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Asian Mediterranean:
China at the Core of Two Periods of Globalisation
(16th-20th century)*

François GIPOULOUX**

Abstract

Mediterranean is a powerful concept, elaborated by Braudel in his seminal study on *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.*[1] It encompasses economic, social and cultural dimensions. In the fourteenth century, Genoa, Venice, Barcelona were global places, controlling world-wide economic flows. This supremacy derived from the structuring of a crucial maritime area, the Mediterranean. What seems to be most remarkable in Braudel's analysis of the Mediterranean maritime world is how borders dematerialized, how flows started to define space and how different stages or levels of development clashed against one another.

During the 18th century, thanks to the overlapping of its trading networks (Arabic, Indian, Portuguese and Chinese) the South China sea was at the core of European and Asian economic exchanges. This paper deals with the following questions: Is Asian Mediterranean a conceptual tool applicable to Asia? More specifically, can the economic corridor of East Asia, hinged onto several interconnected maritime basins: The Sea of Japan, Yellow Sea, South China Sea, Sulu Sea, Celebes Sea be considered a valid illustration of the Braudelian concept, during the two periods under consideration: the end of the 16th century and the end of the 20th century? Is a network of independent cities the prominent actor of this maritime space?

Key Words: Asian Mediterranean, Globalisation, Economic history, China

Mediterranean is a powerful concept, elaborated by Braudel in his seminal study on *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.* It encompasses economic, social and cultural dimensions. In the forteenth century, Genoa, Venice,

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1) Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II.* Paris, Armand Colin, 1949. See also Thomas Rohlen, « A "Mediterranean" Model for Asian Regionalism: Cosmopolitan Cities and Nation States in Asia », Stanford University, Asia Pacific Research Center, May 1995.

Barcelona were global places, controlling wold-wide economic flows. This supremacy derived from the structuring of a crucial maritime area, Mediterranean. Braudel mostly focused on the cities along the Mediterranean coast, at the time of Philip the second.

We are no longer in the 16th century, and Asia, not the Mediterranean, will be the subject of our discussion. However, what seems to be the most remarkable in Braudel's analysis of the Mediterranean maritime world is how borders dematerialized, how flows started to define space and how different stages or levels of development clashed against one another. Braudel demonstrated the dichotomization between centers and boundaries, at a time when countries' borders seemed to blur. He also pointed out the fluidity of geographical divisions largely based upon a political partitioning of the world.

During the 18th century, thanks to the overlapping of its trading networks (Arabic, Indian, Portuguese and Chinese) the South China sea has been at the core of European and Asian economic exchanges. Is Asian Mediterranean a conceptual tool applicable to Asia? More specifically, can the economic corridor of East Asia, hinged onto several interconnected maritime basins: sea of Japan, Yellow sea, South China sea, Sulu Sea, Celebes sea be considered a valid illustration of the braudelian concept, during the two periods under consideration: the end of the 16th century and the end of the 20th century? Is a network of independent cities the prominent actor of this maritime space?

In the maritime republics of medieval Italy, independent port cities and merchants and mariners communities played a major role in maintaining the security of maritime areas. They were also able to create sophisticated legal instruments for the pursuit of their commercial goals. While legal instruments such as bills of lading, commercial contracts, the development of international commercial law and, more generally, a business environment relatively free from state intervention have been largely responsible for the success of the Mediterranean in Europe, we must ask ourselves whether it is possible to detect the same autonomy of port cities and development of commercial law when examining the case of the great emporia in East and Southeast Asia.

To answer these questions, one has to keep in mind a peculiar historical context. Two periods of globalisation have been at work between the 16th and the 20th centuries. The first one ocurred when the four continents were linked on a regular and stable basis, i.e. after the conquest of Manila by the Spaniards, in 1571; the second one took place in the last decades of the 20th century, as a result of the dramatic drop in the cost of transportation and telecommunications, combined with wide deregulation in the financial sector. Moreover, the appreciation of the yen, following the Plaza agreement, launched an unprecedented expansion of Japanese industrialisation across Asia through foreign direct

investment. The integration of China into the world economy accentuated this trend.

1. ASIAN MEDITERRANEAN: A CONTROVERSIAL CONCEPT

The association of the concept of Mediterranean basin with maritime Asia has early occured. As soon as the thirties, the Dutch scholar Jacob Cornelis Van Leur considered such a combination.[2] Later on, George Coedès, in his magistral study on the *Etats hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* (1944) gave the concept its first explicit formalisation. According to him, Southeast Asia is centered upon a «veritable Mediterranean, formed by the China Sea, the Gulf of Siam and the Java Sea. This enclosed sea, in spite of its typhoons and reefs, has always been a unifying factor rather than an obstacle for the peoples along the rivers.»[3] Then Denys Lombard, Pierre-Yves Manguin, Anthony Reid, recoursed, though diverse degree, to the Mediterranean metaphor in their works on Asian maritime economy.[4] However K.N. Chaudhuri undoubtedly used Braudel conceptual framework in the most systematic way.[5]

According to Chaudhuri, human and physical unity of coastal territories of the Indian ocean confer the region a cohesion strenghtened by maritime trade and cultural networks. While Pirenne made Islam, instead of Barbarian invasions or Christendom, responsible for the dismantling of classic Mediterranean world, Islam rise occurs concomitanly with Tang China emerging, and with as sophisticated urban civilisation, in which Arabic and Chinese languages imposed themselves as *linguæ francæ* in the Indian ocean.[6] Chaudhuri explicitly draws on Braudel, and on the three analytic foundations of its logic of history:

2) See J.C. Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History*, Van Hoeve, La Haye-Bandung, 1955. For a very comprehensive review of the concept's application to Asia, see Heather Sutherland, «Southeast Asian History and the Mediterranean Analogy», *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 34 (1), pp 1-20, February 2003.

3) George Coedès, *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*, (1944), Paris, De Boccard, 1989. [The Indianized states of Southeast Asia], ed. Walter Vella and tr. Susan Brown Cowing, Honolulu, East-West Center Press, 1968, pp. 3-4.

4) Denys Lombard, *Le Carrefour insulindien: essai d'histoire globale*, Paris, EHESS, 1990; P.-Y. Manguin, "The amorphous nature of coastal polities in insular Southeast Asia: restricted centres, extended peripheries", Moussons, 5, 2002; Denys Lombard and Jean Aubin (eds.) *Marchands et hommes d'affaires asiatiques dans l'Océan Indien et la Mer de Chine 13e-20e siècles*, Paris, Éditions de École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1988; Roderick Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund (eds.), *Emporia, commodities and entrepreneurs in Asian maritime trade, c. 1400-1750*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991. See also John Smail, «On the possibility of Autonomous History of Modern southeast Asia», *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 2,2, July 1961, pp. 72-102.

5) K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe : Economy and civilisation of the Indian ocean from the rise of islam to 1750*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

6) K.N. Chaudhuri, *op cit.*

space, time, and structure. Instead of Braudel, however, Chaudhuri deals with the Indian Ocean in the broder sense on a 11 century timespan. He also abandons europeocentrism to analyse Asia as an entity explicitly lead by market.

The concept of Asian mediterranean has also raised doubts and interrogations. Among the strongest reluctances, are those formulated by Sanjay Subramanyam[7] who questionned the very relevance of the notion of Mediterranean when applied to Asia. For him, it is not a homogeneous space, economically, politically or culturally speaking. Social links were strong in peculiar points of the area, more distended elsewhere. Subrahmanyam then comes to question the concept itself, asking whether Braudel would not have overestimated the role and position of France and Spain, while underestimating the role played by the Ottomans in the Mediterranean area.

2. ASIAN MEDITERRANEAN: AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

How to intersect the Braudelian concept of region with the changes Asia has gone through twice during the globalisations of the 16th and 20th century? What I find remarkable in Braudel's analysis of this maritime space is that borders break up, space is defined by flows, and different temporalities jumble together. Thus the reading of the Mediterranean concept I suggest here will be neither geographical, nor even historical but institutional. It first describes a polycentric configuration model of global cities with in my view four common features:

Global cities such as Genoa, Venice or Amalfi drew their autonomy from their special position, at the hinge of several competing jurisdictions

To define the connection between place and network, the French geographer Jean Gottmann elaborated the concept of hinge (*charnière*): he thus speaks of *hinge place or hinge region, historical hinge, multiple hinge*, and so forth. In his view, for instance, Constantinople acted as a hinge between capital and empire, between Europe and Asia, between Romans and Greeks, between land and maritime power.[8]

7) Sanjay Subrahmanyam: «Notes on circulation and asymetry in two 'Mediterranean', 1400-1800», in Claude Gillot, Denys Lombard and Roderick Ptak (eds.), *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1999, pp. 21-43.

8) Cf. Jean Gottman, «Capital cities», *Ekistics*, vol. 50, n° 299, March-April 1983, pp. 88-93; see also Kenneth E. Corey et Mark L. Wilson, «Jean Gottmann, contributions inoubliables à la théorie et à la planification urbaines», in *La géographie*, L'orbite de la géographie de Jean Gottmann, n° spécial hors série 1523 bis, janvier 2007, p. 137.

At the fringe of the German empire, Genoa had its municipal immunity recognised by Beranger II, king of Italy (then Lombardy), as early as 958 AD. The city gained independence in 1162, and jealously fought to preserve itself against the incroachment attempted by both Frederick Ist and Frederick IInd of Hohenstaufen.

Thanks to its geographical and political situation at the hinge of three rival empires (Lombard Carolingian, Slavic and Byzantine), Venice enjoyed a wide measure of autonomy and became a commercial linchpin between the three, with a commercial empire stretching from the Adriatic to the Crusaders Orient through the Aegean Sea and Dalmatia. It was the first maritime power in the Occident and at its peak played a role comparable to Athens in Ancient Greece.

Amalfi relied on Constantinople but as early as the 8th and 9th century the city became an important stake in the fierce rivalry between Byzantines and Lombardians from Salerno. It assumed an autonomous government led by a *comes*. This institution was skilfully played out of the tussle between Byzantines and Lombardians, and set forward a «habile diplomacy between the Pope, and the Arabs from Sicily».[9]

Governed by ship owners and maritime traders together with the Viscount and the Archbishop, Pisa enjoyed its first municipal legislation in 1162, while the Empire had recognised its municipality since 1081.

Maritime spaces were secured by an armed force not controlled by the state

The maritime Republics imposed their commercial supremacy by confronting the two maritime powers which controlled the Mediterranean: the North African Arabo-Berber corsairs and the Byzantines.

At the beginning of the XIIth century, Venice and its Illyric allies controlled the Adriatic and thanks to its Byzantium affiliation caught the inflow of Oriental products and distributed them in Europe. Later, it built up its fleet since neither the Byzantine nor the Germanic Empire had a Navy capable of coping with the pirates infesting the Adriatic: Hungarians in Dalmatia, Saracens in Sicily and Bari. Amalfi also played on its dependence on Byzantium to strengthen its economic relations with the Levant, before the Normans annexed it to the kingdom of Sicily (1131).

9) Yves Renouard, *Les villes d'Italie de la fin du X^{e} siècle au début du XIV^{e} siècle*, Paris, Sedes, 1969, T1., p. 65.

Between the 10th and the 12th century, Pisa committed itself to fighting the Arab pirates along the coasts of Southern Italy, Corsica, Sardinia and North Africa. The military and merchants also collaborated their efforts in logistics such as troop transportation during the Crusades. Were the Crusades a result of the power of the Italian maritime presence in the Mediterranean or just an opportunity to entrench its control? The question is without easy answers. The Crusades sped up the predominance of commercial and military activities in the Maritime Republics. The Genoans were the first to understand this and considerable profits were gained from supplying and providing transport for the Crusaders. The more cautious Pisans found it more lucrative to raid the Arabo-Sicilian coasts of North Africa.

Genoa and Pisa allied to drive away the Saracen settlers from Balearics, Sardinia and Corsica. The Tyrrhenian Sea liberated, the alliance then endeavoured to eliminate piracy in the western part of the Mediterranean, pushing towards Sicily, African coasts and Balearics.

Commanding commercial flows mattered more than ruling territories or taxing their people

As Renouard put it, "Venice created a bare colonial empire, with trading posts and ports as its only territorial foundation, at least during the initial centuries."[10] The word colony, applied to Venetian or Genoans trading posts around the Mediterranean, is misleading. In the middle Ages, they were merely foreign presence with varying permanence. More warehouses than settlements, they store merchandise for export and set taxes. Foreign merchants set up shops and sometimes accommodated their visiting colleagues. Without a stable population, the *fonduq* (hostel) was in fact the preferred operations and logistics base for the international trade: trading posts carry commercial transactions, nothing more. Foreign policy was only aimed at maintaining and extending this commercial net work."Possession of territories and carrying weapons when not at sea are pointless: needed products can be bought and mercenaries paid to fight."[11]

New economic and legal institutions are established outside the framework of the State

It is undoubtedly in a very particular context - the highly fragmented political structure of the European Middle Ages - that the origin of risk sharing practices and efficient

10) Yves Renouard, *Les villes d'Italie*...op. cit., Paris, Sedes, 1969, T. 1, p. 79.
11) Renouard, *Ibid.* p. 80.

deployment of capital through shareholding companies can be found. This "optimal fragmentation" to borrow an expression coined by Jared Diamond[12], leads to an unprecedented situation: significant portions of wealth are controlled by what we would call today independent legal entities. Hence, real estate holdings of the Church are in effect administered by economic concerns that are called dioceses, religious orders or even by the Church itself. The regulatory environment's growth produced new corporate bodies - cities, guilds, philanthropic organizations (hospices, hospitals etc).

The Mediterranean commercial system used sophisticated legal instruments extending beyond the state framework and already set the law as consistent, continuous and international. In that respect, maritime law was from its inception more international than municipal constitutions, statutes or common laws. Merchant law conveyed the globalised medieval society's rejection of an imposed order and the emergence of a more natural one.

Impatient and worried about business, merchants could not afford to wait for universities to codify the principles of a common law even though the law was a result of infinite territorial customs applied to autarkic communities. Customs, not law, have been at the heart of commerce since the very beginning of trade. Merchants went beyond local barriers to provide their innovations. Urgency necessitated a new, professional law to be drawn up from seafarers and traders involved in fairs and markets. A law based on trade practices and fairness, freed from local idiosyncrasies and authorities.

Western Europe's commercial hubs then acquired trans-national standing. From the start, maritime law had set out principles and codified applications beyond political borders. The Trani laws (1063), a Pisan commercial code (*consuetudine di mare*) attested from 1075, and the *Tavole amalfitane* (1274) summed up maritime law and customs in 66 chapters. These formalisations demonstrated the continuity and uniformity of maritime law in the Mediterranean. The conventions of commerce guaranteed the interests of merchants as well as ship owners'.

By the middle of the 12th century, maritime laws were operative in Barcelona, Tortosa and Marseille. They codified freight loading and unloading, transport costs, contracts, weapons placing, rules on ships salvaging, tolls and crew-merchants relations.[13] In the major Mediterranean cities for instance, the Catalans had *alfondecs* or grain exchanges.

12) Cf. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: the Fate of Human Societies*, Norton & Co., 1997.

13) Cf. The maritime code of 1258 by James the 1st of Aragon as quoted in Roy C. Cave and Herbert H. Coulson (eds), *A source book for medieval economic history*, New York, Biblio & Tannen, 1965.

These were in fact "hostel-markets" which enjoyed a set of rules then known *as consulates of the sea*, a basis at the time for the organisation of international trade. Consuls arbitrated on disputes with local authorities and could sign agreements with them. These *consulates of the sea* were a compilation of rules and customs and unlike law did not entail formalism. In 1435, James the Ist of Aragon enacted the *Ordinance of Barcelona*, the first legal document dealing with insurance - the first policy being in fact recorded in Genoa in 1347. The rule limiting third party liability of ship owners to an amount based on tonnage dates from this period.

3. THE ASIAN MARITIME SPACE, FROM THE 16TH TO THE 18TH CENTURY

Was there a tradition of urban autonomy in Asia? There were few examples and they did not match in details but they revealed the vitality of merchant autonomous entities: The kingdom of Srivijaya in Sumatra from the end of the 7th to the 10th century; Malacca before its conquest by the Portuguese in 1511; The Ryukyu archipelago, a middleman between Japan and China; Formosa during the brief episode of the Ming loyalist Cheng dynasty, from 1661 to 1683, date of its conquest by the Manchu.

The maritime kingdom of Srivijaya

Let's start with Srivijaya. The history of this maritime kingdom is not very well documented.[14] The sources that are available to us mainly consist of a few rare Chinese documents, travel notes left by foreign visitors, funerary or dedicatory inscriptions, archaeological discoveries and artistic relics. Even the capital's location remains hypothetical, although it was most likely situated at Palembang, in the 11th century. However, contrarily to the agrarian kingdoms of Java, Srivijaya is most certainly the first and most powerful of all the great Malaysian empires. At its heyday, Srivijaya's influence prevailed on the whole of Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula and the Kra isthmus, as well as the western part of Java. Its supremacy was largely based upon a powerful navy that could keep piracy in check. During nearly three centuries, this naval strength enabled Srivijaya's economy to flourish mostly through maritime commerce. Its strategic position at the Southeastern corner of Sumatra and the allegiance of its vassal Kedah, guaranteed its control over the Malacca Strait. Similarly, its authority over the Sunda Strait allowed the kingdom to dominate maritime exchanges between India and China.

14) Cf. O.W. Wolters, *The fall of Srivijaya in Malay history*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1970 . The importance of Sivrijava was noted as early as 1918 by Georges Coedès who however also stressed the difficulty of authenticating names of places from Chinese texts.

Srivijaya therefore, developed relationships not only with the archipelago's other states but also with India and China.

This maritime kingdom's power rested on a naval strength that was based on a monopoly over international commerce - but such a subtle articulation of power was fragile. The loss of its vassals or of its naval supremacy could threaten the Kingdom's very existence - and this is precisely what happened in the 11th century.

The tributary system linking China and the court of Srivijaya was quite elaborate. Chinese merchants, already very active in the Malaysian region, gradually chose Srivijaya as one of their favorite destinations. Their involvement in maritime commerce was in great part generated by the growing demand for Southeast Asian resins and spices. Furthermore, these traders also quickly became indispensable middlemen in the trade of Indian products such as incense and ivory. At court, Chinese merchants were often used as interpreters or translators and sometimes even mandated to conduct diplomatic missions. This merchant community, through its commercial practices, transcended national differences.[15] The cautious discretion evidenced by Chinese texts on the ethnic origin of Srivijaya's merchants enabled the latter to carry on their trade more freely. But the development of direct contacts between Chinese merchants and local markets progressively dissolved the entrepot's supremacy.

The decline of this prosperous commercial hub between India and China is just as much linked to the expansion of Chinese maritime commerce as it is to the rebellion of the Srivijaya's vassals. It appears that the kingdom's demands for higher port fees angered its neighbors, who then started to trade directly with India and China and eventually defeated it. Around the year 1000, Srivijaya was still controlling the largest part of Java but soon lost it to Cola, a South India's merchant kingdom that saw Srivijaya as the major impediment to its expansion on the maritime routes linking South and East Asia. In 1025, Cola took and pillaged Palembang. At the end of the 12th century, Srivijaya had become a minor kingdom and its role in Sumatra's affairs further declined to the benefit of Malayu, a vassal of Java based in Jambi. The fall of Srivijaya shortly antedates the emergence of another great merchant center of maritime Asia, Malacca.

Malacca - City-state and mercantile empire

15) Claudine Salmon, «Srivijaya, la Chine et les marchands chinois, Xe-XIIe s. Quelques réflexions sur l'empire sumatranais», *Archipel* 2002, no 63 : pp. 57-78. See also Kenneth Hall, *Maritime trade and state developement in Southeast Asia*, Honolulu, University of Hawaïi Press, 1985.

Malacca's strategic position attracted merchants at a very early date. Situated on the western coast of the Malaysian Peninsula, the city lords over the strait linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Thanks to the quality of the services it provided and to the moderation of its tax system, Malacca became the region's largest entrepot and the center of the Malaysian world. In the mid 15th century, the city's population reached 100,000 inhabitants, who for a large part were foreign merchants. At that time, Malacca was in effect the Strait's most powerful State. In an effort to compete with Siam for the control of the Malaysian Peninsula, the entrepot established trading posts in Sumatra. Following the visit of Admiral Zheng He, in 1409 Malacca started to collaborate with Ming China to fight piracy or non-official trade. The main goal was to re-establish the free circulation of commercial flows or, to be more precise, to incorporate them in the tributary system. Malacca, by launching the cultivation of pepper, deliberately focused its trade towards the west - the emporium collected a great number of goods to be sent to India and Europe.

From the 16th century onwards, Malacca and Java dominated trading networks throughout South-East Asia. From Malacca, this network was connected to a multitude of others leading to India, Persia, Syria, Eastern Africa, and the Mediterranean, thereby creating the largest commercial system of the times.[16] M.C. Ricklefs described in great detail the commercial network of which Malacca was the centre. It stretched from the Eastern coast of Sumatra to the Sunda and the central and Western parts of the island of Java. It also connected the western part of Java to the western coast of Sumatra, the central and eastern parts of Java to Sumatra. Further links included Java and Bali, Lombok and Sumbawa, Timor, Sumba and the Mollucas.[17]

The city also initiated relationships with Southeast Asia (Siam) and Pegu on the Burmese coast, and was connected to eastern Asia (China and Japan). Its success was largely based upon its ability to become the major player in spice trading in Southeast Asia (cloves from the Mollucas, nutmeg from the islands of the Banda archipelago) and the distributor of Indian textiles. Most of these activities were carried out by an international body of merchants and intermediaries.

Maritime commerce of the Ryukyu Islands

The Ryukyu Islands were a turntable for exchanges between China and Japan throughout the Edo Period (1603-1868) and in particular during the seclusion (*sakoku*)

16) M.C.Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, Indiana University Press, Bloomingtopn, 1981, pp. 18-19.

17) M.C. Ricklefs, *Ibid.*

period. The networks of Chinese mariners and merchants, who had been forced away from the Chinese coasts because of restrictions on maritime commerce imposed by the Ming, were again very active in exchanges between the Ryukyu and other tributary countries.

It was Emperor Taizu of the Ming who in 1372 first encouraged contacts with the archipelago. This resulted in the visit of a tributary mission. The administration of the Kingdom of Ryukyu pledged allegiance and offered merchandise to the Chinese Empire. In exchange it received diplomatic recognition and assurance of protection against external attack. Thus, the kingdom was included in what we would describe today as a regional security and commercial alliance system. This system relied entirely on the economic and military hegemony of China. It was accomplished by sending Chinese delegates to important ceremonies such as the crowning of a new monarch. This relationship was further reinforced by academic exchanges that allowed Ryukyu nationals to go and study in China.

Commercial activities grew within a very distinct international context. During the Edo Period, the Ryukyu Archipelago was subject to two tutelages - it was part of the fief of Shimazu, located in Kyushu, and yet still paid tribute to China.[18] The commercial system of the Ryukyu's was based on entrepot trade for products coming from Southeast Asia - Siam, Patani, Malacca, Palembang, Java, Sumatra, Vietnam and countries from the Sunda area. Japanese products (swords and gold) were exchanged for ivory, tin, precious stones, pepper and other spices, as well as sappan wood used in traditional medicine or in the dyeing industry.

Large quantities of these products were then re-exported towards China, Japan or Korea. Since most Southeast Asian nations paid tribute to China, Chinese became the lingua franca for both governmental and commercial exchanges. The form of entrepot trade that the Ryukyu's developed through its commercial relationships with the rest of Asia and more particularly with Southeast Asia depended upon an intricate network of merchants, navigators and Chinese translators based in Southeast Asia from Luzon to Sumatra and from the Annam to the Siam.

All the commercial activities that were part of this tributary commerce belonged to a royal monopoly in which private trade had no place - officially at least. These activities started in 1372 when diplomatic relations were initiated between the courts of the Ming and Chuzan, the largest and most prosperous of the three principalities that formed the

18) The relative autonomy enjoyed by Ryukyu ends in 1609 with the invasion of the Japanese Satsuma Clan.

Ryukyu's. It is apparently thanks to Chinese captains and ships that Chuzan could launch this flourishing maritime trade. Funds from the Ryukyu's were used to acquire the exotic Southeast Asian products that were to be sent to China as tribute and also - more importantly to traders, resold privately. The court of the Ming would reimburse the mission costs and provide new goods. It is important to underline the subtle mechanics of this *modus operandi* - funds werere public, purchases commissioned and profits were, for a large part, private. The port of Naha was at the center of these exchanges.

The government control of foreign trade, which remained a largely bureaucratic enterprise, was extremely heavy-handed. All departing foreign-bound vessels needed to obtain the *Shissho*, a certificate issued by Ryukyu authorities at Shuri.[19] These certificates showed a registration number that was frequently changed in order to differentiate pirate ships from *bona fide* ones. During the 16th Century, numerous naval missions using Ryukyu ships reached Palembang, on the Southeastern coast of Sumatra and also Sunda Kalapa (Batavia), on the western coast of Java. Relations with Malacca went far back in time. Twenty or so ships from the Ryukyu's visited the great entrepot between 1460 and 1511, the year of the Portuguese conquest.[20] Sulfur and horses were transported from Ryukyu to China, and on the voyage back the cargo included porcelain, silk, brocade. satin and other textiles, medicine, alum and cereals. From Japan to the Ryukyu's, the most sought after products were swords, lances, bows, armors and helmets as well as harnesses, screens, fans, lacquer and gold. On the return trip, from Ryukyu to Japan, ships were loaded with red pinewood (*caesalpinia sappan*) used as a dye in China, pepper that could bring extremely high returns in China (750 to 1,500 times the original cost), cloves, nutmeg, camphor, gold, tin, ivory, sandalwood, perfume and incense, coral, mercury, opium, saffron, rhinoceros horns, timber for ship building, etc.[21]

Maritime routes linked Naha to Fujian and South China and from there diverged into many branches - towards Annam and Siam and then onwards to Palembang and Java, or from Siam and Patani towards Malacca and thence to Sumatra and the Sunda Islands. The golden age of the Ryukyu's trade lasted from 1385 to 1570. The decline that followed was caused by a number of factors - the deterioration of the maritime policy of the Ming, the rise in power of pirate fleets that started to devastate the Chinese coasts, the arrival of the Portuguese, and lastly the ban on maritime activities (*haijin*) that hit Fujian and Guangdong merchants.

19) Shunzo Sakamaki, «Ryukyu and Southeast Asia», *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 23 n° 3, May 1964, p. 385.
20) Ibid. p. 387.
21) Ibid. p. 387.

Taiwan at the times of Zheng Chenggong

One century after the fall of Malacca, Zheng Chenggong (1624-1662), a Ming loyalist rebel and his son Zheng Jing (1661-1683), founded a short-lived kingdom in Taiwan. This was to be the last example of an independent territoriality in east Asia. From two bases - Amoy and Jinmen, Zheng started a naval war against the Manchus, who had banned maritime commerce. Taiwan became an emporium for all of Southeast Asia: silk imported to Japan from China transited through the island, and deer hides were exported towards Japan and used in the manufacturing of armors or shields.[22] This maritime empire that owed its power more to the control of trade routes than to actual territory, spread out from Japan to Siam via the Ryukyu's, and from the Philippines to Vietnam.

Were legal instruments protecting merchants autonomy developed?

The four examples of merchant power we have listed are the only equivalents of the *repubbliche marinare* we can outline. But Venice not only had its navy, its merchants and its armed galleys but also autonomous institutions and law. The international trade in Asia operated in two ways, both different from the Mediterranean model. One was cramped in a bureaucratic corset, the tributary trade. The other, unofficial and in turn called private commerce, smuggling or piracy thrived when government officials supervision shrank. It declined when the officials reasserted control.

The official trade was in fact a tributary commerce (*chao gong mao yi*) as all foreign countries wishing to trade with China had to pay tribute, thus clearly establishing the Chinese suzerainty.

The unofficial trade was the other face of Chinese commerce. It covered a wide spectrum of activities, from private business to smuggling which took up roles the official trade had relinquished, fulfilling creditworthy demand and extended further into more predatory forms such as piracy, an ancient tradition with definite functions in South East Asia. Within a specific maritime area it operated as a kind of levy for protection arrangement. It also asserted authority on a maritime space by keeping away other would-be players. It took a while for a line to be drawn between legitimate (the state) and illegitimate (the criminals) violence and plundering. Sea raids on neighbouring communities or ships looting, piracy was part of the political order in the maritime societies of the Malay

22) Cf. John Robert Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600-1800*, SMC Publishing Inc. Taipei, 1995.

Archipelago. A toll came with a right of safe passage through pirate controlled waters. To crack down on piracy and to subjugate rivals were two sides of the same coin.

Places of trade

1. First was the emporium. It was a market where a great variety of products was gathered and dispatched on a steady basis.[23] But local market it was not. Its domain was long-haul trade. It brought in and shipped products from a vast area. Monsoon seasons ruled commerce and the emporium's primary function: to allow the merchant to hold on to his stock until the price was right. But the emporium remained a peddler's market unlike the warehouse market dominated by commercial companies.

The city was built around the emporium, providing regular trade services: shipping, insurance, credit and business news. The place was often fortified against pirates and bandits. Different rationales operated in a maritime emporium and in the continent or country to which it was attached, it was an island even if it was a port: government intervention was minimal. Among instances of emporia: Malacca, shortly before the Portuguese arrival in the 16th century; Aceh, Riau and Johore soon afterwards.

When Malacca fell in 1511, commerce in its catchments area migrated to Aceh, North Sumatra's sultanate and to Banten on Java's North West coast. Aceh became a major emporium for pepper and Indian cloth, and having bought Portuguese weapons, proceeded to conquer North Sumatra and embarked on lengthy conflicts with the Portuguese, and with Riau and Johore. Riau would be for a long time the cross-roads of the Indian, European and Chinese worlds. Banten defeated a Portuguese fleet in 1527, kept growing and became West Java's and South Sumatra's main pepper warehouse during the 16th century. In 1601, the VOC vanquished a joint Spanish and Portuguese fleet in Banten but started its decline after Batavia's foundation.

An emporium may have been expected in the Malacca strait but not necessarily in Malacca. Its location owed less to geography than to the easily withdrawn cooperation of two groups: local authorities and merchants who came for business. Their negotiations aimed to lock in the other party's agreement, preventing default.

Prices were generally free. But we can observe price setting could be seen in some cases

23) Cf. « Asian Emporia and European Bridgehads » in Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund (eds.), *Emporia, Comodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade*, c. 1400-1750, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1991.

known as *pancadas*: auctions negotiated between authorities and merchants where whole shiploads were sold in one lot. They occurred in Manila, Nagasaki and in Malacca, before the Portuguese arrival. These often abused measures aimed to avoid severe price fluctuations created by brutal changes in supply.

The emporium provided predictability, transparency and stability in transactions. In Malacca, a set of rules and sophisticated constitutional procedures protected the interests of merchants.[24] They floundered with the arrival of Portuguese ships and the establishment of very large companies (VOC, EIC and the others Swedish, Danish and French). The former wished to control trade routes and the latter freed themselves from price swings in an emporium-type market by adopting a global vision of commerce.[25]

2. Second was the warehouse, an import-export hub, with large storage facilities. The freight was unloaded, repacked and re-exported. Shipping networks were consolidated. Shipping, insurance, all the export-related activities became specific and independent trades and professions. The warehouse was closer to production areas, or became itself a production base. More nimble, it was the emporium coming of age with industrial capitalism and steamboats: shipping and supplies no longer relied. Singapore and Hong Kong were the continuing cases in point from the middle of the 19th century onwards.

Officialdom's ascendancy and merchant diasporas.

Eastern Asia however, was a different story. Long haul junks built in Fujian and Guangdong, manned by Chinese crew and officers, following Chinese trade regulations on ship and cargo handled China's commerce.[26] During the 11th and 12th centuries, its merchants took over the Arabs hold on its trade with South East Asia. Five Chinese junks were in Malacca when it fell to the Portuguese in 1511, and 150 Chinese merchants were permanent residents in Manila when it was taken by the Spanish in 1571.[27] A large Chinese community of merchants and craftsmen was also discovered by the Dutch in 1619 when they invaded the city which would become Batavia.[28] All these settlements dated

24) Cf. M.A. P. Meilink-Roelofsz: *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630*, The Hague, 1962, p. 42.

25) Niels Steengaard, «Emporia, some reflections», in Ptak and Rothermund (eds.) *Emporia, commodities....op.cit.*

26) See Jennifer W. Cushman, *Fields of the Sea.* Cornell, Ithaca, 1993. See also Ishii Yoneo (ed.), *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia. Translations from the Tôsen Fusetsu-Gaki*, 1674-1723, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 1998.

27) Chang T'ien-Tsê, *Sino-Portuguese Trade from 1514 to 1644: A Synthesis of Portuguese and Chinese Sources*, RTP, Leyden, 1969, p. 33.

28) Leonard Blussé, *Strange Company : Chinese settlers, Mestizo women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia,*

back to the Song dynasty, the golden age of China's maritime commerce, private and official.

Merchant diasporas made up for the absence of a mercantilist state of the type found in Europe in the 16th-17th century. They also acted as a counterweight to officialdom's ascendancy or a way around it. The concept worked best applied to trade between different cultures when middlemen, brokers and "culture runners" were needed. Calling on anthropology, history and economics, helpful studies focus on the Bugis, Banians, Armenians and other "merchant diasporas" in their relations with local communities.[29]

4. THE TWO GLOBALISATIONS

The different aspects of globalization

Globalization has been described as a process encompassing political, economic and cultural changes caused by large-scale circulation of migratory flows, information, ideas, capital and wealth.[30] It is generated by new long-distance connections often established through various diasporas.

A first globalization took place at the end of the 16th century. The year 1571 constitutes an easy milestone since it is the year the Spaniards took Manila and therefore introduced stable and regular exchanges between the four continents. The rising of a world market coincided with the European hegemony.[31] However, the latter only happened after a long period of time rife with rivalries and open conflicts. Following the Spaniards, the Portuguese, the French and the Dutch, the British were latecomers in Asia and did not overcome Dutch supremacy until the second half of the 17th century.

The second globalization can be dated to 1985. It seems to me this date is a pertinent milestone because of the particular context of the 80's. First came the spectacular fall of

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Dortrecht, 1986, pp. 81-84.

29) See for instance Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World history*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

30) Cf. M. Waters, *Globalization*, Routledge, London, 1995; Olivier Dollfus, *La nouvelle carte du Monde*, Paris, PUF, coll. Que sais-je ? n° 2986, 1995.

31) A good synthesis of this question can be found in the three volumes of Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, Vol. 1. *The structures of everyday life*; vol. 2. *The wheels of commerce;* Vol. 3. *The Perspective of the World*, New York, Harper and Row, 1981, 1982, 1984, and E.L. Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies, and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

transport and communication costs, and deregulation. The revolution in the systems of transportation and communication, and capital movements, happened hand in hand with the transformation of regulatory bodies and the weakening of the functions of the nation-state. The strong reappearance of Asia on the global scene, following two significant events is also of utmost importance. The first of these events happened shortly after the Plaza Agreements (September 1985) when members of the G7 group agreed to collaborate towards a decrease in value of the american currency. The *endaka* - the rise of the yen - that followed caused a surge of Japanese investments in Asia, which in turn contributed to the spreading of the japanese industrialization model throughout the region. The second event was the irruption of China in the global economic system, through a network of international subsidiaries, based in the coastal regions, during the 1990's.

5. THE SOUTH EAST ASIAN MARITIME CORRIDOR IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN ARGUMENT FOR A REACTIVATION OF THE BRAUDELIAN CONCEPT

Subregional economic zones and global history

The example of Asia is here again quite enlightening. The way international relations are structured and formalized shows a significantly different approach. In the 1990's Japan produced an economic and historic literature on subregional economic zones, or areas belonging to different national spaces, that greatly enhanced our understanding of these very unique dynamics.[32] This new type of analysis occurred in a specific context - the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of political blocks, the boom of Japanese investment in Asia and the integration of China in the global economy. New concepts such as "maritime regions" or "oceanic communities" appeared.[33] But can these be considered as pertinent alternatives to the concept of nation-state, which are what historians and governments recognize as coherent and natural categories?

The conceptual thinking that gives ocean basins a central position has the merit of lessening the arbitrary distinctions between Europe and Asia and of highlighting the lasting interactions of oceans and ocean basins.[34] One must, however, still clearly define a few factors concerning these maritime macro regions - their limits in time, their

32) For a critical anlasysis of these various points of view, cf. F. Gipouloux, *Regional economic Strategies in East Asia, A Comparative Perspective*, Tokyo, Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1994.

33) Cf. M.W. Lewis, K.E.Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: a Critique of Meta-geography*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, p. 204.

34) Jerry H. Bentley, «Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis», *Geographical Review*, Vol. 89 n°2, *Oceans Connect*, Apr. 1999, pp. 215-224.

boundaries and their interactions with other regions. The Sulu Sultanate during the 18th and 19th centuries was a buffer zone between two spheres of influence - the Spanish sphere centered around the Philippines and the Dutch sphere that dominated Indonesia and its adjoining seas.[35] Signs of an economic and social integration can be found in the Atlantic and Pacific basins as early as the 16th century, whereas to a certain extent, maritime history after the 16th century dissolves into global history.[36] To use the example of silver, the amount transported from Acapulco to Manila is more or less equivalent to the quantity that transited from the Atlantic to Europe, but was not as large as the amount transported by land, to China in particular, where it would be traded for silk, lacquer and porcelain.[37]

To fully understand how these maritime spaces were structured, one must consider the way they were articulated as hubs or nodes. At first there is obviously a physical space dependant on the quality of its infrastructure, but gradually this space goes beyond the territory framework to reach a virtual stage - it becomes a place where skills, knowledge, creativity and imagination reach a critical mass. It is at this juncture that technical norms, ethical codes, regulations of international commerce etc, are created. How can one map these extremely tight connection networks? What scale should one use?

The world history analysis of exchanges between civilizations, leads to valuable research angles. The goal is not to think of a world history that would only juxtapose national histories but to study *transnational* phenomena. Economic exchanges (commercial and financial flows), the diffusion of innovations, scientific discoveries, migratory flows, environmental history, the history of cultural upheavals and the history of religion are some of the phenomena that are an intrinsic part of the maritime growth of 16th century Europe.

Two key elements of the world history's paradigm seem to be particularly relevant: The nation-state is no longer the only key to history, international relations and even to some extent economic development. The critics of 'europeocentrism' highlight histories that have had a different impact on Europe. They bring to the fore what Pierre Chaunu wished for in the late 60's "the global opening up of civilizations and cultures".[38]

35) Cf. J.F. Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State*, Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1981. From the same author, see *The Sulu Zone: The World Capitalist Economy and the Historical Imagination*, Amsterdam, VU Press, 1998.

36) ibid. p. 220.

37) Flynn, Dennis O. and Arturo Giraldez «Born with a 'Silver spoon': The Origin of World Trade in 1571», *Journal of World History*, Vol. 6. N° 2, 1995, pp. 201-221.

38) Pierre Chaunu, *L'expansion européenne du XIIIe au XVe siècle*, Paris, PUF, 1969, p. 332.

The methodology of global history has put an end to the notion of time being singular, and substitutes, with its long approach, interlarded and intermeshed temporalities. The integration and differentiation processes of history form a wired system interlinking micro-histories and intercontinental histories.

QUESTIONS IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION.

1. Why was there no tradition of lasting city autonomy in China or Japan?

I must say I am not satisfied with the opposition, formalised by learned historians of Asian economy (Subrahmanyam, Chaudhuri, Lombard to quote only a few) between maritime Asia allowing prosperous cosmopolitan commercial networks in its port metropolises and agrarian empires, more concerned with bureaucratic control of their territory than involved in foreign trade: Java, Mogul India, China. The same dichotomy could be found between merchant and continental empires in Middle Ages Europe, and yet it did not prevent cities from gaining autonomy.

2. Why were Asian empires incapable of building Navies?

Indeed, Jin attacks on the Song, and Mongol expeditions against Japan mobilised navies of awesome strength. But China and most of the other Asian naval powers never had the upper hand in protracted clashes with western forces. Similarly, one can wonder why securing maritime space was never attempted by armed forces not controlled by states. Andrea Doria like figures of condottiere renting out their naval strength to various royal powers never emerged in Asia. Why?

3. Can we find corroborated traces of legal instruments attesting ancient and stable private commercial law: bills of lading, insurance contracts, and so forth? If not, why were no legal institutions created by merchants in China or Japan while overwhelming bureaucracy and regulations appeared prevailing?

4. There is no denying of the sophistication of merchant practices, or of the influence of cosmopolitan traders. Then why were no powerful commercial tool like *charter companies* created in Asia? In other words, why was there no accumulation of capital? Or, going back to an old question raised by Chaudhuri, why were the merchants unable to move their capital towards state-sponsored spheres of public interest?