

## CHAPTER XI

### China's Rise and Retreat as a Maritime Power

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#### Introduction

For a very long time Sinological scholarship has emphasized China's land orientation, giving the impression that the Chinese were not interested in the seas or in foreign trade as a commercial undertaking and that all they would tolerate was a form of official tribute trade. Recently, however, a paradigm shift in the assessment of China's interest in maritime space has taken place. Lo Jung-pang 羅榮邦 (1912–1981), a famous Chinese maritime historian, was well ahead of his time in acknowledging the essential role maritime space played for the Chinese, especially in the period between the eleventh century and the Yuan-Ming transition (roughly 1350-1400).<sup>1</sup> Since the 1980s gradually more and more scholars have come to realize that from early times on we have evidence of China's specific interest in and use of the seas both for political, military and commercial purposes. Although Chinese governments, with exceptions,<sup>2</sup> did not actively participate in maritime trade and exchanges until approximately the seventh century, this did not mean that they completely neglected maritime space. While the period when China was a military maritime power was actually relatively short (basically during the Yuan and early Ming dynasties), it had long before become a commercial maritime power (since at least the early Song dynasty) and was undeniably a political maritime power during the Song, Yuan, and early Ming dynasties.

By the first century CE, there was already considerable intercourse between various countries by sea. In the words of Gabriel Ferrand, the China Seas actually resembled “a kind of

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1 I particularly want to recommend his path-breaking and excellent overview; see Lo Jung-pang, *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*, ed. by Bruce A. Elleman (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2011).

2 As discussed below, the discovery of the remains of an old shipyard dated to the turn of the second to third century BCE has been classified as a probably state-supervised shipyard used for military purposes, attesting to Qin Shihuang's 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BCE) active interest in the Southern Seas.. Cf. 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. Or, as is well-known, Emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 140–87 BCE) subjugated Nan-Yue 南粵 and occupied Jiaozhou 交趾 (modern Vietnam) in the south to get access to the wealth from the Nanhai region. Or, in 260, Kang Tai 康泰, received the order of the ruler of Wu, Sun Quan 孫權 (r. 222–252), to travel to Southeast Asia, an embassy that was motivated not only by the interest in Buddhism but also triggered by commercial interests. These are just a few of the most well-known examples. For further details, see also my “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”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 1 (2012), 63-86.

Mediterranean”.<sup>3</sup> We do not, however, possess much information about this early interaction of the Chinese with the maritime world, a fact that has much to do with the lack of interest and consequently lack of recording on early maritime activities of the intellectual élites, in other words, those who composed the official histories. These were mostly court officials who were influenced by Confucian teachings that did not pay much attention to commerce and rather considered it an immoral pursuit of private enrichment. Also engagement with countries overseas lay outside the focus of these court officials. Although the early Chinese polity seemingly did not actively support maritime undertakings or engage with the maritime world before the seventh and eighth centuries, nonetheless archaeological as well as some textual evidence show that this is not the whole story.<sup>4</sup> In addition, several regions of China were already integrated into overseas networks at an early date.

In search of the wealth of the south, China’s First Emperor, Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BCE), already seems to have actively engaged with the Southern Seas (Nanyang 南洋).<sup>5</sup> The discovery of an early shipyard has been considered to be possibly a state-supervised shipyard used for military purposes.<sup>6</sup> Early evidence attesting to a Chinese knowledge of the monsoon winds that regulated and dominated interaction with the South Seas and the Indian Ocean maritime space can be found in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記). It mentions the northwest winds 不周風, north winds 廣莫風, northeast winds 條風, east winds 明庶風, southeast winds 清明風, east winds 景風, southwest winds 涼風, and west winds 閭闔風.<sup>7</sup> Shipbuilding technology experienced significant progress in terms of hull construction, masts, rudders, oars and sails during the Han dynasty. As written sources confirm, there existed different types of ships that could be used for different functional purposes—naval, commercial, commodity or human transportation—across small and large rivers or coastal waters.<sup>8</sup> In 111 BCE Emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 140–87 BCE) subjugated the Nan-Yue 南越 (or 粵) polity in the south to get access to the wealth from the Nanhai region. Ma Yuan’s 馬援 (d. 49 CE) fleet of two thousand deck ships also may be taken as an early manifestation of China’s active engagement as well as of her naval power in the South China Sea during the Later Han Dynasty (25–220 CE). In 42 CE, Ma Yuan’s naval forces fought what “may have been China’s first battle against a foreign navy”, namely Annam. They defeated the enemy and killed thousands of soldiers; several thousands were taken prisoners.<sup>9</sup>

3 See Gabriel Ferrand, *Les K'ouen-louenet les anciennes navigations interocéaniques dans les mers du sud* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1919), 87-88.

4 On the archaeological evidence see, for example, Judith Cameron’s contribution to this volume.

5 See footnote 2. For a more systematic overview of the different purposes the seas were used for or imagined, see my “The ‘China Seas’ in World History”, 63-86.

6 Guangzhou shi wenwu guanli chu, “Guangzhou Qin Han zaochuan gongchang yizhishijue”, 1-16.

7 Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–86 BC), *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 25.1243-1248. According to Gang Deng, *Chinese Maritime Activities and Socioeconomic Development, c. 2100 B.C.–1900 A.D.* (London: Greenwood Press, 1997), 43, the monsoon winds were called *bozhuofeng* 舶趨風 in sayings of the peasant population during Han times. This would imply knowledge and distribution of the character 舶.

8 Lin Fengjiang 林鳳江 and Chen Xiujian 陳秀娟, “Handai de zaochuan ye 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.

9 Lo Jung-pang, *China as a Sea Power*, 37, with reference to *Han shu*, 38b.

At the beginning of the third century CE the Chinese gradually began to explore the lands of the south more systematically in search of precious products, such as pearls. Mortuary objects of foreign origin excavated from tombs, such as jewellery, pearls, glassware, gold ornaments, and the like, clearly indicated China's engagement with the maritime world in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. An extensive cemetery scattered over an area of 68km<sup>2</sup> in total and located at Hepu 合浦 in south China (today's Guangxi province) constitutes one of the best-preserved tomb complexes of the Han period. It contains tombs with a wide array of luxury items, many of them of foreign origin.<sup>10</sup>

Trade flourished during the so-called Three Kingdoms period and the era of the Division of South and North China (Sanguo Nanbei chao 三國南北朝, i.e., early third to sixth centuries). But except for Buddhist monks, the actors who sailed the waters were predominantly not Chinese. In fact, the majority were foreigners, especially from Southeast and South Asia, but gradually also from the Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf region.<sup>11</sup> As for the Chinese merchants who may have travelled on board foreign ships we know little due to the lack of records. Gradually, however, even navies were organized by local governments to conduct wars and partly also to protect the flow of commerce.

Much more research will have to be done in the future to investigate China's maritime interaction with countries overseas during the period between the first and the seventh centuries. The polity Funan 扶南 (Phnam; Southern Annam),<sup>12</sup> with its port OcEo located in the Mekong River Delta, served as a major trading and stopover centre in the first centuries CE.<sup>13</sup> By the early seventh century at the latest, the commercial centres had shifted to the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra where a powerful polity called Śrīvijaya (seventh to thirteenth centuries), known as Sanfoqi 三佛齊 in Chinese, with Palembang as its capital, was established. Both textual and archaeological evidence attest to increasing maritime activities, with the Malacca Straits emerging as an important conduit to the Indian Ocean. Building on Wang Gungwu's seminal study on China's early Nanhai trade,<sup>14</sup> today a number of scholars have started to piece together step-by-step the scanty evidence to obtain a more complete history of China's maritime commerce.

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10 Xiong Zhaoming, "The Hepu Han Tombs and the Maritime Silk Road of the Han Dynasty", *Antiquity* 88.4 (2014), 1229-1243.

11 Tansen Sen, "Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings", in Dorothy C. Wong and Gustav Heldt (eds.), *China and Beyond in the Mediaeval Period: Cultural Crossings and Inter-regional Connections* (Delhi: Cambria Press, Manohat, 2014), 39-62; and Tansen Sen, "Maritime Southeast Asia between South Asia and China to the Sixteenth Century", *TRAINS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 2.1 (2014), 31-59.

12 See, for example, Yoshiaki Ishizawa, "Chinese Chronicles of the 1st–5th Century A.D. Funan, Southern Cambodia", in Rosemary Scott and John Guy (eds.), *South East Asia and China: Art, Interaction and Commerce, Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia No. 17, Held June 6th–8th, 1994* (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 1995), 11-31; and Paul Pelliot, "Le Fou-nan", in *Bulletin de l'École Française de l'Extrême Orient* 3.57 (1903), 248-303.

13 On the role of OcEo, the major port city of Funan, see Pierre-Yves Manguin, "The Archaeology of Funan in the Mekong River Delta: The OcEo Culture of Vietnam", in N. Tingley (ed.), *Arts of Ancient Vietnam: From River Plain to Open Sea* (New York and Houston: Asia Society, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and Yale University Press, 2009), 100-118.

14 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.

In the course of the Tang (618–906) through the Song dynasties (960–1279), a steady increase in maritime trade eventually resulted in the official policy and attitude towards trade becoming increasingly positive and open. Although probably much more trade and interaction was going on in Tang times than hitherto assumed, maritime routes were not yet routinized and the waters were used rather fragmentarily. By late Song times, however, China had become a maritime power and an emporium of commodity exchange in the medieval Asian world and it remained so into Yuan times (1279–1367). Undoubtedly, China was *the* political and military maritime power of the world in the fourteenth century and the early decades of the fifteenth century. But what happened thereafter? Did China completely lose her interest in maritime affairs? These are the key questions I wish to address in this chapter.

To better understand China's role in maritime history over the *longue-durée*, we should not only think in terms of a paradigm shift, and thereby free ourselves from a traditional prejudice. China's maritime history, I argue, cannot be satisfactorily understood (1) without simultaneously considering both her continental *and* maritime development and her "world-historical" integration; and (2) without carefully analysing the specific relationships between politics (including military) and commerce, as well as official and private aspects. To further elucidate China's role in maritime history, seeking to explain her rise as a maritime power and her eventual retreat from maritime space, I will subsequently focus on important key moments or phases. This chapter, however, cannot and does not provide a *systematic* overview on China's maritime engagement throughout the period covered here.

### The great upswing in maritime trade—from Tang to Song

The Tang-Song period played a crucial role in Chinese history as a time when China's integration into supra-regional, global networks, especially maritime ones, received a decisive upswing. Although during Tang times the overland silk routes were still predominant,<sup>15</sup> China's maritime contacts became more intense and Chinese long-distance trade with overseas countries underwent a remarkable expansion. The China Seas eventually received a *new quality*. In the beginning this happened mainly through the intermediacy of the Persian Gulf, that is primarily Iranian (Chin. Bosi 波斯)<sup>16</sup> and Arab (Chin. Dashi 大食)<sup>17</sup> traders, as well as Southeast Asian and In-

15 See for example Rong Xinjiang 荣新江, *Sichou zhi lu yu Dongxi wenhua jiaoliu* 絲綢之路與東西文化交流 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015); Valerie Hansen, *Silk Road: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); or her *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents, with Coverage of the Mongols and Marco Polo* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

16 *Bosi* 波斯 is the term used in Chinese for Iranians and Persian-speaking people. The term first appeared in the standard history of the Northern Wei 北魏 dynasty (386–534) [*Weishu* 魏書, 102.2270] where it referred to the Sasanian dynasty (224–651). *Bosi* was originally the designation of a tribe who settled in the southwestern part of present Iran, namely the province of Pārs/Fārs and is, thus, probably derived from "Pārsi". Although "Bosi" may also refer to Malay people, "Bosi" is also the term used for traders from Iran and the Arab world; in this context, it probably has to be understood as a general reference to peoples from the Middle East trading on ships crewed probably by people of a more diverse range of ethnicities and religions. As Claudine Salmon has suggested (Personal communication 04.11.2008; cf. also her article "Srivijaya, la Chine et les marchands chinois (Xe–XIIIe s.). Quel quesré flexions sur la société de l'empire su matranais", *Archipel* 63 (2002), 57-78), we should probably understand the designation of *Bosi* as a diaspora with communities spread all over

dian<sup>18</sup> merchants, who reached China via Southeast Asia. Both Guangzhou 廣州 in the south and Yangzhou 揚州 in the Yangzi area developed as leading commercial centres with a significant presence not only of Chinese and East and Southeast Asian merchants, but also a remarkable community of Iranian and Arab traders.<sup>19</sup> Later, in the Song period, also Quanzhou 泉州 in southeast China gradually emerged as a centre of Muslim trade. Commercial contacts between China and the Persian Gulf are attested to by both written and archaeological evidence, primarily ceramics. Although Chinese merchants themselves had not yet on any great scale sailed overseas in the period prior to the tenth century, they were obviously very active as middlemen between domestic ceramic production centres and foreign merchants; in fact, the Tang court and other Tang authorities time and again greatly and actively sponsored commercial and political links with the Abbasids (750–1258) and were very interested in attracting foreign merchants, especially Iranian, Arab, Indian and Southeast Asian.<sup>20</sup>

We should certainly be cautious with general statements and cannot, of course, provide any definite quantification of this Iranian-Arab trade with China.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, I think we can

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the Indian Ocean region – and the Chinese used this as an etiquette just as naming products in a summarizing manner as “products shipped from overseas” (*bolaijin* 舶來品).

- 17 The term “Dashī” 大食 is a transliteration from the Persian word “Tāzīk”, that was originally applied to Iranians in contrast to the Turks, but later came to mean “Arabs” in general. It appears in the Tang period as reference first to the Umayyads (*Baiyi dashi* 白衣大食) and then the Abbasids (*Heiji dashi* 黑衣大食). Many “Dashī” people during Tang and probably still Song times, however, were ethnically speaking still rather Iranians than Arabs. It is impossible to make a clear-cut distinction from the Chinese sources.
- 18 Chinese sources indicate the presence of Indian merchant communities in coastal China, including Guangzhou as early as the fifth century. In the middle of the eighth century three Brahmanical temples with a number of priests existed in Guangzhou; see Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 163. The mention of Hindu temples could also indicate the existence of merchant guilds.
- 19 Just recently the tomb of an Iranian (Bosiguoren 波斯國人) called “Mohulu” 摩呼祿, has been found in the vicinity of Yangzhou, in Wuzhacun 五乍村. The tomb stele states that he was born in the Western Region (*xijiu* 西域) and came to Yangzhou on a ship taking the sea route (舟航赴此). Zheng Yang 鄭陽, Chen Deyong 陳德勇, “Yangzhou xinfaxian Tangdai Bosiren mubei yiyi tantao” 揚州新發現唐代波斯人墓碑意義探討, in *Zhongguo shehui kexue wang* 中國社會科學網, <http://arch.cssn.cn/kgx/sjkg/201509/P020150906534018387328.pdf> (DOI:10.16293/j.cnki.cn11-1345/b.2015.03.027).
- 20 In a recent article discussing the importance of Iranian and Arab merchants for long-distance trade in Guangzhou and South(east) China, I summarized the archaeological and textual evidence we possess to date and conclude that the “positive attitude of both the Chinese and especially the Abbasid ruling elites towards mutual commercial (and political) relations was certainly conducive to the expansion of long-distance maritime trade and the importance of Persian Gulf traders therein.” “Although the volume of trade remains difficult to assess, it is clear at least that Iranian and Arab merchants were among the most active foreign long-distance traders in Tang Guangzhou.” See my “China’s Gate to the Indian Ocean: Iranian and Arab Long-Distance Traders”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 76.1 (2016), 135-179.
- 21 In a recent article, Stephen Haw again stressed “that there is now no good evidence of any Islamic presence there [in Champa] until after the sixteenth century” (p. 1), suggesting that there is also very little evidence of Arabs and Muslims in China before that time. Stephen Haw, “Islam in China and the Making of Factious History”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3 (2017), 1-31. In this article, Haw, however, focuses on two inscriptions wrongly attributed to have originated from Champa, moving on to argue that an alleged travel to Quanzhou by Jacob d’Ancona (*The City of Light*) – which has generally been considered a much more recent work in modern scholarship – is a fake, to finish his argument that various modern historians are just relying on for-

maintain the argument that it was in fact Iranian and Arab merchants who originally initiated the age of, and at least for some time dominated, *active long-distance* maritime trade in China, in which Chinese merchants started to get actively involved only in the late eleventh century.<sup>22</sup>

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geries and, thus, actually forge history themselves, with reference to publications (including my own) on a more recent inscription of a Chinese court eunuch named Yang Liangyao 楊良瑤 (736–806), who is said to have been sent to the Abbasid court in 785. Haw, however, completely ignores all the other evidence, both textual and archaeological, that can attest to an early presence of Iranian and Arab merchants in China, having come both via overland and maritime routes. In addition, it has never been argued that Arab merchants dominated the entire early Chinese maritime trade but rather were dominant in China's early (mainly Tang and early to mid-Song times) *active long-distance* trade, while Chinese merchants, due to several reasons, were still quite passive at that time. He completely ignores the range of references to Islam in Southeast Asia and the China coast as cited, for example, in the *New Cambridge History of Islam*, see Geoff Wade, "Early Muslim expansion in South-East Asia, eighth to fifteenth centuries", Chapter 10 of *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. David O. Morgan and Antony Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 365–408, or Chapter 11 by Zvi Benitez, "Follow the white camel: Islam in China to 1800", 409–426 (although he quotes the former chapter). Finally, as far as the "embassy" by Yang Liangyao is concerned, at least my own argument has never been that we know he definitely sailed into the Persian Gulf but that based on what we know about the contemporary political, diplomatic, and military background, his mission is at least very plausible. I specifically addressed and discussed the question of why such an important mission has not been mentioned in either Arab or Chinese historiography. This was first published in a German booklet in 2014 and in more detail in a recent article in BEFEO, where I again put forth very clearly: "Unfortunately, the absence of other sources means that we cannot draw any further conclusions at the moment, but have to be content with the cautious assumptions offered here. The historical circumstances, however, as we wanted to demonstrate, make his mission very plausible; and the decision to send Yang Liangyao to the 'Abbasid caliphate in order to ask the Arabs for assistance in pushing back the Tibetans would also fit very well into Emperor Dezong's foreign political strategy. The muteness of the sources concerning this event can probably be traced back to both the, in various respects, politically delicate circumstances when the mission was sent and to the negative image Emperor Dezong had in later historiography – especially in terms of foreign politics. We hope that in the not too distant future, other sources will be brought to light, be it the tomb inscription (*muqim* 墓誌銘) of Yang Liangyao, other written sources, or archaeological relics that could allow us to paint a more detailed picture of the background and details about this diplomatic mission." Angela Schottenhammer, "Yang Liangyao's Mission of 785 to the Caliph of Baghdad: Evidence of an Early Sino-Arabic Power Alliance?", *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 101 (2015), 177–241. It is striking to see that Haw completely ignores all other evidence on Iranian and Arab presence in China; he also ignores entire arguments, as in the case of my argumentation concerning Yang Liangyao, to make his point. The few lines he quotes in this recent article (p. 26) from my *CHC* chapter, in which I refer to my German booklet, are completely outside the context and argumentation of my book and, therefore, fail to give a fair summary (I argued: "Leider können wir in Ermangelung weiterer Informationen im Augenblick keine weiterführenden Schlüsse ziehen und müssen es bei den hier angestellten vorsichtigen Vermutungen bewenden lassen", p. 70 of *Yang Liangyaos Reise von 785 n. Chr. zum Kalifen von Bagdad. Eine Mission im Zeichen einer frühen sino-arabischen Mächteallianz?* [Reihe Gelbe Erde 10] Gossenberg: Ostasi-enerlag, 2014). Haw's flagrant misrepresentation and distortion of prior scholarship in the service of his *a priori* conclusions is completely at odds with responsible academic investigation.

22 See my argumentation in Angela Schottenhammer, "China's Gate to the Indian Ocean" (2016), in press; "The Emergence of China as a Maritime Power", chapter 7 of vol. 5 of *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, Part 2, *The Five Dynasties and Sung China, 960–1279*, ed. by John W. Chaffee und Paul J. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 437–525, and *Das songzeitliche Quanzhou im Spannungsfeld zwischen Zentralregierung und maritimem Handel. Unerwartete Konsequenzen des zentralstaatlichen Zugriffs auf den Reichtumeiner Küstenregion*. Habilitationsschrift [Münchener Ostasiatische Studien, 80] (Stuttgart: Steiner 2002), 57.

Particularly via Iranian and Arab but also Indian and Southeast Asian merchants, the China Seas were consequently further linked via the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf. Trade relations with Southeast Asia, that is, the eastern part of the larger Indian Ocean space, had existed for centuries before and also merchants from India traded in Guangzhou. But I want to argue that "Persian Gulf traders" may in fact be considered initiators of a more routinized long-distance trade with such distant places and port cities in the Persian Gulf area.<sup>23</sup> This was certainly a novelty. What is more, these traders obviously dominated this *long-distance* trade until the late ninth century.

Also the quality of traded products gradually changed—more and more luxury goods from far-away countries reached China. In this context, cities like Yangzhou, Quanzhou and Guangzhou also emerged as great cultural centres that attracted domestic and foreign intellectuals, scholars, monks, etc.<sup>24</sup> The coastal province of Zhejiang and the region around the Yangzi area increasingly came to the fore of the outer world, as did Japan and Korea. In this way Northeast Asia, in particular Japan, was also linked with the South China Sea. Also commercial and cultural centres along China's littoral at the same time functioned as gates to inland China.

This development, in my opinion, is not understandable without consideration of the advent of Iranian and Arab merchants in China and China's integration into world-historical structures, namely a thorough investigation into their trading networks and generally the world beyond China's borders.

At the beginning of the tenth century the Tang Empire eventually collapsed 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 increasing shift of trade routes from the traditional overland to maritime routes. In addition to technological advances, such as in navigation, political reasons in both China and abroad also played major roles in fostering this increase of commercial relations with foreign merchants.

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) in Fujian, the Kingdom of Wu-Yue 吳越 (907–978), the Southern Tang Dynasty 南唐 (937–975), or the Southern Han dynasty 南漢 (917–971)—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.<sup>25</sup> Maritime trade not only supplied the social and ruling élites with fine and rare luxury articles that were otherwise unavailable in China, but also served as a source of income to fill the state coffers. By *political* decision, maritime space became more and more important primarily for *commercial* purposes.

But the sea was also increasingly used for military goals, although naval battles, it must be admitted, 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 Wu-Yue fleet of five hundred ships,

23 Angela Schottenhammer, *Das songzeitliche Quanzhou*, 53–39, 57.

24 See, for example, the studies in Dorothy C. Wong and Gustav Heldt (eds.), *China and Beyond in the Mediaeval Period: Cultural Crossings and Inter-regional Connections*, chap. 2.

25 See my "Quanzhou's Early Overseas Trade: Local Politico-Economic Particulars During its Period of Independence", *Journal of Sung Yuan Studies* 29 (1999), 1–41.

called “dragon ships” because they were designed in the shape of a dragon. The fleet set out in April 919 to invade Wu 吳 (902–937). An interesting Wu-Yue account speaks of beans being thrown on enemy’s ships and the shooting of “burning oil” (*menghuoyou* 猛火油)<sup>26</sup> 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 海南 (or simply from “south of the seas”?).<sup>27</sup>

Further in the 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 劉巖, sent a fleet of a hundred warships to Fengzhou 鳳州 (near Shantou 汕頭 in Guangdong) and succeeded in defeating the invasion of Chu 楚 (a state located in present-day Hunan); in 930, his fleet raided Champa (Zhancheng 占城) and returned with a rich loot of gold and treasure.<sup>28</sup>

The recently salvaged Intan shipwreck, found off south Sumatra in 1997, which contained a large quantity of lead coins and silver ingots from the Southern Han, also attests to this maritime upswing. It carried a mixed cargo of Chinese ceramics and other artefacts, many of them made from metals and some of West Asian origin, suggesting that the ship might have come from Śrīvijaya and perhaps even was a Śrīvijayan ship.<sup>29</sup>

In order to better understand the integration of these states into maritime structures, diplomacy and commerce, as well as the activities of merchants and rulers, we will in the future have to pay yet more thorough attention to recently discovered archaeological evidence, including shipwrecks and tomb inscriptions. More emphasis will also have to be placed on this period of separation, during which many cornerstones for China’s gradual emergence as a maritime power were laid.

### The Song period

The founder of the Song dynasty who reunited China, Emperor Taizu 太祖 (r. 960–975), had been a Later Zhou 後周 (951–960) officer who understood the importance of employment of naval forces in his campaigns. His navy took part in the subjugation of Nan-Han in 974, and, two years later, with the assistance of a small Wu-Yue naval contingent, it sailed to the lower course of the Yangzi to conquer Nan-Tang 南唐 (937–975).<sup>30</sup> Wu-Yue submitted voluntarily in 978, and, with its submission, China was once more unified under the Song Empire.

26 Wild-fire oil burned even more fiercely when water was added.

27 Qian Yan 錢儼 [937–1003] (originally attributed to Fan Tong 范垆 and Lin Yu 林禹 (Song), *Wu Yue beishi* 吳越備史, 3.4b-5a, in *Siku quanshu*, fasc. 464 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983 [Reproduction from the collection in possession of the National Gugong Museum 國立故宮博物院]).

28 Ruan Yuan 阮元 (rev.) [1764–1849], Chen Changqi 陳昌齊 (comp.) [1743–1820] *et al.*, (*Daoguang*) *Guangdong tongzhi* 道光廣東通志, 184.98, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, fasc. 669–675, here 672.

29 Denis Twitchett and Janice Stargardt, “Chinese Silver Bullion in a Tenth-century Indonesian Shipwreck”, *Asia Major*, 3rd Series, 15.1 (2004), 23–72, 60, 67.

30 “After the defeat of Nan Han in 971, T’ai-tsu turned his attention to the conquest of the Southern T’ang. The Song emperor ordered Ch’ien Shu [錢俶] to join the attack” (according to *WuYue beishi*, 4.20b). Taizu personally commanded some 50,000 soldiers. For this quotation and on the involvement of Wu-Yue in general, see Edmund H. Worthy, Jr., “Diplomacy for Survival: Domestic and Foreign Relations of Wu Yüeh, 907–978”, in Morris Rossabi (ed.), *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 17–44, 32; for details about Nan Tang’s submission see also Johannes

During the Song, maritime trade and overseas relations experienced an unforeseen upswing and was actively promoted by Song rulers. Why this change? What had happened?

The answer to these questions has to a great extent to be sought for in the general geopolitical background of a “China among Equals”, a China that was politically speaking no longer the undisputed centre in the region, but was challenged by the Khitan Liao 契丹遼 (907–1125), the Tangut Xi Xia 西夏 (1038–1227) and later the Jurchen Jin 女真金 (1115–1234), and the Mongols. As the Khitan, Jurchen, and Mongols all proved adept at acquiring and utilizing Song technologies, including naval ones, this led to a type of “arms race”, as John Chaffee has put it.<sup>31</sup> As a consequence, the Song government was in constant search for new financial resources, a development that caused a fundamental reassessment of the role of trade and commerce. Against the background of this new *raison d'état* trade was assessed much more positively—a development that had already started during the tenth century. The importance of maritime trade for state finance is evident from many sources, most clearly pronounced perhaps by Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1068–1085), who officially stated that trade should be used to assist to fill the state coffers.<sup>32</sup> Both domestic and foreign trade were promoted in order to help the state to increase its income, in particular in face of increasing expenditures.<sup>33</sup> Military expenditures, however, also proved to be a powerful stimulus for industry and commerce. The upgrading of the role of maritime commerce, therefore, cannot be separated from Song China's political goals, nor from developments beyond China's borders. In Hakata 博多 (in Japan) for example, as Richard von Glahn has emphasized, Ningbo 寧波 merchants exchanged Chinese copper coins for gold and Japanese handicrafts, but primarily for sulphur, timber and mercury, that is, for bulk commodities that were essential for military and architectural purposes, and also, during a time of war with the Jurchen Jin and later on the eve of the Mongol invasion, consequently sold well on Chinese markets.<sup>34</sup>

To oversee maritime trade, in 971, Emperor Taizu appointed two Canton officials as Maritime Trade Commissioners (*shibo shih* 市舶使). The year 971 is, thus, generally regarded as the date of the Song establishment of the Maritime Trade Office in Canton.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, the early Song rulers gradually began to reorganize its administrative structure. In the course of the

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Kurz, “The Yangzi in the Negotiations between the Southern Tang and Its Northern Neighbours (Mid-10th Century)”, in Roderich Ptak, Sabine Dabringhaus (eds.), *China and Her Neighbours: Borders, Visions of the Other, Foreign Policy 10th to 19th Century* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1997), 29-48;

31 John W. 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, 47.

32 Xu Song 徐松 (1781–1848), *et al.* (ed.), *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 (Qing; repr., Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1976), Zhiguan 44/27a-b.

33 See my “Die finanzpolitische Bezugnahme des songzeitlichen Staates (960–ca. 1100) auf den Reichtum seiner Gesellschaft, unterbesonderer Berücksichtigung der Reformperiode unter Wang Anshi“, *Oriens Extremus* 44 (2003/4), 179-210, for a more detailed discussion of this *raison d'état*.

34 Richard von Glahn, “The Ningbo-Hakata Merchant Network and the Reorientation of East Asian Maritime Trade, 1150-1350”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 74.2 (2014), 249-279; he quotes Yamauchi Shinji 山内晋次, a Japanese historian who coined the term “sulphur road” in the context of contemporary Sino-Japanese trade (p. 269).

35 *Song huiyao jigao*, Zhiguan 44/1b.

dynasty in all ten Maritime Trade Offices (*shibosi* 市舶司), bureaus and superintendencies<sup>36</sup> were opened at different places during different times.

Although private merchants greatly profited from this development, the first sixty years of the dynasty were still mainly confronted with an official state-monopolized commerce that was conducted under the aegis of the tribute system.<sup>37</sup> Only gradually did centralized control give leeway to a more decentralized system involving a host of maritime trade offices or, after 1080, maritime trade superintendencies.

Eventually, a liberalization of Chinese shipping, dating from the year 1090, paved the way for Chinese merchants to actively engage in trade overseas so that they were no longer so dependent on foreign shipping to meet their demands<sup>38</sup>—a milestone in the development of China's maritime trade relations that supported what we may call “privatization” of the China Seas. Derek Heng has called this particular administrative step the “1090 liberalization”.<sup>39</sup> Consequently Chinese merchants increasingly took over the trade and trading routes that so far had been served by Arab, Indian, Iranian, Southeast Asian, or other foreign merchants. At the same time, because the Chinese government, as early as the second half of the eleventh century, restricted Chinese vessels from remaining overseas for more than nine months (that is, approximately one cycle of the northeast-southwest monsoon), the liberalization prompted Chinese maritime merchants to concentrate on Southeast Asia.<sup>40</sup> By the Southern Song maritime trade had become so profitable that Song Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127–1167) acknowledged the great profit from overseas trade.<sup>41</sup>

*Consequences of this new raison d'état*

The economic transformation that occurred in the course of the Song dynasty made Song China *the economic centre and motor* of contemporary maritime trade—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, ceramics were the most sought after Chinese products during the Song. The demand for Song ceramics, which often doubled as ballast for outbound ships, was global in character and it gave rise to an export industry with large-scale kiln complexes centred on the southeastern port cities of Guangzhou and Quanzhou, but

36 Respectively Superintendencies of Maritime Trade (*shibotijusi* 市舶提舉司) and Maritime Trade Bureaus (*shibowan* 市舶務).

37 Derek Thiam Soon Heng, “Shipping, Customs Procedures, and the Foreign Community: The ‘Pingzhou ketan’ on Aspects of Guangzhou’s Maritime Economy during the Late Eleventh Century”, *Journal of Sung Yuan Studies* 38 (2010), 1-38.

38 Derek Heng, *Sino-Malay Trade and Diplomacy from the Tenth through the Fourteenth Century* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009), 50.

39 Derek Heng, *Sino-Malay Trade and Diplomacy*, 48 [with reference to the *Song huiyao jigao*, Zhiguan 44.8a-b], 50.

40 Ibid., 50-53. On pages 54-63, he also provides an excellent overview on the changing tax rates after 1127.

41 “The profit from overseas trade is the greatest. If the trade is handled in the right way, the profit can easily reach millions of coins [*qian* 錢]. Is not the revenue from trade better than that from taxing ordinary people? Thus, I should pay more attention to overseas trade to relieve the tax burden of the people” (市舶之利最厚，若措置合宜，所得動以百萬計，豈不勝取之於民。朕所以留意於此，庶幾可以少寬民力爾)” See *Song huiyao jigao*, Zhiguan 44/20a-b.

extending inland as far as Jiangxi.<sup>42</sup> Speaking about ceramics, it should be mentioned that we definitely know that a kiln complex located in Changsha 長沙 (Hunan) constituted a late Tang period mass-production centre of ceramics that were explicitly designed for exportation to foreign—especially Middle Eastern and Islamic—markets.<sup>43</sup>

During the Song period the production of export ceramics developed as, what we may call, a first mass exportation industry. But Song exports also included various kinds of other manufactured goods, including books and, in the thirteenth century especially, large quantities of copper and tin. In the Southern Song a massive outflow of bronze coins (and un-minted copper) from China to places as far away as the coast of Africa emerged, the export of which the Song government tried to ban without success (indicative of a growing clandestine trade).<sup>44</sup> As for the predominant imports, these included *xiangyao* 香藥 (usually translated as aromatics but also including incense, scented woods, perfumes and medicines) and a few other commodities like ivory.<sup>45</sup>

Resulting from the upswing of maritime trade during this period, we also can note the rapid growth of port cities on the southeastern coast, the origins of which we have already encountered during Tang times. Examples include Guangzhou, Fuzhou 福州, Wenzhou 溫州, Mingzhou 明州 (i.e. modern 寧波), and, above all others, 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 was also later described by the Italian traveller and merchant Marco Polo. Quanzhou 泉州, the Zaitún of Marco Polo, developed extensive trade between China and Southeast Asia, with a rich merchant culture in which Chinese traders mixed with Arabs, Śvījayans, Tamils, Chōlas, Koreans, and Japanese.<sup>46</sup>

On the one hand, this development had significant impact on both the East and South China Seas that were for the first time incorporated into routinized international trade networks with active exchanges of people, commodities and information through frequent maritime trade throughout Asian waters up to the Indian Ocean. Textual and archaeological evidence of the flourishing Song maritime trade is abundant and has been a topic of research for many decades. That we today know so many details about China's maritime trade and the complex commercial networks has to a great extent also to be traced back to achievements in the field of

42 The literature is simply too vast to be summarized here. Suffice it to say that all recent wreck finds brought to light significant quantities of ceramics.

43 These Changsha ceramics have been found on the famous Belitung wreck and, for example, also on the Vietnamese costs. See Regina Krahl, John Guy, J. Keith Wilson and Julian Raby (eds.), *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds* (Washington and Singapore: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, National Heritage Board Singapore and Singapore Tourism Board, 2010), 20; and Kimura Jun, "Maritime Archaeological Perspectives on Seaborne Trade in the South China Sea and East China Sea between the Seventh and Thirteenth Centuries", *Crossroads – Studies on the History of Exchange Relations in the East Asian World* 11 (2015), 47–61.

44 "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: Brill, 2001), 95–176, esp. 126–136.

45 See Paul Wheatley, "Geographical Notes on Some Commodities Involved in Sung Maritime Trade", *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32.2 (1959), 45–129, on the full spectrum of trade commodities, and Lin Tianwei (1986), for a detailed treatment of the trade in aromatics.

46 One of these important Muslim connections was the Pu family of Quanzhou, discussed in John Chaffee's chapter.

underwater archaeology. The previously mentioned Intan wreck, the famous Quanzhou wreck,<sup>47</sup> and the recently salvaged Nanhai 南海 I shipwreck, originally found in 1987 in Taishan off the Guangdong coast,<sup>48</sup> may all serve as evidence.

On the other hand, the undesired result of China's *particular* integration into the greater Asian world and beyond—namely the exchange of valuable manufactured goods, products that possess an added or intrinsic value, for huge quantities of all kinds of aromatics and spices that eventually, due to consumption, disappeared from the internal circulation sphere—resulted in China's "national" economy, in fact, becoming poorer.<sup>49</sup>

The official interest in seaborne trade, finally, formed the basis for the development of a standing navy that was also used for the protection of commerce. Until approximately the early twelfth century, Chinese governments had considered it unnecessary to maintain a navy on a more permanent basis. From Han to Tang times, China's major direction of expansion had been westward overland towards Turkestan. From the tenth century onwards, these routes were blocked and new powerful states emerged along China's continental borders. In search of more financial means to fill the state coffers, maritime trade increasingly came into the focus of the ruling élite.

This geo-political situation, in conjunction with consequent political and military interests of the Chinese government, the increasing importance of commerce (including a general economic and demographic southward movement), and probably even climate changes (such as China's little ice age with very severe winters, many floods and droughts), all contributed to China's shift to the sea and her emergence as a maritime power in the course of the Song dynasty.

### The Yuan period (1271/79–1367)

The active promotion of maritime trade continued throughout the Yuan dynasty. The Mongols and the Yuan government undoubtedly had a strong interest in strengthening its role in the Asian maritime. Diplomatic missions accompanied the search for good trade relations. Numerous missions were sent abroad inviting tribute and trade as far away as India.<sup>50</sup> Between 1285 and 1320/25, the Yuan government still sought to strictly control maritime trade and even forced private merchants to enter government service.<sup>51</sup> But after 1325 regulations were again liberalized.

47 See, for example, Fu Zongwen 傅宗文, "Houzhugu chuan: Song ji nan wai zongshi haiwai jingshang de wuzheng" 后渚古船: 宋季南外宗室海外經商的物證, *Haivai jiaotong yanjiu* 海外交通史研究 2 (1989), 77-83; Angela Schottenhammer, "China's Emergence as a Maritime Power", 453.

48 See [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2015-01/01/content\\_19212032.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2015-01/01/content_19212032.htm) (accessed 1 Sept. 2015).

49 For a detailed analysis of this argument see my "The Emergence of China as a Maritime Power", 516-517.

50 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 (Yang Tingbi).

51 The Yuan sought to strictly monopolize foreign trade and also to control the outflow of metals. Four times in total they imposed a maritime ban, suspending foreign trade, prohibiting merchants to sail abroad and abolishing the Superintendencies of Maritime Trade. See Chen Gaohua 陳高華 and Wu Tai 吳泰, *Song-Yuan shiqi de haiwai maoyi* 宋元時期的海外貿易 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1981), 11-46; Yu Changsen 喻常森, *Yuan dai haiwai maoyi* 元代海外貿易 (Xi'an: Xibei daxue chubanshe, 1994), 107-18.

At the same time, the *military* use of the China Seas once again became predominant. Since 1266 Mongol rulers undertook various efforts to subdue Japan, first using Korea as a diplomatic middleman, but after these efforts failed they prepared for naval attacks. In 1273 the Mongols transported soldiers to Cheju Island off the southern coast of Korea. In 1274 The Yuan launched a first attack on Japan, reportedly with more than 900 ships and a great number of land troops. The warships sailed from Korea, attacked Tsushima 對馬 and Iki 壹岐 Islands, and then, having reached Kyūshū 九州, destroyed parts of modern Nagasaki Prefecture. Battles were fought in the vicinities of Hakata, but suddenly the Mongol troops retreated, probably because of logistic shortages.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps less known is the fact that the Mongols between 1264 and 1308, sailing from the estuary of the Amur river, several times attacked Sachalin and the Kurile Islands—probably because the local Ainu population had attacked other tribes in the vicinity that had already surrendered to the Mongols.<sup>53</sup> All this is evidence of how naval activities were used to assert political claims in the region.

As a consequence of the “militarization” of the seas, also firearms, for example, firebombs, so-called *huopao* 火炮, cast by catapults, came increasingly into use. They first appeared in the tenth century and were later adopted in naval warfare. In 1129, the government decreed that these firebombs should be made standard equipment on all warships. The navy also started to employ prototypes of a gun, a so-called “fire-emitting spear” (*tubuo qiang* 突火槍), from the bamboo tubes of which missiles could be discharged. By the middle of the fourteenth century (during the Yuan), iron bombs<sup>54</sup> were in general use and also rocket-assisted arrows appeared at that time.<sup>55</sup>

The final collapse of the Southern Song also was 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.<sup>56</sup> By then, the Yuan already controlled the entire Chinese coast and had incorporated the former Song navy into its own naval structures. And once again in 1281 they started another attempt to conquer Japan—one fleet again sailed from Korea and another one crossed the East China Sea directly from Zhejiang. Several thousand soldiers are said to have taken part in this undertaking, including many Chinese.<sup>57</sup> Although the conquest of Japan finally failed—

52 See Roderich Ptak, *Die maritime Seidenstraße. Küstenräume, Seefahrt und Handel in vorkolonialer Zeit* (München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2007), 158.

53 See Kikuchi Toshihiko, “The Ainu and Early Commerce in the Sea of Okhotsk”, in <http://www.nippon.com/en/features/c00103/> [28.02.2012] (accessed 15 June 2015): “Until recently, scholars believed that the Ainu had been in Sakhalin since ancient times. But recent archaeological research has revealed that Sakhalin was inhabited by the Nivkh in the thirteenth century. These findings, combined with the account in the *Yuan shi*, suggest that in fact the Ainu were expanding north from Hokkaidō to Sakhalin and pushing the Nivkh northward as they went.”

54 Fragments of what must have been iron bombs have been found on the sea bottom at the site where Khubilai Khans fleet that intended to attack Japan sank.

55 Angela Schottenhammer, “The Song 宋 Dynasty (960–1279) – A Revolutionary Era Turn?”, in Kósa Gábor (ed.), *China across the Centuries* [Budapest Monographs in East Asian Studies] (Budapest: ELTE University, Department of East Asian Languages, 2017), 133-173, 139-140; Stephen G. Haw, “Cathayan Arrows and Meteors: The Origin of Chinese Rocketry.” *Journal of Chinese Military History* 2: 28 (2013), 42

56 See the vivid description of this battle in Lo Jung-pang, *China as a Sea Power*, 237-245.

57 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.

Khubilai Khan (r. 1260–1295) had even threatened Japan with a third attack—it is clear that the East Asian waters had never before seen such a large naval contingent. Figures in the sources have to be treated with caution—the *Yuanshi* 元史 mentions 15,000 soldiers with 900 warships—but we can still get an idea of what expense and efforts had been invested to prepare these naval operations. This also attests 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 military concentration area.<sup>58</sup>

### Early modern China—from Ming to Qing

With the downfall of the Mongol Yuan state and the establishment of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the quality of exchange relations across the China Seas changed drastically. The collapse of the Yuan already led again to a certain re-fragmentation of the China Seas. Private maritime trade suffered great losses, in particular with the initiation of the “maritime trade proscription policy” (*haijin zhengce* 海禁政策) in 1371. Nevertheless, even officially China had not yet retreated from the seas. Despite the on-and-off sea-bans throughout the dynasty, maritime trade continually expanded largely in the form of “illegal” commerce, what officials treated as piracy or smuggling.

On the one hand, China’s political and military maritime engagement became less ambitious and aggressive. Countries overseas, “lying remote in the ocean”, for example Japan, were obviously not really considered a threat, despite other indications to the contrary. For strategic reasons, as the first Ming emperor, Hongwu 洪武 (r. 1368–1398), explained in his “Ancestral Injunctions” (*Huang Ming zuxun* 皇明祖訓, 1373): To maintain peaceful coastal borders and frontiers, China should not trouble overseas countries “lying far away in a corner”, whose “lands would not produce enough for [China] to maintain”, and whose people would not usefully serve China if integrated into the Empire. He furthermore uttered his dislike for military operations against these countries.<sup>59</sup> In a later version of the ancestral injunctions from 1395, fifteen countries were designated as “not to be invaded”, namely Vietnam (Annam), Champa (Zhancheng), Korea, Japan, the Ryūkyūs, Taiwan (Lesser and Greater Liuqius), Siam, Cambodia, South India (Western Oceans), Samudra-Pasai, Java, Pahang, Baihua (Battack or West Java), Śrīvijaya, and Brunei.<sup>60</sup> His reaction to the increasingly severe problems with so-called Japanese pirates (*wokou* 倭寇) raiding the Chinese coasts was the strengthening of coastal defences.<sup>61</sup> Hand-in-hand with the maritime proscription policy and the tribute system, he considered

58 See for example, Jun Kimura, Mark Staniforth, Lê Thị Liên, and Randall Sasaki, “Naval Battlefield Archaeology of the Lost Kublai Khan Fleets”, *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 43.1 (2014), 76–86, [Sept. 10, 2013], in <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1095-9270.12033/full> (accessed 15 June 2015).

59 Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang 太祖朱元璋 (1328–1398, r. 1368–1398), *Huang Ming zuxun* 皇明祖訓, 5b–6a (167–168), in *Xuxin Siku quanshu*, fasc. 264, 165–189.

60 Wang Gungwu, “Ming Foreign Relations: Southeast Asia”, in Denis Twitchett and Frederick Mote (eds.), *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644*, Part 2, vol. 8 of *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 301–332, 312.

61 See the Ph.D. dissertation of Ma Guang for a detailed explanation of the piracy question and the development of Sino-Japanese relations at that time, “The Shandong Peninsula in East Asian Maritime History during the

this to be sufficient to protect China. Hongwu certainly was well aware of the fact that the primary purpose of foreign rulers behind sending “tribute missions” to China was trade, “but he wanted foreign rulers to be circumspect about it”.<sup>62</sup>

Also the late Ming and Qing ruling élites, although they knew well about Japan's interest in Chinese products (the documents all speak of Japan's “dependency” on China),<sup>63</sup> were obviously relatively convinced that in contrast to Korea and the Ryūkyūs, which had been invaded by Japan in 1592 and 1609 respectively (see Maria Grazia Petrucci's chapter), Japan would probably not dare to attack China. By maintaining a strictly regulated tribute system and permitting overseas countries to “pay tribute” to China, that is, to formally submit to and acknowledge China's suzerainty, it was hoped that China could be protected from foreign attacks.<sup>64</sup> A letter of Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1542–1616) threatening to invade China should it not agree to resume mutual trade relations obviously never reached the Ming court.<sup>65</sup>

But we know that Ming China, on the other hand, was well prepared for foreign invasions or attacks should the rulers really consider this necessary. The annexation of Vietnam (1407–1427) and its integration as a province into Chinese territory may well stand as an example for early Ming China's aggressive expansion (despite Hongwu's injunctions to the contrary). Between 1405 and 1433, the third Ming Emperor, Yongle 永樂 (r. 1403–1424), initiated the famous overseas expeditions that were carried out under the supervision of the Muslim eunuch Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–ca. 1433).<sup>66</sup> 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 both the China Seas and the Indian Ocean had seen any naval manoeuvre of similar scope and dimensions. During these few decades in the early fifteenth century, as stated earlier, China was *the* unchallenged maritime power in the world.

The chief aims of the expeditions were to assert China's claim of authoritarian power in the Asian macro-region and beyond, as well as to enforce her status as the powerful “Middle Kingdom” to which all foreign countries were obliged to pay tribute and, thus, acknowledge her political-military and cultural-ideological superiority—if necessary with force and violence.<sup>67</sup>

Yuan-Ming Transition” (Ghent University and University of Salzburg, 2016); and Li Kangying, *The Ming Maritime Trade Policy in Transition, 1368–1567* [East Asian Maritime History, 8] (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2010).

62 Wang Gungwu, “Ming Foreign Relations”, 312.

63 See my, “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* [East Asian Maritime History, 6] (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2008).

64 See for example Wang Yuan-kang, “Managing Regional Hegemony in Historical Asia: The Case of Early Ming China”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5 (2012), 129–153.

65 See Watanabe Miki 渡辺美季, “An International Maritime Trader—Torihara Sōan: The Agent for Tokugawa Ieyasu's First Negotiations with Ming China, 1600”, in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *The East Asian Mediterranean*, 169–176.

66 For an extensive bibliography that provides a good survey on the meanwhile huge body of literature on Zheng He, see Ying Liu, Chen Zhongping, and Gregory Blue (eds.), *Zheng He's Maritime Voyages (1405–1433) and China's Relations with the Indian Ocean World A Multilingual Bibliography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2014).

67 That the quest for supremacy, the enforcement of a hegemonic claim over and the consolidation of her power status in the macro region was the purpose of these expeditions can be observed from various examples. See, for example, Geoff Wade, “The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment.” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the*

Nevertheless, it is incorrect to consider these expeditions as *colonialist* undertakings in the sense of European colonialism. The politico-economic quality behind these expeditions—as violent as they were at times—was decisively different from what we know as colonialism. Very different from the imperialist European powers, the Ming court did not consider the exploitation of foreign wealth as a means of national enrichment, seeking to establish politico-economic circumstances and relations in foreign countries that through *exclusive* exploitation<sup>68</sup>, through the removal of natural or human resources would transfer these into their own domestic value production, as was the case with European colonialist and imperialist countries. The politico-economic motivation and contents of Ming China's violent expansions was decisively different in quality from that of the European colonialists.<sup>69</sup>

China's eventual retreat from the “world seas” finally happened on its *own initiatives*, caused by internal political and ideological considerations and a re-emphasis toward the continental border with the Mongols in north China—again there is much speculation about the concrete reasons of her retreat<sup>70</sup>—and was not forced by external powers, a decision that has irritated and startled many Western historians and particularly journalists.<sup>71</sup>

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*Royal Asiatic Society* 78.1 (2005), 37-58. Many examples taken from official Ming terminology clearly show that the Ming rulers excellently commanded the way of translating subjective interests into objective necessities. For example the term “to pacify” (or expressions as “to restore imperial peace and order”) occur repeatedly in official Ming historiography, in the official language measures necessary to restore law and order, capture evil-doers, establishing a large family in the Four Seas, etc.

68 The exclusive exploitation of a country or region by one specific nation state that had occupied it, was one of the particular characteristics of colonialism in contrast to the “free trade” as later enforced by the USA.

69 This argument obviously cannot be emphasized often enough, as many Western historians, especially but of course not only in Germany, tend to focus only on the violence involved in military actions abroad without paying any attention to or duly considering the different political-economic contents and motivations behind such undertakings. For a more detailed discussion of this argument see Angela Schottenhammer, “Consolidating Insular Southeast Asia and the Meaning of Force in History: “Pax Ming” and the Case of Chen Zuyi 陳祖義 (?–1407)”, in Gregory Blue and Chen Zhongping (eds.), *Rethinking Zheng He's Maritime Voyages: Multi-cultural Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan) (forthcoming). In this volume, see Ubaldo Iaccarino's insightful discussion on the Spanish *reconquista* mentality in contrast to Ming imperial policies and attitudes.

70 Again I would like to recommend in this context the excellent analysis by Li Kangying, *The Ming Maritime Trade Policy in Transition*.

71 It seems that the historical ignorance of erroneous questions, such as “Why did China not grasp for world dominance when it could have done so?” “Why did China not subdue and colonize the world when it could have done so?”, that were so popular when Gavin Menzies with his absolute unfounded arguments of China having discovered the Americas, etc., at least made the Zheng He voyages known to almost everybody in the Western world, is no longer that widespread as it used to be a couple of years ago. BBC News, for example, warns of “historical ignorance. China has never colonized any overseas territories. ... China could have colonized South East Asia, for example, in the early 15th century. It had the resources, it had enormous ships, many times bigger than anything Europe possessed at the time. But it didn't. ... It neither ruled them nor occupied them. Rather, in return for access to the Chinese market and various forms of protection, the rulers of tribute states were required to give gifts – literally tribute – to the Emperor as a symbolic acknowledgement of China's superiority.” (See <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19995218>, accessed October 07, 2016). Erroneous are these questions because they completely abstract from and ignore China's real, actual goals and instead impute to the Chinese the same goals as the Europeans who, out of their political-economic rationale (that is, emerging capitalism), colonized major parts of the world. Only somebody who has this (wrong) assumption in mind can ask a question like “why did China not behave in the same manner as later the Europe-

After these events, however, China at least officially seemed to have given up maritime business, having lost interest in the seas. Existing networks continued to operate, but they were either taken over by merchants from other countries, such as the Ryūkyūs<sup>72</sup>, or conducted via unofficial, clandestine channels.<sup>73</sup> In fact, private undertakings, including smuggling and so-called “piracy”, became predominant. It is clear that after the mid-fifteenth century China was no longer a maritime power, its naval activities primarily concentrated on coastal defence—but we should be very careful in underestimating the continued activities on the seas. Not only wealthy merchant families and their descendants, but also members of local élites including government officials maintained interest in the seas and overseas networks, not infrequently in cooperation with the steadily increasing number of overseas Chinese.<sup>74</sup> China's maritime power passed into “private” hands, so-to-say. Simultaneously, the advent of Europeans in Asia and their sheer insatiable demand for Chinese products greatly fostered clandestine trade.

### The Manchu Qing dynasty

The subsequent Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911), at least until the 1730s, also possessed and maintained a strong interest in maritime space, for both political-military and commercial reasons,<sup>75</sup> but it is clear that throughout the first two centuries security calculations dominated. The Manchus particularly sought to strengthen coastal defence capacities and repel direct threats from the maritime peripheries.

The most prominent example in this respect is certainly the Qing court's fight against the Zheng 鄭 clan on Taiwan.<sup>76</sup> Zheng family power was not eliminated until 1683, when the

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ans” – logical are actions like those of the European imperialist powers only from the standpoint of apologists of the gradual appropriation of foreign wealth.

72 Roderich Ptak, “The Ryukyu Network in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries”, *Revista de Cultura/Review of Culture* 6 (2003), 7-23.

73 An explicit aim of the large research project, “The East Asian ‘Mediterranean’”, which I have been supervising at Munich University from 2002 to 2009, with sponsorship of the Volkswagen Foundation was to bring more light into such unofficial networks.

74 As for the origins and development of Chinese overseas communities see especially the publications by Wang Gung, for example, his *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* [The Edwin O. Reischauer Lectures] (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); or “The Origins of Hua-ch’iao”, in Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia* (New edition; Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), 1-10. Some academic journals particularly focus on the history and the activities of Chinese overseas, for example *Huaqiao Huaren lishi yanjiu* 华侨华人历史研究 *Journal of Overseas Chinese History Studies* (<http://www.cqvip.com/QK/82663X/200804/>); or *Chinese Overseas History, Literature, and Society*, edited by Wang Gungwu with E. J. Brill, to mention just a few.

75 Zhao Gang, *Shaping the Asian Trade Network: The Conception and Implementation of the Chinese Open Trade Policy, 1684–1840* (Ph.D. dissertation, John Hopkins University, University Microfilms International, 2007), as well as his recent revision, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684-1757* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013).

76 In the late 1650s, Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 had begun to quite successfully raid cities in northern Zhejiang and the Zhoushan Islands with perhaps as many as 1,000 ships and about 130,000 soldiers. On the Zheng clan and their maritime empire see the two important recent studies by Xing Hang, *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge

Manchus invaded the island with some 300 warships and 20,000 sailors under the command of Shi Lang 施琅 (1621–1696) and made Taiwan officially a part of Fujian Province.<sup>77</sup>

In terms of maritime commerce, the Kangxi 康熙 emperor's commercial policy in particular has to be characterized as open. Not only did he establish China's Customs Offices (*hai-guan* 海關) between 1683 and 1684, he also officially sponsored maritime trade with his slogan "expand to the seas" (*zhanhai* 展海). Japan, in particular, was of interest for both *commercial* and *strategic* reasons, but also the Europeans with their commercial interests pounced on relatively open ears in China. Especially the eighteenth century witnessed a significant increase in Chinese trade with Europeans, who demanded above all tea, but also porcelains and silks, in a foreign trade focused on the ports of Guangzhou and Macau (Macao) 澳門. The steep rise in commercial activities with Europeans clearly demonstrates that it was not the goal of the Qing court to obstruct trade with foreigners.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, again, one has to be cautious to identify Qing rulers' interest in expansion of this trade with the interests of the Europeans, both merchants and governments. In China, the revenue gained from this trade was basically designed to be used for court and state consumption, and *not* as investment to ensure that China's economy would produce commodities that could profitably and competitively sell on world markets.<sup>79</sup>

As far as Japan is concerned, during the early decades of the Kangxi reign (1662–1722) silver in particular was China's most demanded commodity.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, in the late sixteenth, early seventeenth centuries also great quantities of New Spanish silver coins entered Fujian. Contemporaries observed that local people from Fujian province frequently traded with Luzon (Lüsong 呂宋) selling cheap local goods in exchange for silver.<sup>81</sup> Li Tingji 李廷機 (1541–1616), a native of Jinjiang recorded that they returned home with ships fully loaded with silver coins and often became very wealthy (而所通乃呂宋諸番，每以賤惡什物買其銀

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University Press, 2016); and Wei-Chung Cheng, *War, Trade and Piracy in the China Seas (1622–1683)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2013). See also Xing Hang's chapter in this volume.

77 See especially publications by Patrizia Carioti, "The Zheng's Maritime Power in the International Context of the Seventeenth Century Far Eastern Seas: The Rise of a 'Centralized Piratical Organization' and Its Gradual Development into an Informal State", *Ming Qing yanjiu* 明清研究 (Napoli), 5 (1996), 29–67; Patrizia Carioti, *Zheng Chengong* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1995); John E. Wills, Jr., "Maritime China from Wang Chih to Shih Lang: Themes in Peripheral History", in Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, Jr. (eds.), *From Ming to Ch'ing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 223–228; Frederick E. Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). See also Manel Ollé Rodríguez, "Manila in the Zheng Clan Maritime Networks", *Revista de Cultura/Review of Culture* 29 (2009), 90–103.

78 Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, vol. 1, *Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011); and vol. 2, *Success and Failure in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016).

79 The Qing government never intended to transform its economy into one with efficient production and high sales in the market place to accumulate capital as its sole criterion. See, for example, my review of Paul Van Dyke's two volumes in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 56 (2016), 215–223.

80 With the discovery of new silver mines in Japan in the early seventeenth century, Japan had become the major source of silver for China.

81 Gong Yibing, "The Circulation of Foreign Silver Coins in Southern Coastal Provinces of China, 1790–1890" (M.A. thesis in History, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006), 26.

錢，滿載而歸，往往致富).<sup>82</sup> “In 1632 it was calculated that more than two million Mexican pesos a year circulated between Manila and the coast of Fujian”.<sup>83</sup> But during the early Qing dynasty this trade was severely disrupted, especially because in 1661 Kangxi not only prohibited private people to sail abroad but even ordered that the whole coastal population be evacuated from the coasts to the hinterlands in order to cut off the anti-Qing Zheng “rebels” on Taiwan from their human and material resources on the mainland. This evacuation or relocation of the entire southeastern coastal strip, referred to as “*qianjie ling*” 遷界令 in Chinese, was not lifted before 1669. And the maritime trade ban remained in force until 1683. Mexican silver coins (*pesos*) that had certainly also circulated on local markets for larger purchases were either hoarded as curiosities or melted and recast into silver ingots after the maritime ban imposed by Kangxi in 1661.<sup>84</sup> It took until the third or fourth decade of the eighteenth century until the trade for foreign, New Spanish and Peruvian silver recovered; prior to the Yongzheng 雍正 reign (1723–1735) the import of foreign silver coins was not remarkable.<sup>85</sup>

As far as China's trade with Japan is concerned, soon copper became the most important Japanese commodity for the Chinese. Expanding local markets in China, together with a steady rise in population, required an equivalent of value in much smaller denomination than silver taels (*liang* = 37.3 g), which were not coined and thus simply not adequate for every-day markets and the small commodity circulation. The increasing demand for copper already in 1699 induced Kangxi to promote maritime trade with Japan in order to purchase Japanese copper, so-called “*yangtong*” 洋銅 in the sources. Between 1684 and 1723 China more or less completely relied on Japanese copper.<sup>86</sup> Particular attention, therefore, was, paid to Japanese activities, especially during the Kangxi and Yongzheng reigns (together from 1662 to 1735). Several times, spies were sent to Japan to inquire about the situation there.<sup>87</sup>

Even earlier, in 1659, the Shunzhi 順治 emperor (r. 1644–1662) had ordered a detachment of Manchu troops to move permanently to Hangzhou. During the coastal wars against the Zheng clan (see above), they were temporarily moved to Fuzhou, but returned to Hangzhou in 1683. In 1728, another 1,600 Manchu troops were stationed at the naval base at Zhapu 乍浦, the port of Hangzhou. The Qing court assigned special personnel to complete the building of warships and the navy was ordered “to repair weapons such as artillery and practice offensive military strategies”. The Yongzheng emperor in particular clearly sought to strengthen

82 *Huang Ming jingshi wenbian* 皇明經世文編 (1637), by Chen Zilong 陳子龍 *et al.* (1608–1647), eds., (Taipei: Guolian tushu chubanshe youxian gongsi, 1964), 360.23b–24a.

83 William Atwell, “The T'ai-ch'ang, T'ien-ch'i and Ch'ung-chen Reigns, 1620–1644”, in John K. Fairbank and F. Mote (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 585–640, here 615; see also his “Ming China and the Emerging World Economy, c. 1470–1650”, in *op. cit.*, 376–403.

84 Gong Yibing, “The Circulation of Foreign Silver Coins”, 27.

85 *Ibid.*, 26.

86 For the copper trade at that time, see Liu Hsü-feng (Liu Xufeng) 劉序楓, “Qing Kangxi~Qianlong nianjian yangtong de jinkou yu liutong wenti 清康熙~乾隆年間洋銅的進口與流通問題”, in Tang Hsi-yung 湯熙勇 (ed.), *Zhongguo haiyang fazhan shilun wenji* 中國海洋發展史論文集, vol. 7, *j. shang* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 1999), 93–144.

87 See for example Angela Schottenhammer, “Japan – the tiny Dwarf?”, 331–388; or my “Empire and Periphery? The Qing Empire's Relations with Japan and the Ryūkyūs (1644–c. 1800), a Comparison”, *The Medieval History Journal* 15.2 (2012), 139–196.

the navy and China's self-defence capacity.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, the Qing navy remained basically a coastal navy that was never intended to attack or invade another country, not even against the background of a lack of monetary metals, such as copper, as the Japan trade shows.

In terms of Sino-Japanese relations, Yongzheng attentively listened to a high local government official, Li Wei 李衛 (1687?–1738), governor-general of Zhejiang at that time, who cautioned him against Japanese claims of power in the macro-region. Yongzheng thereupon instructed his officials to “pay special attention to observations of and defences against Japan and its overseas activities”.<sup>89</sup> Li Wei, in 1727, even proposed to appoint so-called “principal merchants” (*shangzong* 商總), who should work together to regulate the Japan trade, coordinate responsibilities and to act as guarantors for merchants departing for Japan.<sup>90</sup> Also other local officials cautiously warned that one should keep a closer eye on developments in Japan.<sup>91</sup>

This clearly indicates that not only local élites but also the emperor had a clear idea of Japan's desire to become the dominant power in East Asian waters, and they maintained a vigilant eye on what happened overseas, even though the main focus lay on China's continental borders. Other threats from overseas were obviously not seen; and while Qing China pursued a very aggressive expansion policy along her continental borders, a policy that eventually even successfully effected the extinction of the Zungars in Central Asia, Qing China's maritime policy was comparably defensive; military “pacification” was not really considered overseas, apparently because any potential threat from countries overseas (except for piracy) was considered negligible in contrast to that from continental neighbours. The self-assessment as the undisputed Middle Kingdom in the Asian world, especially after the successful defeat of the Zungars, unquestionably contributed greatly to this attitude.

Generally speaking, as far as the assessment of maritime space is concerned, while security calculations prevailed in the early Qing period, commercial interests gained in importance in the course of the eighteenth century. But geo-political interests continued to be important. Although China was no longer a maritime power (as it had been in the Song-Yuan and especially the early Ming period), official interest in maritime space had not completely disappeared.

To explain why the official interest in the seas eventually vanished under the Qianlong emperor, is impossible without a thorough examination of China's continental borders in North and Central Asia. Obviously, the political-military success along China's continental peripheries and the consolidation of the Empire as a whole—in 1759 China reached her greatest geographical extension ever obtained—obscured the view of the emperor, who became somewhat self-complacent and gradually lost initiative, and who could still afford himself this atti-

88 See 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, here 103-104; or my “Empire and Periphery?”, 166-167.

89 See *Huangchao zhanggu huibian* 皇朝掌故彙編 by Zhang Shouyong 張壽鏞 (1876–1945) (Beijing: Qiushi shushe, 1902), Waibian 外編, j. 14 (Ribenguo 日本國), quoted by Guo Yunjing, “Views of Japan and Policies toward Japan in the Early Qing”, 104.

90 Angela Schottenhammer, “Japan – the tiny Dwarf?”, 367-368; and Ng Chin-keong, *Trade and Society. The Amoy Network on the China Coast 1683–1735* (Singapore: Singapore National University, 1983), 178-179.

91 See “Cha Ming Wo diban tongqingxing 查明倭地辦銅情形” (entry by Ji Zengyun 嵇曾筠, 1671–1739), in *Gongzhong zhupai zouzhe caizhenglei huobi jinshuxiang* 宮中硃批奏折財政類貨幣金融項 (1737, 7th month, 11th day), document in register no. 1227–014.

tude. Without considering China's goals and final success along her continental borders, the almost complete political-military retreat from the seas, the decrease in the awareness of danger from maritime space under Qianlong cannot be satisfactorily explained.<sup>92</sup>

If we speak of China's retreat as a maritime power, then this undoubtedly happened in the second half of the eighteenth century with the accession of the Qianlong emperor to the throne. But its position as a strong naval power had been lost already in the mid-fifteenth century. It should be further emphasized, however, China's retreat as a maritime power in the second half of the Qing dynasty in no way meant that the Chinese, especially not private actors, completely abandoned interest in the sea.

### Conclusion

China unquestionably was a maritime power for at least several centuries. That it has been, at the same time, only for a relatively short time a strong naval power—Southern Song, Yuan, and early Ming—has to do with its particular political economy and its strong focus on a self-sufficient agricultural and handicraft sector and should, furthermore, be traced back to basically the following factors. First, whereas China from ancient times has continuously been challenged from her continental borders and peripheries, no serious threat came from overseas until the fourteenth/fifteenth centuries, but especially the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries with the rise of piracy and powerful maritime merchants, and later the advent of the Europeans who initially joined the so-called pirates to get access to Chinese markets. The main focus of interest during much of China's imperial history consequently lay on securing, above all, her continental and only secondly her maritime borders.

Second, due to the fact that actually no historical Chinese government, including the Song or Yuan, considered private trade as *the* basis of its political power, private commerce never received the same government support as it did in early modern European states.<sup>93</sup> China's historical political economy, consequently, never necessitated overseas conquests or colonialism to guarantee the exclusive exploitation of human and natural resources in foreign countries to serve for a value and commodity production in China. The focus of maritime politics during most of China's history lay on coastal defence and not maritime expeditions. China consequently, also never developed a permanent strong merchant marine as did Western countries; her naval expeditions were basically all initiatives that served to gain or to maintain control over close neighbouring countries (for either security reasons or in order to exploit certain riches and

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92 See Schottenhammer, "Empire and Periphery?", 139-196; also Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 99.

93 In Europe during the Middle Period the Emperor increasingly handed over to the merchants the liberty to enrich themselves according to their own criteria. Impressed by the sheer quantity of wealth that merchants amassed, the ruling emperors regarded this wealth as a tool also for their own enrichment, namely by benefiting from the merchants' capital via taxes. The enrichment of merchants was in fact so successful that together with the bourgeoisie, a class, which developed from the merchant class, they eventually represented the greatest part of national wealth, on which the aristocratic rulers had become dependent. Subsequently, merchants and bourgeoisie no longer saw and accepted why they should support and nourish an emperor, a person who in their eyes only sponged from their wealth. Instead, in the French Revolution they took over the power of state themselves.

products to be used for the private consumption of the ruling élites, but not in order to integrate foreign wealth into an own economy based on value production), to control sea routes, and to extort the formal, political-ideological, subordination under Chinese rule, if necessary and not infrequently with force.

Third, the *politico-economic* contents of China's imperial expeditions and expansions, I want to emphasize, were completely different from, for example, the colonialist undertakings of the British Empire. Traditional Chinese courts, on the contrary, were more or less aware of the fact that wealth and money assets in the hands of private merchants could be converted into political power and thus constitute a potential threat to imperial power. Therefore, they consistently inhibited the unrestricted increase of money and private property as the dominating or sole criterion of its domestic production. Consequently, private commerce never received a government support comparable to early modern European states (merchants being active in maritime trade remained, for example, "merchants without empire", as Wang Gungwu has put it<sup>94</sup>). But, above all, none of the economic consequences that characterized the emerging capitalist states, such as the search for and violent access to foreign markets, and the integration of their wealth and resources into their home countries to guarantee a continuous value production there (i.e., the Opium Wars) was necessary or desired.

Due to her different political economy (in contrast to the developing capitalist economies in Europe), China's naval expeditions consequently either served to secure and maintain control over close neighbouring countries, particularly Annam and Korea (i.e., conquest of Annam, establishment of commanderies in Korea), or to secure sea routes and the formal subordination under Chinese rule (i.e., Zheng He's expeditions, punitive action against Java, Khubilai's attempts to subdue Japan and to control the sea routes in Southeast Asia as far as India). They never intended to conquer foreign countries overseas in order to forcefully integrate these countries' wealth into a value production in their own national economy. Frequently, interest in the navy was lost once military goals had been achieved.

In other words, the search for material wealth overseas to integrate it into their economy and transform it into money and capital accumulation (to "have treasures captured floated back to the mother-country and turn it into capital")<sup>95</sup> never existed as a political purpose of China's imperial political power;<sup>96</sup> nor did a capitalist economy exist that had capital accumulation as its ultimate goal (capital in its abstract form of money) and, consequently, necessarily treated the whole world as a sphere of its own national enrichment and acted accordingly.

This may also explain why China so simply (or, incomprehensibly from the "modern"

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94 Wang Gungwu, "Merchants Without Empires: The Hokkien Sojourning Communities", in his *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Times Academic Press, 1991), 79-102.

95 Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1959), Book I, Chapter XXXI, 705-706.

96 Although contemporary Spain was also not yet a capitalist nation, its economic calculation basis, as is well-known, was money in the form of gold and silver, that is, moneys with an intrinsic value to serve as measure and equivalent of value – the Spanish aristocratic and ruling élite robbed these riches from Meso and South America, conferred them into their national budget, but then basically used all this gold and silver for consumption purposes, not for investments in the production sphere. The accumulation of money in its abstract form, even as money with intrinsic value, was never the ultimate and dominating purpose of imperial China's economy. I will discuss these differences in more detail in a forthcoming book chapter.

Western perspective) retreated from the world oceans at a point when naval power had just received its peak in the early fifteenth century—security considerations shifted again to the continental borders and its national economy was not dependent on such overseas undertakings. China's traditional economy never required access to foreign markets to sell its products. This is only a modern development initiated with the political-economic reform program of Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1997) and now explored with Xi Jinping's 習近平 “Twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road” initiative begun in 2013. In this respect, in contrast to the Europeans, China simply skipped the age of colonialism.

