

## Trading Networks in Early Modern East Asia

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Source: *Shinzoku kibun* 清俗紀聞 (1799) by Nakagawa Tadateru 中川忠英 (1753–1830), translated by Fang Ke 方克 and Sun Xuanling 孫玄齡. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), j. 10, p. 451.

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## Contents

Acknowledgements and Technical Remarks .....	vii
List of Illustrations.....	ix

ANGELA SCHOTTENHAMMER

Preface .....	1
---------------	---

## INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

IHARA HIROSHI 伊原弘

Numerical Indices that Can Reveal the Life of Song Commoners .....	5
--	---

SUE TAKASHI 須江隆

The Structure of Regional Society as Seen from Local Historical Documents: Focusing on the Southeastern Shoreline Areas, Song to Ming.....	27
--	----

KOH HEYRYUN 高惠蓮

Funktionen der Gottheit Mazu im Ostchinesischen Meer.....	51
---	----

ANGELA SCHOTTENHAMMER

Characteristics of Qing China's Maritime Trade Policies, <i>Shunzhi</i> through <i>Qianlong</i> Reigns .....	101
---	-----

WANG QING 王清

Trade and Exchange Relations between China and the Ryūkyūs During the Reign of Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (1662–1722) .....	155
---	-----

LIN YU-RU 林玉茹

From Supercargo to Mutual Commissioned Trade: Traditional Junk Trade between Lugang Guild Merchants And China Proper during the Qing Dynasty .....	195
--	-----

## Preface

The present volume, the ninth in our series *East Asian Maritime History*, once again seeks to show the intensity of exchange relations and trading networks in the early modern to late imperial “East Asian ‘Mediterranean’”. It includes results of our East Asian ‘Mediterranean’ research project (sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation) that have not yet been published<sup>1</sup>, such as the contributions by Dr. Heyryun Koh 高惠蓮, Dr. Wang Qing 王清 and myself, but at the same time a related study of one of our cooperation partners, Dr. Lin Yu-ru 林玉茹, from the Academia Sinica (Zhongyang yanjiuyuan 中央研究院) in Taipei. As it is our intention to show that these exchange relations and trading networks already had their roots and origins in the tenth to thirteenth centuries at the latest, we have included two examples that discuss local society and socio-economic change within China during the Song to Ming periods – although the other four contributions concentrate on aspects of commercial exchange and administration during the Qing period. Considering China as a part of the East Asian networks, at the same time paying attention to both political, socio-economic and cultural changes both within China and in the East Asian world in general can provide us with much more information on mutual exchange relations than treating the countries as separate entities. For example, to examine official Sino-Japanese relations solely would only lead to relatively general ideas. We need to know what was happening in Song China in order to learn how the two societies were synchronizing each other’s changes. Regional societies were becoming more mature and active in both nations, their influence expanding to local economies in small village units or to local religious activities. Studying and analyzing such changes leads us to understand the real conditions of maritime cross-cultural exchange. Thus, it is important to look behind the curtains and examine these relations in their complexity, including also the origins of the Ming and Qing trading networks in earlier periods, namely the Song.

This is exactly what our first two contributions want to show. Ihara Hiroshi 伊原弘 and Sue Takashi 須江隆 presume that during the Song dynasty regional societies, especially in the Southeast Chinese coastal regions, developed well and were stimulated by active local economies and other activities. Many Japanese Buddhist monks travelled to China, but they were not sent by members of the Japanese aristocracy but by local feudal lords and powerful temples. During this time, significant changes occurred in the society of Japan. Thus, Hiroshi and Sue are investigating changes and developments in Song to Ming China in order to learn more about the synchronization of changes that took place in both China and Japan. Regional societies were becoming more mature and active in both countries, and the influence of mutual trade and exchange affected local economies down to the level of small

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<sup>1</sup> It is neither intended nor possible that each of the publications resulting from our research project on the East Asian “Mediterranean” systematically provides the reader with a general résumé on the topic introduced, such as in this case, for example, an East Asian trading network system. Rather do we here, like in previous volumes, seek to provide the reader with selected examples that are the fruit of individual and team research.

villages. In other words, as for example the contribution by Ihara Hiroshi may show, not only big port cities but also economies on the micro level became more and more integrated into mutual maritime exchange trading networks. Still much more research will have to be done to understand such changes and the gradual integration of “micro-economies” into maritime trading networks in particular throughout the early modern period in more detail. Yet, these two examples may be considered as two more studies in this direction, to understand the real conditions of cross-cultural exchanges and trade. Economic development in villages in both China and Japan made it possible for them to support, for example, the construction of temples. Although we must take into account the fact that many Chinese crossed the East Asian Seas out of poverty, it was essentially the changes during the Song dynasty that promoted cross-cultural and economic exchange between China and Japan.

The contribution by Sue Takashi shows furthermore how important an involvement in shrines and temples, in other words, in aspects of socio-religious life, was also for mundane affairs. In this context, the article emphasizes what I would call the indirect importance of religion for social life and commercial activities as a basic precondition for success in such non-religious affairs. Sue also shows that the temples and shrines, originally places of worship, began to acquire economic value themselves and gradually more or less physically turned into centres of commerce.

Perhaps the more visible and direct importance of temples and religion in East Asian maritime trading networks is analyzed by Heyryun Koh, who focuses on Sino-Korean exchange relations. She investigates functions of the goddess Mazu 媽祖 in maritime trade, providing first a general historical introduction and subsequently concentrating on the analysis of the *Tianjin Tianhou gong Hanghui tu* 天津天后宮行會圖 in order to expound the Mazu cult in the Qing period city of Tianjin 天津. In the last part of her contribution she investigates the question of whether Mazu remained a goddess worshipped by Chinese merchants or if the Mazu cult was also adopted by Koreans. The belief in Mazu was cherished in so-called “*huiguan* 會館”, meeting places for merchants, where it took on additional functions, namely as a protection goddess for guild associations (*hangye shen* 行業神). The first three contributions, although in very different ways, thus attest to the importance of religion and religious institutions in maritime trade throughout the early modern to late imperial period.

My own contribution investigates particular characteristics and developments within the maritime trade administration of the Manchu Qing (1644–1911) government. The treatment of foreigners and foreign (maritime) trade by the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty has often been generalized and consequently been regarded as negative – with occasions such as the famous and eventually unsuccessful embassy by Lord George Macartney (1737–1806) in 1793 serving as evidence. But political claims going hand in hand with such ideological concepts were frequently quite different from reality. The reference of the early Manchu rulers towards overseas trade relations, it will be argued, should rather be designated as “open” – it was for example the Kangxi Emperor who first had China’s Customs Offices (*haiguan* 海關) established in the time

span between 1683 and 1684 – and, generally speaking, ranged from strategic security calculations to profit interests – with a different emphasis during different time periods. While security calculations prevailed in the early Qing period, commercial interests gained in importance in the course of the eighteenth century. The article furthermore intends to introduce some institutional-administrative details including particulars that have hitherto rather been neglected – such as the question if Manchus or Han Chinese were responsible for the administration of trade.

Wang Qing expounds trade and exchange relations between China and the Ryūkyū Islands during the reign of the Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (1662–1722). From the first Chinese investiture on the Ryūkyūs in 1372 (*hongwu* 洪武 5) onwards, the Ryūkyū Kingdom became a tributary country of China and maintained her close connections with China also during the Qing. Ryūkyū’s tributary relations with China developed from relatively smooth beginnings until they were almost disrupted at the end of the Ming dynasty due to the political disturbances at that time, then returning to normality only during the reign of Emperor Kangxi, with a successful investiture on the king of the Ryūkyūs in 1663 (*kangxi* 2). After that some efforts were undertaken to improve mutual trade relations. Wang Qing consequently analyzes a series of archival documents published in China and Japan to provide an elementary survey of the economic intercourse between Ryūkyū and China during the reign of Emperor Kangxi and its particular characteristics, laying special emphasis on private trade as a part of official, legal “tribute trade”.

Our last contribution brings us to Sino-Taiwanese trading networks in late imperial China. Jiaoshang (郊商 Guild merchants) like the Xu 許 family in Lugang 鹿港 were merchants who dominated trade between Taiwan and China proper during the Qing Dynasty and played a key role in the economic history of Taiwan during this period. They obtained export rice through the purchase of large pieces of land and controlled the entire production cycle of rice; from harvest and processing to wholesale. Gradually, they expanded into the import and export business, brokering and investing in firms in Quanzhou 泉州, Fujian, demonstrating the flexibility and diversity of their rice business.

In order to facilitate this expansion, the dominant mechanism of trade in this Taiwanese port began to change. Lugang was a large-scale official port, and as a result of its extensive trade with Quanzhou, the paradigm of trade gradually shifted toward mutual commissioned trade, in which the Xu family acted in the best interests of partner firms to ensure bilateral success.

In order to reduce risks and stabilize shipping routes, guild merchants in Lugang concentrated their business mainly in Quanzhou, and built a business network based upon blood, marriage and native-place relationships. They cooperated with each other by way of commissioned trade, the use of credit, and exchange of market information, thus building a mutually beneficial structure that gradually evolved into a trade bloc across Quanzhou and Lugang.

Undoubtedly, there are still many more aspects to analyze. In particular personal networks between merchants and merchant groups active in the East Asian waters as well as their relations to official and religious institutions have only started to be investigated in more detail. Recently published archive material from