

The East Asian "Mediterranean": Maritime Crossroads of Culture, Commerce and Human Migration

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Preface

The present volume is a collection of papers originally presented for the concluding conference of our project *The East Asian 'Mediterranean'* entitled "The East Asian 'Mediterranean' – Maritime Crossroads of Culture, Commerce and Human Migration" and held at Munich University from November 2–3, 2007. With this conference, we not only tried to summarize our most recent research results and discuss once again the concept of an *East Asian Mediterranean*, especially in comparison to other "Mediterraneans" including a Southeast Asian and an Indian one. Two of the major goals of this conference were to highlight the broad networks of commercial, cultural and human exchanges in the macro region and to promote cross-cultural and international research.

As Victor Mair has recently emphasized "(a)n alarming large proportion of scholars have absolutely no interest or curiosity in cultures other than the one they themselves focus on." As many examples may show, historical parallels "would appear to be of the utmost significance for understanding the dynamics of cultural development. Yet, those who do occasionally hint at the possibility of cultural [or economic and commercial, A.S.] transmission are viewed, at best, as lacking good sense or, at worst, as being reckless renegades. Of course, there are rare and welcome exceptions to the overwhelming absence of attention to cultural interaction..., but it is particularly sad to report that those who confess to maintaining an interest in such subjects do so almost uniformly from a position outside of the intellectual mainstream. Whereas a century ago it was quite respectable to discuss cultural parallels and connections (Conrady 1906)¹, now it is well-nigh disreputable to do so."²

It is as if Victor Mair had spoken out of our soul. Especially our recent experiences in German Sinology and Japanese Studies, with few exceptions, have confirmed this tendency. And even worse, it is not only a question of looking beyond one's own field of expertise. Even within the same field, scholars are sometimes quite ignorant as far as studies on the same or on similar topics in other countries are concerned. It still happens much too often that scholars in Europe and East Asia work on the same topic without even knowing of each other. And how often can one read through English publications which do not even mention fundamental standard publications from Europe on the same subject, because they are written in a language other than English, for example in French, German or Spanish. Although – alone for practical reasons – English admittedly should be the preferred language to be used internationally, there is no excuse for simply ignoring publications in other languages. The "disease" described by Victor Mair consequently exists concerning both the interaction among different disciplines and concerning different countries and languages.

1 This refers to August Conrady, "Indischer Einfluß in China im 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 60 (1906), pp. 335–351.

2 Victor H. Mair (ed.), *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), pp. 4–5.

With our project we have been trying to undertake some steps to ameliorate this situation. And the present volume in particular tries to draw the readers' attention to the necessity and the advantages of international cooperation and interaction investigating topics of Asian history, here especially in the field of culture, commerce and human movements.

The contributions to this volume have been arranged according to thematic sections, that is "Mediterranean Seas – from East Asia to East Africa", "Merchants and merchant networks", "Commodities and transport", and finally "Trade parameters and perceptions" – each section covering a different aspect of interaction and exchange relations in and across the East Asian waters. It should go without saying that this volume cannot fulfil the claim of covering every aspect of interaction in the East Asian waters, but that we have selected case studies in order to show the reader the variety and the different qualities of interaction – a main focus lying on Sino-Japanese, Sino-Ryūkyūan, and Japanese-Korean relations as well as the involvement of Muslim merchants in the Asian waters.

The introductory essay generally compares the European Mediterranean with the China Seas and what we have called "East Asian Mediterranean" in our project and introduces the idea of a semi-Mediterranean or "Semiterranean" for these waters from the tenth century onwards. Subsequently, in the first section, different "Mediterraneans" in the waters from East Asia over the Indian Ocean up to the Persian Gulf and East Africa and groups engaged in these waters are discussed. In particular, the Gulf of Tongking is introduced as another "mini-Mediterranean". At the same time, the contributions proceed in time, from a pre-historical perspective, showing us what we might call "the roots" of our early modern East Asian Mediterranean, the impact and implications of Mongol control over large parts of maritime Asia up to the advent of the Europeans and their quest for control of the waters from Europe to the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. The third contribution here already touches upon a main focus in the second section, that is, the involvement of Muslim merchants in the Asian waters. Subsequently, two major merchant personalities, Katō Kiyomasa 加藤清正 and Torihara Sōan 鳥原宗安, are introduced, who, in the face of the very political background – Japan's invasion of Korea and Japan's search for a new quality of relationship with China respectively – established particular networks across the East Asian waters.

The third section investigates trade in a key commodity, ceramics, as well as tribute items sent to China by the Ryūkyū Islands during the Qing period, and eventually takes a closer look into the hydrodynamics of a Ryūkyūan tribute ship. We will see that although it was mainly Chinese ceramics that were traded in Asia, Southeast Asian ceramics found their way to Northeast Asia, Korean ceramics were found in other East Asian countries, and a Korean settler in Japan, a certain Yi Sam-p'yōng 李參平 (1579–1655), established the first porcelain kiln on Japanese territory and founded the Arita 有田 porcelain production centre – Arita porcelain later being found almost world-wide, as we will see. As for the Ryūkyūs, whose involvement in Asian trade has still not yet been satisfactorily investigated, their role

in the ceramics trade as well as the composition of their tribute items sent to Qing China are analyzed. The last contribution of this section discusses not only the distribution of Jianyang imprints from Ming China to Japan and the Ryūkyūs, but also the spread of the teachings of Zhu Xi, which for some time had played a major role in China's official élite education, in these two countries. This paper simultaneously builds the bridge for our last section, in the sense that it talks about perceptions and ideologies.

The first two papers of this last section introduce the travels of East Asian envoys and embassies in general and the information strategy of imposter envoys from Japan to Chosŏn Korea in particular – the problem of imposter envoys being omnipresent in the fifteenth and sixteenth century East Asian waters. We then proceed to an analysis of the particular characteristics of Sino-Japanese relations, first during the Ming and subsequently during the early and high Qing period. We especially seek to show the changing quality of mutual relations from Ming to Qing. The last contribution eventually goes back to the case of the Ryūkyūs, investigating the local idea of kingship and the origins of this kingdom.

Many aspects of trade, diplomacy and perceptions across and within the East Asian and Asian waters must necessarily remain uncovered. Yet, we hope that this volume will provide the reader with a relatively wide variety of both interesting and less known aspects of East Asian maritime trade history and constitute a further small step towards a better understanding of trade and interactions in this region during the early modern period.