) dismissed the court’s ruling, however, stating that “China’s territorial sovereignty and marine rights, will not be affected by the so-called Philippines South China Sea ruling in any way” (BBC, 2016c).
4.2.3 Sea power and the Spratly Islands

The main tool for the Chinese government to assert its claims on the Spratlys, or the South China Sea in general, is the People’s Liberation Army Navy (Zhang, 2015, p. 92). Like the case of the Senkaku Islands, the PLAN, with the help of its proxies, is using its maritime strategy to plan its moves in the South China Sea and secure its dominance within the First Island Chain. A comparison has often been made between the strategy of the Chinese in the South China Sea and that of the Americans in the Caribbean a century earlier. In his books The Problem of Asia (1900) and The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future (1897), Mahan has laid out the geopolitical importance of the Caribbean to the US as vital to the US interests and therefore being the dominant sea power in that region was essential (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 49). Crucial for naval operations attempting to realize such a policy, are refuelling stations or naval bases. In Mahan’s thinking, three characteristics determine what makes a good location for naval bases, namely 1) they had to be near SLOCs; 2) on a location where they could easily be defended; and 3) close to natural or stored resources (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 51). China is now applying Mahan’s Caribbean case to the South China Sea by obtaining and building outposts in the Spratly Islands in order to secure its outer perimeter, that flanks vital SLOCs and grants greater control over shipping to the Malacca Strait. The latter is especially important as the Chinese are dependent on the sea lanes for much of their exports as well as their energy supplies (see Chapter 2), although the dependence on shipping for energy has somewhat diminished because of the continental pipelines (De Jong, 2016, interview).

To China, Taiwan is seen as its critical outpost – territory on the edge of Chinese territory that is of key interest to the PRC’s strategy – and has therefore always been at the centre of the Chinese grand strategy (the political level of strategy). However, Taiwan also owns Itu Aba, the largest island in the Spratlys, which would grant China another ‘unsinkable carrier’ in the Spratlys should Taiwan be conquered, as well as a potential EEZ (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 53). In July 2016 the PCA ruled, however, that none of the Spratlys generate an EEZ as they are all classified as rocks (Taipei Times, 2016).

Through intimidation and the use of force, China is hoping to get the other claimants to back off (Clarke, 2010, p. 74; De Jong, 2016, interview). One way the Chinese tend to do this, is by modernization of its fleet and by conducting military exercises in the South China Sea as a show of arms (Chang, 2012, p. 28-36). In 2010, for instance, two groups of warships were sent to the
South China Sea so as to deter provocations by the Vietnamese against Chinese fishermen, while at the same time they held a military exercise involving over 100 ships (Lim, 2014, p. 119).

Another way China tries to obtain control over the South China Sea is by ‘building’ new islands on pre-existing reefs in the Spratlys. In 2014 China started dredging on a massive scale, by US

Land Reclamation in the South China Sea

![Cuarteron Reef](image)

![Johnson Reef](image)

![Fiery Cross Reef](image)

![Mischief Reef](image)

![Gavens Reef](image)

![Hughes Reef](image)

![Subi](image)

Figure 4
Admiral Harry Harris Jr. referred to as “The Great Wall of Sand” (Beech, 2016, p. 24). By May 2016 China had reclaimed over 1,295 hectares, or 13km², of land, which is, compared to the just 20 hectares of all other counties combined, an enormous territory (AMTI, 2016j-k; Wall Street Journal, 2015). Although artificial islands, built on the Chinese-owned reefs that normally were above sea level only during low tide, do not create an EEZ nor territorial waters, this does not seem to stop the Chinese building frenzy.

New facilities with sea denial capabilities have been built on all seven Chinese possessions in the Spratly islands, ranging from cement plants and possible radar facilities to military facilities, defensive towers, (naval) gun emplacements, AA-gun, helipads, harbours and even airstrips. Airstrips, with hangers suitable for fighter jets, are being built on the larger artificial islands the Fiery Cross Reef (airfield completed) and the Mischief Reef and Subi Reef (airfields almost completed) and offer the Chinese new ‘unsinkable’ carriers (see Appendix 1 & Figure 4) (AMTIa, c-i). And these building activities are not limited to the Spratlys. Near the Scarborough Islands and Paracel Islands the Chinese started dredging as well (Beech, 2016, p. 27).

The creation of these islands near the ‘maritime silk road’ with its major SLOCs in the South China Sea, worth an annual $5 trillion in trade (De Jong, 2016, interview; Guardian, 2016e), like the American bases in the Caribbean at the time of Mahan, will enhance the PLAN’s chances of securing these trade routes and thereby secure China’s energy flows (Guardian, 2016e; USNWC, 2012). However, despite the building frenzy in the South China Sea, the Corbettian fleet-in-being approach with a focus on anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) through submarines and sea mines (see Chapter 3) will still be the PLAN’s main focus, since it is not strong enough to face a navy like the USN in conflict (Clarke, 2010, p. 76-77; Woudstra, 2011, p. 26). From the newly created base at Mischief Reef the Chinese are able to observe naval activities in Filipino waters. This makes the Chinese claims on the islands mainly of strategic significance, since it would allow the Chinese to defend the SLOCs in the South China Sea, disrupt the enemy’s sea lanes, control the airspace and set up surveillance in the area (Clarke, 2010, p. 78). Furthermore, in order to be less dependent on mainland supplies, China is planning to build a ‘floating’ nuclear power plant to the islands (The Independent, 2016).

These artificial islands seriously impede the freedom of navigation (FON), since foreign (military) vessels are no longer free to go about their business in the area as China does not recognize the ‘right of innocent passage’ – a right where both civilian and military vessels can sail through the
territorial waters if they adhere to a certain set of rules (Dröge, 2016, interview). Moreover, experts think China, once the islands are finished, might declare an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea, which would impede the freedom of overflight (Rapp-Hooper, 2016, p. 1; De Jong, 2016, interview; Patalano, 2016, interview), although the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in July 2016 has increased the political cost of doing so. This declaring of an ADIZ has, of course, already occurred in the East China Sea.

Once again, it is not just about securing the SLOCs, it is also about the natural resources in and below the sea. As addressed in the introduction, the South China Sea in general, and the Spratly Islands in particular, are believed to contain large amounts of oil and gas. According to the US Energy Administration, the oil reserves are approximately 11 billion barrels, in addition to 190 trillion cubic feet of gas (CFR, 2016). Its exact locations are unknown, however, and recent studies suggest that they might be farther away from the Spratlys than originally thought. Securing these reserves would help feed China’s manufacturing-based economy and would, at least in part, ensure the long term continuation of economic growth (Clarke, 2010, p. 79; De Jong, 2016, interview).

As noted in Chapter 3, Chinese theory of sea power is not only derived from Mahan, but also from Sun Tzu. In the South China Sea, the China’s ‘blue men’ are operating, with PLAN support, on fishing boats and other ‘mysterious’ vessels, many of which lack fishing nets (Beech, 2016, p. 28). They attack Vietnamese fishing vessels by ramming them or forcing them at gunpoint to leave the disputed area, transporting building materials to the artificial islands and even buzzing a US surveillance ship (Beech, 2016, p. 28-29). Clashes between Chinese ‘fishermen’ and other countries have been seen quite regularly since 2007 when Beijing returned to its more assertive stance (Lim, 2014, p. 119). In 2011, they even opened fire at a Filipino fishing vessel (ABS-CBN, 2011). These ‘fishermen’ do not, however, operate alone. They are accompanied by Chinese government institutions such as the CCG, as for instance an incident in 2016 shows when over 100 fishing vessels sailed into the waters near the Malaysian coast, escorted by the CCG (Japanese Times, 2016c). The CCG also regularly aims its water cannons at foreign trawlers as well as maritime authorities, leaving little doubt that China is using these boats as military proxies (Beech, 2016, p. 29).

Another one of Sun Tzu’s aspects is creating diversion. On the one hand China is negotiating with the ASEAN countries about the banning of missiles in the Spratly Islands. On the other hand
China is exactly just doing that, placing SAM missiles on the islands, something Chinese President Xi Jinping had promised that he would do. The head of the Australian National Security College, Medcalf, concluded that this means that “China is not taking such diplomacy seriously” (Japanese Times, 2016a). The strategy in the negotiations by the Chinese is one of ‘delaying’, meaning they purposefully delay the negotiations to the point where in practice they have consolidated their control over the claimed waters (Lim, 2014, p. 120). This would then strengthen their negotiating position.

4.2.4 Conclusion of Chinese Sea Power: the Spratly Islands

This second section has reviewed how Chinese sea power and foreign policy are being brought into practice in the South China Sea. The question posed at the beginning was: “what is the essence of the Chinese maritime strategy and foreign policy in the case of the disputed territory of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea?” With that in mind, one could state that Chinese sea power in the South China Sea is the prime example of Chinese maritime strategic thinking. The importance of the Spratly Islands lies first of all in the proximity to the SLOCs. In true Mahanian fashion, the one who controls the SLOCs has the best chances of controlling the sea and protect its merchant fleet. These SLOCs are, moreover, very important to the Chinese economy, since its economy is export driven with much of that being moved by sea. A strong navy naturally springs from a strong reliance on commercial shipping (Lim, 2014, p. 129).

Second, its rich fishing grounds and its potentially large oil and gas reserves would make China less dependent on the Middle East and in turn on the sea lanes leading from the Middle East through the Malacca Strait or other bottlenecks. In the long run, especially in the case of conflict, it would partially secure its energy needs, although it still would be dependent on supplies from the Middle East or the former Soviet states. It also grants access to the richest fishing grounds near the Spratly Islands, which lessens the pressure on China’s coastal fishing grounds (Lim, 2014, p. 126).

Third, China means to assert its sovereignty over the Spratlys since they are, according to the Chinese, part of their historic waters. In order to be able to back-up this claim, they require a strong navy, supported by naval bases. Currently the PLAN is, apart from the USN, the strongest navy in the region and therefore would have little trouble to crush any resistance by the other claimants (Lim, 2014, p. 133-134; Gerritsen-Schutmaat, 2016, interview). The US, however, remains a potential problem to China, as we will see in the next chapter, which is why the focus
of the PLAN is on Corbettian fleet-in-being. This perceived threat, examined in the next chapter as well, is also why the Chinese are building the island; to keep the US out. For now, however, China is resorting to diplomacy and hybrid warfare and land reclamation in order for it to make its dominancy in the Spratly islands a reality.
Chapter 5: Chinese Sea Power: the American Factor

An analysis of Chinese sea power would not be complete without taking into account the role the United States of America (US) plays in it as the world’s sole superpower. There are three major reasons why the US is interested in the situation in the region. First, as we have seen in the previous chapter, many of the world’s most important shipping routes lead through the South and East China Seas. Second, the disputes regarding the Spratly Islands and the Senkaku Islands involving US allies, primarily Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines, and China could lead to instability in the region, growing tensions and conflict. And third, if China’s influence keeps growing, it could eventually oust the US from the East Asian theatre, resulting in an American loss of influence (Carnegie Endowment, 2015). To counter this, as of 2010 the US has made clear that it is “back to stay” when it comes to East Asia, meaning a shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean (Lim, 2014, p. 140). This chapter will therefore look at the role the US plays in the East Asian theatre and will answer the question, “What is the role of the United States, as a major actor with huge interests in the region, in these territorial disputes or conflicts?”. This chapter will first look at the East China Sea and the South China Sea and then at the US strategy in the region.

5.1 U.S. Interests in the East China Sea

The US interest in the East China Sea goes all the way back to the end of World War Two. As part of the terms of the Japanese surrender, an occupation force was put in place in Japan (and Korea until 1948) while the Japanese territories were placed under US administration. As a consequence of the occupation of Japan and Korea by the American armed forces and the withdrawal of the European nations from their former colonies, East Asia came under the American sphere of influence, not only militarily but also in a diplomatic and economic sense (Gompert, 2013, p. 77). The San Francisco Treaty of 1951 brought an end to the occupation of Japan, but the US was allowed to keep military bases on the Japanese islands. During the 1950s Japan and Taiwan, as well as South Korea, signed mutual security pacts with the US. In these security treaties countries pledged to aid the other if either one of them came under attack by another country. The main goals were to create stability in the region and to keep the countries free of aggression (and communism), which up to today are its main goals (Gompert, 2013, p. 83). Although the security treaty between the US and Taiwan – which was similar to the treaty between Korea and the US or Japan and the US – was terminated in 1979, the country still heavily relies on US support, for instance through the sale of arms, and through the Taiwan
relations Act of 1979 that requires the US to “come to Taiwan’s defence with arms and ‘services’” (Christensen, 2015, p. 30; Washington Times, 2016). During the Cold War, the US built a network of countries allied to the US and with American bases on their soil. These US bases are located all around China and expanded over time (see Figure 5). In the East China Sea, three countries are vital to US interests, namely South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, with the latter being especially vital to American SLOCs as it connects the South China Sea and the East China Sea (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 61). Severing the SLOCs by losing Taiwan would, in strategic terms, mean that the US forces would be split in two between south and north of Taiwan, thus severely undermining its punching power (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 61). Losing Taiwan would also allow the Chinese to project their power into the Pacific as well as the Indian Ocean. These arguments make it that the ROC can be labelled a critical outpost. Containing China, or at the least maintaining the status quo by not letting Taiwan be conquered by China, is therefore important to the US strategy in East Asia. The US has to achieve this despite its dwindling capacity at sea from 600 ships during the Reagan administration (1981-1989) to just 275 in 2009 (Woudstra, 2009, p. 312). Regardless, sea power remains important to the US, as it allows binding countries together that are far apart (Lim, 2014, p. 144). In turn, it allows them to much better coordinate a response to posed challenges.

In the East China Sea, the US relies on its allies, particularly Japan, for helping to keep the SLOCs open, to maintain the rule-based economy in which East Asia plays a vital role, but also to make sure the East China Sea does not fall into unfriendly hands (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 114; Lim, 2014, p. 140; Gompert, 2013, p. 82). This policy of ‘not allowing another country to take over the East Asian theatre’ has been a constant in US policy ever since it

![Figure 5: US Military Bases in East Asia, summer 2014](image_url)
became a world power in 1945 (Gompert, 2013, p. 78). In order for the US to maintain that position, its strategically-located overseas bases are of the utmost importance, as Mahan had already stated a hundred years back. It therefore makes sense that the US Kadena airbase in Okinawa is located exactly on the spot between the Pacific Ocean and China – again naval and air bases should, according to Mahan, be located near SLOCs, in a spot that is easily defendable and close to natural or stored resources – thereby forming an obstacle to the Chinese (Manicom, 2014, p. 129; Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008, p. 51). Another military base that has again grown in importance for operations in East Asia is the US base at Guam. Guam is special, as it is the most westward bit of American territory, meaning that the Americans do not need to negotiate a deal with another country about stationing troops there (Lim, 2014, p. 146).

Regarding the Senkaku Islands, the United States officially takes no position in the conflict over its ownership. However, the US does recognize Japanese administrative control over the islands, which makes Article 5 of the US-Japanese Defence Treaty applicable to the islands (Christensen, 2015, p. 31; CFR, 2014). Article 5 deals with attacks by third parties on either Japan or the US and calls on a party to come to the aid of the other. Because of that, US military intervention would take place if China were to invade the Senkaku Islands, despite Washington’s reluctance to get involved in the East China Sea over a few islands with little economic or strategic worth (Manicom, 2014, p. 173-175). Over time the Japanese-American alliance has even deepened to the point where both countries work together to protect each other’s interests in the region. This deepened cooperation has been shown for instance after the Earthquake in 2011 when the US and Japanese forces worked side by side, on the largest scale in the history of the alliance, to rescue civilians (CFR, 2014), but also in the 2000s when Japan in a historic move sent troops to Iraq to support the US (Guardian, 2003). In case of a conflict where Washington gets involved, the Americans would in Mahanian tradition focus on denying Chinese command of the commons air and sea. The US Navy (USN), being a very Mahanian blue water surface navy with a focus on power projection through its carrier battlegroups, would use these carrier strike groups, which would make the carriers –the focal point of each group – prone to Chinese anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) sea denial by submarines, mines, ASBMs, from the air, in space through ASATs and in cyberspace (Krepinevic, 2010, p. 25). This vulnerability to submarines stems from the fact that anti-submarine warfare (ASW) is incredibly difficult due to the limiting range of the sonar – sound has to travel back and forth through water, losing much of its energy, for the destroyer to

21 Guam also lies on the line that demarcates the Second Island Chain in the Chinese strategy.
be able to pick up the sound – and the submarine’s ability to pick up the sound of the sonar – using passive sonar, sonar that only listens – from much farther away since sound has to travel one way only (see Figure 6; Woudstra, 2016, interview; Dröge, 2016, interview). The difficulty in combatting submarines also goes for naval mine warfare (NMW; mines could explode when trying to locate them) and for combatting enemy (ASAT and ASBM) missiles. The US is trying to make up for this vulnerability by building new submarines themselves – fighting subs with subs –, as well as new long-range stealth bombers and a new strategy, as will be explained further on (Krepinevich, 2015, p. 79), but the fact remains that, like any other navy, the USN would be vulnerable to A2/AD. This vulnerability was shown during Operation Earnest Will in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), when in 1988 the USS Samuel B. Roberts hit an Iranian mine (Woudstra, 2011, p. 27; Gompert, 2013, p. 70).

Another Mahanian aspect of the USN is that is very offensively orientated and therefore has put less emphasis on anti-A2/AD equipment (Steinberg & O’Hanlon, 2014, p. 111).

In response to the increased Chinese assertiveness, the US stepped up its own presence by sending more submarines to Guam and rotating more F-22 aircrafts through Japan, sending combats ships to Singapore, increasing arrangement for military bases in both Singapore and Australia and improving its relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Christensen, 2015, p. 29; Steinberg & O’Hanlon, 2014, p. 108). These measures aim to reduce the Chinese assertiveness and thereby limit the potential for conflict within the First Island Chain. However, an unexpected side effect of this ‘containment’ of China within the First Island Chain could well be the formation of a shield, or a wall, within the First Island Chain against outside US intervention, by providing them with some command of the sea there, especially if US ships would want to stay out of anti-ship missile range (Map 10; Diplomat, 2011).

The US is also the main advocator of the freedom of navigation (FON) and freedom of overflight (FOO) in the East Asian region, or indeed all around the globe, even though the US itself has not ratified the UNCLOS treaty of which these are a part (Wyne, 2016, snapshot). Any attempt to claim sole-ownership of the East China Sea, and thus threaten US interest, will be met by US opposition. In the East China Sea the US is mainly advocating the freedom of overflight (FOO), since China does not actually own any features there. So when in 2013 the Chinese put up an Air
Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), the first thing the Americans did was to violate the claimed ADIZ by flying two B-52 bombers (relatively slow-moving and easily visible by radar) all the way from Guam through the newly claimed ADIZ, thereby challenging the Chinese ADIZ (Wall Street Journal, 2013b). The Chinese, in turn, did not respond to the provocation, meaning that despite declaring an ADIZ the freedom of overflight for now has prevailed.

5.2 U.S. Interests in the South China Sea

In the South China Sea the US has important interests, though none of them – like in the East China Sea – are of a territorial nature. Some of the American interests that apply to the East China Sea also apply to the South China Sea as, for instance, interests regarding the stability in the region by not letting incidents escalate and maintaining a good climate for trade, as well as keeping it free of aggressors.

The most important element of American policy in the South China Sea is the freedom of navigation operations (FONOP). The US maintains the right of innocent passage of naval ships vis-à-vis China, Taiwan, Vietnam and Malaysia, who do not recognize this right. To assert the freedom of navigation, the US is conducting these so-called FONOPs in the South China Sea. As Chapter 3 has explained, the territorial waters are located twelve miles of the shore of any land. The contiguous zone (24 NM off shore) and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ; 200 NM off shore) are, according to the US, freely accessible to both civil and military ships from any country, without having to give prior notice. The territorial waters are also accessible to military and civilian ships, though they do need to adhere to certain rules when sailing through them (Dröge, 2016, interview). China, however, disagrees and claims that military vessels should give prior notice when they enter its EEZ or contiguous zone and the territorial waters are off-limits altogether (Goldstein, 2013, p. 137). What these FONOPs are designed to do, is to take US warships within the 12-mile radius of claimed territorial waters of China, Vietnam and Taiwan as part of the right of innocent passage – so not to contest ownership of the islands (USNI News, 2016a). On May 10, 2016, for instance the US missile destroyer USS William P. Lawrence sailed unannounced into the claimed territorial waters around the artificial island – artificial islands do not generate territorial waters or an EEZ according to UNLCOS – at Fiery Cross Reef, triggering a strong Chinese response (USNI News, 2016a). By sending a carrier strike group to the area the US also means to uphold the FON. The goal is to deter China from pursuing an aggressive course,
but in order for China to feel that way, they should become more regular and explicit (Kaplan, 2016, p. 40).

The US interest in the FON operations is also self-interested, since the Americans have interests regarding the natural resources and the economic potential found in East Asia (Gompert, 2013, p. 76) and because the US sees the First Island Chain as the transpacific island chain that extends west towards East Asia (The Diplomat, 2011). Limiting the accessibility for merchant shipping would endanger the US trade with the region, making it important to continue the FON operations to keep the sea lines open to all maritime shipping (Gompert, 2013, p. 76).

Observers fear that China will announce an ADIZ in the South China Sea, which would mean that the US, who said they will always oppose the implementation of such, would have to act accordingly (National Interest, 2016a). If China chooses to declare one, the US, with the help of its allies, would have to respond if it wants to uphold the freedom of overflight in the South China Sea and rule of law (Rapp-Hooper, 2016, snapshot p. 4). Not doing so would mean surrendering the waters and the airspace above it to the Chinese (Patalano, 2016, interview).

As the importance of the waterways in the South China Sea has gone up recently due to the economic development in East Asia, weaker states who cannot defy China on their own are driven into the arms of the US by the Chinese assertiveness (Chang, 2012, p. 28-36). For instance the Philippines, where in 2016 the US Navy after being expelled 25 years ago in 1992 was being welcomed back into the Subic Bay harbour, as well as five other locations in the Philippines (Washington Post, 2016a). Furthermore, the US is negotiating cooperation agreements regarding matters of defence with Vietnam, as well as India and other ASEAN countries, who were all driven into the arms of the US by the rise of China (Gompert, 2013, p. 79). Within ASEAN the US already gained a leading role regarding the South China Sea (Rapp-Hooper, 2016, snapshot p. 1). Finally, the US is conducting military exercises with both Vietnam and Cambodia, who were driven into the American arms by growing Chinese assertiveness (Ross, 2013, p. 32). These examples show that the East and Southeast Asian theatres have been increasingly polarized between China on the one hand and the countries supported by the US on the other.

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22 Recently, Philippine president Duterte’s anti-American rhetoric could thwart the cooperation between the two nations but at this moment he remains silent on the American bases in the Philippines.
Not only do Southeast Asian countries open up to US bases on their territory, they also buy US weapons and military vehicles. In 2011 the Philippines bought two Hamilton-class cutters (used by the US Coast Guard) and were exploring options to acquire new fighter jets (Chang, 2012, p. 35). Meanwhile, Vietnam has been upgrading its military as well. In May 2016, in a historic move by president Obama, the lethal arms embargo against Vietnam was lifted after 50 years, allowing US arms deliveries to the country. Vietnam and the US are also partners in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an agreement regarding free trade in which twelve countries participate and of which China is no part (Washington Post, 2016b). This shows again the increased polarization and militarization of the East and Southeast Asian theatres, accompanied by a growing importance of the US, that has its roots in the increased Chinese assertiveness. As a whole, however, the US presence has a stabilizing effect on the region (De Jong, 2016, interview; Patalano, 2016, interview).

5.3 U.S. Strategy
The US grand strategy (political level) towards China is twofold: on the one hand the Chinese are treated as the enemy. This approach could become a reality, because treating the Chinese as such will lower the threshold for violence, especially since the Chinese strategy states it should attack an opponent pre-emptively if its interests are being damaged (Betts, 2013, p. 96). On the other hand there are others who claim that the US should treat the Chinese-US relations as a non-issue since the economic interdependence between the two countries will prevent them from escalating into war (Betts, 2013, p. 96). They argue that treating the Chinese as the enemy will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. When the Obama administration came to power, it declared it would rebalance the US military power towards Asia (Sutter et al., 2013). Although the official response of the Chinese government was one of restraint, the Chinese public voiced its discontent with the American policy and advocated a more forceful Chinese foreign policy (Sutter et al., 2013, p. 41-42). The US quickly pointed out that it mainly meant an economic and diplomatic rebalance, which somewhat eased the Chinese discontent (Sutter et al., 2013, p. 42). As a result the current US strategy, as explained below, is found somewhere in the middle between both options, which in the short run might be sustainable, but in the long run might prove to be disastrous (Betts, 2013, p. 99).

23 President-elect Donald J. Trump, however, stated that he aims to withdraw from TTP when he comes into office next year. It therefore is uncertain how this cooperation will develop itself (SkyNews, 2016).
In the last few decades China and the US evermore rely on the other for trade (for numbers see Gompert, 2013, p. 73), which makes them interdependent and a conflict much more damaging to both of them. The US strategy therefore aims to, on the one hand, see to balance US interests in and access to the region and the Chinese threat to those interests, while one the other hand balance with the American global interests and partnership between the two countries on those issues (Gompert, 2013, p. 83; Lim, 2013, p. 37).

Recently the focus has been on the former rather than the latter, resulting in a form of containment. The US Air-Sea Battle operational concept (renamed Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons in 2015) is one of the ways in which this is expressed (USNI, 2015). The Air-Sea Battle strategy is much like the allied Air-Land Battle strategy, used against the Soviet Union during the Cold War in the face of declining forward defence capabilities and increased costs (De Ruiter, 2012, p. 14-19). The Air-Sea Battle was designed for surviving the first wave of A2/AD attacks, before attacking the enemy’s A2/AD networks and launching installations and blockading China using its ships, planes and submarines (De Ruiter, 2012, p. 16). It aims to achieve this by having the Navy and the Air Force work together more closely and thereby exploit and maintain the American technological supremacy and create cross domain synergy (Krepinevich, 2010; Gompert, 2013, p. 137; De Ruiter, 2012, p. 15). The reason for this is quite simple: even with the best anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities it remains incredibly hard to detect, let alone destroy, submarines and other A2/AD capabilities that China possesses such as NMW, ASBMs and protect satellites against ASAT missiles (Krepinevic, 2010, p. 26; Woudstra, 2016, interview; Dröge, 2016, interview; Schaart, 2015, p. 55). Since the US relies heavily on technology for much of its systems, protecting these
systems is central in this strategy. Protecting these systems will be especially hard since China will in Sun Tzu-esque tradition aim to paralyze these systems. Targeting missile launchers on land and sea, submarine- and air bases, as well as attacking systems through cyber-warfare, from farther away using your technological advantage, therefore seems to be the US strategy as it will keep the US troops and fleet out of harm’s way (Gompert, 2013, p. 138). Another aspect of the US strategy is that it relies more heavily on its allies (‘A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower’), to maintain the strategic balance with China because of dwindling US capacity and a global increase in missions (Woudstra, 2011, p. 27; Woudstra, 2009, p. 313).

5.4 Conclusion

The question central in this chapter was: “What is the role of the United States, as a major actor with huge interests in the region, in these territorial disputes or conflicts?” As this chapter has shown, the United States has huge interests in the waters near China. The role played by the US in the East China Sea is mostly related to the security contracts between the US and its allies Japan, Korea and to a certain extent Taiwan. The alliances between the US and those regional countries have a stabilizing effect on the region. President Obama’s statement that he would rebalance the US military to East Asia however created strong opposition among the Chinese public.

The Senkaku Islands, as the prime cause of conflict in the East China Sea, are of little interest to the US and yet they are included in the Japanese security contract. In the South China Sea the main American interest is to uphold the freedom of navigation and the freedom of overflight, whereas in the case in the East China Sea primarily is about upholding the FOO. The main difference between the two cases is, however, that China owns seven islands in the South China Sea, although the recent court ruling has declared none of the Spratlys are actual islands (Patalano, 2016, interview), near which these FON operations can and should be conducted and in the East China Sea owns no islands – though as mentioned in the previous chapter, the gas rigs might have military bases on them. The danger of these FON operations has increased over time, especially now that military installations are being set up on the islands. However, failing to conduct these operations will mean yielding the waters around the islands to the Chinese and for that reason it is in everybody’s interest to continue the operations (Patalano, 2016, interview). The same goes for the freedom of overflight operations in the light of the Chinese...
potential to declare a future ADIZ in the South China Sea, or the current ADIZ in the East China Sea.

Should the US and China meet in battle, the US needs to be prepared to deal with the Chinese A2/AD threat. The large-platform carriers, being the prime tool for American power projection in Mahanian tradition, will be the prime target for Chinese anti-ship missiles, but also the American dependence on technology makes them susceptible to ASAT and cyber-warfare. The US Air-Sea Battle strategy is one potential way in dealing with this threat posed by the Chinese A2/AD capabilities. Another is its dependence on US allies, which helps maintain the USN operational capabilities. In the end the US should determine what grand strategy it will adopt regarding China, as that will also determine a Chinese response.
Chapter 6: Concluding Chinese Sea Power

Now that the key aspects of the rise of China and the main interpretations of sea power have been elaborated upon, the various parties and their interests have been addressed and finally, how (Chinese) sea power has affected the disputes regarding the Senkaku Islands and the Spratly Islands has been discussed in the previous chapters, this conclusion brings it all together and answers the research question posed in this thesis. To recall, this question was: “What is the effect of the Chinese concept of sea power, compared to the Western concept(s) of sea power, upon the territorial disputes in the East and South Chinese Sea in relation to the Japanese-Chinese conflict over the Senkaku Islands and the multinational conflict over the Spratly archipelago during the twenty-first century?”

6.1 Final Conclusion

In examining the Chinese concept of sea power, we find striking similarities with the Western concept of sea power. Although until recently China could generally be considered to be continental power, the last two decades have witnessed a dramatic shift towards the maritime sphere.

Mahan’s six constituents for sea power – situated on an advantageous geographical position, an abundance of natural resources, the extent of the territory, a population large enough to defend said territory, the character of the society and the character of the government – all are applicable to the current Chinese situation. As of the 2000s the importance of Chinese commercial shipping continued going up due to the rapid economic development and China’s ever increasing hunger for natural resources. Since a large commercial fleet enables a country to field a larger navy, which then enables a larger commercial fleet etc., China has progressively been expanding its maritime fleet to defend its sea lines of communication (SLOC).

Geographically China has some of the largest ports in the world and a long stretch of coast. The Chinese demand for natural resources has led to the expansion of its maritime fleet, as well as the establishment of ports and harbours abroad (the String of Pearls being the prime example of this policy). China itself of course is an enormous country with the largest population on earth. The character of the population can be described as sea-going, since most of the large cities are located along the shoreline. Interestingly enough the last constituent of sea power, the character of the government, has changed somewhat since the Maoist era ended. During the Maoist era, the focus was on land and fighting a land-based war. The outlook therefore is
considered a continental one. Starting when Mao Zedong died in 1976, a shift away from this focus on land to a maritime outlook occurred. This shift also means that the character of the government could be partially labelled as sea-going as well, although as research has shown, there are still elements from the bygone times, in for instance the declaration that labelled the nine-dash line as Chinese internal waters and the Chinese desire to occupy it as if it were land; and in the name of the Chinese navy: People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). Under the supervision of Admiral Liu Huaqing, known as China’s Mahan or Gorshkov, China’s navy developed itself both in terms of technology and in doctrine. Most important, however, was the change in outlook that meant a new strategic approach was necessary. The first new strategic concept came to be known as the ‘First and Second Island Chain’ and has striking resemblances to the Soviet ‘Concentric circles’ model as devised by Admiral Gorshkov. The Chinese adopting this model in part stems from the fact that many of the Chinese thinkers at that time had had their education in the Soviet Union. However, rather than adopting the more defensive Soviet-like approach, the Chinese opted for a doctrine called ‘active defence’ that called for maritime assertive actions in the near-seas.

At the time of Liu’s retirement, the turn towards Mahan in terms of strategy continued under the leadership of admiral Huang Jiang. The four ways in which the Chinese could deal with an enemy at sea all are Mahanian ways of obtaining command of the sea, or sea control. However, due to the fact that the Chinese navy does not yet possess a mature naval apparatus in terms of numbers and doctrine, it was forced to look elsewhere too for its naval strategy. Hence, Sir Julian Corbett came into the Chinese scope. His focus on the fleet-in-being strategy, combined with A2/AD warfare, perfectly suited the Chinese situation. Moreover, Corbett looked at sea power in a broader sense, meaning that he looked at it in relation to the armed forces on land. Though Mahan acknowledged that the forces on land were important, he did not put as much emphasis on it as Corbett did.

The Chinese do not draw solely on Western thinkers for their maritime strategy, however. They also draw on Sun Tzu for their maritime strategy, unlike in the Western maritime thinking. Sun Tzu’s book the ‘Art of War’ has had a large impact on Chinese (maritime) thinking, for instance because of his focus on deceiving the opponent. The best known quote, “To win a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting, that is the acme of skill”, is of course the prime example of this focus on deceit. Where Western nation-states traditionally fight a Clausewitz-style war of army versus army where the
demarcation is clear, China often opts to wage a guerrilla-style type of war. This is a major discrepancy between the two and leaves the Western nations clueless as to how to deal with this strategy within the boundaries set by international law. The best example of this comes from the hybrid warfare (China’s ‘blue men’) waged in the South China Sea, where maritime organisations such as the CCG as well as the MSA, the FLEC and the CMS are being used for semi-military purposes, with the latter two even fielding large decommissioned PLAN ships with guns. Moreover, even local fisheries are being used for these purposes, against which it is very hard to act. Oftentimes (retired) PLAN officers are brought aboard these vessels and depending on the situation they will either wear their uniform, or take it off. When do the latter, they fall under civilian law making the actions they undertake none-military actions and making it hard to the other party to respond to it accordingly.

Another Sun Tzu-esque element in Chinese military strategy is the manoeuvrist approach. This means that before you confront an enemy you would have to know both yourself and your enemy. Knowing both the enemy’s and your own strengths and weaknesses which you consequently should exploit and strengthen. The relentless Chinese attacks in the ‘cyberspace’ common are an example of this.

6.1.1 Comparison between the two cases
In comparing the two cases central to this thesis and the role of Chinese sea power in it, some remarkable similarities become clear. First, the Chinese claims in both the East and the South China Sea are, at least in part, based on historic use. In the East China Sea, however, the UNCLOS stipulation regarding the continental shelf is also being applied by China. To bolster the claims in both seas, the Chinese navy is conducting regular patrols and exercises and, more importantly, relies on hybrid warfare to achieve its goal of obtaining sea control in China’s claimed seas. Regular clashes between fishing vessels from Japan and China in the East China Sea and between mainly Vietnam and the Philippines on one side and China on the other in the South China Sea occur regularly. These clashes and intrusions of the contiguous and territorial zones do not only involve the fishermen, but also China’s maritime organisations and sometimes even the PLAN.

Another similarity is that in both cases nationalism plays a huge role. The economic growth in China led to the development of a middleclass and a growing self-awareness of this class. Expressions of this new awareness can be found everywhere, but for instance the support for the development of an aircraft carrier, as a way of power projection, and the offering of funds
for that project by Chinese citizens or the ‘holidays’ that are being organised to the Paracels (‘a patriotic duty’) are among the most prominent.

As far as the differences go, the most obvious is of course that China does not own islands in the East China Sea, whereas it does own (and creates) them in the South China Sea. In the East China Sea the declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) that overlaps with other countries’ ADIZs meant that planes had to file their flight plan before entering the ADIZ. Despite the fact that the Americans called the Chinese bluff on the very same day, an ADIZ in the South China Sea, though it has not yet been declared, could be enforced more thoroughly because of the artificial islands with airfields and AA-gun emplacements created there. The aim of the islands is to incorporate the South China Sea into the Chinese sphere of influence by making it Chinese internal waters, thus denying other nations military access to these waters without the Chinese say-so. The military facilities, such as harbours and airstrips, built on the islands contribute to this goal by giving China the means to enforce their claims. These naval bases (unsinkable carriers) in Mahanian terms are located on a prime spot near the busiest trade routes, the Maritime Silk Road, in the world and grant China control over the SLOCs.

The Permanent Court of Arbitration’s (PCA) ruling of July 12, 2016, meant that in terms of UNCLOS none of the islands in the Spratlys are actual islands but mere rocks. They therefore do not generate an Exclusive Economic Zone, nor do they have territorial waters. Of course artificial islands do not in any case generate an EEZ, but it does in theory somewhat diminish the importance of the area in terms of international law. The Senkaku islands do generate an EEZ and territorial waters but since there are numerous other UNCLOS stipulations that come first, ownership of the islands does not change the current EEZ and therefore merely is a political victory. In terms of strategic importance the islands have none either, though neither Japan nor China will publicly say so. And as the previous sections have shown, this is also not reflected in their naval strategy.

The American factor in the two cases is threefold. The first American interest revolves around the freedom of navigation. China does not recognize the ‘right of innocent passage’, meaning all military ships have to declare to the Chinese government where they are headed when they enter Chinese waters. Because the Americans want to uphold the ‘right of innocent passage’ they conduct regular FON operations (FONOPs) near the Chinese claimed waters in the South China Sea. This also means sailing within the Chinese-claimed territorial waters. Connected to
the FONOPs are the freedom of overflight (FOO) operations. Much in the same way the FONOPs are conducted, the FOO operations aim to uphold this right by flying through the claimed airspace. The main goal is to respectively nullify and deter an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East and South China Sea. Finally, through the military alliances in the region, the US hopes to balance the rise of China and create stability in the area. These military alliances often involve the stationing of US military personnel in the allied countries and on its own territory in Guam. In response to the increased Chinese assertiveness in the region, the US itself has also stepped up its own presence. The military exercises and the Air-Sea battle strategy all contribute to a stronger, visible, presence in the East and Southeast Asian theatre. The US therefore are an important actor in the area.

The Chinese version of sea power, which draws heavily on Western thinkers, has part of its roots in Sun Tzu and his focus on deception, which, unlike in the West, plays an important role in the Chinese strategy. These Sun Tzu-esque elements return on many occasions as we have seen in the cases in the East and South China Sea and could very well increase the chances of conflict, especially because the international law has no precedent as to how to deal with such situations. What the future of the China and its neighbouring countries will hold, no one knows, but as China comes of age, it will definitely want to earn its place among the big countries. Whether China will be able to achieve that remains uncertain, but partially depends on how it handles disputes like those discussed in this dissertation.

6.2 Reflection on Research

In reflecting on my own research, there are positive aspects to be identified, as well as limitations. One positive aspect to be identified are the insights gained during my six-month internship at the Netherlands Institute for Military History (Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie; NIMH\(^24\)) in how a military organisation like the Dutch armed forces functions. Through the many interviews conducted with personnel, both civilian and military, from all four branches of the armed forces (Army, Navy, Air Force and Military Police), I feel that I have gotten an insight that would otherwise not have been possible. These insights were enhanced since I lived on a military base for six months and regularly met with military personnel at the local bar. The stories they told me about the armed forces and its conduct, though not necessarily related to this topic, helped me in

\(^{24}\) https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/militaire-geschiedenis-nimh
understanding this topic better. Moreover, the stories told at the NIMH, combined with the knowledge gained from the interviews and the study of the literature, have enabled me to write a better thesis. And I would say this experience is also reflected in my thesis.

The experience was further enhanced because of the simple fact that I did not just conduct research for my thesis, but also worked on two other topics, one of them being ‘Historical missions’ in which the Dutch military participated after 1947. The historical missions I researched were EUFOR Althea (European Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina) from 2004 on, the Airplane crash at Tripoli airport 2010, the United Nations Observer Mission in South Africa (UNOMSA) in 1992 and the Patriot mission ‘Active Fence’ between 2013-2015 in Turkey. These historical missions have, apart from the knowledge of how a military organisation functions, helped me with my writing skills, though it was sometimes tough to switch between British and Dutch, since this thesis had to be written in English but the internship assignments had to be in Dutch.

Some of the limitations I would identify are related to the fact that my internship was in the Netherlands and not in China. Although it was not possible nor recommendable (a Hong Kong Chinese friend of mine strongly discouraged me to try to get an internship in China) to take an internship with the Chinese armed forces as a Dutchman, this physical limitation, combined with the fact that my internship fell in the summer break, made it somewhat difficult to get to the right persons for the interviews. This difficulty is also in part why my internship was extended by another two months (six instead of four months). It of course also meant that my interviews are exclusively with Westerners looking at the China issue, rather than the Chinese themselves talking about it. However, I do think that within the Dutch armed forces I was able to find the best possible persons, all very knowledgeable, to conduct interviews with, yet it does explain the limited number of interviews.

Despite these difficulties, the methodological approach selected at the beginning of this project enabled me to properly research the topic. It was possible to make a distinction between the Western and Chinese approach to sea power and then apply it to the two cases studies selected in advance. Especially the case study regarding the South China Sea was useful because in July 2016 the PCA’s ruling came out, generating a storm of news articles regarding the topic. How

25 https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/historische-missies (soon in English as well)
and what the influence of the PCA’s ruling will be on the conflicts in both the South (not only the Spratlys but also the Paracels for example) and East China Sea, would be a topic for further research. Another recommendation for further research would be emphasising the role of (Chinese and Indian) sea power in the so-called string of pearls in the Indian Ocean, where competition between the two countries will cause tensions as well.

As to how the results of the thesis fit into the larger theoretical framework, this research has emphasised the Sun Tzu-esque elements in sea power which have commonly been neglected when thinking about the concept. In the literature on territorial disputes this study has added to the research by looking at these two cases purely from a military (maritime) strategic point of view. In the societal framework this research further shows that the rise of China has the potential to escalate in a conflict over a few islands. This means that transition of power (it has often been said that the West has been in decline and the East will take over the leading role) will not necessarily go smoothly. Yet the West should also consider that with that rise, China might want to create a sphere of influence in accordance with its power, not unlike the US did when it rose to power. However, it would be in everybody’s interest to not let the conflicts over tiny islands grow into a regional conflict, or worse...

“Force is never more operative than when it is known to exist but is not brandished.”

– Alfred Thayer Mahan, 1912.
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United Nations (N/A)


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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Chinese Facilities in the Spratlys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name reef</th>
<th>Reclaimed land (m²)</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuarteron Reef</strong></td>
<td>231.100</td>
<td>Access channel (125m), multiple support buildings, possible communication antennas (5) possible radar facilities including radar towers (2), concrete plants (3), helipad (2), pre-existing military facility, possible gun/missile emplacements (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fiery Cross Reef</strong></td>
<td>2.740.000</td>
<td>3000m airstrip, 630.000m² harbour, multiple cement plants and support buildings, AA-guns, possible radar tower, possible gun emplacements (8), pre-existing anti-frogmen defences, communications equipment, greenhouse, helipad (2), military facility, pier, administrative facility, lighthouse (2), possible satellite com. equipment (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gaven reef</strong></td>
<td>136.000</td>
<td>Access channel (122m), 66.402m² port, AA-guns, possible large radio communications antenna, construction support structure, gun emplacements (8), naval guns, military facility (2), helipad (2), cement plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hughes Reef</strong></td>
<td>76.000</td>
<td>Access channel (118m), defensive tower (4), 292.000m² harbour, 35.350m² port, military facility, gun emplacement (5), possible radar facility, helipad, light house, cement plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Johnson Reef</strong></td>
<td>109.000</td>
<td>Access channel (125m), concrete plant, defensive towers, desalination pumps, fuel dump, military facility (2), radar facility, small port, 3.000m² harbour, possible weapon tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island</td>
<td>Reclamation Area</td>
<td>Reclamation since:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mischief Reef</td>
<td>5.580.000</td>
<td>February 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subi Reef</td>
<td>3.950.000</td>
<td>July 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix 2: The Artificial Islands in the Spratlys Up Close**

Cuarteron
Fiery Cross Reef

Gavens Reef
## Appendix 3: Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Type of organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anselm van der Peet</td>
<td>Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>June 6, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Occupied since</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Cay (Vietnamese: Song Tu Tay)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Reef (Da Nam)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petley Reef (Nui Thi or Da Thi)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Cay (Son Ca)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namyit Island (Nam Yet)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery Great Reef (Da Lon)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin Cowe Island (Sinh Ton)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins Reef (Co Lin)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansdowne Reef (Len Dao)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin Cowe East Island (Sinh Ton Dong)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladd Reef (Da Lat)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spratly Island (Truong Sa or Truong Sa Lon)</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
West Reef (*Da Tay*) Vietnam 1988
Central Reef (*Truong Sa Dong*) Vietnam 1988
East Reef (*Da Dong*) Vietnam 1988
Pearson Reef (*Phan Vinh*) Vietnam 1988
Allison Reef (*Toc Tan*) Vietnam 1988
Cornwallis South Reef (*Nui Le*) Vietnam 1988
Pigeon or Tennent Reef (*Tien Nu*) Vietnam 1988
Barque Canada Reef (*Thuyen Chai*) Vietnam 1988
Amboyna Cay (*An Bang*) Vietnam 1988
Northeast Cay (Filipino: *Parola*) Philippines 1970-1978
Thitu Island (*Pag-asa*) Philippines 1970-1978
Loaita Cay (*Panata*) Philippines 1970-1978
Loaita Island (*Kota*) Philippines 1970-1978
West York Island (*Likas*) Philippines 1970-1978
Flat Island (*Patag*) Philippines 1970-1978
Nanshan Island (*Lawak*) Philippines 1970-1978
Commodore Reef (Filipino: *Rizal*) Philippines ±1980
Ilu Aba Island (Chinese: 太平島) Taiwan 1956
Subi Reef (Chinese: 渚碧礁 Zhubi Jiao), PRC 1988
Gaven Reef (南薰礁 Nanxun Jiao) PRC 1988
Hughes Reef (东门礁 Dongmen Jiao) PRC 1988
Johnson South Reef (赤瓜礁 Chigua Jiao) PRC 1988
Fiery Cross Reef (永暑礁 Yongshu Jiao) PRC 1988
Cuarteron Reef (华阳礁 Huayang Jiao) PRC 1988
Mischief Reef (美济礁 Meiji Jiao) PRC 1995
Swallow Reef (Malay: *Layang-Layang*) Malaysia 1983
Ardasier Reef (*Ubi*), since 1986 Malaysia 1986
Mariveles Reef (*Mantanani*) Malaysia 1986
Erica Reef (*Siput*) Malaysia 1999
Investigator Shoal (*Peninjau*) Malaysia 1999