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The “China Seas” in world history: A general outline of the role of Chinese and East Asian maritime space from its origins to c. 1800 [☆]

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Abstract Through the East Asian waters its neighbouring countries have since early times on maintained networks of trade and exchange relations. Historically, these waters constituted not only a kind of border or natural barrier but from very early times on also a medium facilitating all kinds of exchanges and human activities, a medium through which in particular private merchants but also governments and official institutions established contacts with the world beyond their borders. The seas were sometimes considered a barrier but above all a contact zone, a medium that despite its dangers and difficulties enabled people to establish and maintain manifold exchange relations.

This article intends to provide a general outline of the historical role and significance of East Asian maritime space from its origins to approximately 1800, including the East China Sea, the Bohai Sea, the Yellow Sea (Huanghai), the southern section of the Japanese Sea, and parts of the South China Sea (now usually called Nanhai). It focuses especially, although not exclusively, on China's traditional treatment of and reference to this maritime realm. Also in order to maintain the spatial concept operable, we have decided to call this maritime space the “China Seas”.

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Introduction

East Asia is a region that has recently gained increasing geopolitical importance and in the course of globalization may well become the new world-centre in the future.¹ Through the East Asian waters its neighbouring countries maintain today a global network of trade and exchange relations. But integration into local and supra-regional networks is not only a modern phenomenon. Historically, these waters constituted not only a kind of border or natural barrier but from very early times on also a medium facilitating all kinds of exchanges and human activities, a medium through which in particular private merchants but also governments and official institutions established contacts with the world beyond their borders. Generally speaking, East Asian maritime space was used by fishermen, private and official traders, governments (nations) and government institutions, pirates, and travellers for both commercial, military, diplomatic and private purposes, such as migration or voyages. The seas were sometimes considered a barrier but above all a contact zone, a medium that despite its dangers and difficulties enabled people to establish and maintain manifold exchange relations.² This article intends to provide a general outline of the historical role and significance of East Asian maritime space that includes the East China Sea, the Bohai 渤海 Sea, the Yellow Sea (Huanghai 黃海), the southern section of the Japanese Sea, and parts of the South China Sea (now usually called Nanhai 南海), focussing especially, although not exclusively, on China's traditional treatment of and reference to this maritime realm. Also in order to maintain the spatial concept operable, we have decided to call this maritime space the "China Seas", a term that may not be misunderstood in the sense that this East Asian body of water as a whole or all of the sections that we address in this paper at any time belonged to China or were part of Chinese sovereignty.³ Notwithstanding the fact that the focus of this article lies in the importance and role of maritime space for and in China's history, we will now and again also discuss developments that took place in Japanese or Korean coastal waters.

At the same time, it may at least not be neglected that during probably most of the time periods from antiquity through the middle to the early modern period it was in fact China that was the, if not always political, but at least economic and cultural centre of the macro-region, which – although it was undoubtedly primarily a continental power – was also quite active in maritime space.



East China Sea Region

First being a regional "Mediterranean",⁴ the China Seas soon developed as a spring-board and starting-point for long-distance trade, and by Song times at the latest were firmly integrated into the world-wide exchange system as it existed at that time, an "international" exchange system that admittedly was not yet a global one but that was "substantially more complex in organization, greater in volume, and more sophisticated in execution, than anything the world had previously known".⁵ Regional seas grew more and more together and were gradually integrated into global structures – with interruptions and setbacks of course.

This brings us to the question of sea routes, which can unfortunately not be discussed in more detail within the scope of this article. Basically we can discern northern, eastern, southern and western routes, which can generally be summarized as follows:

1 The "northern routes" (*beihang lu* 北航路)

- 1a From Fujian 福建, Zhejiang 浙江 and Jiangsu 江蘇, or from Shandong 山東, to the eastern and southern coasts of Korea and further to Japan (Hakata 博多, Nagasaki 長崎)

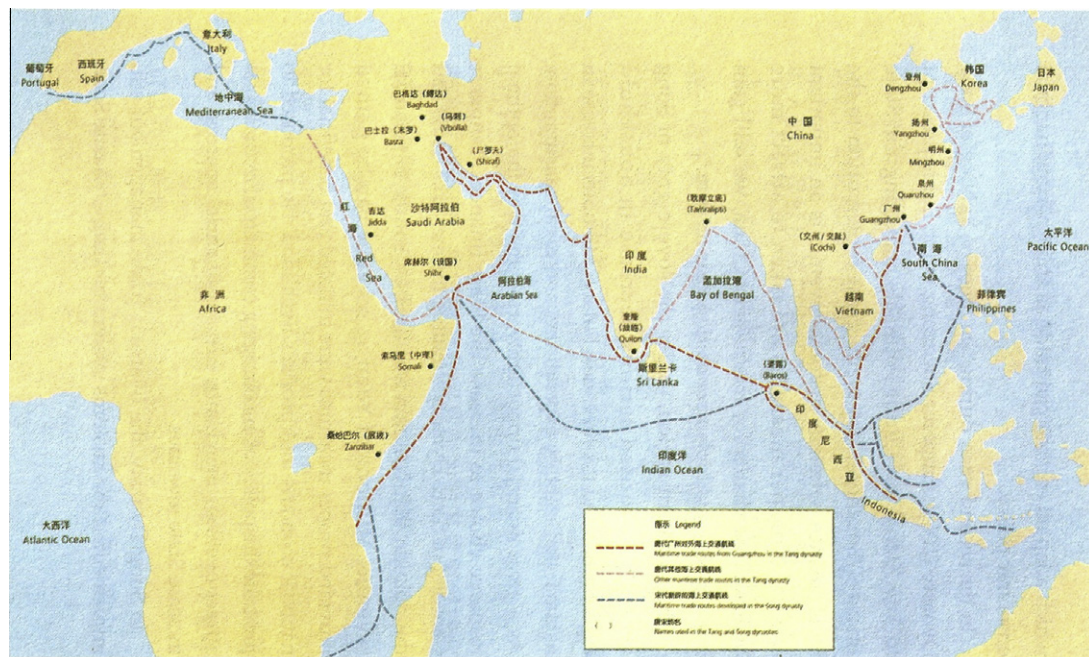
¹ This is also reflected by discussions about an East Asian integration, beginning with a uniform market and gradually developing into a closer political and military cooperation, similar to the European Union. Even ideas like an East Asian currency (similar to the Euro) have been raised.

² See Angela Schottenhammer, Roderich Ptak (Eds.), *Maritime Space in Traditional Chinese Sources*, in: *East Asian Maritime History*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2006), vol. 2.

³ We are well aware of the fact that the spatial concept of East Asia itself is a highly complex and not unproblematic one.

⁴ When we speak of an East Asian "Mediterranean", a term borrowed from the French historian Fernand Braudel that connected the neighbouring countries in the macro-region, the term is used only as a methodological tool to emphasize the broad variety of multi-layered exchange relations. Fernand Braudel (1902–1985), *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*. (Paris: 1949; Paris, Armand Colin, Le Livre de poche, 1990, rééd.), vol. 3.

⁵ Abu-Lughod, Janet, *Before European Hegemony. The World System A.D. 1250–1350*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 353.



唐宋时期亚洲海上交通图
The Sea Communication Chart of Asia belonging to the Tang and Song dynasties.

- From Dengzhou 登州 and Penglai 蓬萊 in Shandong along the Bohai and Dalian Bay 大連灣 to the mouth of the Yalu River
- From Jiangsu or Zhejiang via Huksan 黑山島 to the west coast of Korea
- 1b The “eastern route” (*donghang lu* 東航路) from Fujian or Zhejiang via the Ryūkyūs to southern Japan
- 2 Eastern routes (also *donghang lu*)
- 2a From Fujian via the northern tip of Taiwan to Naha 那霸 on the Ryūkyūs
- 2b From Fujian and Zhejiang directly to southern Japan
- 3 Southern routes (*nanhang lu* 南航路)
- 3a The “eastern route” (again *donghang lu*) from Fujian to Luzon and the Sulu region
- 3b The so-called “western route” (*xihang lu* 西行路) from Jiangsu via Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong and then further to the South China Sea – via Hainan, Vietnam and the area of modern Singapore – and to the Indian Ocean (this route had many branches within Southeast Asia)⁶

⁶ Angela Schottenhammer, “The Sea as a Barrier and Contact Zone: Maritime Space and Sea Routes in Traditional Chinese Sources and Books”, 9, in Angela Schottenhammer, Roderich Ptak (eds.), *Maritime Space in Traditional Chinese Sources*; see also the many publications of Roderich Ptak that discuss sea routes, for example, *China, the Portuguese, and the Nanyang. Oceans and Routes, Regions and Trade (c. 1000-1600)*. (Aldershot, etc.: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004), Variorum Collected Studies Series CS 777; Roderich Ptak, “Jottings on Chinese Sailing Routes to Southeast Asia, Especially on the Eastern Route in Ming Times”, in Jorge M. dos Santos Alves (coord.), *Portugal e a China. Conferências nos encontros de história luso-chinesa*. (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2001), 107-131; “The Northern Trade Route to the Spice Islands: South China Sea – Sulu Zone – North Moluccas. (14th to early 16th Century)”, *Archipel* 43 (1992), 27-56.

Many guides and descriptions of sea routes existed in China. An anonymous Ming map, for example, the *Gu hanghai tu kaoshi* 古航海圖考釋, shows the trade arteries from the Bohai area down to the mouth of the Pearl River near Guangzhou. In some cases, the routes are depicted as lines (*chuanlu* 船路), in others they are described in words.⁷ Sea routes of course also sometimes changed over time and with them the in- or decreasing importance of coastal and port cities. Information on sea routes and coastlines was compiled into route maps, star charts, and “compass-needle manuals” (*zhenjing* 針經) or so-called “rutters”.⁸ During the famous expeditions led by Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–1433), for example, an enormous quantity of information on sea routes and coastlines was collected and composed as rutters and maps. Unfortunately, much of this geographical material was later burnt by the Minister of War, Liu Daxia 劉大夏 (1437–1516). Nevertheless, the geographical knowledge related to them was not entirely lost.

The *condition sine qua non* for the practical use of maritime space were boats and ships. When exactly the Chinese first

⁷ Timothy Brook, *Geographical Sources of Ming-Qing History*. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1988), 43.

⁸ The first printed rutter was apparently the *Duhai fangcheng* 渡海方經 by Wu Pu 吳朴, which was published in 1537. Cf. Tian Rukang 田汝康, “*Duhai fangcheng* – Zhongguo diyiben keyin de shuilubu 渡海方經 – 中國第一本刻印的水路簿”, in Li Guohao 李國豪 et al. (eds.), *Explorations in the History of Science and Technology in China*. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 301–308. It is also briefly discussed in Timothy Brook, “Communications and Commerce”, in Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (eds.), 1998. *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8: *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644*, Part II. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 579–707, 696–697.



蓬莱物語 2巻 [ホウライ モノガタリ]. Kraft-Katalog Nr. 274; KS 7/295/4 (Muromachi monogatari); NSN 13f; Sawai 2 S. 101-130; Mjm 5 Nr. 103; A 27. Reprinted with kind permission of the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin (Libri japon. 450).

began to build boats is hardly reconstructable. Early sources, generally speaking, contain little evidence on ships or seafaring. The *Yijing* 易經 (chapt. Xici 系辭) traces ships for transportation purposes back to the time of the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝). The *Shijing* 詩經 contains various references to boats and ships.⁹ But these very short entries cannot provide any further information about shipbuilding; in addition, they mostly refer to river shipping. Various archaeological relics including boats, oars, and rudders¹⁰ dating to periods between 6000 and 2000 BC, encouraged Chinese scholars to conclude that already during the earliest times of Chinese civilization, during the Xiantouling 咸頭嶺 culture (6500–5000 BC), in Guangzhou dug-out canoes were used to venture into the open waters. But even when we assume that these dates are correct, they do not allow any further conclusions concerning shipbuilding. Archaeologists furthermore found metal rings dating to the Warring States Period (475 or 463–221 BC) that supposedly were used to fortify ship planks.¹¹ But we do not possess any definite proof for this. It would seem to be safe to say only that by Shang times at the latest (16th–11th centuries BC) the coastal population used simple devices to float along the coastal waters.¹²

Written sources only rarely speak about construction forms of ships (for example *Shiji*, chapt. 30 and 118). The “first seaworthy vessel”¹³ according to some Chinese historians, is recorded in the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年), composed at the time of the Warring States.¹⁴ When Huangdi 黃帝 ascended the throne, a big fish that had been caught in

the coastal waters, was reportedly sacrificed.¹⁵ King Mang 芒 is recorded as having caught a big fish in the sea.¹⁶ But such entries of course provide no valuable information concerning shipbuilding.

A spectacular find was excavated in 1974 in Guangzhou, when archaeologists discovered the remains of an old shipyard that was dated to the turn of the second to third century BC.¹⁷ According to estimations ships of a length of up to 30 m and a width of 8.4 m could have been constructed there.¹⁸ *In situ* various Qin and Han coins, carpenters’ tools, arrowheads and daggers were excavated. Through comparative analysis scholars concluded that this was most probably a state-supervised shipyard used for military purposes.¹⁹

Eventually, during Han times, shipbuilding technology was on a great upswing. Progress was made not only in terms of hull construction, masts, rudders, oars or sails. But, as written sources confirm, there existed different types of ships that could be used for different functional purposes – naval, commercial, for commodity or human transportation across small and large rivers or coastal waters.²⁰

⁹ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics. With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*, in Five Volumes, vol. IV, *The She King*. (Reprint, Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1992), vol. IV, 38, 71, 74, 102, 280, 338, 404, 435, 443.

¹⁰ Xi Longfei 席龍飛, *Zhongguo zaochuan shi* 中國造船史. (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 2.

¹¹ Xi Longfei, *Zhongguo zaochuan shi*, 38.

¹² Xi Longfei, *Zhongguo zaochuan shi*, 21, 27–29.

¹³ Gang Deng, *Chinese Maritime Activities and Socioeconomic Development, c. 2100 B.C.–1900 A.D.* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 1997), 23.

¹⁴ Gang Deng, *Chinese Maritime Activities and Socioeconomic Development*, 22–23.

¹⁵ Gang Deng, *Chinese Maritime Activities and Socioeconomic Development*, 23; *Zhushu jinian tongjian* 竹書紀年統編 by Xu Wenjing 徐文靖. (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan 1966), j. 1, 5a (87).

¹⁶ *Zhushu jinian tongjian*, j. 3, 18a (181).

¹⁷ Thomas Höllmann, “Panyu: Die südliche Pforte nach China während der Han-Zeit”, in Margarete Prüch, unter Mitarbeit von Stephan von der Schulenburg (ed.), *Schätze für König Zhao Mo. Das Grab von Nan Yue*. (Heidelberg: Braus Verlag, 1998), 109–113, here 110; Guangzhou wenwu guanlichu 廣州文物管理處, “Guangzhou QinHan zaochuan gongchang yizhi shijue 廣州秦漢造船工場遺址試掘”, *Wenwu* 4 (1977), 1–16.

¹⁸ Gang Deng, *Chinese Maritime Activities and Socioeconomic Development*, 77.

¹⁹ Guangzhou wenwu guanlichu, “Guangzhou QinHan zaochuan gongchang yizhi shijue”.

²⁰ Lin Fengjiang 林鳳江, Chen Xiujuan 陳秀娟, “Handai de zaochuanye yu haiwai maoyi 漢代造船業與海外貿易”, *Longjiang shehui kexue* 龍江社會科學 6 (1994), 65–67.

Essential for sailing the seas were the periodic monsoon winds, which determined seafaring all over the Indian Ocean over centuries.²¹ These winds comprise a system of regularly alternating winds and currents unique to the Indian Ocean and South and East China Sea. From April to September, as the Asian land mass heats up, hot air rises producing a vacuum, which sucks in the air from the ocean, creating the southwest monsoon. During the other six ‘winter’ months of the year, the opposite reaction occurs, creating the northeast monsoon. They were later called *xinfeng* 信風 (reliable winds), *jifeng* 季風 (seasonal winds) or *maoyifeng* 貿易風 (trade winds) in Chinese. Early evidence that the Chinese knew about these winds can be found in the *Shiji*. It mentions the northwest winds 不周風, the north winds 廣莫風, the northeast winds 條風, the east winds 明庶風, the southeast winds 清明風, the east winds 景風, the southwest winds 涼風 and the west winds 閭闔風.²²

But the invention of the sail constitutes a problem. We can only speculate that probably as early as Shang times simple forms of sails were in use.²³ Functional sails were probably not used before the fifth century BC, certainly later than in Egypt.²⁴ Scholars basically agree that sails were most probably invented by non Han-Chinese peoples such as the Yue 越. This contradicts the legend that the sail (*fan* 帆) had already been invented by the Great Yu 大禹 during the Xia 夏 Dynasty (trad. 2205–1766).²⁵

Early mythology and ideology

Already in the first millennium BC the sea had a definite place in Chinese ideology. A bronze inscription from the 10th century BC mentions the term “*hai* 海” already in its meaning as “sea”, while the term “*yang* 洋” is still restricted in meaning to signify a “vast, expansive space”.²⁶ The earliest Chinese literary source attesting to the fact that the sea was originally regarded as a kind of frontier, margin, or delimitation – and at

the same time as a mythological place – is the Daoist work *Liezi* 列子 (3rd–4th century BC; fl. 398 BC), which refers to five mountains in the middle of an abyss beyond the Bohai Sea 渤海 in the East – the first one Daiyu 岱輿, the second Yuanjiao 員嶠, the third Fanghu 方壺, the fourth Yingzhou 瀛洲 and the fifth Penglai 蓬萊.²⁷ The Eastern Sea was considered the frontier or margin towards immortality and a space in which the islands of the immortals are located – Penglai 蓬萊, Fangzhang 方丈 and Yingzhou 瀛洲. Tomb No. 1 from the Mawangdui 馬王堆 complex contained a mural with a representation of the Penglai Islands. In Chinese mythology these were considered the empire of immortality where the elixir of immortality could be found.²⁸ Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BC) is said to have searched for these islands to obtain the immortality drug. Similar stories are reported about Emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 140–87 BC).²⁹ In 130 BC, a certain Li Shaojun 李少君 told the emperor about the process of obtaining immortality as supposedly also carried out by China’s first and mythical emperor Huangdi 黃帝. These stories at least reveal that the sea seems to have possessed quite a strong magical-mythological attraction for Chinese emperors and other members of the social elite. They also attest to their interest in a world beyond – be it a mythical one or a vast unknown world beyond China’s borders. Interestingly, these mythical ideologies all refer to the Eastern Sea (*donghai* 東海), the direction in which the sun rises. According to Chinese views China was surrounded by the Four Seas (*sihai* 四海), located close to three oceans (*yang* 洋). The Eastern Seas included the Bohai 渤海 Sea, the Huanghai 黃海 Sea or Yellow Sea, the Donghai 東海 Sea or the East China Sea and the Nanhai 南海 or South China Sea.

Early imperial China (Qin-Han)

The first contacts on sea routes were of course established with close neighbours in the region. From approximately the fourth century BC relatively lively shipping developed in the Northeast Asian waters, in particular between China and Korea. Originally, the increase in shipping activities in the Eastern Seas certainly also has to be traced back to Emperor Qin Shihuangdi’s 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BC) search for the islands of the immortals. The sea route led from Shandong either via various small islands or directly along the coastline in the direction of Korea.³⁰ Via Korea Chinese influence eventually also reached Japan, but we still know relatively little about concrete routes and contact in this early period. The first human movements and migration to Japan from the Chinese mainland also took place via Korea. In addition, the sea was from early times onwards used for commercial and military purposes. But it must be mentioned that in terms of maritime commerce the Chinese

²¹ The monsoon winds were known to most of the seafarers. Greeks and Romans knew the winds according to its “discoverer” Hippalos, who probably lived in the first century BC. He dared to sail over the open sea and could, thus, shorten tremendously the sea voyage to India. Also the Indians knew about the monsoon winds and highly respected the stormy southwest monsoon. Both the anonymous composer of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* as well as Plinius the Older in his *Natural History* distributed the discovery of these winds”. For details see for example Dietmar Rothermund, “Der Blick vom Westen auf den Indischen Ozean vom <Periplus> bis zur <Suma Oriental>”, in Dietmar Rothermund, Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (Hrsg.), *Der Indische Ozean. Das afro-asiatische Mittelmeer als Kultur- und Wirtschaftsraum*. (Wien: Promedia, 2004), 9–35.

²² *Shiji*, j. 25, 1243–1248. According to Gang Deng 1997, 43, the monsoon winds were called *bozhuo feng* 舶越風 in sayings of the peasant population during Han times. This would imply knowledge and distribution of the character 舶.

²³ Xi Longfei, *Zhongguo zaochuan shi*, 48–50.

²⁴ Gang Deng, *Chinese Maritime Activities and Socioeconomic Development*, 32; Lin Huadong 林華東, “Zhongguo fengfan tanyuan 中國風帆探源”, *Haijiaoshi yanjiu* 海交史研究 2 (1986), 85–88; Xi Longfei, *Zhongguo zaochuan shi*, 51–52.

²⁵ On the invention of the sail during Shang times, see Xi Longfei, *Zhongguo zaochuan shi*, 49–50.

²⁶ Bernhard Karlgren, “Grammatica Serica Recensa”, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 29 (1957), 947 and 732.

²⁷ *Liezi* 列子, in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1954), vol. 3, chpt. 5 (*Tangwen diwu* 湯問第五), 52.

²⁸ Michel Loewe, *Ways to Paradises. The Chinese Quest for Immortality*. (Reprint, Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1994), 37.

²⁹ *Hanshu* 漢書 by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), j. 25B, 22a (according to Loewe, 37).

³⁰ Zhang Xun 張巽, *Woguo gudai haishang jiaotong* 我國古代海上交通. (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), 1–2; Yü Ying-shi, *Trade and Expansion in Han China. A Study in the Structure of Sino-Barbarian Economic Relations*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 182.

remained relatively passive until approximately the 11th century. They seem to have traded early on (in the Qin-Han period) with locations in Korea and a bit later also Japan, but did not venture to trade with Southeast Asia, not to speak of the Indian Ocean, until the latter half of the 11th century. In this context, one should make a distinction between Chinese activities in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia.

In search of the wealth of the south

Early contacts with Southeast Asia basically went via the South China Sea and Canton or Panyu 番禺 as the major port. On Panyu the famous historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BC) reports that it constituted an important commercial centre where pearls (*zhuji* 珠璣), rhinoceros horn (*xi* 犀), tortoise shells (*daimao* 玳瑁), fruits and fabrics (*guo bu* 果布) were exchanged.³¹ But commercial relations became really important between South China (Guangdong), Indo-China and the Malay Archipelago only at the beginning of our time. In 111 BC Emperor Han Wudi subjugated the NanYue 南粵 Empire in the south to get access to the wealth from the Nanhai region. We know that in 29 AD Jiaozhou 交趾 (modern Vietnam) under the supervision of its local governor still voluntarily sent an embassy to the Han court “paying tribute” (交趾牧鄧讓率七郡太守遣使奉貢).³² At that time many Chinese had already migrated to the region from the north. But soon problems arose and Wudi sent a punitive mission to the south (see below). Later descriptions provide evidence that the Chinese were, for example, especially interested in the copper wealth of the region.³³

Many Chinese historians claim that the merchant junks (*guchuan* 賈船) that were also used by Han envoys around 100 BC were built in China and operated by Chinese sailors. The *Official History of the Han Dynasty*, the *Hanshu* 漢書, however, clearly states that these envoys had to rely on foreign “barbarian junks” (*manyi guchuan* 蠻夷賈船) to travel along the coasts. Still the Tang period *Tang yulin* 唐語林 by Wang Dang 王諱 refers to “foreign ships called *haibo* 海舶”, which year for year come to Guangzhou for trade, the largest ones coming from the “Lion’s Country” (Shizi guo 獅子國), that is Sri Lanka. Whenever these or other foreign junks reached Guangzhou, the local population was full of excitement.³⁴

Hepu 合浦 in South China was very famous for its richness in pearls.³⁵ Even though it was economically speaking rather an undeveloped region – favoured as a place of exile for offi-

cials who had fallen into disgrace – the pearl fishing was very lucrative. On Hainan Island, that was called Zhuyai 珠崖 at that time, two commanders, Zhuyai and Dan’er 儋耳 were established. But due to revolts both commanders were suspended again in the first century BC and all the evidence we possess suggests that the island did not play an important role in China’s early sea routes that rather used to follow the coastal line to the south.

Probably the most important source concerning China’s maritime contacts and routes in the Nanhai region during the Han Dynasty is provided by a much quoted and discussed entry in the *Hanshu*. Scepticism about the authenticity of the passage as well as the assumption that it was not actually written by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) himself has been raised. But there can be little doubt that the entry provides a relatively authentic picture of China’s maritime relations at that time. Contacts with places in Indo-China, North Sumatra, Myanmar and South India are mentioned.³⁶

Following this entry in the *Hanshu* and comparing it with archaeological evidence along the coasts of Southeast Asia and India, ships in these times sailed from Hepu 合浦 or Xuwen 徐聞 first to Funan 扶南 (Phnam; Southern Annam), the first important kingdom in Southeast Asia,³⁷ and then reached Oc Eo, the port of Funan.³⁸ From there they travelled via the Gulf of Thailand to the East coast of the Isthmus of Kra on the Malay Peninsula. Goods were unloaded and then transported on land probably crossing the narrowest passage of the isthmus at Kra Buri in order to reach the West coast. From there ships sailed in the direction of the Gulf of Bengal

³⁶ *Hanshu*, j. 28, 1671: 自日南障塞, 徐聞, 合浦船行可五月, 有都元國; 又船行可四月, 有邑盧沒國; 又船行可二十餘日, 有諶離國; 步行可十餘日, 有夫甘都盧國。自夫甘都盧國船行可二月餘, 有黃支國, 民俗略與珠崖相類。其州廣大, 戶口多, 多異物, 自武帝以來皆獻見。有譯長, 屬黃門, 與應募者俱入海市明珠, 璧流離, 奇石異物, 齎黃金雜繒而往。所至國皆粟食爲餽, 蠻夷賈船, 轉送致之。亦利交易, 剽殺人。又苦逢風波溺死, 不者數年來還。大珠至圍二寸以下。平帝元始中, 王莽輔政, 欲耀威德, 厚遺黃支王, 令遣使獻生犀牛。自黃支船行可八月, 到皮宗; 船行可二月, 到日南, 象林界云。黃支之南, 有已程不國, 漢之譯使自此還矣。 For an English translation of the passage see Yü Ying-shi, *Trade and Expansion*, 172–173, also Yü Ying-shi, “Han Foreign Relations”, in Denis Twitchett, Michael Loewe (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. I. The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–220 A.D.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 376–462.

³⁷ See for example Yoshiaki Ishizawa, “Chinese Chronicles of the 1st–5th Century AD Funan, Southern Cambodia”, in Rosemary Scott & John Guy, *South East Asia & China: Art, Interaction & Commerce. Colloquies on Art & Archaeology in Asia No. 17. Held June 6th–8th, 1994*. (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 1995), 11–31; Paul Pelliot, “Le Fou-nan”, in *Bulletin de l’École Française de l’Extrême Orient* 3: 57 (1903), 248–303.

³⁸ On the role of Oc Eo, a major city of Funan, see also Pierre-Yves Manguin, “The Archaeology of Funan in the Mekong River Delta: the Oc Eo Culture of Vietnam”, in N. Tingley (ed.) *Arts of Ancient Vietnam: From River Plain to Open Sea*. (New York, Houston: Asia Society, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Yale University Press, 2009), 100–118; Eric Bourdonneau, “Réhabiliter le Funan. Oc Eo ou la première Angkor”, *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* 94 (2007), 111–157; or on the large network of canals of the city that actually required a functioning and centralized polity see also Eric Bourdonneau, “The Ancient Canal System of the Mekong Delta – Preliminary Report”, in Anna Karlström and Anna Källén (eds.), *Fishbones and Glittering Emblems. Southeast Asia Archaeology 2002*. (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 2003), 257–270.

³¹ *Shiji* 史記 by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BC). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), j. 129, 3268.

³² *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–446). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), j. 1 shang, 41.

³³ Herbert Franke, *Geschichte des Chinesischen Reiches. Eine Darstellung seiner Entstehung, seines Wesens und seiner Entwicklung bis zur neuesten Zeit*. (2nd edition of the new, revised edition. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter), vol. 1, 390–391.

³⁴ For further details cf. James K. Chin, “Ports, Merchants, Chieftains, and Eunuchs. Reading Maritime Commerce of Early Guangdong”, in Shing Müller, Thomas, O. Höllmann Putao Gui (Eds.), *Guangdong: Archaeology and Early Texts [Archäologie und frühe Texte]*. (Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 2004), 217–239, 222–223.

³⁵ *Hou Hanshu*, j. 76, 2473; Edward Schafer, “The Pearl Fisheries of Ho-p’u”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 72:4 (1952), 155–168.

and then further to the east coast of Sri Lanka or they reached another South Indian port, Arikamedu, or another port along the coast of Coromandel.³⁹ The return voyage happened accordingly or via the Malacca Strait. Funan was an important stopover in the Indo-Iranian and Parthian sea trade of that time. Among the archaeological relics of its former capital dated to the second to fourth century archaeologists excavated a Roman coin of 152 AD with the image of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (reg. 161–180). Undoubtedly, this find does not tell us anything about how and when the coin got there. But there is also no convincing reason to deny the existence of a relatively robust sea trade in Funan. Both Parthia and India are recorded in the *Hou Hanshu* as trading with the Romans by sea and conducting a very lucrative commerce. The seafaring trade of the Roman Empire, thus, finally connected Southeastern Europe and the Orient with the west coast of India, it connected the Red Sea to the Arabian Sea and ports in India,⁴⁰ and from there links existed that led into the China Seas, even though they were not yet routine.

Human movement and migration

The sea – certainly also understood figuratively in the sense of escaping to a remote place – including islands located close to the littoral but also countries like Korea and Japan were relatively early on considered or used as a place of refuge or exile. Kongzi 孔子 (551–479 BC) is claimed to have already said he would go into exile on the seas with a raft, should his political ideas not be accepted (*Lunyu* 論語, Book 5, chpt. 7).⁴¹ The first concrete case of an exile by sea is reported from the year 473 BC. After the state of Yue had annexed Wu, Fan Li 范蠡, originally advisor to the victorious King Gou Jian 句踐, went overseas fearful of the revengeful personality of the king (*Shiji*, Yuewang Gou Jian).⁴² When in 277 BC the state of Qin conquered the state of Yue in Southeast China (modern Zhejiang and Fujian), local inhabitants are said to have fled in great numbers overseas. One renowned modern historian, Zhang Xun 張騫, even claimed in this context that the original settlers of the Penghu 澎湖 Islands as well as of Taiwan were originally descendants of these Yue refugees who were known as fishermen with short hair and tattoos. A first official state-supported emigration to lands overseas is transmitted from the third century BC. Emperor Qin Shihuang is said to have sent a fleet with 3000 young emigrants, men and women, as well as with grain, seeds and a great quantity of tools in the direction of Japan.⁴³ When Dong Zhuo 董卓 (murdered 193) took over power through a coup d'état towards the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, many scholars and literati are said to have emigrated to Liaodong 遼東 by crossing the Bohai Sea.

³⁹ Bernhard Dahm, “Handel und Herrschaft im Grenzbereich des Indischen Ozeans“, in Dietmar Rothermund, Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (Hrsg.), *Der Indische Ozean. Das afro-asiatische Mittelmeer als Kultur- und Wirtschaftsraum*. (Wien: Promedia, 2004), 105–122, here 109.

⁴⁰ Liu Xinru, *The Silk Road in World History*. The New Oxford World History. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33 and 40.

⁴¹ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*. (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1994), vol. 1.

⁴² *Shiji*, j. 41, 1740.

⁴³ *Shiji*, j. 118, 3086.

Military purposes

Following the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, naval battles had become quite popular by late Eastern Zhou times. In 549 BC King Gong 共 of Chu 楚 sent out his fleet to attack the kingdom of Wu 吳. In 525 BC, Wu 吳 subsequently dispatched its fleet twice to attack Chu. It has been calculated that between 549 and 476 BC a further 20 sea battles took place between Wu and Chu alone.⁴⁴ But we can say with relative certainty that the war ships navigated only in the close coastal waters and in river estuaries. A real sea battle did not take place before 485 BC when Fuchai 夫差, King of Wu 吳, sent a fleet from the south and defeated the navy of the Kingdom of Qi 齊 in the north (Aigong 哀公, year 10). In 482 BC the Kingdom of Yue 越 in the south attacked Wu from the sea and eventually defeated and annexed the country nine years later. All these references attest to the use of the seas around China for political military purposes, but first only along the coastal line of what is now China. But soon rulers ventured a bit further.

In 109 BC the Emperor Han Wudi dispatched a fleet with 5000 soldiers from Shandong via the Bohai 渤海 Sea to Korea in order to attack the country and establish Chinese prefectures or commanderies there.⁴⁵ The Chinese soldiers were supposedly transported to Korea on multi-storied ships called “*louchuan* 樓船”. Subsequently, the Han Empire established three commanderies on Korean territory, Lelang 樂浪, Zhenfan 真番 and Lintun 臨屯.⁴⁶ Also a first Chinese occupation of the island of Hainan, at that time designated as Dan'er and Zhuyai, is recorded from Han times. The campaign took place in the winter of the year 6 of the reign period Yuanding 元鼎 (112 BC) of Han Wudi. The *Hanshu* speaks of 100,000 soldiers that are said to have participated in the campaign.⁴⁷ Edward E. Schafer in this context also mentions the famous Han general Ma Yuan 馬援 (14 BC–49 AD) who was involved in many campaigns in the south: “These garrisoned territories seem to have been little disturbed by the immigrants of settlers with their strange ways during the earlier Han period. But in the first century of the Christian era, after the definitive conquest of those lands by the septuagenarian hero Ma Yüan, the soldiers were followed by colonists and their magistrates, bringing all the paraphernalia of official culture with them. Parts of Nam-Viet took on the superficial but pleasing aspect of a respectable Chinese province”.⁴⁸ These examples clearly attest to the fact that by Han times at the latest the Chinese Empire was expanding its influence via the sea to close-by

⁴⁴ Zhang Xun, *Zhongguo hanghai kejishi* 中國航海科技史. (Beijing: Haiyang chubanshe 1991), 23.

⁴⁵ *Shiji*, j. 115, 2987–2989.

⁴⁶ Concerning the development of these commanderies see Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*. Translated by Edward W. Wagner, with Edward J. Schultz. (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 19–21; Erling von Mende, *China und die Staaten auf der koreanischen Halbinsel bis zum 12. Jh. Eine Untersuchung zur Entwicklung der Formen zwischenstaatlicher Beziehungen in Ostasien*. (Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), 30–46; also Yü Ying-shi, “Han Foreign Relations”, 451–457.

⁴⁷ *Hanshu*, j. 6, 188; also Wang Xiangzhi 王象之 (*Jinshi* 1196 – after 1221), *Yudi jisheng* 輿地紀勝. (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1962), j. 89, 2a.

⁴⁸ Edward H. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird. T'ang Images of the South*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 16.

neighbouring territories. The use of the China Seas for naval, military purposes has, thus, a long tradition.

Diplomatic purposes

Sources tell us much less about early private trade relations. Little has been recorded – often we possess only indirect evidence – and also archaeology can so far provide us with only more general tendencies. Officially at least, maritime trade in Northeast Asia was more or less closely linked up with diplomacy.

First written evidence of a visit of a Japanese envoy to China stems from the year 57. In the *Hou Hanshu* it is mentioned that the Wo 倭 – this is the old Chinese designation of Japan – had brought tribute to the Chinese court that year. The Han Emperor Guangwu 光武 (reg. 25–57) is even said to have conferred, via the Japanese envoy, a golden seal to the “King of Wo”.⁴⁹ An inscription confirmed the Japanese ruler as the king of his country. This written record seemed to have been verified when in 1784 a golden seal was unearthed on the Island of Shika-no-shima 志賀島 in Japan – supposedly exactly the same seal that had been conferred upon the Japanese king by the Han emperor.⁵⁰ Indeed this seal has meanwhile been considered as authentic among Japan’s archaeological experts; a solid proof that this really *is* the seal that is mentioned in the *Hou Hanshu* is this, however, admittedly not.

As tribute the Japanese are said to have sent goods such as textiles, sapan wood, bows and arrows, slaves, and white pearls. Chinese gifts on the other hand included silk fabrics, gold objects, bronze mirrors, pearls, lead and cinnabar.⁵¹ Bronze mirrors as well as numerous other bronze and iron objects stemming from the Han period have been excavated in various places in both Korea and Japan. Undoubtedly, bronze mirrors constituted one of the early trade commodities and diplomatic gifts of the time. Even bronze coins cast under the rulership of Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9–23) have been unearthed from some places in Kyūshū 九州.⁵²

The China Sea was of course also used by fishermen since earliest times. Coastal residents of Shandong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang obviously were highly qualified shipbuilders and already during Zhou times were using the coastal waters for fishing and trading.⁵³ Boats for two can probably be dated back to the Eastern Zhou Dynasty 東周 (770–221 v. Chr.). Relics of

rudders are much older and have been estimated to date back to 7000 BC or earlier.

Migration, military, political-diplomatic and commercial purposes were, thus, the dominating factors of activities in the China Seas in this early period. The sources provide us with the impression that, officially at least, military and diplomatic purposes prevailed while trade was only of minor importance. This certainly does not reflect the whole range of the picture. And it is clear that official relations went along with cultural exchange, a factor that became ever more important parallel to the sharp increase in commercial interchange and interaction. The routes still closely followed coastlines and islands in the more shallow waters.

The period of division (Sanguo 三國, 220–265, 280; Nanbei chao 南北朝)

This period is characterized by growing official and non-official relations with Korea and Japan, which rose as independent states at that time, a process that was also facilitated by increasingly frequent travels of Buddhist monks. As Korea and Japan converted to Buddhism, China became a major pilgrimage destination for monks seeking education and texts and, thus, also increasingly functioned as a mediator of Chinese culture. The China Seas were used increasingly for private voyages and increasingly functioned as a cultural exchange zone. Goods and technologies introduced to these countries by merchants undoubtedly greatly facilitated the adoption of Chinese culture throughout the China Seas.

At that time, Korea was divided into three kingdoms, Koguryō 高句麗 (37 BC–668 AD), Silla 新羅 (57 BC–935 AD) and Paekche 百濟 (18 BC–660 AD). Mutual relations with China and Japan were, generally speaking, characterized by military considerations. The Chinese state of Wei 魏 (220–265) attacked Korea, in particular Koguryō that had a joint land border with China, and vice versa. All three Korean kingdoms, on the other hand, tried to take advantage of China’s separation and use nomadic peoples as well as Japan for its own military purposes. Paekche, for example, asked for Japanese troops to assist in attacking Silla.⁵⁴ Paekche also developed as the spring-board from which aspects of Chinese culture as well as Buddhism were further transmitted to Japan. But despite these not really pacific politics that continued throughout the Nanbeichao period, it was a time when the ruling and social elites in Korea adopted many elements of Chinese culture as well as Buddhism.

Wei also maintained official relations with Japan. Twice the Wei ruler sent embassies to Japan, between 238 and 247 and vice versa four Japanese embassies came to China. The chapter “Description of the Eastern Barbarians” (*Dongyi zhuan* 東夷傳) in the Wei annals of the *History of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志) described the Wo 倭 people in relative detail. The various peoples of the Wo country, it is said, can be reached, as a rule, by each time crossing another small sea. The geography and the most important local products are described, as well as the number of households, if known, the name of the responsible official, as well as distances. The Wo country is mentioned as the country of the Queen Himiko 卑

⁴⁹ *Hou Hanshu*, j. 85, 2821. This seal is today on display in the Historical Museum of Fukuoka, Japan. For the historical assessment of the seal cf. Seyock *Auf den Spuren der Ostbarbaren. Zur Archäologie protohistorischer Kulturen in Südkorea und Westjapan*. (Münster: LitVerlag, 2004), 207–211. Bunka. Tübinger interkulturelle und linguistische Japanstudien. Illustrations may be downloaded from <http://www.web.nchu.edu.tw/~leehsin/Japan-1.htm>, <http://www.otomiya.com/fishing/guide/guide13.html>, http://www.www3.famille.ne.jp/~o-koga/kuma/kirameki/Super-History/sh_01.htm, <http://www.bfortune.net/social/seso/nihon-edo/kinin.htm>.

⁵⁰ Yü Ying-shi, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, 186; Alfred Wiczorek, Sahara Makoto, *Zeit der Morgenröte. Japans Archäologie und Geschichte bis zu den ersten Kaisern*. (Mannheim: Reiss-Engelhorn Museum, 2004), 225.

⁵¹ *Hou Hanshu*, j. 30, 857–858.

⁵² Yü Ying-shi, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, 186.

⁵³ Zhang Xun, *Woguo gudai haishang jiaotong*, 3–4.

⁵⁴ Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, 45–46.

彌呼, supposed to have been located in the regions of Xiemayi 邪馬壹, in Japanese Yama'ichi.⁵⁵

Japan's contacts with China for a long time were maintained basically via Korea. This has of course also to do with the managing of the sea routes. It was easier to sail along the coasts and passing islands than to take the direct sea route via the open sea, a route that was first officially taken in Tang times. Japan's interest in Korea in this respect basically only existed in her role as intermediary to Chinese culture. One was interested in scholars, books, calendars and art objects. It was also via Korea that Buddhism reached Japan, mainly via Paekche. A last Japanese embassy to China had reached the court of the Western Jin 西晉 (265–316) in 266, a following embassy is not mentioned before 413, when it reached the court of the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420).⁵⁶

With the unification of North China under the Toba-Wei 拓拔魏 (386–534) the Northern Bei Wei state became Koguryō's most important partner. After 425 for more than a century regular tribute and trade relations existed between both countries. At the same time, Koguryō tried to maintain diplomatic relations with China's Southern dynasties, what turned out to be not as easy as hoped. In 480 and 520, for example, two embassies of Koguryō to the Southern Qi and the Liang Dynasty were caught by the Bei Wei.

The influence of Chinese civilization, as well as immigrants from both China and Korea that were troubled by wars between 365–645, left far-reaching signs in the hitherto still relatively primitive and traditionally organized Japanese society that was based upon a clan system (*uji* 氏). A Japanese work dating from 815, the *Shinsen shōji roku* 新撰姓氏錄, contains genealogies of 1182 aristocratic people from Kyōto and five inner provinces. More than 30% of these aristocratic families were of foreign origin (*bambetsu* 蕃別), 176 from China, 120 from Paekche, 88 from Koma (Koguryō) and 18 from Silla. Also numerous Korean peasants and craftsmen emigrated to Japan during this time.⁵⁷

During this time period, the East China Seas also started to become the spring-board for locations beyond in Southeast Asia. In this context, it is intriguing to see that the Chinese character for ocean-going junk “*bo* 舶” seems to appear for the first time in the third century. In 260, Kang Tai 康泰, received the order of the ruler of Wu, Sun Quan 孫權 (reg. 222–252), to travel to Southeast Asia. He left a report about his travels, the *Wushi waiguo zhuan* 吳時外國傳 (*Description of foreign countries during the time of Wu*), parts of which have

survived in later encyclopaedias. An entry in the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 by Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) provides us with a brief passage of the *Wushi waiguo zhuan*. Accordingly, at that time overseas junks existed that were equipped with seven sails (舶張七帆).⁵⁸ Another entry quotes the *Nanzhou yiwu zhi* 南州異物志 by Wan Zhen 萬震 and speaks of people beyond China's borders, whose ships were equipped with up to four sails according to their size (外徼人隨舟大小或作四帆).⁵⁹ Sun Quan reportedly already possessed ships of a size to be able to transport up to 3000 soldiers and officials and could sail along the big rivers and streams (大船名之曰長安亦曰大舶載坐直之士三千人與群臣泛舟江津).⁶⁰

Interestingly, the character for “*bo* 舶” is written in two different ways in the *Wushi waiguo zhuan* (乘大伯舶張七帆; see also *Nan Qishu*, j. 11, 195: 舶, 白也), which may suggest that it originally emerged from a certain phoneme (in Cantonese pronounced “bakh”), perhaps by adopting a foreign language term related to the Arab “*bahr*” or the Greek “*baris*”. According to Pierre-Yves Manguin, the expression “*kolandio phonta*” in a passage in the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* has been interpreted as a corrupt Greek form “*kunlun bo* 昆崙舶”, referring to ships that sailed from India to Southeast Asia.⁶¹ They are described as ships up to 50 m in length, carrying about 300 tons of goods and hundreds of passengers, equipped with multiple sails and masts and planks fastened with vegetal fibres.⁶² Nautical archaeologists call these vessels “stitched-plank and lashed-lug technique”.⁶³ Foreign shipbuilding traditions consequently greatly influenced South China's shipbuilding industry. As late as the Tang Dynasty coastal people of Guangdong learned how to build junks without using nails, namely by tying together planks and beams with the fibres of

⁵⁸ *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 by Li Fang 李昉 (925–996), j. 771, 5b, *Sibu congkan*, fasc. 35–55.

⁵⁹ *Taiping yulan*, j. 771, 5b.

⁶⁰ *Sanguozhi buzhu* 三國志補注 by Hang Shijun 杭世駿. (Shanghai: Shanghai yinshuguan, 1937), j. 6, 6b (1023).

⁶¹ Pierre-Yves Manguin, “Southeast Asian shipping in the Indian Ocean during the 1st millennium AD”, in Himanshu Prabha Ray and Jean-François Salles (eds.), *Tradition and Archaeology. Early Maritime Contacts in the Indian Ocean* (Lyon/New Delhi: Manohar/Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen/NISTADS, 1996), 181–198, here 190. Ian Glover early on had already turned scholars' attention to the role of Southeast Asia as a link between India, Southeast Asia and beyond; see his *Early Trade between India and Southeast Asia: A Link in the Development of a World Trading System*. (Hull, University of Hull, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1989). *Occasional paper*, No.16.

⁶² For a description see Pierre-Yves Manguin, “The Southeast Asian Ship: An Historical Approach”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 11 (2) (1980), 266–276; also Paul Pelliot, “Quelques textes chinois concernant l'Indochine hindouisée”, in *Études asiatiques publiées à l'occasion du vingt-cinquième anniversaire de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*. (Paris: EFEO vol. II, 1925), 243–263.

⁶³ See Pierre-Yves Manguin, “Southeast Asian Shipping in the Indian Ocean during the 1st Millennium AD”, 184ff; also Pierre-Yves Manguin, “Trading ships of the South China Sea: Shipbuilding Techniques and their Role in the Development of Asian Trade Networks”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 36 (1993), 253–280; on the role of the Malay Peninsula in early maritime trade relations see also Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h, translated by Victoria Hobson, *The Malay Peninsula: Crossroads of the Maritime Silk Road (100 BC–1300 AD)*. (Leiden, Boston, Köln: E. J. Brill, 2001).

⁵⁵ Matsushita Kenrin 松下見林, who introduced this text into Japanese scholarship, supposed that the last character, “*yi* 壹”, was a typo and replaced it by the character “*tai* 臺”. From this the name Yamatai for the land of the Queen of the Wo resulted, a name that has remained in use until today despite critical textual analysis. Later in the fifth century Yamato in Central Japan was the seat of the central Japanese government. In this context it has been suggested that the Yamatai of the Wei Annals is actually identical with Yamato. More recent research, however, claims that the Yamatai of the Wei Annals rather referred to the northern part of Kyūshū. But even taking into consideration archaeological evidence, the residence of Himikōs, Yama'ichi, cannot be identified with absolute accuracy.

⁵⁶ Jean Reischauer, Robert Karl Reischauer, *Early Japanese History*, 40 BC – 1167 AD. (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1967), 17.

⁵⁷ Jean Reischauer, Robert Karl Reischauer, *Early Japanese History*, 19–20.

the “*guanglang* 光榔 tree”, a kind of palm (*Arenga pinnata*).⁶⁴ The greatest period of advancement in Chinese shipbuilding technology occurred during the Song and Yuan dynasties.⁶⁵

The most famous Chinese overseas vessels are the so-called “sand ships” (*shachuan* 沙船) for shallow waters, the “bird ships” (*wu* or *niao chuan* 鳥船) with a sharp bottom, proficient in sailing in the open waters, as were the “Fuchuan 福船” (Fujian ships) that were equipped with a keel and the “Guangchuan 廣船” (Guangdong ships) – but these have basically to be dated into the Song dynasty (960–1279). Song ships, as the famous Quanzhou shipwreck that was excavated in 1974 off the coast of Quanzhou (Quanzhou Houzhu Song chuan 泉州后渚宋船) may show, were already divided by bulkheads into ship compartments.⁶⁶

Some time later, we meet the expression also in *Official Histories* of the Nanbei chao period, such as in the *Songshu* 宋書, the *Nan Qishu* 南齊書, the *Jinshu* 晉書 or the *Liangshu* 梁書.⁶⁷ Analysing the quotations from these histories we learn that both private merchants and official persons crossed the sea on such *bo* 船. The *Liangshu*, for example, explicitly speaks of foreign merchants (外國賈人) who arrived on *bo* and also mentions the multiple profits that could be made from mari-

⁶⁴ James K. Chin, “Ports, Merchants, Chieftains, and Eunuchs. Reading Maritime Commerce of Early Guangdong”, 222–223.

⁶⁵ Jacques Dars, “Les jonques chinoises de haute mer sous les Song et les Yuan”, *Archipel* 18 (1979), 41–56; also Pierre-Yves Manguin, “Trading Ships of the South China Sea” (1993). For the history of shipbuilding techniques in East Asia also Jun Kimura, “Historical development of shipbuilding technologies in East Asia”, chapter 1, downloaded via <http://www.shipwreckasia.org/wp/download.php?id=31.08.2012>, where a few concrete wrecks are introduced. Historians and underwater archaeologists including Jun Kimura, Xi Longfei, Cai Wei, Sally Church and others also started a website, see <http://www.shipwreckasia.org/projects/>.

⁶⁶ See for example the excavation report in Fujiansheng Quanzhou haiwai jiaotongshi bowuguan 福建省泉州海外交通史博物館 (ed.), *Quanzhouwan Songdai haichuan fajue yu yanjiu* 泉州灣宋代海船發掘與研究. (Beijing: Haiyang chubanshe, 1987).

⁶⁷ *Songshu*, j. 97, 2377: 南夷、西南夷, 大抵在交州之南及西南, 居大海中洲上, 相去或三千里, 遠者二三萬里, 乘船舉帆, 道里不可詳知; *Songshu*, j. 97, 2380–81: 今遣二人, 是臣同心, 有所宣啓, 誠實可信。願勅廣州時遣舶還, 不令所在有所陵奪; *Nan Qishu*, j. 11, 195: 後孫權征公孫淵, 浮海乘船, 白也。今歌和聲猶云『行白紵』焉; *Nan Qishu*, j. 31, 573: 又度絲綿與崑崙舶營貨, 輒使傳令防送過南州津; *Nan Qishu*, j. 41, 724: 眇芬芳於遙渚, 汎灼燦於長濤。浮艦雜軸, 遊舶交綬; *Nan Qishu*, j. 58, 1015: 又曰: 「臣前遣使齎雜物行廣州貿易, 天竺道人釋那伽仙於廣州因附臣舶欲來扶南, 海中風漂到林邑。國王奪臣貨易, 并那伽仙私財; *Nan Qishu*, j. 58: 1018: 史臣曰: 書稱「蠻夷猾夏」, 蓋總而為言矣。至於南夷雜種, 分嶼建國, 四方珍怪, 莫此為先, 藏山隱海, 環寶溢目。商舶遠遯, 委輸南州, 故交廣富實, 初積王府; *Jinshu*, j. 97, 2547: 其王本是女子, 字葉柳。時有外國人混渚者, 先事神, 夢神賜之弓, 又教載舶入海; *Liangshu*, j. 33, 470: 天監初, 除臨川王後軍記室參軍, 待詔文德省。尋出為南海太守。郡常有高涼生口及海舶每歲數至, 外國賈人以通貿易, 舊時郡以半價就市, 又賈而即賣, 其利數倍, 歷政以為常; *Liangshu*, j. 54, 787: 所以然者, 頓遜迴入海中千餘里, 漲海無崖岸, 船舶未曾得逕過也; *Liangshu*, j. 54, 788: 扶南國俗本體。... 其南有微國, 有事鬼神者字混填, 夢神賜之弓, 乘賈人舶入海, 混填晨起即詣廟。... 便依夢乘船入海, 遂入扶南外邑。柳葉人眾見舶至, 欲取之, 混填即張弓射其舶。...; *Liangshu*, j. 56: 842: 建康令庾信率兵千餘人屯航北, 見景至航, 命微航, 始除一舶, 遂棄軍走南塘, 遊軍復閉航渡景。皇太子以所乘馬授王質, 配精兵三千, 使援庾信。Paul Pelliot, “Le Fou-nan”, in *Bulletin de l'École Française de l'Extrême Orient* 3:57 (1903), 248–303, here 271, 277; *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (late 5th or early 6th century), j. 1, 9a.

time trade, basically by buying cheaply and then reselling the goods for higher prices (*Liangshu*, j. 33, 470). Also Chinese pilgrims like Faxian 法顯 (c. 337–422) provided descriptions of these ocean-going vessels. This is a clear indication for that states neighbouring the China Seas started to venture into this body of water on a more regular basis between the 3rd and 5th century AD.

The China Seas were increasingly used for private commercial activities – reflecting, according to our thesis, a general tendency away from official military, political and diplomatic relations towards more private exchange – although, as mentioned above, the Chinese basically still remained passive receivers along the coast, especially as far as relations with the Nanhai are concerned. But it is undisputed that major changes took place in the China Seas during this period. Also the increasing importance of Buddhism has to be mentioned. Wang Gungwu provides a very good overview on early Chinese trade in the Nanhai and the gradual rise in importance of Buddhist religion, culture and commodities.⁶⁸

In Ge Hong's 葛洪 (284–343) *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (*Records of Deities*), the Daoist immortal Ma Gu 麻姑 once told another immortal, Wang Yuan 王遠, that since meeting him, the Eastern Sea had been turned into mulberry fields three times.⁶⁹ From this story comes an old Chinese saying, “*canghai sangtian* 滄海桑田”, which literally means turning the sea into mulberry fields, but which has been widely used to indicate any great transformation. The third to approximately the early seventh centuries were in fact a period of great changes in the China Seas. In this context we can speak of a period of the coming together of the East and the South China seas as well as its gradual linking up with the Indian Ocean, the gradual growing together of what had formerly been a “maritime patchwork” (Flickenteppich), to use the word of my colleague Roderich Ptak.⁷⁰

Early middle period China (Sui-Tang)

During the Sui Dynasty 隋 (589–617) official and diplomatic relations still seemed to prevail. But private traffic, especially of monks and merchants, increased. The first Sui Emperor, Wendi 文帝 (r. 581–604), still concentrated on the consolidation of the newly unified empire. In 598, he sent troops to Korea on both land and sea routes to subdue the country. Generally, he looked towards north China and the wealth of the south rather seemed to have been a thorn in his flesh. In 598, he even tried to restrict maritime commerce in the south by prohibiting the construction of large ships. All ships that were built in the south and were longer than 30 Chinese feet were confiscated (其江南諸州, 人間有船長三丈已上, 悉括入官).⁷¹ However, this is not only a clear sign of the *existing*

⁶⁸ Wang Gungwu, “The Nanhai Trade: A Study of the Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31:2 (1958), 1–135; also Liu Xinru, *The Silk Road in World History*, 60–61.

⁶⁹ *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 by Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–343), in Shou Yizi 守一子 (ed.), *Daocang jinghualu* 道藏精華錄. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1990), Book 2, j. 2, 7.

⁷⁰ Roderich Ptak, *Die maritime Seidenstraße*. (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2007), 54.

⁷¹ *Suishu* 隋書 by Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), j. 2, 43.

commercial wealth in the south that accrued from maritime trade; this political measure also attests to the fact that the sea was regarded under political criteria but that at the same time trade relations that had developed more or less independently continued to exist.

Military purposes

The second Sui Emperor, Yangdi 楊帝 (r. 605–617), however, actively promoted maritime trade and “called for men to establish contacts with far-away regions”.⁷² Several missions were sent to various countries in Southeast Asia. Although he, too, used the sea for military purposes (in 612, 613 and 614 in the three campaigns that were undertaken to Korea) and hundreds of ships are said to have been constructed to sail from Shandong to Korea, Yangdi at the same time paid great attention to the wealth that could be derived from maritime trade.

He eventually also ordered the construction of a fleet and undertook military expeditions to Liuqiu 流求.⁷³ It is still unclear to which island this actually refers, the Ryūkyū Islands or Taiwan. Until today scholars have not arrived at a definite conclusion. According to Ts’ao Yung-ho 曹永和 the majority of historians considers it to be Taiwan.⁷⁴ This is at least the first time that Liuqiu is officially mentioned and, thus, another part of the East China Seas was explored for the first time officially. However, the mission was not successful. A lot was apparently destroyed and thousands of captives taken who were later taken to China as slaves. But no trade or diplomatic relations were established. When the Chinese army proceeded further into Chinese territory – if we accept that this entry actually referred to Taiwan – most of the soldiers were infected with malaria or died of other diseases.⁷⁵ After this campaign, Taiwan at least officially seems to have disappeared again from Chinese consciousness.

Diplomacy

When the ruling elite of Japan came to know about the unification of China, between 581 and 600 a first embassy was sent to the Chinese court. In 607, during the reign of the Japanese Queen Suiko 推古 (592–628; according to Nelson) with Ono no Imoko 小野妹子, the first official Japanese envoy was sent to the Chinese court. The Japanese letter that was handed over to the Chinese emperor designated Japan as the “Country of the Rising Sun”, while China was addressed as “Country of the Setting Sun”. Imoko referred to the Chinese emperor as “the Bodhisattva Son of Heaven who dedicates his full power to the support of Buddhist teachings”. Nevertheless, the letter was seen as a bone of contention, as, in the eyes of the Chinese, the Japanese ruler had placed himself on the same level with the Chinese Son of Heaven. But in spite of diplomatic irritations and the alleged insult, Emperor Yangdi sent his own envoy, Pei Shiqing 裴世清, back to Japan with Ono in 608. They

sailed via Shandong, Paekche 百濟, Tsushima 對島 and Iki 壱岐 further east. This means that they still took the route along the coastline and islands avoiding deep waters. Pei Shiqing later brought some Japanese students with him who then spent some time in China and learnt the basics of Chinese culture.

In this context, we see that the sea route from Japan to China also was starting to become a route for scholars and people who were in search of knowledge and Buddhist teachings. Official students from Korea and Japan came to China to learn about Buddhism and Chinese culture. Japan adopted not only art and culture from China but more or less its complete administrative system. Certainly the most famous Japanese monk who came to China at that time was Ennin 圓仁 (c. 793–864), who left us an interesting diary about his travels in the Tang empire. Among Chinese monks who went to Japan Jianzhen 鑑真 (688–763) has to be mentioned. All this attests to the importance of culture and religion in mutual exchange relations. Trade relations of that time were also greatly influenced by Buddhism, Buddhist texts and artefacts ranging highly among them. At the same time, the sea routes expanded on a permanent basis to places such as India and the Persian Gulf.

Between 623 and 684 alone numerous missions not only from Indo-China but also from countries further away reached China, such as Java 訶陵, Panpan 盤盤, Juloumi 拘婁密, Dandan 單單 on the Malay Peninsula, Srivijaya (Sanfoqi 三佛齊) and Jambi (Moluoyou 摩末羅游遊) on Sumatra. Important also are the embassies from India between 656 and 658, a mission from Sri Lanka in 670 (the first one since 527), as well as missions from the Persian rulers. Already in 638, for example, the Persian king Yazdgard III (r. 632–651) sent a mission to the Chinese Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 627–649) asking for help to repel the Arabs. Starting with the Abbasid Caliphate in 750, merchants gradually became more important than diplomats. Since the overland routes were temporarily rather obstructed by political and military clashes, the merchants went by sea. Thus since Tang times, the major communication road between the Persian Gulf and China came to be the sea route. This has of course also to be traced back to the upswing of navigation in the Islamic world.

We have clear evidence that Yangzhou, located on the Grand Canal about 15 km north of its junction with the Yangzi, was not only known to Muslim Arab and Persian traders, but that it was one of their major trading centres at that time. The *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 refers to several thousand Arab and Persian merchants being killed in a local disturbance at Yangzhou during the 750s (*Dashi Bosi gu hu sizhe shuqian ren* 大食波斯賈胡死者數千人; *sha shang hu Bosi shuqian ren* 殺商胡波斯數千人).⁷⁶ In 785, Arabs and Persians are said to have plundered Guangzhou (*Dashi, Bosi kou Guangzhou* 大食, 波斯寇廣州).⁷⁷ Also Arab maritime accounts, such as the *Akhbār al-Sīn wa-l-Hind* of 851,⁷⁸ give detailed descriptions of Arab

⁷² *Suishu*, j. 82, 1817.

⁷³ *Suishu*, j. 81, 1822–1823 (*Dongyi* 東夷) states: 流求國, 居海島之中, 當建安郡東, 水行五日而至。

⁷⁴ Ts’ao Yung-ho 曹永和 (Cao Yonghe), *Zhongguo haiyangshi lunji* 中國海洋史論集. (Taipei: Lianjiang chubanshe, 2000), 40.

⁷⁵ *Suishu*, j. 24, 367.

⁷⁶ *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998–1061). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), j. 141, 4655 and j. 144, 4702.

⁷⁷ *Xin Tangshu*, j. 6, 161.

⁷⁸ This date was given by Abu Zaid, the author of the *Silsilat al-tawārīkh* written in the tenth century, when he edited the former work.

settlements in China. According to Abu Zaid, by 878 about 120,000 foreign merchants had settled in China.⁷⁹ Elsewhere I have already argued that it was in fact Persian and Arab merchants who actually carried long-distance maritime trade to China and initiated the age of active maritime trade there.⁸⁰

Trade contacts between China and the Persian Gulf are also attested to by archaeological evidence, primarily ceramics. Tang artisans copied artistic influences with which they came into contact, adopting and adapting many exotic styles. Native styles were combined with shapes and decorative motifs from Persia, India, Greece and Syria. A great quantity of Tang period bronze coins has been excavated at the port of old Hormuz.⁸¹ These coins most probably reached Hormuz by sea.

In the course of the Tang Dynasty the East China Seas eventually witnessed a fresh phenomenon. The Yangzi area with the city of Yangzhou developed as a leading commercial centre with a significant presence not only of Chinese and East Asian or Southeast merchants, but a remarkable community of Persian (Bosi 波斯) traders. The Yangzi area with the city of Yangzhou 揚州 developed as a leading commercial centre with a significant presence not only of Chinese and East or Southeast Asian merchants, but a remarkable community of Persian and Arab traders – so-called Muslim or Hui 回 merchants, as they are called since Yuan times in Chinese sources.⁸² Trade contacts between China and the Persian Gulf are attested to by both written and archaeological evidence, primarily ceramics.

The China Seas were consequently further linked up via the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf. And also the quality of traded products changed – more and more luxury goods from far-away countries reached China. In this context, a city like Yangzhou (and of course Guangzhou in South China) also emerged as great cultural centres that attracted both domestic and foreign intellectuals, scholars, monks, etc. The coastal province of Zhejiang and the region around the Yangzi area increasingly came to the fore of the outer world, also Japan and Korea. And in this way Northeast Asia, in particular Japan, was also linked up with the South China Sea. And commercial and cultural centres like Yangzhou at the same time functioned as the gateway to inland China.

Use of the sea for military purposes, however, remained prevalent also during Tang times. Sources repeatedly speak of large fleets and up to 500 ships. In one case, Japan is said to have supported Paekche with a real armada and supposedly 400 of these battle ships burnt down in flames during an un-

successful attack. Even if we take these figures as exaggerations, they do at least attest to the obviously enormous capacity to mobilize the required wood and other resources for the construction of ships for military purposes within relatively short time periods, both in China, Korea and Japan.

To summarize, commercial exchange and cultural transfer in the early period reached a peak of hitherto unseen density and intensity and had already started to overshadow the military campaigns of navies. In the following period China even rose as a maritime power.

Late middle period China (Wudai-Song-Yuan)

Since the An Lushan 安祿山 (693–757) Rebellion in 755 stability and order within China had already decreased. At the beginning of the tenth century the formerly glorious Tang Empire eventually collapsed formally and China fell apart into the so-called Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. Against the background of political instability in Central, North and East Asia, and, last but not least, in China itself, we can now observe an ever present shift of trade routes from the traditional overland routes to maritime routes. In addition, we have to take into consideration in this historical context the active promotion of maritime trade, first by rulers of local dynasties or kingdoms during this period and subsequently by the Song government during the tenth century. Maritime trade not only supplied the social and ruling élites with fine and rare luxury articles that were otherwise unavailable in China, but it was also used as a source of income to fill state coffers. During a time when China was split among competing dynasties and kingdoms, some rulers of states located in coastal areas, such as the state of Min 閩 (910–946), and later, the independent rulers of the Quanzhou region in Fukien, the Kingdom of WuYue 吳越 (907–978), the Southern Tang Dynasty (937–975), or the rulers of the Southern Han dynasty 南漢 (917–971) in Guangdong, all discovered maritime trade to be a way to guarantee the economic underpinning of their regimes, including the satisfaction of their own personal consumer demands.

We know, for example, that the Min Kingdom in Southeast China had trade contacts with Zhancheng 占成 (Annam 安南), Sanfoqi 三佛齊 (Srivijaya), Korea and probably also Japan.⁸³ Local ruling clans, such as the family of Liu Congxiao 留從效 in Min, are said to have given generous sponsorship to the construction of kilns for ceramics production⁸⁴ – ceramics being one of the most important exports goods – as well as the mining of metals. And the local Wang clan is supposed to have possessed numerous kilns already, located especially close to the capital, Fuzhou.⁸⁵ We can here clearly depict a new tendency that local rulers and governments were discovering foreign maritime trade as a source to underpin their national resources and state coffers, making available to the social

⁷⁹ Gerald R. Tibbetts, "Early Muslim Traders in South-East Asia," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30:1 (1957), 1–45. See also Gerald R. Tibbetts, *A Study of Arabic Texts Containing Material on Southeast Asia*. (Leiden, London: Published for the Royal Asiatic Society by E. J. Brill, 1979).

⁸⁰ Angela Schottenhammer, *Das songzeitliche Quanzhou im Spannungsfeld zwischen Zentralregierung und maritimem Handel. Unerwartete Konsequenzen des zentralstaatlichen Zugriffs auf den Reichtum einer Küstenregion*. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), 57.

⁸¹ Gert Naundorf, "Die Seidenstraßen und ihre historische Dimension", in Dieter Kuhn (Hrsg.), *Chinas Goldenes Zeitalter. Die Tang-Dynastie (618–907 n. Chr.) und das kulturelle Erbe der Seidenstraße*. (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 1993), 53–79, 63.

⁸² Literally this refers to "persons and things related to Islamic faith" and is generally translated as "Muslim". It must be emphasized, however, that the term was much more widely used and also included ethnic people like Uighurs or West Asian people in general.

⁸³ See Li Donghua, *Quanzhou yu woguo zhonggu de haishang jiaotong* 泉州與我國的海上交通. (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1986), 43, 58–59.

⁸⁴ This is mentioned in the clan's genealogy. See also D. H. Smith, "Zaitun's Five Centuries of Sino-Foreign Trade", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 4/5 (1958), 165–177, 172.

⁸⁵ See Angela Schottenhammer, "Local Politico-Economic Particulars of the Quanzhou Region During the Tenth Century", *Journal of SungYuan Studies* 29 (1999), 1–41, 24 seq.

and ruling élites the fine and rare luxury articles hitherto unavailable as well as a means of income to fill state coffers. By *political* decision, maritime space became more and more important primarily for *commercial* purposes. In this context, a significant commercialization of the China Seas took place, a process that greatly accelerated during the following Song dynasty.

But the sea was also used for military purposes, although naval battles basically still took place in river estuaries. Qian Liu 錢鏐 (852–932) placed his son Qian Yuanguan 錢元瓘 (887–941) in command of a WuYue fleet of five hundred ships, called “dragon ships” because they were designed in the shape of a dragon. It set out in April 919 to invade Wu 吳. An interesting WuYue account speaks of beans being thrown on enemy’s ships and the shooting of “burning oil” (*menghuo you* 猛火油)⁸⁶ to set fire to the ships. Then, the liquid was shot from a metal tube. The oil, it is recorded, was obtained from Arab merchants from Hainan (or simply from “south of the seas”).⁸⁷

Or, further south, the state of Nan-Han also became prosperous by its encouragement of maritime commerce and rose to power through the possession of a navy. In 928, the ruler of Nan-Han, Liu Yan 劉嚴 sent a fleet of a hundred warships to Fengzhou 封州 (in Northwest Guangdong), which had been attacked by a navy (*shuijun* 水軍) from Chu 楚 (a state located in present-day Hunan) and succeeded in repelling the invasion of Chu; in 930, his fleet raided Champa and returned with a rich loot of gold and treasure.⁸⁸

In her 1991 book, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*, Janet Abu-Lughod argued that the thirteenth century Eurasian world encompassed a vast trade system. It was a segmented system, it must be admitted, with seven regional sub-systems such as maritime East Asia, South-east Asia, Southwest Asia and the like, but with a sufficient volume of long-distance trade to justify speaking of a world system. Moreover, she argued that the primary economic motor driving this system was China, both as a producer of porcelain and other popular exports, and as a mass consumer of incense, aromatics and other goods from South-eastern and Southern Asia.⁸⁹ Also segmented was the North-east China Sea, to be sure. With the establishment of the Liao (907/916–1125) and later the Jin (1115–1234) dynasties, the North-eastern coastal zone was separated from the rest of China and experienced a different development. Frankly speaking, we still

know only very little about maritime trade activities of the Khitan Liao and the Jurchen Jin, but it can be stated with certainty that they were more engaged on their continental borders, in particular with their southern neighbour, China. Southeast China, on the other hand, experienced the greatest upswing in maritime trade ever seen during this time period. At the same time, thriving centres in Champa, Srivijaya, Calicut, Baghdad and Cairo, to name just a few, did much to provide the system with its vitality.

That the sea route was preferred also for official diplomatic contacts may be concluded from the following entry. A tribute mission from “Dashu 大食” arrived in China in early 1024. After their arrival, a complaint was made that the embassy had followed the land route through the territory of the Tangut Xixia 西夏 (1038–1227). As a consequence, it was decreed that future Dashu missions must come by sea and use Guangzhou as the port of entry.⁹⁰ The *Songshi* subsequently speaks repeatedly of “*bozhu* 舶主” (ship captains) from Arabia.⁹¹ This may be taken as evidence that at least from the early eleventh century onwards most tribute missions reached China by sea. Missions between the Persian Gulf and Guangzhou have already been described by Jia Dan 賈耽 (710–785). The passage is translated by Friedrich Hirth and Rockhill and therefore will not be repeated here.⁹²

The idea of considering maritime trade as a financial source had already emerged, as we have seen, in the course of the 10th century. But it eventually became the main impetus for the promotion of seaborne trade with the introduction of Emperor Shenzong’s 神宗 (r. 1068–1085) new legal statutes. In 971, a year after the conquest of the Southern Han, a Maritime Trade Office (*shibo shi* 市舶司) was already established in Guangzhou to handle all ships from the Nanhai and to secure the government a larger share of the profits attainable through the rapidly increasing maritime trade. Two years later a ban on Chinese merchants venturing overseas to engage in trade signalled the government’s intention to control the trade.⁹³ Only a few years later, between 976 and 983, the trade was declared a state monopoly and private trading with foreigners more or less forbidden. At about the same time (*Taizong shi* 太宗時, i.e. 960–975), a general Monopoly Office (*jueshu* 權署) was established in the capital. Orders were issued that all foreign aromatics and goods of value imported into China through the ports of either Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Zhejiang province or Jiaozhi 交趾 (Tongking) had to be deposited in government storehouses.⁹⁴ Then in 987, the Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r.

⁸⁶ Wild-fire oil, which burned even more fiercely when water was added.

⁸⁷ *WuYue beishi* 吳越備史 by Fan Tong 范垞, j. 3, 4b–5a, in *Siku quanshu*, fasc. 464: 五年春三月命王率水師大小戰艦五百餘艘皆刻龍形...夏四月乙巳大戰淮人於狼山江將戰之夕王召指揮使張從賓計之曰...每舟必載石灰黑豆江沙以隨焉...乃撒豆於賊舟我舟則沙焉戰血既潰踐豆者靡不顛路命進火油焚之火油得之海南大食國以鐵筒發之。

⁸⁸ *Guangdong tongzhi* 廣東通志 by Jiang Fan 江藩 (1761–1831), Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), j. 184, 4a.

⁸⁹ Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*; K. N. Chaudhuri’s *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) constitutes an important precursor to Abu-Lughod’s book. See, too, the articles in Angela Schottenhammer, *The Emporium of the World: Maritime Quanzhou, 1000–1400*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001) and Derek Heng, *Malay Trade and Diplomacy from the Tenth through the Fourteenth Century*. (Ohio University Research in International Diplomacy, Southeast Asia Series No. 121, Ohio University Press, 2009).

⁹⁰ *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 by Xu Song 徐松 (1781–1848) et al. (comp.). (Taipei: Shijie shuju 1964), Fanyi 4/91b–92a, 7/22b (7745); *Song shi* 宋史 by Tuo Tuo (Toghto) 脫脫 et al. (comp.). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1985), j. 490, 14121; *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考 by Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254–1325). (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan 1987), j. 339, 2664. Cf. Robert M. Hartwell, *Tribute Missions to China*, 960–1126 (unpublished manuscript), 71.

⁹¹ *Songshi*, j. 490, 14118–14121.

⁹² Friedrich Hirth, W. W. Rockhill, *Chau Ju-kua. On the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1911), 8–16. Jia Dan’s geographical treatise is the *Huanghua sida ji* 皇華四達記. See also M. Reinaud, *Relations des voyages faits par les Arabes et les Persans dans l’Inde et à la Chine au IX^e siècle de l’ère Chrétienne*, Tome 1. (Paris, 1895).

⁹³ *Songshi*, j. 6, 76; cf. So Kee Long, *Prosperity, Region, and Institutions in Maritime China: The South Fukien Pattern, 946–1368* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000).

⁹⁴ *Songshi*, j. 186, 4559.

976–997) sent eight eunuch attendants in four missions out into the Nanhai 南海 to invite traders to come to China. Two years later a second maritime trade office was opened in Hangzhou 杭州, followed by a third in Mingzhou 明州 in 992.⁹⁵ In the course of the Northern Song dynasty a series of maritime trade offices was established along the South-eastern coast to supervise maritime trade, the major ones being located in Guangzhou, Quanzhou and Mingzhou (Ningbo). Emperor Shenzong eventually officially stated that trade (including maritime trade) should be used to help fill the state coffers.⁹⁶ Thus for the first time, the commercial aspect became as important as politics, but it was an official state-monopolized commerce. Much of that commerce occurred under the aegis of the tribute system, which was extremely active through the first 60 years of the dynasty, and even in the case of trade carried out through the maritime trade offices. Only gradually did the centralized control give way to a more decentralized system involving a host of maritime trade offices or, after 1080, of maritime trade superintendencies (*shibo tiju si* 市舶提舉司). Eventually, a liberalization of Chinese shipping dating to the year 1090 paved the way for Chinese merchants to “shop abroad” so that they were no longer so dependent on foreign shipping to meet their demands⁹⁷ – a milestone in the development of China’s maritime trade relations that supported what we may perhaps call a “privatization” of the China Seas.

Shipbuilding, it must be mentioned in this context, was a major industry during the Song, benefiting from such technological advances as both floating and graving docks (below ground level) in the shipyards, and the use of models and blueprints to standardize the production of government ships.⁹⁸ Much of the shipbuilding was aimed at supplying the needs of the Song navy and domestic commerce, but the demand for seagoing ships was also great, especially since, beginning in the 11th century, Chinese-style junks came to supplant the Arab shows that had long dominated transoceanic trade in the Indian Ocean and south-east Asia.⁹⁹

Until the Xining reign period (1068–1077), there were two central shipyards on the coast of China, namely in Hangzhou 杭州 and Canton, as well as provincial yards located in land. Although shipbuilding establishments were to be found throughout the empire, including Shandong, the south-eastern coast specialized in ocean-going ships. Particular attention was furthermore paid to the defence of coastal cities and the protection of merchants’ ships from pirate attacks. As Jung-pang Lo has shown, during the Northern Song dynasty, when Canton was still the principal port of China bringing in about 80–90% of the total volume of maritime commerce, numerous

naval stations (*zhai* 寨) and observation posts were established along the coast from Canton to an island called Ruzhou 渚州 (Dan’gan Island 擔桿島, located south-east of modern Hong Kong, or Hailing Island 海陵島, located south-east of Yangjiang 阳江, Guangdong?), that is over a distance of 700 *li* (c. 200 miles).¹⁰⁰ In other words, the Song government actively encouraged merchants to conduct maritime trade and facilitated their doing so.¹⁰¹

John Chaffee has already convincingly argued that the economic transformation that occurred in the course of the Song dynasty made Song China the economic centre and motor of contemporary maritime trade¹⁰² – despite the fact that it was politically speaking no longer the undisputed “Middle Kingdom” in the region. As evidenced by archaeological finds from all parts of maritime Asia, the demand was especially high for Song ceramics. But Song exports also included silks, foodstuffs (often in large ceramic containers), manufactured goods (including books), and – in the 13th century especially – large quantities of copper and tin. Indeed, such was the demand for copper coins that the government repeatedly though ineffectually tried to ban their export. In the Southern Song a massive outflow of bronze coins (and un-minted copper) from China to places as far away as the East coast of Africa had emerged as a major irritant for the Song government.¹⁰³ As for imports, Song urban consumers developed a great appetite for *xiangyao* 香藥 (usually translated as aromatics but it included incense, scented woods, perfumes and medicines), but also for pearls, ivory, rhinoceros horn, cotton fabrics, ebon and sappan woods, among other commodities.¹⁰⁴

A result of the upswing in maritime trade during this period was the rapid growth of the port cities of the south-eastern coast, origins of which we have already encountered during Tang times. Examples include Guangzhou, Fuzhou 福州, Wenzhou 溫州, Mingzhou, or above all Hangzhou (Lin’an 臨安), certainly the largest city in the Empire during the Southern Song, when it served as the capital. Its wealth and cosmopolitan atmosphere is later also described by the Italian traveller and merchant Marco Polo. A city like Quanzhou 泉州, the Zaitun of Marco Polo, developed as a centre of the Nanhai trade, the trade with the South China and Southeast Asian Seas with a thriving merchant culture, in which Chinese traders mixed with Arabs, Srivijayans, Tamils, Cholas,

⁹⁵ *Songshi*, j. 186, 4558–9.

⁹⁶ *Song huiyao jigao*, Zhiguan 44/27a–b.

⁹⁷ Derek Heng, *Malay Trade and Diplomacy*, 50.

⁹⁸ Deng Geng, *Maritime Sector, Institutions and Sea Power of Premodern China* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 18–20. See also Lo Jung-pang, “Chinese Shipping and East-West Trade from the Xth to the XIVth century,” in *Sociétés et companies de commerce en Orient et dans l’Océan Indien. Actes du Huitième Colloque International d’Histoire Maritime*, ed., Michel Mollat (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1970), 167–78, here 172, and Wang Zengyu 王曾瑜, “Tan Songdai zaochuan anye 談宋代造船業”, *Wenwu* 文物 10 (1975), 24–27.

⁹⁹ Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 177–178.

¹⁰⁰ *Pingzhou ketan* 萍州可談 (1119) by Zhu Yu 朱彧 (1075? – after 1119), j. 2, 1 (288), in *Siku quanshu*, fasc. 1038.

¹⁰¹ Lo Jung-pang, “Maritime Commerce and its Relation to the Sung Navy,” *JESHO* 12 (1969), 72–73.

¹⁰² John Chaffee, “Song China and the multi-state and commercial world of East Asia”, *Crossroads: Studies on the History of Exchange Relations in the East Asian World* 1/2 (2010), 33–54.

¹⁰³ Angela Schottenhammer, “The Role of Metals and the Impact of the Introduction of Huizi Paper Notes in Quanzhou on the Development of Maritime Trade in the Song Period,” in Angela Schottenhammer, ed., *The Emporium of the World: Maritime Quanzhou, 1000–1400*. (Leiden, Boston, Köln: E. J. Brill, 2001), 95–176, esp. 126–136.

¹⁰⁴ John Chaffee, “Song China and the multi-state and commercial world of East Asia”, 41; see Paul Wheatley, “Geographical Notes on Some Commodities Involved in the Sung Maritime Trade”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32.2, No. 186 (1959), 1–140, 45–129, on the full spectrum of trade commodities, and Lin Tianwei 林天蔚, *Songdai xiangyao maoyi shi* 宋代香藥貿易史 (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua daxue chubanshe, 1986), for a detailed treatment of the trade in aromatics.

Koreans, Ryūkyūans, and Japanese. This development affected both the East and the South China Seas. Momoki Shiro and Hasuda Takashi emphasize that “North-east Asia was deeply incorporated into international trade networks for the first time” during the eleventh through to the fourteenth centuries.¹⁰⁵ Yamauchi Shinji calls this “the age of Japan-Song trade” in which “there were active exchanges of people, commodities and information through frequent maritime trade with the Asian continent,”¹⁰⁶ and Charlotte von Verschuer has similarly described it as the age of free trade for Japan’s relations with China and Korea.¹⁰⁷ Despite flourishing trade relations only few Japanese embassies, however, seemed to have reached China. Roderich Ptak suggests that generally speaking official circles in Japan seem to have maintained a relatively negative attitude towards the foreign.¹⁰⁸ But this did not derogate mutual exchange relations. Chinese settlements in Japan (Tōbō 唐坊), like Hakata 博多, and Korea, like Mokpo, both coastal cities, also attest to the fact that it was no longer mainly foreigners that came to China, but that to a greater extent than seen before Chinese also went abroad. Thousands of Chinese, it has been speculated, travelled to Korea during the Southern Song.¹⁰⁸

In 1020, Korea officially became a tributary of the Liao. But despite the lack of official diplomatic relations Song-Korean trade flourished during both the Northern and Southern Song. We have records of Korean merchants settling in China (for example in Ningbo), while Korean records document visits by dozens of Chinese ships, especially during the eleventh century.¹⁰⁹ This period also marked the highpoint of an active trade between Korea and Japan, which also exchanged frequent embassies.¹¹⁰ Moreover, visits by Arab envoys and merchants to Korea are well documented in Koguryō sources, including a visit by an Arab (Dashi 大食) envoy and one hundred others from Arabia in 1024, a telling indication of Korea’s participation in the maritime trade world.¹¹¹

In 1123, a first Chinese mission was sent again to Korea. The chief envoy, Xu Jing 徐兢 (1093–1155?), left us an interesting report about his travels, the *Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* 宣和奉使高麗圖經 on this mission. And his report tells us that, although he considered the seas as a frightening, dangerous place, at the same time he saw it as something “intelligible, manageable, predictable, quantifiable, and survivable”.¹¹²

Also relations with South-east Asia reached a hitherto unseen peak. Geoff Wade has argued that the period of 900–1300 C.E. constituted an “age of commerce” for South-east Asia,¹¹³ while Kenneth Hall identifies the period 1000–1400 as a time of fundamental transitions in the trade and state developments of that region.¹¹⁴ The appearance of new ports in South-east Asia, the movement of administrative centres nearer to the coast, population growth and the development of both cash cropping and South-east Asian ceramics and textiles industries, new modes of consumption, and new mercantile organizations greatly attributed to the upswing of maritime commerce between the China Seas and South-east Asia.¹¹⁵ Arab or Hui 回 played a major role in contemporary maritime trade, but Chinese became increasingly important. The Islamic domination of the China Seas had already set in, as we have seen above, during Tang times and it was during the Song when it received a real upswing. During the Mongol period still more Hui merchants and Huihui 回回 in general settled in Chinese coastal cities such as Quanzhou. It was also from Quanzhou that the China Seas were further extended to the south-east, namely to the Spice Islands and Moluccas.¹¹⁶ Although Chinese merchants had for the first time become really active seafarers across the China Seas, we have to see that during the period between the 11th and 14th centuries (approx. 1000–1400), also foreign merchants (especially South-east Asian, South Asian and West Asian or Huihui merchants) were most active during this time.

Both commerce and migration consequently saw an unprecedented peak during this time. Simultaneously, military purposes, although they did not disappear completely, retreated into the background. The active and direct participation of the Song court in maritime trade and the liberalization of Chinese shipping in 1090 greatly contributed to this development across the China Seas. At the same time we observe a privatization of exchange, although everything remained under state control, in particular imports and domestic redistribution of imports. That the administrative system was repeatedly changed in the course of the Song dynasty attests to the fact that there still existed an uncertainty about how to ideally control

¹⁰⁵ Momoki Shiro 桃木至朗, “Dai Viet and the South China Sea Trade: From the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 12.1 (1999), 1–34, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Yamauchi Shinji 山内晋次, “The Japanese Archipelago and Maritime Asia from the 9th to the 13th Centuries”, in Fujiko Kayoko, Makino Naoko, and Matsumoto Mayumi (eds.), *Dynamic Rimlands and Open Heartlands: Maritime Asia as a Site of Interactions*. Proceedings of the Second COE-ARI Joint Workshop. (Ōsaka: Research Cluster on Global History and Maritime Asia, Ōsaka University, 2007), 82–99, 83, 93.

¹⁰⁷ Charlotte Von Verschuer, *Across the Perilous Sea: Japanese Trade with China and Korea from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Century*, Kristen Lee Hunter, trans. (Ithaca: East Asia Program, 2006), Chapt. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Roderich Ptak, *Die maritime Seidenstraße*, 155.

¹⁰⁹ Lee Hee-Soo, *The Advent of Islam in Korea: An Historical Account* (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 1997), 55–59. For an overview of Quanzhou merchants visiting Korea, see Li Yukun 李玉昆, *Quanzhou haiwai jiaotong shilue* 泉州海外交通史略. (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 1995), 48–50.

¹¹⁰ Volume 2, *Heian Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 576–643. Kawazoe Shoji 川添昭二, “Japan and East Asia”, in Kozo Yamamura, (ed.), *Medieval Japan*, vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of Japan*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 396–446, 406.

¹¹¹ Lee Hee-Soo, *The Advent of Islam in Korea*, 56.

¹¹² Sally Church, “Conception of Maritime Space in Xu Jing’s *Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing*”, in Angela Schottenhammer, Roderich Ptak (eds.), *Maritime Space in Traditional Chinese Sources*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2006), 79–107. *East Asian Maritime History*, 2.

¹¹³ Geoff Wade, “An Earlier Age of Commerce in South-east Asia: 900–1300 C.E.?” in Fujiko Kayoko, Makino Naoko, and Matsumoto Mayumi (eds.), *Dynamic Rimlands and Open Heartlands: Maritime Asia as a Site of Interactions*, 27–81.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth R. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985). Chapter 8.

¹¹⁵ Geoff Wade, “An Earlier Age of Commerce in South-east Asia”, 71–75.

¹¹⁶ Roderich Ptak, *Die maritime Seidenstraße*, 219.

and supervise maritime trade in order to use it for state purposes without damaging trade. But only during the Yuan dynasty did the substantial participation of the Song court in the domestic redistribution of foreign imports finally give way to a kind of monopoly on trade by means of officially sponsored trading voyages and intermittent bans on private shipping.

Between 1285 and 1320/25 the Yuan government sought to strictly control maritime trade and even forced private merchants to enter government service. Only after 1325 were regulations again liberalized. It can doubtlessly be claimed that the Mongols and the Yuan government actively promoted maritime trade and had a strong interest in strengthening its role.¹¹⁷ The search for good trade relations was accompanied by diplomatic missions. Numerous missions were sent abroad inviting tribute and trade as far away as India.¹¹⁸

At the same time, the military use of the China Seas again predominated – perhaps for the first time since early Tang times. From 1266, Mongol rulers undertook various efforts to subdue Japan, first using Korea as a diplomatic middleman but after these efforts failed, naval attacks were prepared. In 1273, the Mongols transported soldiers to Cheju Island off the South Korean coast. In 1274, a first attack on Japan, supposedly with more than 900 ships and a great number of land troops, was launched. The battle ships sailed from Korea, attacked Tsushima 對島 and Iki 壱岐 Island and having reached Kyūshū 九州 destroyed parts of modern Nagasaki Prefecture. Battles were fought in the vicinities of Hakata but then the Mongol troops suddenly retreated – probably because of logistic shortages, as has been speculated.¹¹⁹ As is well known, the final collapse of the Southern Song was also brought about in a naval battle. In 1279, the Song surrendered to the Mongols after a historic battle at Yaishan 崖山 off the coast of Guangzhou.¹²⁰ By then the Yuan already controlled the entire Chinese coast and had incorporated the former Song navy into its own naval structures. And they started another attempt to conquer Japan. One fleet again sailed from Korea, the other one crossed the East China Sea directly from Zhejiang. Several thousand soldiers are said to have taken part in this undertak-

ing in 1281, among them many Chinese. But Mongol forces again failed, supposedly due to a typhoon. Subsequently, a great number of Chinese captives remained in Japan. This second defence of the Mongol fleet subsequently led to the emergence of a kind of legend in Japan: it was believed that divine winds (*kamikaze* 神風) had rescued the country from Mongol invasion. Although the conquest of Japan finally failed – Kubilai 忽必烈 Khan (r. 1260–1294) had even threatened Japan with a third attack – it is clear that the China Seas and East Asia in general had never before seen such a large naval contingent. Although figures in the sources may be exaggerated, we can still get an idea of what expense and efforts had been invested to prepare these operations. They also attest to the fact that very soon after their conquest of Song China and its coastal regions the Mongols were able to control and systematically use Chinese shipyards and the necessary civil and military apparatus. For the first time in history, the China Seas had become a large-scale naval battlefield and area of military concentration.

After these military operations, maritime trade continued to flourish across the China Seas and it was actively promoted by the Yuan rulers. It has also to be mentioned that due to the fact that the Mongol capital – Dadu 大都 or Khanbalik – was located in a not very fertile region in the north, as a consequence of which it had to be provided with alimentation and food products from the south, coastal shipping from the Lower Yangzi region to Shandong and across the Bohai 渤海 Sea was actively promoted. Domestic waterways were insufficient for the transportation of the large amounts required in the capital. Never before had the transportation of food played such an important role as during China's Mongol period. Consequently, in addition to the already existing overseas networks, a more complex and dense coastal network developed. Both short- and long-distance sea routes grew increasingly together.

According to Janet Abu-Lughod, the world trade system entered its golden age under the Mongols, who secured the continental trade routes under the Pax Mongolica and encouraged maritime trade. One may certainly debate the question whether or not this was a golden age. Certainly, however, and here I would like to quote my colleague John Chaffee, “never again in imperial Chinese history do we see government encouragement of trade or the levels of maritime commerce that existed during the Song and Yuan”.¹²¹ And sea routes between the China Seas and seas and regions further to the West during certain phases developed among others in particular due to the fact that land routes were no longer as permeable as before. As far as products traded on these routes are concerned, luxury items still formed part and parcel of the package. But, in addition, increasing quantities of staple goods were exchanged. Coastal shipping along the Yuan Chinese coast, for example, transported enormous quantities of rice. And never before had such high quantities of Chinese ceramics and coins been shipped overseas. All these products were no longer mainly shipped by foreigners but increasingly also by Chinese merchants. In addition, maritime transfer of culture and religion, above all Buddhism (including texts and artefacts), Islam and also Confucianism, played a decisive role. Generally speaking, however, during the Song and Yuan, Is-

¹¹⁷ Herbert Schurmann states in this context that “(t)he institution of maritime transportation during the Yuan offers conclusive proof that the Mongols, far from discouraging progress in China, encouraged it with all their power. The Yüan was a period in which the great development which began in the late T'ang and continued through the Sung remained in full force.” Herbert F. Schurmann, *Economic Structure of the Yüan Dynasty: Translation of Chapters 93 and 94 of the Yüan Shih*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 116; for general tributary practices within China during Mongolian rule, cf. Herbert F. Schurmann, “The Mongolian Tributary Practices of the Thirteenth Century”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 19 (1956), 304–389.

¹¹⁸ See Tansen Sen, “The Yuan Khanate and India: Cross-Cultural Diplomacy in the thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *Asia Major, Third Series* 19.1–2 (2006), 299–326.

¹¹⁹ See Roderich Ptak, *Die maritime Seidenstraße*, 158.

¹²⁰ The circumstances are described in an excellent manner by Lo Jung-pang, *China as a Sea Power, 1127–1368* (unpublished manuscript), 186–197. A new edition, edited by Bruce A. Elleman has just been published as *China as a Sea Power, 1127–1368: A Preliminary Survey of the Maritime Expansion and Naval Exploits of the Chinese People During the Southern Song and Yuan Periods*. (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2011).

¹²¹ John Chaffee, “Song China and the multi-state and commercial world of East Asia”, 48.

lam and Islamic Hui merchants seem to have become more important than Buddhism, at least on the sea routes from South and South-east China further west. In this context, we can perhaps even speak of an Islamic-dominated overseas trade.

Along with flourishing trade relations certainly not a new but increasingly important and severe phenomenon also arose – that of piracy.

Early modern China (Ming–Qing)

With the downfall of the Mongol Yuan state and the establishment of the Ming Dynasty, the quality of exchange relations across the China Seas changed drastically. The collapse of the Yuan had already resulted in a certain fragmentation of the China Seas again. Private maritime trade suffered great losses. We should recall that never before the Yuan had great amounts of food provisions been shipped along coastal routes to supply the Yuan capital. In its final years the Yuan court had become increasingly dependent on rice and grain shipments up the Grand Canal to the capital Dadu (Beijing), making them vulnerable to extortion from Zhang Shicheng 張士誠, who had proclaimed himself “King Cheng of the Great Zhou Dynasty” in 1354. The arrival of Fang Guozhen’s 方國珍 (1319–1374) naval forces in the Yangzi estuary to fight Zhang certainly contributed to the latter’s decision to eventually surrender to the Yuan court in 1357. Fang’s fleet is said to have numbered over one thousand vessels of all kinds, and he controlled much of the Ningbo 寧波 and Shaoxing 紹興 region in the Hangzhou Bay. Fang had been among the earliest leaders to acknowledge the rise of Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398) – later the first Ming Emperor Hongwu 洪武 (r. 1368–1398) – but, the power and influence of both Zhang and Fang constituted a clear warning to Zhu not to become dependent on such persons or to give them the opportunity to rise in his newly established dynasty. A great part of the remaining private maritime trade between China, Korea and Japan came to be controlled by private persons, who on occasions disposed of greater fleets and can be designated as a kind of “merchant empires”. To some extent, Zhang Shicheng and Fang Guozhen may be considered a kind of prototype of such merchant magnates. At the same time, such experience without doubt nourished the suspicion of a ruler like Hongwu and convinced him not to provide private merchants with too much power as a consequence of which they could obtain the means to undermine state authority. This conviction had far-reaching consequences.

Maritime trade prohibition and the rise of Chinese mercantile power

With the initiation of the “maritime trade proscription policy” (*haijin zhengce* 海禁政策) in 1371,¹²² the “privatization” of maritime exchanges that we have described above was suddenly interrupted from the Chinese side. Foreign trade was

subsequently only possible as part of the official tribute system. Foreign tribute missions presented part of their cargoes as tribute and received rewards of Chinese goods in return. The remaining part of their goods they were permitted to sell to Chinese, mostly during a fixed time period at a market or place especially designated for this purpose and only under strict government supervision. As a rule, private merchants accompanied the tribute missions and then used this opportunity to sell their goods for Chinese ones.¹²³

It is important to emphasize that despite the official ideology that placed China in the middle of an East Asian world order with “barbarian” vassals around that paid tribute and despite the official interruption of private foreign trade, exchange relations still never came to a standstill and this never led to China’s or even East Asia’s complete isolation from the outer world. Nevertheless, this had various consequences and the quality of exchange relations changed significantly. This policy affected not only the China coast and Chinese merchants but the entire China Seas region.

Migration and China’s overseas expansion

Many fewer foreigners came to China than before and they all had to rely on Chinese merchants for selling their goods. Private traders from South, South-east and West Asia no longer came to China and also the foreign communities in Chinese coastal cities soon declined. The Ming maritime policy, thus, actually enabled the Chinese for the first time in history to really monopolize Sino-foreign exchange, as Chang Pin-tsun has argued.¹²⁴ This policy consequently unintentionally formed the basis for the gradual rise of Chinese private mercantile power in the coming centuries, although its original goal had in fact been to curb private commerce. And it gave rise to all the Chinese overseas communities from which the Chinese cherished their manifold maritime commercial networks.

But Ming China’s new maritime policy not only prevented many foreign merchants from coming to China to trade it also deprived great parts of the coastal population of their former livelihoods. Many Chinese who had depended on maritime trade for their living were now driven into smuggling, either becoming “pirates”, emigrating or both. The political decision to curb all private maritime trade in the long perspective consequently caused a large mass emigration of Chinese to countries overseas where they built up the well-known overseas Chinese communities – above all in South-east Asia, but also in other countries like Japan. Families from Fujian moved to the island country of the Ryūkyūs (according to some sources they were officially sent there by Emperor Hongwu) and helped to maintain trade relations throughout East and in particular South-east Asia and even beyond. This large-scale emi-

¹²² *Ming Taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄, j. 70, 3b. (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1967), 133 vols., vol. 3, 1300: “*Reng jin binhai min bu de si chu hai* 仍禁濱海民不得私出海”; see also Fan Zhongyi 範中義, Tong Xigang 仝晰綱, *Mingdai Wokou shiliue* 明代倭寇史略. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 71–72.

¹²³ For a very good English description of Ming maritime trade based on the tribute trade system please see Roderich Ptak, “Ming Maritime Trade to Southeast Asia, 1368–1567: Visions of a System”, in Claude Guillot, Denys Lombard & Roderich Ptak (eds.), *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea*. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, Germany, 1998), 157–191.

¹²⁴ Chang Pin-tsun, “The Rise of Chinese Mercantile Power in Maritime Southeast Asia, c. 1400–1700”, *Crossroads – Studies on the History of Exchange Relations in the East Asian World* 6 (2012), 205–230.

gration of Chinese since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is so-to-say the Chinese variant of the overseas expansion, China's early modern overseas trade expansion.¹²⁵

We have seen above that the China Seas have been used for migration ever since. But never before had they experienced such a form of what we might term "mass migration" and such an "expansion" of Chinese traders overseas. This overseas expansion resulted both from the new policy implemented by the early Ming government and from a commercialization of local economies that since Tang times at the latest had been directly linked to maritime trade.¹²⁶ Many trading networks were subsequently only maintained with the help of Chinese residing overseas (Huaqiao 華僑, lit. "Chinese living outside of China"). Also the emigration of numerous Islamic merchant families to South-east Asia is significant. Originally considered partners of the Mongols, many were simply not desired in the new social environment of Ming China. In general the Arab-Persian preponderance that we have observed during the Tang-Song-Yuan period decreased in favour of Indian shipping.¹²⁷

As a consequence of the new Ming policy, trading centres also shifted away from the Chinese littoral to other regions. In this context, the Ryūkyū 琉球-Islands (modern Okinawa) and Ryūkyūan merchants entered the scene. They little by little took over the role of an intermediary in the East Asian waters, frequently in cooperation with Chinese merchants.¹²⁸ They provided Japanese merchants, for example, with tropical goods from South-east Asia, and the latter re-exported a part of these to Korea. This intermediary role enabled the islands to enjoy considerable independence. To some extent, the Ryūkyūs occupied a special position during this time, especially in terms of relations with China. They became China's most loyal "tribute country", providing products such as horses and sulphur, whereas the Chinese on the other hand gave all sorts of development aid – from technical equipment and expertise, such as ships and shipbuilding, to human resources including (Confucian) education. Ryūkyūan students were, for example, officially dispatched to China to study there. Also different products appeared to a larger extent than before on the Chinese Seas, such as South-east Asian ceramics, as the direct access to Chinese ceramics was blocked.

Although tribute missions were officially exchanged between Korea and the Ming, these were rather overshadowed by restrictions imposed by the trade proscription. Also official relations between China and Japan were at a low point. In

1523, the Maritime Trade Offices (*shibo si*) of Fuzhou and Ningbo were even closed down as a consequence of the so-called "incident caused by striving for tribute" (*zhengong zhi yi* 爭貢之役), also called the "Ningbo-incident".¹²⁹ And although later during the early seventeenth century the new Tokugawa rulers, starting with the time of Ieyasu 德川家康 (1542–1616; r. 1603–1616), sought in vain to re-establish direct relations with China – of course under *their* political-economic premises – it should be emphasized that until 1871 officially no diplomatic relations existed between China and Japan.

The Zheng-He expeditions

For some thirty years, however, during the early Ming, China returned to the centre of the maritime world. Between 1405 and 1433 the third Ming Emperor, Yongle 永樂 Emperor (r. 1403–1424), initiated in all seven overseas expeditions that were carried out under the supervision of the Muslim eunuch Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–c. 1433). Debates about the actual purposes of these expeditions continue unabated to this day.¹³⁰ But it has been widely accepted that they did not primarily serve trading purposes but were rather diplomatic missions serving political ends.¹³¹ It has also startled modern scholars that these most influential naval undertakings took place during a time period preceded and followed by a more or less strict maritime prohibition policy. However, the expeditions become understandable when seen in the context that China considered herself as the leading power, with undisputed supremacy in the contemporary Asian world and beyond. The main purpose behind the expeditions, I would argue, was a demonstration by China of this view, and may even have implied a claim for "world domination", at least in Asia, by the Yongle Emperor.

¹²⁹ For further details see Oláh Csaba, "Debatten über den japanischen Tribut nach dem Zwischenfall in Ningbo (1523) und der chinesische Umgang mit der ersten darauf folgenden Gesandtschaft (1539–40)", in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *The East Asian Maritime World 1400–1800: Its Fabrics of Power and Dynamics of Exchanges*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2007), 169–218.

¹³⁰ The more generally accepted explanations include efforts to impress its neighbours with China's prosperity and power, the Ming court's wish to stimulate trade and tribute missions from abroad, and the aim of securing foreign luxury products. The official accounts (*Mingshi*) note that the Yongle Emperor intended to find the former emperor, Zhu Yunwen 朱允炆 (r. 1399–1402), whom he had just ousted from the throne. For a discussion and refutation of the hypothesis that the expeditions were dispatched for the purpose of concluding military alliances with countries in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean region to fight against Timur (d. 1405), cf. Morris Rossabi, "Cheng Ho and Timur: Any Relation?", *Oriens Extremus* 20 (1973), 129–136.

¹³¹ Timothy Brook, "Communications and commerce", in Frederick W. Mote, Denis Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8, part 2 (1988), 579–707, 615: "Their rationale was diplomatic, enabling the Yung-lo emperor to declare his enthronement and demonstrate his suzerainty over other Asian states, as well as providing passage for foreign envoys bearing tribute to the Chinese throne; but it was also economic ..."; John E. Wills sees the voyages as "an anomalous state-directed revival within the framework of the tribute system of Sung-Yüan positive attitudes towards maritime trade. ...", cf. John E. Wills, "Relations with maritime Europeans", in Frederick W. Mote, Denis Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8, part 2 (1988), 333–375, 334.

¹²⁵ Wang Gungwu, "Merchants Without Empire: The Hokkien Sojourning Communities", in James D. Tracy (ed.), *The Rise of Merchant Empires*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 409–421; Chang Pin-tsun, "The First Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century", in Roderich Ptak, Dietmar Rothermund (eds.), *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400–1750*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), 13–28; Wang Ling-chi, Wang Gungwu (eds.), *The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays*. (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998).

¹²⁶ Leonard Blussé, *Visible Cities. Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia and the Coming of the Americans*. (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 2008), 14.

¹²⁷ Roderich Ptak, *Die maritime Seidenstraße*, 269.

¹²⁸ For a recent study on the role of Ryūkyūan merchants during this time, cf. Roderich Ptak, "The Ryūkyū Network in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries", *Revista de Cultura/Review of Culture* 6 (2003), 7–23.

The historical facts and circumstances do at least suggest that Yongle intended to realize in a practical fashion the concept of the middle Kingdom versus surrounding vassal or tribute states.

Independently of the exact historical assessment of the expeditions, it is certain that they officially carried China throughout the Indian Ocean as far as the East coast of Africa and the Red Sea for the first time and remained unrivalled until our days. It also becomes evident from the routes of the expeditions that official Ming naval policy mainly concentrated on the western part of South-east Asia and the Indian Ocean region. Hormuz located in the Persian Gulf obviously played a key role in the expeditions. It is repeatedly mentioned as destination and even appears on an old Chinese sea-route map, the so-called *Zheng He hanghai tu* 鄭和航海圖.¹³² Debates have also taken place about the alleged size of the ships or the question of what kind of weapons they carried on board (the term “fire arms” is vague; were these perhaps already some form of small cannons?). Supposedly between 20,000 and 30,000 men including mariners, soldiers, officials, physicians and technicians as well as others accompanied the expeditions. Although much of the information that we encounter in the sources may be exaggerated (definite archaeological evidence is lacking until today), it is clear that never before had both the China Seas and the Indian Ocean seen any naval manoeuvres of similar dimensions. During these few decades in the early fifteenth century China, thus, was *the* unchallenged maritime power in the world. And its eventual retreat from the “world seas” eventually happened on its own initiatives, caused by internal political considerations and a re-emphasis of the continental border with the Mongols in north China – again there is much speculation about the concrete reasons of her retreat – and was not forced on it by external powers.

Piracy and naval enterprises

When Ming tribute trade began to decline after the mid-15th century, while the trade proscription was still in force private trade in the form of smuggling began to fill its vacuum.

Illegal private merchants, smugglers or “pirates” as they are called in official Chinese historiography (most of these texts simply reflect the official Chinese position that stamped everybody who was violating the trade proscription as “pirate”), became increasingly active. Private trade was still prohibited and with the advent of the Europeans the demand for Chinese products even increased while there were increasingly fewer official possibilities to trade. A modern source collection like the *Mingdai Wokou shiliao* 明代倭寇史料 in seven volumes¹³³ attests to the great quantity of source material that exists on the topic of smuggling and piracy during the Ming. Although also foreigners like the Japanese, reflected in the term “Wokou” 倭寇 (lit. Japanese bandit; Jap. *Wakō*), or Portuguese were active in this network of clandestine trade, using offshore islands to exchange their goods, it was

Chinese people who formed the backbone of the smugglers.¹³⁴ Activities of more famous pirate-merchants of the 16th century, such as Wang Zhi 汪直, Xu Dong 許東, Li Guangtou 李光頭, Xu Hai 徐海 and others have already been investigated in more detail.¹³⁵

Piracy was not only omnipresent along the Chinese littoral but also in the Korean Straits. It strongly influenced international relations and trade policies in the East China Sea during this early modern period.¹³⁶ Already during the thirteenth century, Korean coastal cities had repeatedly been attacked by Japanese pirates, but in the 14th century such attacks increased again. Eventually, in 1380, the Koguryō (918–1392) court successfully countered an attack by pirates. Great efforts were made to destroy the scattered bases of the *Wakō* on the islands lying near the south coast of Korea. In 1419, 227 ships with more than 17,000 Chosŏn (1392–1910) soldiers invaded the Asō Bay 淺茅 and raided the heart of Tsushima 對馬 Island, curbing *Wakō* power in the Korean Straits at least for a time. The interest of the early Chosŏn government in foreign trade relations thus lay not in financial profits but in the pacification of the *Wakō* at all costs.¹³⁷ To help reduce the threat of pirate assaults, ports were opened to Japanese seafarers on the south-east Korean coast, and living and trading quarters known as the *Waegwan* 倭館 (*Wakan*) [Japan Houses] were set up in the first half of the fifteenth century in order to strictly control foreign traders.¹³⁸

On the Japanese side the feudal lords of Tsushima were entrusted with the responsibility of consolidating the relationship between the two countries. By the Kyehae Treaty 癸亥約條 of 1443, the number of trading ships coming to Korea via Tsushima was limited to fifty annually, and the *Haedong chегukki* 海東諸國紀 (1471) by Shin Suk-chu 申叔舟 details the number of ships the members of the Sō 宗 and Sōda 早田 families of Tsushima were allowed to send each year. Such restrictions once again provided the reason for various forms of piracy. Jurgis Elisonas regards it as possible that the *Wakō* were not only interested in the commodities traded across East Asian waters, but also engaged in slavery, one story reporting, for example, 200–300 Chinese slaves being kept by Japanese families on Satsuma 薩摩藩.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Chang Pin-tsun, “The Rise of Chinese Mercantile Power in Maritime Southeast Asia, c. 1400–1700”.

¹³⁵ See, for example, the articles in Robert J. Antony (ed.), *Elusive Pirates, Evasive Smugglers. Violence and Clandestine Trade in the Greater China Seas*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010); Charles O. Hucker, “Hu Tsung-hsien’s Campaign Against Hsü Hai, 1556”, in Frank A. Kierman, Jr., John K. Fairbank (eds.), *Chinese Ways in Warfare*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 273–307; John E. Wills, “Maritime China from Wang Chih to Shih Lang”.

¹³⁶ These developments have recently been investigated by Barbara Seyock, “Pirates and traders on Tsushima Island during the late 14th to early 16th centuries: as seen from historical and archaeological perspectives”, in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *Trade and Transfer across the East Asian “Mediterranean”* (2005), 91–124.

¹³⁷ Barbara Seyock, “Pirates and traders” (2005), 91–124.

¹³⁸ Key S. Ryang, “The Korean-Japanese Relations in the 17th Century”, *Korea Observer* 13:4 (Winter 1982), 434–450.

¹³⁹ Jurgis Elisonas, “The inseparable trinity: Japan’s relations with China and Korea”, in John Whitney Hall (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan*, volume 4. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 235–300, here 260.

¹³² *Zheng He hanghai tu* 鄭和航海圖 by Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀; edited and annotated by Xiang Da 向達. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961). *Zhongwai jiaotong shiji congkan* 中外交通史籍叢刊, 19.

¹³³ Zheng Liangsheng 鄭樑生 (ed.), *Mingdai Wokou shiliao* 明代倭寇史料. (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1987), 7 vols. See also Fan Zhongyi, Tong Xigang, *Mingdai Wokou shilüe*.

The “Maritime Great Wall”, as Chang Pin-tsun has called it,¹⁴⁰ provided an effective policy along the coast to seal off China from overseas countries, but in the long perspective it was not successful.¹⁴¹ For the Chinese coastal waters the sixteenth century undoubtedly constituted a peak in terms of piracy and discussions about expenses needed for coastal defence contributed to the general debate about the abolition of the trade proscription policy.

Military operations

A first larger naval expedition, after the Mongol attempt to conquer Japan, occurred with the invasion of Korea in 1592 under the Japanese ruler Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1536–1598). One of the most effective examples of Korean resistance came from a naval campaign led by Admiral Yi Sun-sin 李舜臣 (1545–1598) in the summer of 1592. He is said to have developed a type of attack vessel equipped with cannons called the “turtle ship”, which obviously caused particular problems for the Japanese navy.¹⁴² Especially famous is the battle near Hansan Island 閑山島, one of three great victories against the Japanese as a result of which Korea regained control of the sea lanes. The Ming government also assisted Korea at this time, sending a relief army to Korea led by Li Rusong 李如松. The death of Hideyoshi in 1598, however, resulted in the eventual retreat of the Japanese from the Korean peninsula.

Also in the 17th century, in particular during the Ming-Qing conquest, the China Seas continued to be a space for military operations. Mention should be made of Emperor Kangxi's 康熙 (r. 1662–1722) fight against the “merchant empire” of the Zheng 鄭-clan who had retreated to Taiwan after the fall of the Ming and the eventual conquest of Taiwan, carried out under the Commander-in-chief of the Manchu fleet, Shi Lang 施琅 (1621–1696).¹⁴³

For North-east Asia we should mention the example of Mao Wenlong 毛文龍 (1576–1629), a Chinese general who had escaped to Korea with a small army and set up a base on Pidao 皮島 (Kado Island), south of the Yalu estuary, in 1621 when the Manchus took Liaodong and consequently blocked the overland route between Korea and China. Pidao needed large quantities of food to provide for the tens of thousands of soldiers under his command¹⁴⁴ and the refugees from Liaodong. But regardless of its strategic advantages for diplo-

macy, trade and military defence, the island was unable to provide for the necessary provisions by itself. Food supplies from Dengzhou 鄧州 or Tianjin 天津 were irregular due to the Ming government's financial problems as well as the insecure nature of maritime transport. Beside grain, Mao also demanded that the Korean government provide ships, horses, guns and ginseng.¹⁴⁵ Pidao, as Jung Byung-chul has shown, developed not only as the official diplomatic contact space between Ming China and Korea, but also as an important frontier market for Ming-Korea-Manchu triangular trade at the northern edge of the Yellow Sea. Under Mao's patronage, “merchants from south and east crowded into the island, [and] the Pidao market grew as prosperous as a city on the mainland”.¹⁴⁶

The Zhoushan 舟山 Islands, offshore Zhejiang, to the east of the Hangzhou Bay, comprising 1390 islands and 3306 reefs, thereby forming one of the largest archipelagos of China, constituted a flourishing smuggling centre, especially for Sino-Portuguese and Sino-Japanese smuggling. They continued to fulfil this role until the archipelagos were completely destroyed by Ming troops in 1549 and 1558, respectively – as a consequence of which Taiwan emerged as the commercial centre in the East Asian waters.¹⁴⁷ When the Qing established their capital in Beijing, Ming loyalists fled south.¹⁴⁸ In 1646, Ming loyalists around Prince Lu 魯王, Zhu Yihai 朱以海 (1618–1662), retreated to the Zhoushan Islands and settled there between 1649 and 1651, when Qing troops conquered Zhoushan and defeated the Ming loyalists. Consequently, having already lost their commercial importance during Ming times, the island archipelago continued to play a political-military role. After the conquest of Taiwan, however, the Chinese concentrated themselves on her continental border and officially no more naval undertakings were carried out during the time period under investigation here.

A few words are due on the particular role Taiwan played in the China Seas. As we have seen above, it apparently first entered official Chinese consciousness during the Sui period, although many things remain unclear about its early history. In older texts it is, as a rule, called “Liuqiu 琉球” of which there exist various character variants and which in early texts appears with the adjectives “big” (*da* 大) or “small” (*xiao* 小) referring to Taiwan and the Liuqiu or Ryūkyū Islands or

¹⁴⁰ Chang Pin-tsun, *op. cit.*

¹⁴¹ See for example the *Wubei zhi* 武備志 (1624 ed.) by Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀; Charles Hucker, “Hu Tsung-hsien's Campaign against Hsu Hai, 1556”.

¹⁴² Donald N. Clark, “Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming”, in Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8, part 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 272–300, 294–295.

¹⁴³ For details see, among others, Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); John E. Wills Jr., “Maritime China from Wang Chih to Shih Lang: Themes in Peripheral History”, in John E. Wills, Jonathan Spence (eds.), *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth Century China*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 204–238.

¹⁴⁴ *Mingji beilüe* 明季北略 by Ji Liuji 計六奇 (1622–?). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), j. 2, 40.

¹⁴⁵ *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, *Injo sillok* 仁祖實錄, j. 6, 614 (Injo 2:5:2: *eulmyo* 仁祖 2年 5月 2日, 乙卯); *Ibid.*, j. 6, 637 (Injo 2:8:22: *gapjin* 仁祖 2年 8月 22日, 甲辰); *Ibid.*, j. 17, 238 (Injo 5:11:18: *sinsa* 仁祖 5年 11月 18日, 辛巳).

¹⁴⁶ Jung Byung-chul, “Late Ming Island Bases, Military Bases and Sear Routes in the Offshore Area of Liaodong”, in Angela Schottenhammer, Roderich Ptak (eds.), *Maritime Space in Traditional Chinese Sources*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2006), 41–50; here with reference to the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, j. 183, 482 (*Gwanghaegun* 14:11:11: *guimao* 光海君 14年 11月 11日, 癸卯).

¹⁴⁷ Chang Pin-tsun 張彬村, “Shiliu shiji Zhoushan qundao de zousi maoyi 十六世紀舟山群島的走私貿易”, in *Zhongguo haiyang fazhan-shi lunwenji* 中國海洋發展史論文集, vol. 1. (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan sanminzhuyi yanjiusuo, 1984), 71–95. Already during the late Yuan and the early Ming period, the archipelago had been used as a space for both political and commercial retreat and for military operations.

¹⁴⁸ Lynn Struve, *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 114.

either *only* Taiwan or *only* the Ryūkyū Islands. The name of “Taiwan 臺灣” seems not to have been used before the 1630s.¹⁴⁹ Although the island was certainly visited by Fujianese fishermen – evidence for which is also suggested by the later Portuguese designation of the island group, namely “Pescadores”, literally meaning “fishermen” – Taiwan emerged only relatively late as a trading “rendezvous” in the East Asian waters. Not before the opening of the port of Haicheng off the Fujian coast (formerly called Yuegang 月港) and the subsequent gradual liberation of Chinese private maritime trade in 1567 did its history as an international trading “rendezvous” begin.¹⁵⁰ And it must be emphasized that until Qing times, the island was considered as a frontier location, not really being part of the Qing Empire, although it was officially incorporated as a part of Fujian Province in 1684. Qing sources describe the island as “lonely hanging beyond the seas” (*gu xuan haiwai* 孤懸海外),¹⁵¹ as a “faraway place beyond the deep ocean” (*yuan zai zhongyang zhi wai* 遠在重洋之外).¹⁵² The local inhabitants are repeatedly referred to as cruel, ruthless and stubborn. They are described as “foreign people that came from several places outside [the Chinese realms]” (*fanmin zachu er wailai zhi min* 番民雜處而外來之民).¹⁵³

Thus although Taiwan officially became an integral part of activities in the China Seas in the seventeenth century, it continued to play a particular role.

The advent of the Europeans

The period we have been talking about is of course also the time when the first Europeans, the Portuguese, came to the China Seas, driven by the quest to avoid the trade routes in Asia Minor controlled by the Mameluks of Egypt and thus to monopolize the “spice routes” into Europe combined with missionary goals. They were followed by the Spaniards, the Dutch and only later also the British, French and various other European nations. With the advent of the Europeans, the China Seas once again experienced a qualitative change. Step by step and with interruptions or even setbacks, the Asian waters had increasingly “grown together” and this initiative originated in East Asia. With the beginning of the European overseas expansion gradually more and more Europeans filled roles that had formerly been carried out by Asian traders. Early networks of missionaries and merchants brought East Asia and its people gradually into closer contact with Europeans at places such as Macao, Manila, Taiwan and Nagasaki.¹⁵⁴ With Vasco Da Gama (1468/69–1524) and Ferdinand Magellan (1480–

1521) and his successors the China Seas were eventually “opened up” on a permanent basis also beyond the Indian Ocean towards the Atlantic in the West and the Pacific up to Mexico and the American continent in the East. Starting with the Portuguese and Spanish expansion the China Seas consequently became part of and were connected with the entire world, a process that was completed with English colonialism in the nineteenth century.

The prohibition policy of the Ming on the one hand resulted in a certain decline in the importance of Chinese merchants on the seas, namely the importance of China-based merchants. Indian and South-east Asian based Muslim traders expanded their traditional networks and traded with China in connection with tribute envoys.¹⁵⁵ Also Ryūkyūan merchants, as we have seen above, took over the role of the Chinese merchants to a certain extent. But on the other hand, especially when Ming tribute trade declined after the mid-fifteenth century, more and more Chinese migrated to overseas countries from where they managed a powerful private trade network. Chinese merchants came to monopolize these networks in the China Seas and foreign, basically Southeast, South and West Asian merchants were displaced, from then on being active only beyond the China Seas. In this respect, it is probably not exaggerated to state that the maritime trade proscription at the same time constituted the basis for the rise of China’s private mercantile power.

The eventual abolishment of the trade proscription was not only the result of a long political debate within China but also of both contradictions within China’s political-economic system¹⁵⁶ and of the ever increasing demand for Chinese products, in particular by the Europeans, and the consequent high profits that could be earned from engaging in maritime trade. This caused not only private people to maintain or build up clandestine networks but also official persons and institutions to engage in maritime trade – despite official prohibitions. The abolition of the maritime trade proscription was soon only a question of time. Trade relations boomed in the late 16th and early 17th century and only the Manchu conquest of China brought with it a certain setback.

Although the main markets for the Europeans lay in Europe, European merchants and merchant organizations soon constituted competition for Chinese traders in East Asian waters. Between 1600 and 1700 the Chinese were gradually displaced by the Dutch and other European merchants in the trade with South-east and South Asia. But, as Chang Pin-tsun has argued, only the Dutch VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) was able to successfully enforce a monopoly of

¹⁴⁹ See Chang Pin-tsun, “The Emergence of Taiwan as an International Trading Rendezvous in the Sixteenth Century”, in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *Taiwan – A Bridge between the East and South China Seas*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2011), 9–24, 12.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ *Shizong Xianhuangdi zhupi yuzhi* 世宗憲皇帝硃批諭旨 by Yongzheng 雍正 (1677–1735) and Qianlong 乾隆 (1711–1799), j. 176, section 5, 27b, in *Siku quanshu*, fasc. 418–423.

¹⁵² *Shizong Xianhuangdi zhupi yuzhi*, j. 13, section xia, 22b; also j. 72, 1b (*yuan ge haiyang difang* 遠隔海洋地方).

¹⁵³ *Shizong Xianhuangdi zhupi yuzhi*, j. 72, 3b.

¹⁵⁴ John E. Wills, “Relations with Maritime Europeans, 1514–1662”, in Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, volume 8, part 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 333–375.

¹⁵⁵ On the rise of private trade, see Chang Pin-tsun, *Chinese Maritime Trade: The Case of Sixteenth-Century Fu-chien*. (Ph.D. dissertation; Princeton: Princeton University, 1983), 198–290; Bodo Wiethoff, *Die chinesische Seeverbotspolitik und der private Überseehandel von 1368 bis 1567*. Dissertation, Hamburg, *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Kommissionsverlag, 1963).

¹⁵⁶ See Li Kangying, *The Ming Maritime Trade Policy in Transition, 1368–1567* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2010), *East Asian Maritime History*, 8, for an excellent discussion about the gradual shift in Ming China’s maritime policy.

trade between South-east Asia and India in the seventeenth century.¹⁵⁷ Generally speaking, at least as far as the China trade is concerned, the period between 1720 and 1760 has been designated the “period of construction of the European China trade”.¹⁵⁸ After the Qing government lifted its ban on maritime trade and opened Customs Houses (*haiguan*) between 1683 and 1685, foreign trade quickly revived and numerous Chinese commodities re-appeared in the Asian waters. A new world-market had come into existence. It was a time when “Chinese silks were being worn in the streets of Kyōto and Lima, Chinese cottons were being sold in Filipino and Mexican markets, and Chinese porcelain was being used in fashionable homes from Sakai to London”.¹⁵⁹

In maritime relations with Japan, Chinese merchants remained very active. In the 17th and 18th centuries China pursued a relatively positive trading policy with Japan, seeking to obtain first as much silver and, later, copper as possible from her neighbour – although, as we have seen above, no official diplomatic relations were re-established until 1871. The hub for mutual exchange relations was Nagasaki, where Chinese merchants were competing with Portuguese and later Dutch traders. Japan on the other hand tried to obtain knowledge, specialists and goods from China not only via China’s official Nagasaki trade but also via the Ryūkyūs. The island country was even subdued by the Japanese fief of Satsuma 薩摩 in 1609. It has been argued that after the subjugation by Satsuma in 1609 actually most of the profit went to Satsuma, as a consequence of which from time to time the Chinese cargoes were unloaded on smaller islands to hide them from the Japanese officials – contraband practices that of course only encouraged stricter control on the Satsuma side.¹⁶⁰ In general Satsuma did play an important role within the smuggling networks in Chinese and Japanese waters at that time. This is attested to by many examples in the *Tsūkō ichiran* 通航一覽 (1853).¹⁶¹ Smuggling (*nukeni* 抜荷) was nothing extraordinary.¹⁶² Also Dutch sources attest to this phenomenon. A local interpreter, after the Dutch had repeatedly complained about the rampant smuggling of the Chinese, noted: “(T)he Chinese have to smuggle in order to render their business profitable”.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Chang Pin-tsun, “The Rise of Chinese Mercantile Power in Maritime Southeast Asia, c. 1400-1700”. For a comprehensive and very good account of activities of the VOC in the Indian Ocean World, see also René J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century*. (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Jürgen Osterhammel, *China und die Weltgesellschaft*. Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis in unsere Zeit. (München: C. H. Beck 1989), 112.

¹⁵⁹ William Atwell, “T’ai-ch’ang, T’ien-ch’i, and Ch’ung-chen Reigns, 1620–1644”, in Frederick W. Mote, Denis Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 7, part 1 (1988), 585–640, 587.

¹⁶⁰ Wolf Haenisch, *Die auswärtige Politik Ryūkyūs seit dem Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts und der Einfluß der Fürsten von Satsuma*. PhD dissertation, Berlin 1934. (Erlangen: Buchdruckerei Krahl, 1937), 25.

¹⁶¹ Cf. for example *Tsūkō ichiran* 通航一覽 (1853) edited by Hayashi Fukusai 林復斎 (1800–1859) et al. (Osaka: Seibundō shuppan, 1967), vol. 5, j. 198, 228.

¹⁶² For numerous examples cf. *Tsūkō ichiran*, vol. 4, passim.

¹⁶³ Paul van der Velde & Rudolf Bachofner, *The Deshima Diaries. Marginalia 1700–1740*. (Tōkyō: The Japan-Netherlands Institute, 1992), 69. *Deshima Series*, ed. by J. L. Blussé and W. G. J. Rammelink, *Japan-Netherlands Institute Scientific Publications of the Japan-Netherlands Institute* No. 12.

The China Seas of that time were a closely connected and complex network of sea routes on which primarily private individuals and institutions from many countries world-wide were active, above all for commercial purposes. Migration continued and also numerous Europeans settled in East Asia. With the missionaries during the late 16th to early eighteenth centuries Christianity – that had only played a minor role in the centuries before – and European culture also entered the China Seas.

Politically speaking, the seventeenth and eighteenth century Qing emperors concentrated primarily on China’s continental borders. But they were still interested in what was going on overseas. Emperor Kangxi openly raised his concerns in face of the European expansions that he considered a threat, both from continental (Russia)¹⁶⁴ and maritime (the Netherlands, the Spaniards, the British) borders.¹⁶⁵ Both Kangxi and Yongzheng were concerned about developments in Japan and even sent spies there.¹⁶⁶ During the rule of Kangxi and Yongzheng fears have even been accentuated about Japan’s activities in the East Asian waters (such as cooperation with the Zheng 鄭 clan) and her general anti-Manchu resistance, along with her restrictive foreign trade policy that attempted to make the country stronger, and that Japan may even use her copper cast cannons to attack China.¹⁶⁷ But with the rise of the Qian-

¹⁶⁴ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 65–66; Jürgen Osterhammel, *China und die Weltgesellschaft*, 100 and 465, Footnote 75.

¹⁶⁵ Admiral Shi Lang 施琅 had suggested that Taiwan became a fortified base to protect China against the “strong, huge, and invincible” warships of the Dutch. Kangxi, later, ordered a Qing garrison of 8,000 soldiers to be left permanently on the island. Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 57. In 1703, Emperor Kangxi, on a tour of the southern provinces, was alarmed to discover how many Westerners were present all over China. Foreseeing trouble, he imposed restrictions on Europeans entering the empire.

¹⁶⁶ Kangxi in 1701 sent a Manchu bondservant, the chief clerk (*ulinda* 烏林達) of the Imperial Silk Manufactory (*zhizao ju* 織造局) in Hangzhou, Morsen 莫爾森, as a secret agent to Japan. Disguised as a merchant, Morsen sailed from Shanghai in the summer of 1701 and returned to Ningbo in the autumn of the same year. Under the Yongzheng Emperor, the Chinese doctor and merchant Zhu Laizhang 朱來章, who had lived in Nagasaki for quite a while, was sent at least twice to Nagasaki to inquire about the political-economic situation there. For a detailed analysis of the background behind the dispatch of these spies see Angela Schottenhammer, “Japan – the Tiny Dwarf? Sino-Japanese Relations from the Kangxi to the Early Qianlong Reigns”, in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *The East Asian Mediterranean – Maritime Crossroads of Culture, Commerce, and Human Migration*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2008), 331–388. *East Asian Maritime History*, 6.

¹⁶⁷ “Although Japan is a tiny dwarf barbarian island, it relies on its big copper cast cannons which can attack from a far-away distance and its extraordinarily sharp Wodao swords; already in the former Ming Dynasty [Japan] belonged to the evils of the seas (*haihuan* 海患); in the Eastern Seas (*Dongyang* 東洋) it was considered a violent invader (*qiangkou* 強寇). Our dynasty has a majestic spirit, and they [i.e. the Japanese] have prostrated themselves from fear and hidden, so that for many years they have had no way to offend against China (*zhonghua* 中華).” This stems from a memorial of the governor-general of Zhejiang, Li Wei 李衛 (1687?–1738). See *Shizong Xianhuangdi zhupi yuzhi*, j. 174, section 8, 25a-b (201). See also Guo Yunjing, “Views of Japan and Policies Toward Japan in the Early Qing”, in Joshua Fogel (ed.), *Sagacious Monks and Bloodthirsty Warriors: Chinese Views of Japan in the Ming-Qing Period*. (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2002), 88–108.

long Emperor interest in what happened in Japan – not to speak of the European countries – disappeared almost completely.¹⁶⁸ With Korea and the Ryūkyūs tribute relations were officially maintained.

Officially, China, as had Korea and Japan, almost completely retreated from the China Seas in the second half of the 18th century. In this context, we may speak of a European-dominated China Seas region. And it was the Europeans who eventually connected the China Seas from outside with the entire world. The network across the China Seas was characterized by a variety of commercial competition along with smaller campaigns and “punitive actions” but it was not before the 19th century that military purposes again dominated the Chinese waters.

Conclusion

Can the history of the China Seas reasonably be explained from a global historical standpoint? We have seen that basic characteristics of interaction were present already from relatively early times on – increasing economic and cultural interrelations and exchange, human movements and migration, or diplomatic intercourse. Interaction networks require a certain permanence and stability. We observed a process of increasing economic, political and cultural interaction in certain phases, or, in our case in particular during the period from the collapse of the Yuan dynasty until the mid-16th century, of deconstruction or de-globalization of grown networks. In this respect, the question can certainly be answered affirmatively. But the history of the China Seas of course followed its own characteristics.

In earliest times military and diplomatic relations seem to have prevailed, although the coastal waters were being used for short-distance commercial exchange as well – that it has always been used as a source of living by fishermen and their families should go without saying. From the post-Han to the Tang dynasties we could subsequently observe a continuous upswing of private commercial interaction in which Buddhism (as religious and cultural element) played a predominant role. During the Tang-Wudai-Song-Yuan period we see an Islamic dominated maritime trade in the south, linking up China on a permanent basis with the Indian Ocean region and the Persian Gulf, while North-east Asia was rather predominated by Confucian and Buddhist culture. Commercial exchanges on southern and Western routes were dominated by merchants from the Islamic world. Song and Yuan China eventually developed as the economic motor in the macro-region with Chinese merchants becoming ever more active in the China Seas and beyond from the late eleventh century. This process is also paralleled by an ever-increasing privatization of interactions.

With the collapse of the Yuan Empire and the establishment of the Ming dynasty we subsequently encounter a phase of deconstruction and re-segmentation of the seas. Except for the three decades between 1405 and 1433, when China for the first time in history officially expanded as far as the Indian

Ocean up to the coast of Africa and the Red Sea, the country subsequently officially retreated from the China Seas. Consequently, this was only a temporary and not a more permanent expansion of interaction.

But the structures and networks that had grown over centuries could not be destroyed simply by government decree. Rather were they maintained by private, “illegal” actors. Gradual privatization from the post-Han to the Tang period was, thus, followed by an “officialization” during the Song-Yuan and finally illegalization (smuggling) and mass emigration during the Ming. The persisting profits that could be earned via maritime trade, especially against the background of a sudden new and ever increasing demand for Asian, above all Chinese, products by the Europeans, eventually led to a reprivatization of commercial interactions, even if this happened under more or less strict government control. And it may be considered an irony of history that the maritime trade proscription policy of the Ming rulers that was intended to curb private maritime trade eventually led to its opposite, the rise of Chinese mercantile power.

With the advent of the Europeans, Chinese and Asian traders in general lost their share of the market and the increasingly complex commercial network again came to be dominated in large parts by foreigners, this time the Europeans. In addition, Christian culture and religion entered the China Seas.

François Gipouloux has recently provided a comparison of three different Mediterranean Seas – the European Méditerranées of the *repubbliche marinare* and the Hanseatic League in the Baltic Seas and the Asian Mediterranean comprising the Sea of Japan, the Yellow Sea, the South China Sea, the Sulu Sea and the Sea of the Célèbes.¹⁶⁹ The large absence of independent institutions and a private commercial law in Asia is one of his main arguments explaining the different historical developments of Europe and Asia. In Europe we encounter city-states that were maintaining the networks across the Mediterraneans and that developed independently of a central governmental sovereign. Both the *repubbliche marinare* and the Hanseatic League could only prosper because a tradition of independent cities in Europe existed. According to Gipouloux, inter-regional commercial exchange in Asia, in contrast to the European Mediterraneans, adopted basically two peculiar forms of progress: (1) tribute trade, that means trade that was forced into a bureaucratic corset and implemented behind an official diplomatic umbrella, and (2) non-official or contraband trade (p. 89).

Summarizing the history of interaction in the China Seas, we have to conclude that for a holistic assessment of the region’s history this statement would be too generalizing. Although we do not encounter city-states like in Europe, since Tang times there existed large commercial cities along the coastlines, such as Yangzhou, Guangzhou or Quanzhou, with great numbers of merchants that could pursue their private commercial interests at least relatively liberally, and with partly significant foreign settlements that often even possessed their own jurisdiction. And such merchant communities, of course to different degrees, disposed of certain institutional

¹⁶⁸ For a more detailed discussion of these arguments see Angela Schottenhammer, “Empire and Periphery? The Qing Empire’s Relations with Japan and the Ryūkyūs (1644–c. 1800), a Comparison”, *The Medieval History Journal* 16: 2 (2012), in press.

¹⁶⁹ François Gipouloux, *La Méditerranée asiatique. Villes portuaires et réseaux marchands en Chine, au Japon et en Asie du Sud-Est, XVIe–XXIe siècle*. (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2009).

structures to carry out long-distance trade.¹⁷⁰ It is also important to note that contraband trade was not the most important commercial activity throughout China's and East Asia's history. In particular during the Song-Yuan period maritime trade was not only officially sponsored (even though it was more or less strictly controlled), but private commerce and merchants enjoyed at least a certain degree of independence and liberty. That developments across the China Seas nevertheless looked so differently from those in Europe has probably rather to be traced back to the very different politico-economic purposes of the governments of China, Korea and Japan, to their different understandings of sovereignty and foreign trade and, consequently, to their qualitatively different reference to the seas as a medium of exchange and interaction.

Since antiquity, the China Seas have grown more and more together and have been connected via sea routes to regions as far away as India, the Persian Gulf and the Islamic and Oriental worlds. And this development originated in Asia. However, that they were globally (in the literal sense) integrated, was achieved by the Portuguese and the Spaniards. But *in Asia* the Europeans entered into trading networks that already *existed* and they overtook roles that had previously been played by others for centuries. With their advent, however, these networks gradually came to change their quality. The more or less direct connection between military and commercial seafaring that was typical for Europe but has never been a typical characteristic of seafaring in the China Seas before can from then on also be observed in the China Seas.

¹⁷⁰ These institutional structures were of course far more developed by Ming/Qing (e.g. *Huiguan* 會館-like merchant associations) than by Song/Yuan times but they did exist in earlier times, too, e.g. in the form of the "commendas" during the Song or the "*ortu*" merchants' partnerships during the Yuan.