

RIS DISCUSSION PAPERS

Towards an Economic Community: Exploring the Past

Vineeta Shanker

RIS-DP # 47/2003



**Research and Information System
for the Non-Aligned and
Other Developing Countries**

**Towards an Economic Community:
Exploring the Past**

Vineeta Shanker

RIS-DP # 47/2003

April 2003

**RESEARCH AND INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR THE
NON-ALIGNED AND OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (RIS)**

Zone IV-B, Fourth Floor, India Habitat Centre

Lodi Road, New Delhi-110 003 (India)

Tel: +91-11-4682177-80; Fax: 4682174

RIS Discussion Papers intend to disseminate preliminary findings of the research carried out at the institute to attract comments. The feedback and comments may be directed to the authors(s).

Contents

Introduction	1
Section 1: Asian Trade and Commercial Links	3
Introduction	3
A. Early Trading Links	4
B. Development and Strengthening of Regional Trading Links	6
C. Burgeoning of Asian Trade and Commercial Networks	7
D. The Arrival of European	14
Section II: The Spread of Religious and Cultural Influences	16
Introduction	16
A. Trading Communities and Settlements	16
B. Political and Social Interactions within Asia	17
C. The Spread of Religions	19
Conclusion	24
Bibliography	26

Towards an Asian Economic Community: Exploring the Past

Introduction

Since early times, Asia has played a preeminent role in world culture and commerce. For the greater part of its history, it has had a leading role in the world economy and has been far wealthier, more advanced and more cosmopolitan than Europe. It is only in the last two hundred years or so, since its colonialization by European powers, that this predominance has been eroded and its influence in world affairs diminished.

The seat of the two of the major ancient civilizations, India and China, Asia has been the cradle of economic, social and philosophical dynamism and progress for more than four millennia. By the fifth and sixth century BC, these two countries were more materially and technologically advanced than the rest of the world. They also had established sophisticated schools of philosophy, which had begun to spread by the beginning of the first century AD and deeply influence the conduct of commerce, politics and religion in large parts of the Asian continent.

Throughout pre-colonial history, Asia has functioned not only as an active participant in the global economy but also, and perhaps much more so, as an integrated region, with close economic and cultural ties. Its intensive trade and commercial links with Europe and Africa are well established. The famous silk routes and the ancient maritime network that linked Asia to Persia, Egypt and beyond are also well documented. What is perhaps not so well known is the existence of a complex and thriving network of interaction among the Asian countries. This active intra-Asian trade was accompanied by strong cultural and social interaction. These economic, social and cultural ties bound the region into a closely integrated one. As the means of travel and communication expanded and developed, so did regional contact and cooperation. By the fifteenth century, Asia was integrated into a large and vibrant regional network of exchange, which in turn was linked to the global economy through trade and commerce with the Middle East and Europe.

This paper has two main themes. The first is that regional trade and cooperation within Asia has been a major pillar of Asia's preeminence in the world economy, until colonialization altered the structure and direction of this trade and commerce. The second is that this long history of trade and exchange has been accompanied by a remarkable lack of any major conflict. There were undoubtedly local disputes and wars among different petty rulers. However, there was little attempt at either territorial expansion or economic and cultural hegemony on the part of any of the major regional players who

pursued and benefited from extensive commercial and cultural links between themselves and other smaller partners.

The paper is divided into two main sections. The first explores the nature, direction and strengths of the trade links that existed between Asian nations and with the rest of the world. The purpose of examining Asia's global linkages prior to its colonialization is to demonstrate that Asia was effectively integrated into the world economic system long before the arrival of the Europeans and the opening of the all sea route to Asia. The main focus of this section is however the close links that existed between the different sub-regions within Asia. It examines the evolution of the structure and nature of these linkages over the years and demonstrates how regional trade was often the basis of successful long distance global trade. Even when the Arabs dominated the Asian seas and controlled much of the long distance trade particularly from India and China to the Middle East and the Mediterranean, they needed to actively participate in the intra-regional trade so as to both access the goods as well as to finance the long distance voyages. The Portuguese and Dutch too, found it necessary and profitable to participate in this so called 'country trade' in the initial years of their involvement in Asia.

The second section of the paper focuses on exchanges other than economic and looks at the spread and assimilation of diverse cultural and religious influences across the region. It examines how culture and ideology found their way across the lands and the seas and the links between the different countries of the region expanded beyond the material. India and China have been in the forefront of this exchange, having had a long history of diplomatic and cultural exchanges. From very early times, they have both sent emissaries and welcomed travelers, teachers and scholars from across their borders. Cultural influence has also taken the informal route and has accompanied the traders and merchants who crossed the seas and made either temporary or permanent homes in the areas with which they traded. This section highlights that for the most part, the transmission of ideas and beliefs took place in a non-conflicting non-coercive manner.

The paper thus establishes the existence of long standing economic and cultural ties amongst the different sub-regions of Asia. It shows how the Asian nations were bound together in a close network of economic and commercial links; but it goes beyond tracing merely the trade transactions. It also examines how cultural and spiritual ideas were actively sought and transmitted across the region, taking the relations between these nations beyond the economic to include social, cultural and spiritual interactions. It argues that as a result of these multifaceted exchanges the links and interconnections forged among Asian nations were deeper and richer. In the light of the historical context brought out in the paper, it can be argued that the 200-year colonial period was but an interregnum and that traditional links can be revived and restored in the current context. Thus, the paper concludes that there is a strong historical basis for reestablishing an Asian community.

Section 1

Asian Trade and Commercial Links

Introduction

Section I looks at the evolution and structure of trade and commercial links in Asia since pre-Christian Era to the 16 century, till the arrival of the Europeans into the Asian Seas. It traces in broad trends the development of land and maritime trading links and looks at the expansion of regional trading networks as well as of long distance trade. While demonstrating how they together formed an integrated network and supported and buttressed each other, it focuses on the regional trade exchanges and cooperation, highlighting the emergence of the latter as the basis of long distance trade.

This section is divided into four main parts.

The first explores the trading links in the early pre-Christian period up to the second century AD. It traces the development of the famous silk routes and the expansion of coastal maritime trade into long distance trade. By the 2 AD, Asian had a fairly extensive network of localized exchanges, which in turn were linked into a long distance network of trade stretching from Western Europe via the Mediterranean Basin and the Red Sea to South China.

The next seven to eight centuries are covered in the second part, which highlights the expansion and consolidation of these trading systems. This was the heyday of the Silk routes. It was also a time of rapid increases in maritime technology and the expansion of maritime trading networks. During these years South East Asia got sucked into the long distance trade for the first time. With the opening of the straits of Malacca, its strategic location on the route of long distance trade from the Middle East to China via India, catapulted it into becoming a key link in the growing international trade.

The next part traces the rise of three regional empires viz. Egypt under the Fatimids in the West, India under the Cholas and China under the Sung Dynasty and with it the fragmentation of the long distance trade into three segments. The rise of these empires resulted in the creation of huge domestic demand for traded goods. This in turned fuelled the deepening and strengthening of regional economic ties. This period from the 10th to the 16th century AD saw a not only an expansion of regional trade and commerce but its emergence as a very basis of long distance trade. Although data on volumes of trade are not available, records show that there was also a steep rise in intercontinental trade during this time.

When the Europeans, led by the Portuguese, entered the Asian Seas, they were confronted with this vast and complex network of regional trade. They were compelled to participate in regional or 'country' trade in order to procure the spices and other goods demanded in Europe. Interestingly, it is the profits from regional trade that financed and bolstered the long distance trade long distance trade. The arrival of the Europeans and the decline in regional trade is discussed briefly in the fourth part.

A. Early Trading Links

From the very early times, India and China were in contact with each other through a network of land and sea routes¹. These routes started off as localized networks of petty exchange and were gradually linked into a long distance trading channels as demand increased and travel became easier.

Even prior to the discovery of the famous land routes, there is evidence that some exchange was already taking place between India and China. Although its actual route and time of arrival is not known, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that Chinese silk was known in India by the 4th century BC. There is a mention of a silk workshop in Arthashastra that testifies to the existence of silk production in the 4th century BC. Indeed the word Sari, referring to the Indian dress, is said to have its origins in *sares* meaning silk country. On the other hand, cotton, an exclusively Indian invention, found its way into China and became the basis of the invention of paper in the 2^d century in China. Although, there is little documentary evidence on the details of exchange between India and Chain, accounts of travelers and emissaries leave little doubt that there were close links between the two countries.

i) The Famous Silk Roads

Three main land routes are said to have connected India and China, passing through rough and arduous terrain and linking China to Persia via India. Of the two older ones, the northern path that went across western China into Afghanistan, into Central Asia and Persia touching India in Taxila (now a part of northern Pakistan) came to be known as the famous Silk Route.

Prior to its discovery in Emperor Wu's time around the second century BC, the Silk route was used by nomadic tribes, who brought silk and other handicrafts from China to be sold in the Western Asia. The Han Emperor Wu-ti sent Chang Ch'ien to the Western world at the end of the second century The main purpose of Chang Ch'ien's journey was not trade but defense; he was sent in search of the famed horses from Dawan and Tienshan mountains in present day Kazakhstan and for finding out

¹ The first contacts are said to have been made by Buddhist scholars from India who appeared in the Chinese capital in 217 BC under the Tsin dynasty.

the whereabouts of the dreaded Hu barbarians who were a menace to the Han dynasty². Chang Ch'ien's return in 126 BC was the starting of the silk route.

The discovery of the second land route was chance by-product of Chang Ch'ien's journey. Interestingly, when in Bactria, Chang Ch'ien was surprised to find bamboo walking sticks and cloth from Sechuan. Enquiry revealed that these Chinese goods had come into Bactria via India. This chance encounter subsequently led the Chinese to the discovery of an ancient trade route that ran from Sechuan through Yun nan to north east India from thereon to Northwest India and Iran.³ Even though the famous Silk routes essentially connected China to the West they passed through India and were used by the two countries for land-based trade with Persia and with each other

ii) Maritime Trading Networks

Maritime routes have knitted the coastal regions from time immemorial. As boats became bigger and better and the knowledge of the winds and the seas grew, the maritime forays got longer and longer. It is said coastal South India had a thriving maritime trade with Burma and Malaysia as far back as 500 BC. By the third millennium BC, advances in maritime technology had taken place such as to make longer sea voyages possible.⁴

India and China had also been linked via maritime routes for a long time. During the western Han times, there was a sea route that linked Leizhou in China to Conjeevaram on the east coast of India via the southern peninsula of Myanmar. Indeed as the Chinese trade and commerce expanded to the Arabian and Mediterranean regions, Quilon on the west coast of the Indian peninsula became the junction for Chinese sailors who sailed up to western Asia and even Africa. With the progress in maritime transport in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, trade between India and China expanded greatly. The opening of the sea route across the Indian Ocean turned into a very convenient channel for promoting the relations between the two ancient civilizations.

Evidence from Indo-China demonstrates the development of localized networks of exchange in raw materials and exotic products in the second millennium BC with a possibility that it had started in the late third millennium itself. There also appears to be evidence that regular exchange links between India and South East Asia had started earlier than the first millennium AD. The nature of these links

² The new breed of horses reinforced the military capability of China to such an extent that it was able to eliminate the Huns and to expand its power to as far as Korea.

³ A third land route sprang up during the Tang period in the 7th century. This was the route taken by Wang Xuanze an emissary of the Tang Emperor Taizong for his three missions to India and passed through Tibet and Nepal to Northern India.

⁴ Glover, IC 1989 Early Trade between India and Southeast Asia: A link in the Development of a World Trading System, Centre for South-East Asian Studies The University of Hull. pg 2.

is, however, uncertain and it is not clear whether these were commercial exchanges or an extension of the 'prestige goods reciprocal exchange economy' as suggested by some historians⁵. Whatever their nature, whether financial gain or cultural diplomatic exchange, it is clear that the beginnings of trading and cultural links among the South East Asian economies themselves and between them and India can be traced back to the 2nd millennium BC and possibly go back even further in time.

A combination of land and sea routes through Bagan in Myanmar was also frequently used. Ships from the east coast of India, particularly from the south, would sail up the Irawaddy from Yangon upto Bagan. And the Chinese merchandise would come down the Irawaddy in barges to Bagan which as result grew into a prosperous center of trade.. The twenty thousand temples of Bagan and the splendor of Mandalay are a testimony to the wealth that was generated from this flourishing inter-regional trade.

B. Development and Strengthening of Regional Trading Links

The first millennium of the Christian Era was a period of rapid growth for Asia; 'these were centuries of light ..'⁶ As demonstrated above, a number of localized exchange networks existed in South East Asia. The early years of the Christian millennium were a time of economic expansion and political consolidation in both India and China, much more in the latter. Trade ties between these two countries also increased and the expansion of trade links between these two major countries of the region, widened the localized networks into regional ones.

By the early fifth century, major changes had taken place in the international trade route, which crossed South East Asia. The opening of the straits of Malacca enabled direct contact with the northwestern edge of the Java Sea region. The increasing demand for pepper and the introduction of the Indian vine variety in this region drew the Indonesian islands into a rapidly growing trade. Over the next two centuries, Sumatra, western Borneo, Java and the islands of the east were all sucked into the trading network and into what came to be known as the empire of Srivijaya.⁷

By the first millennium AD these rather separate South East Asian exchange systems had been linked into a vast network of trade stretching from Western Europe via the Mediterranean Basin and the Red Sea to South China. In other words, the first millennium saw the first appearance of the World System – the systematic economic integration by trade of all the inhabited part of the world with the exception of Americas and Australasia. Coming from the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, the international trade

⁵ "Long distance voyaging in double-or single- hulled outrigger canoes and plank built boats was taking place"
op cit pg 2

⁶ Mason Colin 2000 A short History of Asia: Stone Age to 2000 Macmillan Press Ltd. London p 61

route initially hugged the coast line into western India and from there it went to the east coast of India, along the Bay of Bengal to Burma and the Malay Peninsula.⁸ Later, as shipping improved, the trade route shifted to the crossing of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, making the journey shorter and swifter.

Strategically located on the route of the great international maritime route connecting China and the West, South East Asia provided a staging post for merchants from East and the West. Its role was to provide “a key link, furnishing the passing traders with supplies, local products, Chinese and Western goods, storage facilities and hostelry for waiting out the monsoon seas on”⁹ Initially, its commercial importance lay primarily in its strategic location astride the international maritime route.

One of the more important South East Asian kingdoms was that of Srivijaya lying in the west of the Malay world. On account of its strategic location astride the trade route from India to China, it had since the seventh century gained importance and its wealth was proverbial.¹⁰ Angkor was another kingdom, which rose to prominence in this period and had strong economic and cultural ties with both China and India.

This was also the heyday of the Silk route over which horse and camel caravans carried paper, silk, gunpowder, spices, tea and condiments to the West and exchanged them for horses, Persian gold and silverwares, myrrh, carpets and glassware. It was also a time when maritime trade expanded and localized trading networks came to be integrated into long distance trade, which connected Venice and Canton and brought into the trading loop, the port towns of Western India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia.

C. Burgeoning of Asian Trade and Commercial Networks

There was a significant change in the organization of maritime trade in the Asian region in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This marked the beginning of five hundred years of expansion and strengthening of Asia’s trading network. Long distance trade from the Persian Gulf to China was

⁷ See John K. Whitmore *The Opening of South East Asia, Trading Patterns through the Centuries* in Hutterer 1977 op cit

⁸ Trade and commercial contacts between Asia and Europe have been a regular feature since the beginning of the Christian Era. There is ample evidence in the form of both artifacts such as coins, seals etc. and descriptions in Classical writings for historians to construct a detailed structure of trade between India and the Roman world and to conclude that these were ‘entrepreneurial ventures undertaken for commercial profit, facilitated by coinage and underwritten by accumulated capital’ see Clover, op. cit.

⁹ Hall, K.R *The Coming of Islam to the Archipelago: A Reassessment* pg 213 in Hutterer, KarL.L. ed 1977 *Economic Exchange Social Interaction in South East Asia: Perspectives from Pre-history, History and Ethnography*. Michigan Papers on South East Asia, 13 Center for South East Asian Studies, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

¹⁰ As the very name suggests, it had strong links with Hindu India and from where its rulers are said to have derived much of their religious legitimacy.

conducted mainly by Arab merchants and Arab ships and was organized as one long arduous voyage from the West to the East with ports of call and stops in the Western coast of India. In the middle of the tenth and in the early eleventh century this pattern was discontinued in favor of shorter, segmented voyages between a number of port cities. The long voyages were given up and Arab ships instead of continuing from Indian ports to the South China Sea stopped in ports on the west coast of India. From there the goods were carried to the eastern coast and were met by ships and traders from South East Asia and China. Goods from China, Japan, South East Asian and Sri Lanka were brought by mainly Chinese ships to South Indian ports.

Several factors led to this change in the pattern of trading which in turn was to have important implications for the growth and development of the region. First among them was the shift in power from Baghdad to Alexandria as a result of the decline of the Abbasids of Baghdad and the rise of the Fatimids of Egypt to a dominant position in the Muslim world at the end of the 10th century. This shifted trade from Hormuz and the Persian Gulf to Aden and the Red Sea. Whereas ships from the Persian Gulf had followed the coastline to the harbors of Gujarat, ships from the Red Sea crossed directly to the Malabar coast further to the south of India. The voyage across the Arabian Sea was made at the time of the summer monsoon and the winds carried the ships to the harbors further south of Gujarat. Around the same time, Arab merchants began to realize that a single long voyage involved considerably higher transaction costs; the seas were free and protected and apart from the distance involved there was always the risk and uncertainty on account of sea piracy. This prompted them to bring their goods only up to the Indian ports.

On the eastern side, the Sung dynasty came into power in China and more than any previous Chinese dynasty began to control and promote maritime trade. Under the Sung dynasty, China had the largest merchant navy and Chinese ships had up to five masts, balanced stern rudders and could carry up to a 1000 people.¹¹ Chinese traders and junk owners also came to realize the financial gains to be made from direct involvement in trade in the South China Sea. Chinese merchants and traders increasingly plied the eastern segment of the international route.¹²

India, which straddled the two segments of the trade, too had an important part to play in this organizational shift of maritime trade. Around the same time, towards the end of the tenth century, south India emerged as a regional maritime power under Rajaraja Chola. The Cholas (who rose to power between 985 and 1025 AD) first brought south India with its flourishing ports in both the western Malabar and the eastern Coromandel coasts under their power and then proceeded to gain

¹¹ See Mason, *op cit*, 2000 p 79

¹² Under the Sung (960-1279) and the Yuan(1279 –1367)dynasties, Chinese ships linked the coasts of East Africa, Egypt and Japan to China, stopping at Calicut on the western coast of India, which under the Zamorins had emerged as a leading entrepot in the area.

control of the maritime centers of Ceylon and the Maldives. This had important implications in terms of an active participation and control of trading activities in the region. Inland, the Cholas extended their empire expanded up to Central India in the north. The expansion of the Chola Kingdom also implied the emergence of South India as a new center of consumption. The reason why Arab traders and seafarers would stop in the southern ports of India and avoid the risks of sailing the Indian Ocean lay in the growing prosperity of Southern India and the consequent increase in its demands for goods from both the East and the West. It is this together with the emergence of merchant guilds that enabled the segmentation of trading activities into a western and eastern wing. The more Indian, Arab and Chinese ships brought eastern and western goods to these ports, the more these ports began to function as emporia or centers of trade and exchange.

The emergence of the Cholas in India and the Sung dynasty in China as large, unified and prosperous regional powers gave a great fillip to regional economic trade and exchange. There was a steep rise in trade between India, China and South East Asia. Part of the increase in the regional trading activities no doubt fed into international trade, which is also said to have risen sharply in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Long distance trade was however, only a part of the overall trading activities of the region.

As Egypt rose in power in the tenth century and Egyptian ships sailed across the Indian Ocean, the more southern ports of the Malabar Coast came into greater prominence. There was a relative decline in the importance of Gujarat as the major international port. Gujarat and the Malabar coast however, continued to play an important part in the regional trading activities during this time. As indicated above, Indian ships connected the two coasts of India and carried not only international cargo but also goods meant for regional markets.

There were two major trading areas on the east coast of India – namely the Coromandel (near present day Chennai) and Bengal. Not only was there trade between the ports of these regions, but also there is evidence to suggest that substantial trade was carried on both with Burma and Thailand. They also traded with other parts of the archipelago including Sumatra and Pasai (in now Indonesia) with Molacca and beyond. Exports from Pulicat, which was the principal Cormandel port, consisted mainly of textiles. Exports from the Bengal region consisted of rice, sugar, textiles and conserves. The imports on the other hand were more varied and included Indonesian spices, various kinds of woods, Chinese silk and other goods, gold and non precious metals such as tin, copper, quicksilver, lead and vermilion.

There was thus a steep rise in interaction between the dominant regional powers of Cholas, Srivijaya and Sung China in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Expansion of regional trade was also accompanied by a rise in international trade during this period. While luxury goods such as Chinese silks, Indian textiles and Indonesian spices no doubt constituted an important part of the trade with the

Middle East and Europe, intra Asian trade was an equally, if not more, important part of the commercial transactions in the region. This trade, which included trade in military animals such as horses and elephants, foodstuffs and textiles, very often lay at the basis of the spice trade. Elephants, specially trained in Ceylon, were exported to all over Western India by merchants from Malabar. Invasions into India had clearly demonstrated the superiority of fast moving cavalry over elephants and led to an increase in the demand for horses, especially by the warring Muslim princes of the Deccan and the Hindu kingdom of Vijaynagar. As they did not breed well in tropical climates, the steeds had to be imported from Persia and Arabia.¹³

Trade in foodstuffs was crucial to all ports and often formed the basis of exchange, Rice, being the staple food in Asia, often served as currency and was exchanged for pepper, ginger and cinnamon. Indian merchants traded rice for spices in the Malay archipelago, which were then exchanged for gold and silver on the Indian subcontinent. The spices were then shipped out to the West. Vijaynagar dominated all the states of the south, as well as the countries of the Persian Gulf, Yemen and East Africa. The ports of Coromandel Coast supplied Ceylon and the Bengal and Pegu in Burma exported rice to Western Indo-China, Malacca, Sumatra, Ceylon and the Maldives. Finally Java supplied rice to the Malay archipelago. Sugar was another important food product traded in the region and came from Vijaynagar and Bengal. Gujarat, Coromandel and Bengal also supplied cotton cloth, an essential item, to South East Asia. Each region had its own special kind of textiles. The cheaper, thicker varieties constituted the bulk of the intra Asian demand.

Thus by the end of the eleventh century, three major regional empires of Egypt, India and China emerged and were linked in a vast and expanding network of trade and commerce. There was a long distance component of this trade which brought exotic products from China and India as well as the much in demand pepper to the Egyptian ports and then on via the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. There was also a regional component of this trade. In order to procure the goods destined for the western market, traders had to engage in regional exchange, as there was little that Europe had to offer Asia. Over the next four centuries, the growth of this regional component was the basis of Asian wealth and prosperity.

i) Chinese Naval Expeditions

By and large, trade in the region was in private hands and there were few rules and regulations restricting the movements of either goods or men. The seas continued to be free and private trade flourished in the region essentially till the arrival of the Portuguese. There was however a brief period when under the Ming dynasty, China 'nationalized' private maritime trade and converted it into a

¹³ Interestingly, on the frontier between the two fighting blocs, Goa emerged as the biggest horse market in the

government venture. From the reign of Hung-Wu in the later half of the fourteenth century, both private sea and coastal trade was banned. Instead the government undertook the active promotion of trade and sent out its own ships and fleets. An important aspect of this government trade was its emphasis on tribute trade and the seven naval missions undertaken in the early part of the fifteenth century were essentially tribute missions.¹⁴

The fifteenth century was the heyday of Chinese maritime power and domination of the Asian Seas. Chinese overseas shipping had, in fact, been conducted on an impressive scale even prior to the Ming era. However, it was in the Ming period that the great maritime expeditions were undertaken.

The Chinese maritime supremacy in the fifteenth century was undisputed. Its fleet comprised of two to three hundred huge ships most of which carried firearms. The total crew consisted of twenty to thirty thousand men and many of them were well-trained combat units. These armadas, commanded by Cheng Ho and other eunuchs, patrolled the seas and while conducting trade also provided protection to the smaller countries in the region. These countries in turn sent tribute missions to China and accepted and acknowledged the superiority of the Middle Kingdom.

The grandeur of Chinese naval supremacy was however short lived. Apart from the huge drain on resources that these great government ventures entailed, the accompanying ban on private trade unleashed forces that came to threaten the security of the once free and safe seas and undermine the very basis of prosperity of the South East Asian regimes.

ii) The Rise of Piracy and Smuggling

The impact of this prohibition on private trade was a rise in smuggling and illegal trade. Not all the population previously engaged in private trade could be absorbed into government trade activity despite the fact that the tribute missions were huge and often involved several thousands of men. As a result a number of coastal traders simply ignored the law and took to smuggling. In the course of time this led to the emergence of a highly sophisticated and complex illegal private trade sector.¹⁵ As the government tried to suppress private trade, there was an upsurge in coastal banditry and piracy as those engaged in smuggling organized themselves into militant groups, the Wo-K'ou. Pirates and smugglers often fought with the government and with the growth of the Wo-K'ou pirate clans, often with each other.

region.

¹⁴ Although there were some elements of tribute trade even under Yuan China, these did not constitute a significant part of the overall trade which was essentially in private hands.

As pointed out elsewhere, Arab traders dominated Asian trade right up to the sixteenth century. Then for a brief interregnum in the fifteenth century when the Chinese, under the Ming dynasty reached the peak of their maritime progress and the government took control of trade and dominated the Asian seas and extended their influence into the Pacific as well. With the end of Chinese government trade in 1435, long distance sea trade in the Indian Ocean passed over into the hands of the Near Eastern and Indian merchants. 'The Chinese left free an immense area in which Bengalis, Tamils and Gujaratis were to spread and organize new networks that supplied the needs of the Chinese clientele. They bought products from India, from Europe and from the Arab world to the markets of Malacca....'The location of Malacca at the point where the two monsoon winds die down attracted all kinds of merchandise from East and West.'¹⁶

Thus, at the dawn of the 16th century, at the time when the Portuguese, having discovered the all-water route to the Indies via Cape of Good Hope, were beginning their forays into the Indian Ocean, the Asian trade network, particularly to the east of the Moluccas, was dominated by not Arab but Indian merchant communities who were for the most part Muslims.

iii) East Asian Trading Networks

The Ming era was also one of domestic consolidation and economic prosperity. As domestic production increased and Chinese demand for imports rose, China's trade expanded not only with South East Asia, India and the Far East but also with Japan and other islands in the region. It is quite clear that the Chinese with their larger ships and bigger fleets dominated the Sino-Japanese trade. With a ban on private foreign trade still in place, a 'bundle of lines', of illegal private trade, often in the hands of smugglers and pirates, connected the different Chinese regions¹⁷ to ports in Japan. Trade from the Fujian coast to Japan went via Taiwan which first served as a staging post providing victuals and essentials to the passing ships. Gradually some of its local products got inserted in this trade. There were also trading links between Japan and Korea. These however declined around the mid sixteenth century because of the activities of the Wokou. In 1557, an agreement between Japan and Korea helped ease tensions and by 1567 relations between the two countries were restored to a large extent.

In 1567, China relaxed its trade restrictions and this led to the disappearance of the Wokou problem, which had been slowly declining. The Fujianese, Cantonese and the overseas Chinese who had undoubtedly been involved in piracy and brigandage, turned to Manila and South East Asia

¹⁵ Roderick Ptak Merchants and Maximization: Notes on Chinese and Portuguese Entrepreneurship in Maritime Asia c.1350-1600 pg 36

¹⁶ Bouchon, Genevieve Merchants... p 43

¹⁷ Ports along the coasts of Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong were the most important.

iv) Reorganization of Intra-Asian Trade

We have seen in an earlier section that that the 10th and 11th centuries were a watershed in Asian commercial history. Political and economic developments, as far as in Persia and Egypt, led to the reorganization of trade and the emergence of emporia and large coastal ports. As trade expanded so did the importance of these emporia and this in turn drew ever-increasing areas of the hinterland into the network of international and regional trade.

The sixteenth century also saw important changes in the organization of trade in Asia. Several developments in the fifteenth century paved the way to these changes, which were to lead to the emergence of new economic, political, religious and social structures in the region.

First among these was the almost simultaneous emergence of these two sultanates, nearly 5000 km apart. In 1400, Gujarat on the western coast of India abandoned its allegiance to the Sultanate of Delhi and established itself as an independent state. In 1404, the Hindu king of Malacca converted to Islam. The conversion itself, as we will see in a later section, was prompted by the needs of securing the all important trade connections. Gujarat and Malacca then made common cause on the basis of this common religion and became the focus of trans-oceanic trade.

In 1433, the Chinese abandoned their great naval expeditions leaving a wide gap in both the Euro-Chinese and Indo-Chinese trade. Indian Muslim merchants from Gujarat, Bengal and Malabar Coast quickly filled in this gap. For a long time Tamil merchants had played a dominant role in the intra-Asian trade. Tamil princesses married into the courts of Indonesia had protected the interests of these traders. However, with the decline in the Karimi merchant guilds and their regrouping on the west Indian coastal towns of Gujarat and the conversion of the Sultan of Malacca to Islam, the sway of the Tamil Hindu merchants was replaced by that of the Gujarati Muslim traders

The reasons for the sudden withdrawal of the Chinese from maritime trade are still not clear. Its impact was however, very definitive. Although the vacuum left by the Chinese was quickly filled in by Indian Muslim traders, the withdrawal is often seen by historians as the beginning of the decline of Chinese and Asian preeminence in the regional and world economy.

D. The Arrival of Europeans

i) The Portuguese

When the Portuguese arrived in the Indian Ocean they came face to face with this fairly extensive and sophisticated network of trade. Their arrival at Calicut in May 1498 marked the beginning of a new era in European–Asian trade.¹⁸

The entry of the Portuguese into the Asian trade network did not bring about any dramatic or sudden changes in either the structure or organization of inter Asian trade. They concentrated essentially on pepper (though they also bought some other goods) which they procured against precious metals. There was little that Europe could offer Asia at reasonable costs at that time. Although Europe had been striding forth in scientific and technological improvements, the Industrial Revolution had yet to take place and the goods available did not have enough cost advantage to make them attractive in the Asian markets.

The most important change that the Portuguese brought into the Asian trading system was the introduction of the system of cartazes or passes whereby, all ships had to get passes from the Portuguese to sail the seas. A pass did not cost very much, but the holder was obliged to call at the Goa controlled ports where he would pay duties to the Estado authorities. In return, the Portuguese offered protection against pirates and other enemies. For the first time in Asian maritime history, the seas were no longer free. Historians argue, however, that the quantitative impact of this innovation was not significant and did not result in any dramatic changes in the volume or composition of trade.¹⁹

Although the procurement of pepper for the European market remained the primary purpose of Portuguese trade ventures, they found themselves actively participating in what they termed ‘trade from India to India’. In 1511, they took control of Malacca and recognizing its strategic importance made it the central base of their trading operations in South East Asia. With the help of the Tamil keling merchants, they were able to penetrate the complex intra-Asian trading network of routes and goods. This ‘country trade’, as it came to be known, was an important and a more lucrative

¹⁸ For the first time in history, the volume of trade between the two continents was no longer subject to the constraints of carrying it overland for part of its journey¹⁸. Hitherto, all cargo bound for either West Asia or for Europe used either the Red Sea route or the Persian Gulf route. Both involved some overland transportation and were subject to the constraint of both the availability of pack animals and the size of the riverboats. Initially both the old routes continued to be in use, but gradually by the seventeenth century the sea route had more or less taken over the transportation of goods from Asia to Europe. Moreover, it was for the first time organized by the Europeans themselves, who, having discovered the route, dominated it, thereon.

¹⁹ In order to break into the existing trade system they sought to seal the western end of the Indian Ocean and divert the flow of some important commodities through the Cape route. The entrance to the Red Sea could not be sealed effectively, and although near Eastern trade suffered, the Portuguese were not able to curb it completely. This together with the cartaz system resulted in the search for alternate routes. As a result by 1530 or so a new alternative system of trading routes connecting those points not controlled by the Portuguese emerged. Hence while Portuguese ships called at Malacca, others specially the Muslim traders went to Johor or Aceh.

component of their trading activities in the region. The gains from this trade were used to finance and bolster the long distance trade. Although initially, the Portuguese Crown took the lead in participation in this country trade, gradually private interests based both in Portugal as well as those who had ventured east, began to play a more active role. This participation and reliance on country trade reflected the vibrancy of the trading interactions among the Asian nations themselves.

ii) The Dutch and the English

The Portuguese monopoly over the Cape route did not last long and was successfully challenged first by the Dutch and then by the English East Indian Companies. In the course of the seventeenth century there was a jump in the volume of trade from Asia to Europe. The composition of Asian exports also underwent a radical transformation over this period. Textiles and raw silk replaced pepper and spices, which had accounted for a major share of total exports from the region. This in turn had important implications for the regional focus of trade. The new imports from Asia were procured overwhelmingly from India and the latter became the most important trading region for European trade in the latter part of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Like the Portuguese before them, the Dutch and English took an active part in the highly profitable intra-Asian network of trade. However, unlike the short-lived interest of the Portuguese Crown, Dutch and English official involvement was substantial and long-term. Moreover, unlike the Portuguese who often found themselves caught between the conflicting pursuits of God and Mammon, the Dutch involvement in Asia followed a definitive pattern in the sole pursuit of commercial profitability, which paved the way for colonial rule in the area.

The Europeans soon realized that in order to compete with other traders and increase the profitability of this trade, they must gain exclusive purchasing rights over these goods. This led to attempts to gain monopsony rights over the supply of spices and over time led to the establishment of the factory system. Initially these factories were essentially trading posts taking advantage of proximity to the market to procure textiles at cheaper prices. Over time however, they evolved into fortified establishments with their own government and military set ups. This enabled them to intervene in the hinterland not merely in the provision of credit and investment in the production of goods but also in the form of protection of these captive sources of supplies through armed conflict if necessary.

The rest is colonial history.

SECTION II

The Spread of Religious and Cultural Influences

Introduction

Equally important and inextricably linked to the regional trade in goods was the spread of culture, religion, art and even political statecraft in the region. With the trade went the trader and with the trader the cultural and religious influences of his homeland. Whether it was by land or by sea, the journeys were long and arduous and often required the traders to set up temporary homes in distant lands. This was particularly true of the sea voyages, which were crucially dependant on the direction of the winds and sailors had to often wait for the winds to turn before returning to their homelands.

This section explores the social, cultural and religious links that bound the Asian region into a closely integrated Asian community. It is divided into three parts, the first of which looks at the composition and origins of the trading community and the nature of its settlements in the major trading regions. The second part examines the nature of political and social interaction among the Asian subregions, highlighting the deep roots of these cultural and diplomatic ties, particularly between India and China. The third part of this section looks at the spread of the three main religious traditions found in Asia viz. Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. This section emphasizes the relatively conflict free manner of the spread of these religions in the region and their adaptation and assimilation with the existing cultural practices. There appears to have been minimal attempts at imposition of any of these ideologies or establishment of cultural hegemony.

A. Trading Communities and Settlements

The Asian Seas were free and plied by traders from regions as far as the Middle East on one side and China and Japan on the other. It is not surprising to find traders from all over the region in the different ports. Prior to the 10th century the evidence is anecdotal. However, from the 10th century onwards records show that traders from different places had their different settlements in the major trading ports. In Pulicat for example, the major trading group at the end of the first millennium was that of Muslims belonging mainly to the Marakkayar communities of South Eastern India though there were some who were of Arab origin. The trading community also included the Telugu speaking Chetties, Armenians as well as merchants of Persian origin. In Bengal traders engaged with trade with Indonesia were Persian while the trade with Malacca was in the hands of the Tamil keling merchants. At the Malacca end the mercantile community consisted largely of Keling merchants of Tamil and Telugu origin who had settled and had become an integral part of the community in these regions. Gujarat had a strong Arab and Jewish community and when in the 10th century, power shifted to

Egypt, there is evidence of Egyptian and Arab settlements along the Malabar Coast. Indian merchants were also settled in Pagan and other parts of Burma. There is evidence that there was at the end of the thirteenth century a south Indian colony in the province of Guangzhou. All these trader settlements, even when they were in enclaves outside the fortifications where the rulers and noblemen lived, were an important conduit of cultural values, ideas and practices

An important factor in the spread of cultural influences was immigration. Although, there appear to have been little en masse migrations within the region, the movement of the Chinese to different parts of South East Asia in the fifteenth century was a significant exception. Rising demographic pressures as well a decline in employment opportunities, to which the ban on private trade no doubt contributed, led to a large Chinese emigration and the establishment of the Chinese Diasporas in South East Asia. By the mid fifteenth century, some of these settlements had several thousand people who were mainly engaged in trade and services. As with other foreign traders, the Chinese tended to stay together and, although there were intermarriages and acculturation, closely retain their family and cultural traditions. As a result, the Chinese were often found concentrated in tiny Chinatowns where they did their best to replicate their traditional Chinese life-style. So closely knit were some of these communities that often their entire population consisted of families from the same village or the same county.

B. Political and Social Interactions within Asia

Even before the spread of Buddhism to China around the 1st century AD, it is said that China and India were exchanging emissaries and engaged in exchange of ideas and knowledge in a wide range of areas. It is these that led to the cultivation and production of silk in India and the export of cotton to China. The fact that these exchanges were often state sponsored also points to the diplomatic and political ties that must have existed among these countries. During the first millennium, travel accounts and treatises contain more information about philosophical and cultural exchanges than they do about trade.

More documentary evidence exists for the period after the tenth century and shows the continued and frequent exchange between the India and China during that time. The Cholas sent several embassies to the Middle Kingdom and were recognized as the “Tributary state of the First Class”, the same status as the Fatimids, Srivijaya and Java and together with China these states represented the four major powers of the Indian Ocean. That the interactions between India and China involved more than the sending of envoys and tribute missions has been highlighted by the findings of the lower part of a temple and about 200 sculptures all in the Chola style in the port of Guangzhou. Together with a bilingual Tamil-Chinese inscription of 1281 AD, which reports a dedication of a Shiva statue in

another temple in Guangzhou, this provides the earliest evidence of the existence of Tamil settlements in Southern China.

Evidence of Chinese presence in India is also found in the form of coins and ceramics relating to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In Nagapattinam, there existed till 1867, a Chinese pagoda, which, according to Chinese sources, was built in 1267. Apparently the Chinese followed the example of Srivijaya which had earlier established a Buddhist monastery in the same port.

The Chola king Rajaraja had maintained friendly relations with Srivijaya and is known to have allotted the entire revenue from one village for the maintenance and upkeep of a Buddhist shrine that the king of Srivijaya had constructed in Nagapattinam, a major port in the Chola state. After his accession to the throne in 1014, King Rajendra continued the policy of friendship between the two states and while confirming the allocation of the earlier revenue for the Buddhist shrine is said to have received precious gifts from Srivijaya for a Hindu temple in the Chola port. At the same time, Srivijaya's relations with China were also kept alive through embassies and apart from the gifts that these tribute missions carried, Srivijaya is said to have had a temple constructed for the welfare of the Chinese Emperor as part of the diplomatic relations.

There are ample indications of the strong Hindu and Buddhist links across the Bay of Bengal. It was also around this time, around the mid eleventh century that the kingdom of Pagan united central and coastal parts of Burma with the northwestern coast of the Malay Peninsula. Pagan was thus for the first time able to link maritime trade in northern Bay of Bengal and the Coromandel Coast with China via the land route to Yunnan. Ships carrying cargo from the East coast of India sailed up the mighty Irawaddy up to Pagan and were met by barges from China. Even after the Cholas the merchant guilds continued to be active as revealed by a thirteenth century inscription at the only Hindu temple in Pagan. This temple was apparently built for Indian merchants and the inscription reports a donation by a merchant.

The relations of the South East Asian states with their large and dominant neighbors – India and China – were intensive but of a very different nature. Having been under the strong cultural influence of India for more than a millennium prior to the eleventh century AD, they looked upon India not merely as a trading partner but also as the holy land of Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition to economic links, these religious and cultural ties bound the South East Asia to India. With China on the other hand, the relations were more of a political and economic in nature. All the kingdoms of South East Asia and particularly those who were small and harassed by their neighbors sent tribute missions to the imperial court in China. In return for their gifts and their requests they were granted protection.

C. The Spread of Religions

i) Buddhism

By the third century BC, Emperor Ashoka had had done much to spread the message of Buddhism across India. He even sent his brother to Ceylon and emissaries to Burma. However, it was only by the first century AD that Buddhism found its way to the central plains of China. Buddhism reached China via the Silk route, traveling west into Afghanistan, through Central Asia, to Xin Jiang and across the Taklamakan desert before reaching China through Xian.

From very early on, even prior to the introduction of Buddhism in China and prior to the discovery of the sea routes, envoys from the two countries used to visit each other. These missions which are said to have started in 2nd century BC were prompted by mutual respect and appreciation and are recorded extensively in Chinese historical documents.²⁰ With the advent of Buddhism, many more missions were undertaken in search of Dharma and as a pilgrimage to the land of the Buddha. There is a story that tells of how the Han emperor Ming-ti dreamt of a golden person, the Buddha. He sent Ambassadors to India to invite Buddhist teachers. The first historically known Buddhist masters arrived in China in AD 67. These were Dharmaksha and Kasyapa Matanga. As the tale goes, they arrived on white horses laden with scriptures and sacred relics. The first Buddhist monastery, called, not surprisingly the White Horse Monastery, was built for these two masters and exists even today.

The exchange of teachers and students also started the translation of the Sanskrit Sutras into Chinese and relations between China and India were further strengthened. A few hundred teachers went to China from India between the first and the twelfth century and bequeathed a legacy of about 3000 works translated from Sanskrit into Chinese. The Chinese pilgrims to India such as Fa-Hsien, Hsuan-tsang, Wang Hsuan, I-ching have all left records which are famous treatises on the social, political and economic conditions in India of that time. These records were carefully studied by the Chinese scholars and Kings and no doubt contributed to the understanding of India as well as the development of institutions and practices in China. Later on, in the reign of Kanishka of the Kushan dynasty, Sino-Indian bilateral cultural and religious relations entered a new phase in the economic, political and cultural domains.

With a growing interest in Indian scriptures and texts also came an interest in Indian art forms – Chinese painting and sculpture of the first millennium were distinctly influenced by Indian art. For instance “The Official History of Liang, composed in 636 AD notes that India was a prosperous, cultured and civilized nation. It delineates the beautiful paintings and carvings in the grand palaces;

the intricate and exquisite dresses worn by the elite and talks about the haunting music of India. A later work “The Official History of Sung” written in 1345 AD gives detailed descriptions of the social and political conditions under the Chola Kings who were in power between 9th –13th century and of their 31 tributary states. Also, the three major carvings in the stone grottos of China named Dunhuang, Yunhuang and Longmen have evidently been deeply influenced by the Gandhara art of India and then have developed an integrated and unique style of their own. Thus as with Buddhist philosophy, in art and culture too, the Chinese have since centuries been open to outside influences and have assimilated them into a mosaic which is distinctly their own. This harmonization has been the hallmark of the two ancient civilizations – China even more than India.

The form of Buddhism that came to China was the Mahayana school, which was very different from the orthodox Theravada form, which became popular in Burma and Thailand.

What is of tremendous significance and a telling comment on the nature of relations among the Asian civilizations is that the introduction of Buddhism did not invoke hostility in China. Buddhism was discussed, explored, absorbed and assimilated by the Chinese to finally make it their own. By the time of the Tang dynasty, the Chinese had established their own sect of Buddhism, with the people in the lower ranks adopting it as their religion prompted by the support from the emperors and the ruling elites. Certain aspects of Confucianism, such as ancestor worship and the cult of the family were incorporated into a sinified form of Buddhism. It was this form of Chinese Buddhism, which spread eastward into Korea and Japan where it underwent further adaptations to local customs and beliefs, thus showing it to be a flexible and adaptable philosophy.

Buddhism reached South East Asia via China. In the sixth century the estuary town called Shrivijaya, probably on the site of present Palembang in Sumatra, was the central point for trade in nutmeg, cloves and other spices, scented wood specially sandalwood, and pearls and was an intermediate port for the vessels plying between Persia, India and China. It was in all probability a tributary state of China and appears to have prospered under its patronage. A Chinese pilgrim I-Ching(Yijing) who visited this town in the 7th century on his way back to India from China, noted that more than a 1000 monks lived there and its rulers had links with the famous Buddhist University at Nalanda in India. Chinese influence and with it Buddhism also found roots in another kingdom that flourished in Central Java in the 7th century. It was this Indonesian kingdom that built the vast Buddhist monument called Borabudur.

Like Hinduism, when Buddhism came to these regions they did not supplant the existing culture but merely added a layer over it and in time became intertwined with it. The temples and dances of Bali

²⁰ Zhang Qian sent his envoy to India and during the Han period when the Han empire and the Kashmir region

that to date draw their inspiration from the Ramayana continue to flourish in Indonesia the largest Muslim country in the world only helps to substantiate the harmonious intermingling cultures that took place in Asia.

ii) Hinduism

South Indian ships were trading with Burma and Malaysia as far back as 500 BC. The south Indian communities that were established along the coastline, exported pepper, diamond, pearls, apes and peacocks. But apparently, the most influential export was the Indian cultural influence. The first journeys were made when sailing was still fairly rudimentary and the sailors went where the winds took them. It is likely then that the outward journeys must have been in the months between June and November when the southwest winds blow steadily. It is also likely that they would not have been able to return till the winds became northeasterly, somewhere around May. The dependence on the direction of the winds also meant that the sailor merchants had to stay wherever they made a landfall till the winds turned.

It was probably in this way that their customs, religion and art began to spread eastward from India to Indo-China and the Malay Peninsula. The first description of an Indianised state comes from a third century account. This was Funan, located in the great delta of the Mekong, and strategically on the trade route between India and China. Funan's capital was called Vyadhapura a distinctly Indian name. The kingdoms of Shrivijaya, in Sumatra and the temples of Prambanan, Angkor Wat and Bagan are all testimony to the export of Hindu philosophy and culture to Indo- China and South East Asia. So deeply embedded is this influence that it is still evident in the ceremonies and carnivals that are celebrated in the region.

Some historians however argue that the Hinduization of South East Asia did not take place through the spontaneous transference of Indian cultural influences through the traders. Here they make a distinction between cultural influences and the specifically Indian cultural forms, involving the ritualistic, magical legitimization of the ruler, the offerings, the consecration formula, the classical, mythological genealogy of the ruling house. They contend that these could not have been transmitted by the traders who would have been ill equipped to perform the highly ritualistic acts of a rigidly codified and complex Brahmanical religious practice. That these were undertaken is known from the sacral and epigraphic relics found in the region. In the rigid caste system, which came to characterize the social structure of South India by the beginning of the Christian era, the teaching and transmission of spiritual- religious knowledge was the exclusive preserve of the Brahmins. And it is highly improbable that the Brahmins were also the traders, the caste system defined the calling of each group

were often visited by envoys of the respective nations.

and permitted no transgressions. The traders no doubt came from the lower social groups and could not have performed such a role.

According to J.C. van Leur ‘the initiative for the coming of Indian civilization emanated from the Indonesian ruling groups, or was at least an affair of both the Indonesian dynasties and the Indian hierocracy.’²¹ There was no ‘Hindu colonization’ and no ‘Hindu colonies’ in South East Asia. There is no evidence of a political invasion and occupation of the regions where there were strong Indian influences. Nor does there appear to have been colonization and settlement of large number of Indians following the trade route. No doubt Indian traders like the rest of the foreigners engaged in maritime trade, settled in ‘kampongs’ or city quarters. These colonies were little enclaves, which tended to preserve the Indian way of life, with its customary laws, social habits and cultural practices and had little or no contact with Indonesian life except through the market and the harbors. Except for a few prominent among them, the traders could not have had access to the courts and nobles of these countries and could not have influenced the adoption of Hindu religious practices in their courts.

According to this view, Indian civilization was “called...to the east.”²² Indonesian rulers and nobles, in an attempt to legitimize their interests involved in first international trade and second in organizing their states and subjects, “they summoned the Brahman priesthood to their courts.” Indian priesthood was well known through out the region, tales of Indian culture, statecraft and religion having been carried by the traders from either side. It is by means of this trade that South East Asian rulers and nobles, who held a predominant place in international trade, both as owners of ships and as financiers of trade, came in contact with India and learnt of its statecraft and religious practices. In pursuit of their commercial interests they sought to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the dominant and larger partner, by adopting the very cultural and religious symbols that gave Indian rulers *their* legitimacy. Indian priests were also able to give their dynastic and political pursuits a magical, sacral legitimacy.

It is because of the state patronage of the formal ritualistic forms of Indian religious practices, that Hinduism did not entirely replace the existing local culture. The latter was influenced no doubt over time by both the cultural practices of the trading (keling) community as well as by the court rites and rituals, but retained its indigenous characteristics. The durability and continuity of these native cultural forms as well as their adaptation to changed circumstances is testimony of the fact that neither the Indian rulers nor Hinduism itself sought to uproot or forcibly influence the existing cultural and religious practices in the region.

²¹ pg 103 Indonesian Trade and Society

²² op cit p 98

iii) Islam

While the history of the spread of Islam to the Indian subcontinent is extremely well documented, there is not enough evidence to put a definitive date to the entry of Islam into South East Asia. Arabs had known of the region for generations but there is little conclusive evidence to show the adoption of Islam in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Historians contend that Islam probably came to South East Asia somewhere in the 13th century and its acceptance and adoption were related to both the prevailing structure of maritime trade as well as the domestic political situation in the region.

There is no doubt that Islam was brought to the archipelago with the Muslim merchants as they moved along the established trade routes. There was apparently no 'missionary' endeavor. Muslim merchants who had become accustomed to conducting their business under the protective umbrella of Islamic law were the obvious transmitters of Islam's basic beliefs during these early stages of the 9th and 10th century. Indian Muslim merchants, whose trading links with Java and Sumatra as well as the Malay Peninsula were discussed in an earlier section, had an important role to play in the diffusion of Islam into the region. These traders came from Gujarat, Bengal and the Coromandel Coast and while there is no conclusive evidence as to which of the three regions was the most important, it appears that that merchants from the eastern coast South India, in particular, the Coromandel Coast played an important part in the spread of Islam in the archipelago.

The conversion to Islam, of the ruler of the Malay port of Melaka, somewhere between 1409-1436, was an important landmark in the history of the expansion of Islam into South East Asia. The upcoming Melaka dynasty adopted Islam and used it as a "political instrument against Indian trade, against Siam and China and against the Hindu regime of Java"²³ The spread of Islam in Melaka thus took place under the patronage of the king who not only encouraged its teaching but often ordered their subjects to adopt the new religion. They encouraged missionary work and themselves participated in intellectual discourse with Islamic theologians who were invited from both India and the Middle East.

With its spread in India under the powerful Mughals, Islam was perhaps seen as the resurgent ideology among the nobles and elite in South East Asia. Its adoption by the new and upcoming rulers in the Malay Peninsula and Indonesian archipelago was regarded as a break with the declining Hindu past and as a new source of prestige.

Finally a notable factor on the acceptance of the new religion was that it was not antithetical to indigenous beliefs and traditions. The appeal of Islam lay in its mystical strand, Sufism and its

²³ Indonesian Trade and Society p 112

willingness to accommodate existing beliefs. Sufism developed around the 13th century and was largely responsible for the appeal of Islam beyond its Arabian heartland. Sufi teachers fanned out along trading routes and many merchants were adherents of the different schools of Sufism that emerged in the course of time. Mystical thought and the aim of union with the Absolute, which was a part of Sufi mysticism, found common ground with the deep rooted cultural attitudes, which together with their animist roots had also assimilated the Hindu- Buddhist spiritual traditions from India.

Although Islam made significant progress in the region in the fifteenth century, its spread was initially confined to the coastal regions and there too not all the coastal rulers took to the new religion despite the prolonged exposure to it via the Muslim traders. The spread of Islam gathered pace in South East Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries. If the conversion of Melaka was an important milestone for the spread of Islam, so was its conquest by the Portuguese in 1511. The Portuguese occupation of Melaka closed the port to the Muslim traders who started taking alternate routes where they met less religious hostility. Aceh, which had adopted Islam in the 14th century developed into a center for Muslim trade and soon became renowned for its active promulgation of the new faith. Brunei too prospered from the fall of Melaka and was responsible for the spread of Islam to the southern islands of the Philippines.

As with the other religions, Islam did not uproot the existing culture but merely added another layer over it and over time mingled and mixed with existing cultural influences to form a mosaic of diverse influences.

In contrast, Christianity was the only religion, which almost from its very inception had the might of an organized and powerful State behind its expansion. The Portuguese were driven by both the love of Mammon and of God in their Asian adventures. Inspired by missionary zeal, they often coerced the people in the regions where they dominated to convert to Islam. The Dutch had no such missionary zeal, but found themselves favoring those who had converted to Christianity among the local traders and merchants. The manner in which Christianity was forced to be imposed shows that the process of dissemination failed to take into account the sensitivities of the local people and the Asian culture of harmonious co-existence. It is therefore not surprising that, with the exception of the Philippines, Christianity was unable to establish strong roots in the region.

Conclusion

The paper sketches the historical roots of the Asian community. It shows that these historical ties run deep and can be traced back to the pre-Christian Era. It brings out the close economic links that bound the region into a highly developed, complex and flourishing network of regional trade. It also

highlights the importance of these regional economic relations not only in the growth and prosperity of the region but also as the very basis of the expanding long distance trade. Interaction among the Asian countries was not limited to the economic but went beyond to include social, political, cultural and religious aspects. It is this multifaceted nature of relations that have bound the Asian region into an integrated community. What is also striking about this long history of interaction is the absence of any major conflict among the different countries, particularly the major players in the region. Both India and China were during the first fifteen centuries, economically, militarily, ideologically and culturally highly developed nations. They could have been competitors for dominance in the world but they were not. Indeed the history of their relations is one of respect and coexistence²⁴ The development of the last two centuries and the current perception of Asia as a diverse, heterogeneous and conflict ridden region should not hide the importance and the strength of the close cooperation that has existed between India, China, Japan and the now Asean region. While a great deal more work is needed for a more in-depth analysis, the historical roots of Asian cooperation provide a strong basis for re-establishing an Asian community.

²⁴ Part of the reason for this nature of interaction is no doubt geography. Separated by the almost impassable Himalayan Mountains, it would have been impossible for either nation to mount a successful attack on the other. However, with the development in maritime technology and the emergence of China as the strongest naval power in the region especially during T'ang and Ming eras, attack by sea was not unfeasible. The reasons for the absence of dispute and contention between China and India lay perhaps in the confidence of the two nations and the high respect and tolerance that they had for both learning and new ideas.

Bibliography

- Chaudhuri, S and Michel Morineau ed 1999 Merchants, Companies and Trade Europe and Asian in the Early Modern Era. Studies in Modern Capitalism Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris. Cambridge University Press Cambridge.
- Das Gupta, Ashin 1967 Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK
- David Bulbeck, Anthony Reid, Lay Cheng Tan, Yiqi Wu compiled South East Asian Exports since the 14th Century Cloves, Pepper, Coffee, and Sugar Institute of South East Asian Studies. Singapore KITV Press The Netherlands
- Glover, I.C. 1989 Early Trade Between India and Southeast Asia : A Link in the Development of a World Trading System. Occasional Papers No.16 Centre for South-East Asian Studies, University of Hull
- de Jonge Huub and Nico Kaptein Transcending Borders :Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in South East Asia.
- Kristoff, N.D. and Sheryl WuDunn 2000 Thunder from the East: Portrait of a Rising Asia. WS Bookwell, Finland
- Mason, Colin 2000 A Short History of Asia Macmillan Press Ltd. London
- Prakash Om, ed 1997 European Commercial Expansion in Early Modern Asia. An Expanding World The European Impact on the World History 1450-1800. Vol 10. Varorium
- Prakash, Om and Denys Lombard ed 1999 Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1800 Indian Council of Historical Research, Manohar, New Delhi
- Ptak, Roderich 1998 China and the Asian Seas. Trade, Travel, and Visions of the Other(1400-1750) Varorium
- China and Portugal at Sea The early Ming Trading System and the Estado da India Compared pp21-37
- Sino-Japanese Maritime Trade, circa 1550:Merchants, Ports and Networks pp281-311
- China and Calicut in the Early Ming Period: Envoys and Tribute Embassies pp81-107
- Rothermund, Dietmar 1981 Asian Trade and European Expansion in the Age of Mercantilism. Manohar New Delhi.
- Tarling Nicholas ed 1999 The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia Vol.One, Part two From c.1500 to c.1800. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Vohra N.N. ed 2002 India and East Asia . Culture and Society IIC Shipra Publications Delhi
- Van Leur, J.C.1967 Indonesian Trade and Society Essays in Asian Social History The Hague

RIS Discussion Papers

- #01 *World Trade Organisation and India – Challenges and Perspectives* by V.R. Panchamukhi, 2000
- #02 *WTO Regime, Host Country Policies and Global Patterns of Multinational Enterprises' Activity: Implications of Recent Quantitative Studies for India* by Nagesh Kumar, 2000
- #03 *Trade and Environment Linkages: A Review of Conceptual and Policy Issues* by T.R. Manoharan, Beena Pandey and Zafar Dad Khan, 2000
- #04 *Natural Resource Accounting: Economic Valuation of Intangible Benefits of Forests* by T.R. Manoharan, 2000
- #05 *Multinational Enterprises and M&As in India: Patterns and Implications* by Nagesh Kumar, 2000
- #06 *Explaining the Geography and Depth of International Production: The Case of US and Japanese Multinational Enterprises* by Nagesh Kumar, 2000
- #07 *Liberalisation Outward Orientation and In-house R&D Activity of Multinational and Local Firms: A Quantitative Exploration for Indian Manufacturing* by Nagesh Kumar and Aradhna Agarwal, 2000
- #08 *China as # 1: Threat or Opportunity?* by Ramgopal Agarwala, 2001
- #09 *Market Access for Industrial Sector in WTO Negotiations An Agenda for Developing Countries* by Rajesh Mehta, 2001
- #10 *India's Trade in 2020: A Mapping of Relevant Factors* by Nagesh Kumar, 2001
- #11 *Alternate Forms of Trading Arrangements in Indian Ocean Basin: Implication for India from IOR-ARC* by Rajesh Mehta and S.K. Mohanty, 2001
- #12 *INDO-Japanese Trade: Recent Trends* by Rajesh Mehta, 2001
- #13 *Post-Reforms Export Growth in India: An Exploratory Analysis* by Saikat Sinha Roy, 2001
- #14 *WTO's Emerging Investment Regime and Developing Countries: The Way Forward for TRIMs Review and the Doha Ministerial Meeting* by Nagesh Kumar, 2001
- #15 *India-Central Asian Republics Economic Cooperation with Special Reference to Kazakhstan – India Economic Relations* by N. Makhanov, 2001
- #16 *India-ASEAN Economic Cooperation with Special Reference to Lao PDR-India Economic Relations* by Thatsaphone Noraseng, 2001
- #17 *The Public-Private Debate in Agricultural Biotechnology and New Trends in the IPR Regime: Challenges before Developing Countries* by Sachin Chaturvedi, 2001
- #18 *Review of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture: The Current State of Negotiation* by Biswajit Dhar and Sudeshna Dey, 2001
- #19 *Indian Software Industry Development in International and National Development Perspective* by Nagesh Kumar, 2001
- #20 *Implementation of Article X of the Biological Weapons Convention in a Regime of Strengthened Intellectual Property Protection* by Biswajit Dhar, 2001

- #21 *Perceptions on the Adoption of Biotechnology in India* by Biswajit Dhar, 2001
- #22 *Product Standards and Trade in Environmentally Sensitive Goods: A Study of South Asian Experience* by Sachin Chaturvedi and Gunjan Nagpal, 2001
- #23 *Establishment of Free Trade Arrangement Among BIMST-EC Countries: Some Issues* by Rajesh Mehta, 2002
- #24 *Potential of India's Bilateral Free Trade Arrangements: A Case Study of India and Thailand* by Rajesh Mehta, 2002
- #25 *Intellectual Property Rights, Technology and Economic Development: Experiences of Asian Countries* by Nagesh Kumar, 2002
- #26 *Infrastructure Availability, Foreign Direct Investment Inflows and Their Export-orientation: A Cross-Country Exploration* by Nagesh Kumar, 2002
- #27 *Foreign Direct Investment, Externalities and Economic Growth in Developing Countries: Some Empirical Explorations and Implications for WTO Negotiations on Investment* by Nagesh Kumar and Jaya Prakash Pradhan, 2002
- #28 *Status and Development of Biotechnology in India: An Analytical Overview* by Sachin Chaturvedi, 2002
- #29 *Persistence in India's Manufactured Export Performance* by Saikat Sinha Roy, 2002
- #30 *Measuring Developments in Biotechnology: International Initiatives, Status in India and Agenda before Developing Countries* by Sachin Chaturvedi, 2002
- #31 *WTO and Indian Poultry Sector: Lessons from State Support Measures in Select Countries* by Rajesh Mehta, 2002
- #32 *Towards an Asian Economic Community – Vision of Closer Economic Cooperation in Asia: An Overview* by Nagesh Kumar, 2002
- #33 *Towards an Asian Economic Community: Monetary and Financial Cooperation* by Ramgopal Agarwala, 2002
- #34 *Towards an Asian Economic Community: The Relevance of India* by Nagesh Kumar, 2002
- #35 *India, the European Union and Geographical Indications (GI): Convergence of Interests and Challenges Ahead* by Sachin Chaturvedi, 2002.
- #36 *WTO and Product Related Environmental Standards: Emerging Issues and Policy Options before India* by Sachin Chaturvedi and Gunjan Nagpal, 2002.
- #37 *The Determinants of India's Exports: A Simultaneous Error-Correction Approach* by Saikat Sinha Roy, 2002.
- #38 *Analysis of Environment Related Non-Tariff Measures in the European Union: Implications for South Asian Exports* by S.K. Mohanty and T.R. Manoharan, 2002.
- #39 *Addressing Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement: A Case Study of Select Processed Food Products in India* by Rajesh Mehta, M. Saqib and J. George
- #40 *Liberalization, Firm Size and R&D Performance: A Firm Level Study of Indian Pharmaceutical Industry* by Jaya Prakash Pradhan, 2003

- #41 *Economic Co-operation Between India and Singapore: A Feasibility Study* by Rajesh Mehta, 2003
- #42 *Export Performance of Indian Enterprises in Knowledge-based Industries: Recent Trends, Patterns and Implications* by Nagesh Kumar and Jaya Prakash Pradhan, 2003
- #43 *Export Competitiveness in Knowledge-based Industries: A Firm-Level Analysis of Indian Manufacturing* by Nagesh Kumar and Jaya Prakash Pradhan, 2003
- #44 *Determinants of Outward Foreign Direct Investment From A Developing Country: The Case of Indian Manufacturing Firms* by Nagesh Kumar and Jaya Prakash Pradhan, 2003
- #45 *Possibility of Close Economic Cooperation between India and Singapore* by S.K. Mohanty, April 2003
- #46 *Towards a Multipolar World of International Finance* by Ramgopal Agarwala and Gauri Modwel, April 2003