

# Imagined Geographies

The Maritime Silk Roads in World History, 100–1800

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# Introduction

Today we cannot imagine world or global history without acknowledging a Eurasian or even an Afro-Eurasian exchange reaching back to ancient silk roads. In fact, it is a fashion given new immediacy with Chinese president Xi Jinping's invocation of the Belt and Road Initiative spanning both maritime and terrestrial tangents and with his Maritime Silk Road vision announced during his visit to Indonesia in October 2013. The notion that the sea silk route should be institutionally celebrated was also demonstrated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) back to the early 1990s. But just as new evidence revealed by marine and other archaeological discovery in the previous few decades has fed into new scholarship, so in this book we seek to read out new interpretations of the premodern sea silk road literally connecting Rome with China. With interconnectivity and exchange at its heart, it is an approach that brings to the fore a novel appreciation of the pivotal place of the sea passages linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans. By the second century CE, maritime traders had mastered the changing wind patterns of the South Asian and East Asian monsoons, allowing them to make both coastal and open-ocean voyages from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and return. Across the centuries the maritime connection would become paradigmatic of civilizational exchange. This was especially instanced from the early centuries of the first millennium with the Sanskritic transfer arriving from across the Bay of Bengal to the region now known as Southeast Asia. This was also the case with respect to the arrival of Islam in the archipelago first attested in the thirteenth century, such as that carried by seaborne traders arriving from India or Arab lands leading to the establishment of religious beachheads, the setting up of Sultanates, and with conversions still ongoing.

Since recorded history global regions have been distinguished from each other by culturally assigned criteria. In this sense, geographic imaginaries are also called into play in consideration of the ways that space is represented mentally and cartographically across civilizations and time. What also appears to be necessary in the articulation of regional world history is a double sense of long time and grand space. It is an approach that sets aside purely national history, especially as the spatial ordering of the world cannot be taken for granted. History is never linear. Rather,

it is multivalent. Even the best resourced and researched history is ultimately mediated through subjective experience. Most histories are imagined, if not contrived. And so are geographies and even sailings. As historian Roderich Ptak (2018: 235) has written, even relative to the crossings of the terrestrial silk roads, we can associate sailing corridors such as those linking China with the Afro-Asian world “with a strong mental component.” The notion that a sea route is a mental construct or “only exists in our minds” is something that this work also ponders.

Especially in consideration of the space or corridor linking China with India and farther west, my research seeks to demonstrate just how a series of interconnected historical world regions emerged in their own right long before the age of high European imperialism. For example, the Roman or Hellenic world calls down one sense of historical region. The Hindu-Buddhist world embracing the subcontinent including Sri Lanka appears cogent. The broader Sanskrit or Buddhist cosmopolis such as it touched both maritime and mainland Southeast Asia also appears as a coherent world-historical region, but even this has been challenged. The Sinic world at the core appears obvious but not so its boundaries or reach across the oceans. Over long periods and across civilizations, distantly apprehended geographic evocations of place present themselves as imaginaries, subjective understandings, or otherings fitting local values or conventions. Universal values to the degree that they have gained acceptance today were far over the horizon in ancient Rome, Catholic Europe, the Islamic caliphates, Ming China, or Tokugawa Japan, to strike just a few examples of powerful centrism.

Intellectual fashions wax and wane, just as new paradigms replace the old. Indeed, practitioners of connected world history have pushed the envelope of research by identifying the corridors and circuits within them literally linking the seas and littorals of, respectively, the Mediterranean, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian subcontinent, and the intervening islands and land reaching to China, Korea, and Japan. Yet another body of scholarship, notably that related to the Sino world, imposes its own dimension and scaling with special attention to the impact of China’s tribute-envoy system upon the maritime world from the Ryukyu Islands to the Malacca Straits and Java Sea and even touching the Indian subcontinent.

As I have elaborated elsewhere (Gunn 2003; 2018b), the calibration of the vast Afro-Eurasian world was well known to the ancients at both ends of the silk roads connecting China with Rome. Nowhere was this world better understood than by the first-century CE Alexandria-based astronomer Ptolemy. Drawing upon Babylonian and well as Greco-Roman understandings of the known world—a tri-continental picture—the Alexandrian also bequeathed the now-familiar concept of latitude and longitude, with longitude measured east or west of a prime meridian (today centered on Greenwich), as well as a method to produce maps based on astronomical data. Although highly inaccurate with regard to regions east of the Mediterranean, once revived in late medieval Europe, the Ptolemaic template would become a standard down until the early modern age, also taken on board by

cartographers, Muslim included. Such Ptolemaic riddles as the true location and calibration of the Golden Chersonese or Malay Peninsula including the Straits of Malacca, Singapore, and Sumatra, and the Sinus Magnus (Great Gulf) or China seas—critical in the European age of discovery—not to mention the scaling and mapping of China conducted by European missionaries in the service of the Qing, proved to be a millennium-long quest. Even setting aside the disambiguation of Terra Australis (Australia) from the Antarctic landmass (only demonstrated in the early 1800s), the quest to correct and adjust Ptolemy would not completely end until the last oceanic atoll found its place in a world mapping graticule. In a word, the Ptolemaic datum point and legacy cannot be ignored in interrogating ancient, medieval, European Renaissance, and even early modern renditions of Asian space.

To illustrate the point—and the theme—a small number of discretely connected sites lending to a world regional framing are highlighted. They include such termini ports as Siraf in the Persian Gulf, connected to Quanzhou on the eastern seaboard of China; a key maritime destination astride the Malacca Straits (Palembang in southern Sumatra) leading to India in one direction and Java and Timor in another; a single multiport trading site linking Northeast Asia with both maritime and mainland Southeast Asia (Ryukyu); and, from the mid-1500s onward, another site associated with East-West commercial activity—namely, Portuguese-administered Macau, directly linked to Nagasaki in southwestern Japan in the silk-for-silver trade. If we read history correctly, we may see in this study a premonition of the present age of networked businesses where once again East-Northeast Asians and others partner with South and Southeast Asians (notwithstanding the transformations engendered in modern national economies in line with the prevailing rules governing interstate relations).

## **I. Moving beyond National History**

Obviously, there are many ways to write a history without national blinkers. We could examine intellectual, cultural, or religious exchanges across cultures and even civilizations. We could just examine trade and commerce, drawing out answers to such questions as accumulation on a world scale, center-periphery dynamics, and others that animate economic historians. We could proceed in ways that examine commodity chains, for example, the way that spices and other exotics sourced from remote locations end up in distant marketplaces. Or, in a similar vein, we could explain how precious items like porcelain from China end up in royal palaces in the Middle East or Europe or even in tribal settings where they are venerated as semisacred items. Or we could investigate the global arbitrage trade in silver that was closely examined by Adam Smith.

The craft of world or global history writing today also calls up some sense of the cyclical (not excluding East Asian dynastic cycles), along with the demographic, the environmental, and the economic, as with the forty-five- to fifty-five-year wave



pattern described by Nikolai Kondratiev. More so than ever before, findings from marine archaeology actually help to outline the sinews of the ancient maritime silk roads connecting the seas and oceans. In fact, all of these approaches are called into play to demonstrate global connections as well as intraregional correlations across time. While Rosetta Stones are not found every day, it is also true that major archaeological discoveries, including in marine archaeology, continue to revolutionize our understandings of ancient trade and commerce.

Practically by definition, world history is not national history, although it can be so subverted. Still, to lay my cards on the table, where these histories are autonomous or build upon privileged access to palace archives or arcane texts, national perspectives cannot be ignored. For better or worse, the lion's share of historical research is conducted or mediated under national auspices. Research visas are vetted, access may be limited, and patronage denied. As Sebastian Conrad (2017: 4), author of *What Is Global History?*, explains, with its assault on national history, global history has a polemical bent insofar as it "aims to effect a change in the organization and institutional order of knowledge." Nevertheless, authors of global histories do not seek to replace national histories with total histories or histories of the planet. Neither do they necessarily write macrohistory. Rather, and close to the approach adopted in this book, Conrad (12) continues, "It is often more a matter of writing a history of demarcated (i.e., 'non-global') spaces, but with an awareness of global connections and structural conditions."

The zeitgeist of the age is also telling as with new intellectual currents and interests. Fresh understandings, such as those emerging from environmental and even epidemiological studies, can be important in shaping historical writing. The global dissemination of ideas is another by-product of the scientific age, and world historians are also beneficiaries of the digital revolution. As Conrad (2017: 2), puts it, "Writing history in the twenty-first century is not what it used to be," inter alia suggesting that the way historians use this technology has affected their thinking, as with assimilating competing narratives and (hopefully) taking heed of a diversity of voices. Still, a feature of my approach is to combine pioneer investigations dating back to the efforts of the first Orientalist scholars with present-day ongoing research and drawing upon local as well as international expertise. But where the Orientalist generation trained in epigraphy tended to focus upon the monumental, today the application of modern technologies such as carbon dating, remote sensing, and aerial surveillance have vastly improved our understanding. As the editors of a collection touching upon historical links between China and Southeast Asia have remarked, the field is now so large and complex that a synthesis of ideas, approaches, and information seems desirable (Tagliacozzo and Chang 2011: 13). This is all the more so given that no single scholar can handle all the requisite languages, geographies, and events. To be sure, few historians master multiple working languages across cultures, and practically all stand on the shoulders of earlier generations of researchers.

World regional history analysis might thus be seen as spinning out of a convergence of intellectual interests and fashions. The name and impact of French Annales school historian Fernand Braudel (1975) merits particular attention, especially with his stress on geography (the Mediterranean) and the *longue durée*. Indian Ocean studies appears to have developed separately, with major contributions on “segments” or circuits from both local and nonlocal authors. With his concern for unequal exchange, core-periphery exploitation, and world markets, Immanuel Wallerstein’s (1974, 1979, 1984, 1989, 2004) world-system approach has been a compelling addition to the lexicon of post-Columbian history. As a globo-centric approach that places Asia outside of European incorporation until the nineteenth century, Wallerstein also calls up a literature of critical response. Especially for want of perspective, such an approach tends to underestimate premodern geohistorical formations. But a second generation of scholars of oceans and trade has also drawn upon Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis, notably sharing a concern for his core concepts.

In particular, one who has worked from inside a world-system perspective, and to whom I shall refer in subsequent discussions, is Janet Abu-Lughod (1989: 4), especially what she dubs the “Thirteenth-Century World System.” Observing a particularly high cultural level of efflorescence in the thirteenth century, such as was achieved from one end of the Indian Ocean circuits to the other, especially via the agency of Arab traders, she describes this period as an important prelude and corrective to a “modern” world system based on European hegemony. While the West would eventually forge ahead with the faltering of the Thirteenth-Century World System, up until that time, the Orient was far advanced. No matter the range of critical discussion on world-system theory, all parties to the debate are wedded to the view that the wellspring of historical change is to be found in global interactions (Lewis and Wigen 1997: 136–37; Vink 2007: 43–52).

## II. Imagined Geographies/Geographical Imaginaries

Just as maps sets and *imaginaria* date back to ancient Greece and Rome in the Western tradition, so it is not difficult to seek out in other civilizations and traditions mental maps and tropes, especially when it comes to rendering space. In particular, this applied to empires and it still holds. Although the measurement of global space goes back to ancient Babylonia through the Alexandrians, for most of the past two millennia the geography of lands and nations stood outside of cartesian space (or that of René Descartes’ usage). In some traditions, kingdoms positioned themselves as radiant centers or mandalas. In both Christendom and the Islamic world, overlords emerged as defenders of their faith. In yet other traditions, emperors purported to rule everything under heaven. Almost everywhere pomp and ceremony ruled. Frequently, control of labor and minds eclipsed notions of territory, and barbarian others and war captives were relegated to outcast status.

Since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), the notion of imagined histories and geographies has gathered intellectual force, as with Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined communities" or, from another tangent, a newfound concern for identity and even identity politics. In this light, geographies can be viewed as instruments of power serving to "other," exclude, alienate, or to suborn. As Said argued, in the discourse of European Orientalism, "Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant." For Said (1978: 56–58) it is Europe that "articulates" the Orient, with its roots in antiquity with the Greco-Persian Wars of 480 BCE resulting in Alexander the Great's push eastward to the Indus Valley. Mentally, this led to the creation of a new taxonomy and the subdivision of Asia into realms (regions actually) of those conquered and known versus those unknown and awaiting conquest, including the Near Orient and Far Orient. Old World and, after Columbus, New World distinctions (although at the time it was mistaken for part of the Old World) are not excluded from such mental apprehension as in "the mind's geography."

To be sure, Said's classic went on to spawn a major critical literature, with Said entering the fray with new editions and commentaries. For example, Kim M. Phillips (2014: 2–3; chap. 1) draws attention to a "distinctive European perspective on Asia during the era 1245–1510," at a time when attitudes were little touched by colonial mentalities. Contrary to Said's major concern with postmedieval attitudes, as Phillip's intervention reminds us, we should also be alert to era. Moreover, Said's preoccupation with the Middle East leads him to ignore the true Eastern Hemisphere. With China at its core, the Eastern Hemisphere as identified by Ptolemy was hardly known in "Western" classical antiquity aside from vague allusions to sources of silks and spices. Even when attested by Marco Polo under the Mongol Khanate, China was still vaguely rendered as Cathay (and still is in Russian and some other languages), with the true China (now under the Ming) only revealed and identified by the first-arriving Jesuit missionaries in the late sixteenth century. In other words, the classical world was also polycentric across the vast Eurasian landmass when we consider the rise and fall of civilizations. That which was not Asia on the Eurasian continent was loosely Europe, and that which was not Europe was Asia, although the Hellenic-Roman world of the eastern Mediterranean was part of both worlds and before it, Phoenicia. From Roman times, India was connected east and west via its Indian Ocean trading networks and with major Hindu-Buddhist outliers in the region we now know as mainland and maritime Southeast Asia. From 800 onward, Islamic caliphates and empires dominated swathes of Afro-Eurasia, Persia and Mughal India included. With even longer continuity the central kingdom of China remained the major civilizational influence in East Asia, bringing Japan, Vietnam, and Korea within its cultural orbit, standing as well at the core of a powerful tribute trading network reaching even the extremes of the Indian Ocean at its apogee under the early Ming emperors.

While conventional world histories typically elaborated upon the rise and fall of empires and, in the Saidian version, physical and political-ideological conquest, there was also flux and borrowing. Alongside the sinews of trade connecting East and West—such as testified to by the evidence produced by marine archaeological research—there were also significant transfers of ideas, philosophies, and religions. Elsewhere I termed this the “Eurasian exchange” (Gunn 2003). Many books and treatises have addressed these issues, but the focus of this study turns precisely upon the geographic. Geographies, whether Orientalist or not, tended to be compiled from data supplied by travelers, including sailors, traders, and missionaries. Marco Polo’s *Travels* is one such work. Ibn Battuta’s *Travels*, the work of an early fourteenth-century Morocco-born traveler, fed into an Islamic tradition. The early Ming voyages of Admiral Zheng He likewise produced a range of spinoffs, as in Chinese geographic writing on the Indian Ocean trade. Needless to say, such empirical works fed into cartographies, many culture-bound and many fanciful, comprising a range of imagined geographies. Successive chapters in this book likewise refer back to the mapping, charting, and arranging of space in civilizational context.

### III. Unpacking Area Studies and the Importance of Scale

As with cartography, we cannot imagine space without reference to scale: small scale with regard to world maps and globes, large scale as with city map and province-level maps, and perhaps, intermediate scale with respect to world regions. Map projection matters because projections can produce their own distortions. In a word, boundaries that encompass space are also constructs, although they are not physical as with mountains, rivers, and seas. And for regions without a core, riven by mountain ranges and inaccessible forests, divided by rivers and seas, albeit navigable—such as would fit what has been labeled Southeast Asia—then special caution is required. My point is that all imaginaries of place should be referenced against the perspective that scale offers. For example, a map depicting glass bead distribution across the Asia-Pacific may have little congruence with a map depicting an Indic world footprint or even musical gong distribution. Likewise, a map depicting the regional presence of megalithic culture may have little congruence with linguistic patterns. The same is true with respect to mapping ethnic boundaries. But even where there are congruities across mainland and maritime Southeast Asia as testified by the presence of material objects or shared traits, how can or should we essentialize this world?

Colonialism was certainly fertile in inventing empire or congruities of space and territories where none existed before: French Indochina was one; the Dutch East Indies was another; British India, which included Burma, Ceylon, and, by extension, Malaya, was another. For that matter, Qing China hardly resembled the ancient Chinese core between the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers. Japan too would aggrandize its own homeland before moving upon Korea, Taiwan, “Manchukuo,”

and China at large, not to mention its presumed wartime Co-prosperity Sphere taking in most of mainland and island “Southeast Asia” before being expelled. The Southeast Asia we know today—namely, the intermediate zone between India, the Bay of Bengal, and the western Pacific—was an invention of Allied war planners and, in the hands of Cold War warriors, an arena of contestation. With the outbreak of the Korean War, East and Northeast Asia had already been brought on board, with each defined by its own civilizational inheritance. India (South Asia) was *sui generis*, albeit complicated by partition. Notwithstanding the complex overlay of civilizations touching upon Southeast Asia, it too would fall into the Western (mostly US) academic realm of area studies with three of four languages matching core subregions given special attention. Over the decades that the Cold War raged a succession of regional organizations made their appearance. Even a nation was invented—namely, Malaysia coming into being in 1963, growing larger with the merger of two Borneo state, and then smaller with rejection on the part of Brunei and the eviction of Singapore in 1965. Then, out of the bloodbath that led to the creation of the Western-backed Indonesian New Order, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was born, adopting English as its elite-centered lingua franca. In 2002 under United Nations auspices, yet another territory gained or, rather, reclaimed its statehood. This was Timor-Leste, abandoned by Portuguese colonizers in 1975 in the face of an Indonesian military occupation that cost the lives of practically a third of the population.

The invention of region and even a region lacking a single core, as with a Rome or Mecca or the Middle Kingdom, or even a common language whether Latin, Arabic, or written Chinese thus calls up some inquiry, especially when it comes to the zone between India and China. Actually, scholars of Sanskrit—with many in the employ of colonial governments—and with some voices in India adding their agreement, did vest the region between India and China with coherence. In this argument, a Greater or “Farther India” paradigm placed India at the core of a “colonial” ensemble reaching to a Southeast Asian periphery from Java and—with Hindu Bali as living testimony—to the central mainland, as with Angkor and the Cham coast of Vietnam (as testified by the first-arriving Westerners). Excavations and research both confirmed the depth and reach of the Indic world and its Sanskrit imprint in the era of monument building (sixth to fourteenth century CE) even prior to the emergence and spread to Southeast Asia (eleventh to fourteenth century CE) of the Theravada Buddhist Pali canon from its Ceylon/Sri Lanka loci.

Nevertheless, postwar struggles against colonialism and the emergence of independent nation-states led to a variety of reactions. In some new nations, Western missionaries were shown the door, while in others, missionaries were welcomed in. Still others would look to neo-traditionalist ideologies, as with “Buddhist socialism” in Burma, Pancasila in Indonesia, “Malay, Islam, and Kingship” in Brunei Darussalam, or “patriotic education” in the People’s Republic of China, as ways of legitimizing authoritarian rule. In other situations, Marxists have torn down Christian churches

and Buddhist temples alike. Buddhists have squared off against Muslims and vice versa. Across regions, war and social strife have periodically arrested archaeological and other research and, lamentably, destroyed much monumental evidence. The two sixth-century monumental statues of Gautama Buddha carved into the side of a cliff in the Bamyān Valley in Afghanistan was lost at the hands of an Islamicist party, and even the famed Angkor complex became a shooting range in the Cambodian civil war of the 1970s.

On the sidelines as it were, academics (with natives largely supplanting Westerners as the century wore on) strove to make sense of the historical dynamics behind what is obviously a rich cultural legacy mixing indigenous and borrowed traditions. Reaction to the notion of foreign borrowing (Indianization, Westernization) entering standard historical discourses on Southeast Asia gave way to a vigorous advocacy for indigeneity or “autochthonous” development. For example, in *Siam Mapped*, historian Thongchai Winichakul (1994: 17) writes that “the geo-body of a nation is a man-made territorial definition.” More generally, he was contrasting traditional notions of Asian space to the “hegemony of modern geography” or the obsession of the first-arriving Europeans in Asia with the fixity of space and boundaries encoded in mapping. His concern was with Thailand, but we should at the same time be cognizant in this sense of not only the application of mathematics to land or geodetic survey but also the hydrographic when it comes to surveying ports, seas, and oceans.

As will be further discussed, out of this debate emerged a powerful trope around the processes of “localization” of civilizational transfers under which far greater agency and genius is attributed to natives in domesticating foreign imports. In the words of the Sanskrit scholar Andrea Acri (2017: 11), such scholarship “has contributed to shape the manner in which modern Southeast Asians perceive their identities in the context of a dialectic relationship between post-colonial nation-states and such a supra-national entity as ASEAN.” From this understanding, he argues, “it is essential to transcend arbitrary geo-political and disciplinary contingencies, and move towards a wider-ranging, and truly ‘borderless,’ connected history.”

#### **IV. Islamization**

Islamic world culture infiltrating the terrestrial and maritime silk roads would likewise impose its own sense of scale and spatiality across an ocean arc reaching from the Middle Eastern heartland to the coastal provinces of China (and matched as well by the land silk roads). For all Muslims, orientation to Mecca becomes an imperative, so Arabs and Persians were precocious in their invention of direction-finding devices. Islam also implied membership in an *ummah* or community irrespective of race, language, and polity. Under the rule of caliphs and with the Ottoman Caliphate, from its advent in 1517 only extinguished in 1924, Islamic loyalty often ran counter to the sway of temporal authority, especially but not exclusively under European

colonialism. In reality, outside of the heartland most Muslims existed over long periods as religious minorities or adapted eclectically, for example, the role played by Sufi brotherhoods. In other contexts, Hindu rajas-turned-sultans retained many of the trappings of pre-Islamic courts (and this we can see in the archipelago even today). Granted that such Islamic sultanates as with Aceh, Malacca, Johor, Brunei, Sulu, Patani, and Banten, along with courts on Java were territorial in their own rights, there is little evidence of direct connection between these and other Islamic polities even if they were brought into contact by long-distance trade conducted by Indians, Arabs, Persians, Ottomans, Chinese and even Ryukyans. While Islamic orthodoxy was attested in such sultanates as Aceh, the widespread adoption of orthopraxic Islam on the part of the faithful in modern-day Southeast Asia such as that fueled by Saudi Arabian *dakwa*, or missionary zeal, is a relatively recent development. A narrative of steady Islamic missionization also papers over or disguises the way that Islam adapted or indigenized with local societies, although reformist currents would indeed add impetus to conform to a single, usually Sunni, standard. The current trend toward intolerance in some quarters actually adds fuel to the argument that this part of the Dar al-Islam (world of Islam) was indeed shaped by outsiders, although Islam has no special term for this region as it does with, for example, the Maghreb or Arab far west as with Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

## V. Sinicization

As with Indianization and Islamicization, Sinicization is a blanket term with regard to processes of religio-cultural transfer. If we are looking for deep roots of a Sinic world transfer, then we may find it in such prehistoric examples as Hoabinhian culture first identified in northern Vietnam but more broadly attested in Yunnan and Guangxi as with bronze drum culture. We may also see the roots of such transfers in rice seedling or rice terracing adoptions in the Philippines, Java, and Bali. Or we may even see the origins in what some ethnographers have described as the “Austronesian dispersion,” or sea migrations of people out of China and dispersion through the archipelago and across oceans as discussed in Chapter 2 (Gunn 2011: 297–304). Turning to a historical period, the advent of the Han outlier state in the Red River valley was epochal in signaling a widespread implantation of Sinic culture in a Southeast Asian locale with China ruling northern Vietnam as an imperial province for nearly a millennium until 938. While Vietnamese kings would fight back against Chinese domination, Vietnam took on board everything from chopsticks to divination, from patriarchy to rule by mandarins selected by examination. We would have to move on to Song seafaring and the Mongol Yuan period for attestations of direct Chinese contact with Southeast Asia polities. The Malacca Straits area ruled over loosely by the Palembang Srivijaya Empire was one such contact zone.

But unlike India or even Islam, China was a political core from which the emperor ruled all under heaven, served by elite bureaucrats steeped in Confucian traditions and recruited through examination and so ensuring the dynastic continuity of a powerful state center. As carefully developed in this book, the “central kingdom” would also be linked with inner and outer polities via a ritualized tribute-envoy or trade system. Glossed as *tianxia*, or “everything under heaven,” the term even remains serviceable today as a non-Eurocentric contribution to international relations discourse. While Vietnam from the Han dynasty, Korea and Japan in an early period, along with the Ryukyu Kingdom did acculturate with China, taking on board many of the tenets of Confucianism and other defining elements, there was also powerful and creative interplay short of outright Sinicization. The outer circle of tributary states was hardly even touched by China outside the reciprocal visits of envoys or, during the Mongol Yuan interlude, as victims of punitive expeditions. More generally, it was only the Ming-Qing transition period that saw large numbers of especially Fujianese migrate to coastal zones from central and south Vietnam to Malaya, to Java, to the Philippines (later joined by Cantonese, Hainanese, Teochiu, and other dialect groups). Needless to say, such movements led to wide-scale cultural transfers, intermarriage, and religious symbiosis, with Thailand as a special example.

## VI. The Chapters

With “geographical imaginaries” as a trope, the ensemble of chapters seeks to read out from a multi- or even decentered approach to region-informed lessons on early modernity, the rise and fall of city states and port polities, state consolidation, cultural-civilizational exchange, maritime prowess and commercial acumen, and a great deal more. Allowing of course great variation with respect to the select number of sites and ports, and notwithstanding historical method itself, it is an approach that deliberately seeks to unsettle or even challenge many verities seemingly embedded in national historiographies and myths.

Under the rubric of “Writings,” Part I examines just how the genre of world regional history has emerged within the larger framing of world history, sensitive to both time and space as well. Chapter 1 examines historiographical trends relating to segments of the Indian Ocean and South China Sea trade, finding a rich albeit not always connected literature.

Standing back from Eurocentric framings, Part II, “Imaginaries,” brings to the fore, variously, Indian, Arabo-Persian, Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese European imaginaries across five sequential chapters, separately setting down the empirical background to the study with reference to interchange and cultural borrowing linking India, Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. Chapter 2 examines evidence relating to the transmission and reception of Indic civilizational influences in Southeast Asia. Chapter 3 reveals a new constellation of geographic imaginaries of Asia



outside of a Western or at least rigid Ptolemaic tradition—namely, those owing to Arabic-Persian-Islamic provenance. Chapter 4 focuses on the Chinese civilizational tradition and explains the China-centered tribute trade system and the world that trade made. Chapter 5 highlights the pivotal role of Japan in turning from Ming loyalist to haughty renegade under the long Pax Tokugawa. Chapter 6 is dedicated to a single hypothetical, although one that has drawn more heat than light: Who (aside from Aborigines) discovered Australia first, Portuguese, Dutch, or Asians (at least as viewed from the perspective of a Portuguese-Eurasian geographer writing in the early seventeenth century)?

Part III is concerned with evidence. Allowing that ancient as well as early modern port cities were connected by maritime trade, Chapter 7 offers a synchronic and diachronic analysis through a sampling of nine archaeological sites and a number of trade centers spanning the maritime silk roads. Allowing that recent advances in marine archaeology have practically revolutionized this field, Chapter 8 examines shipwreck and other archaeological data to adduce comparative lessons on a number of interrelated facets contributing to a general world regional history perspective.

Part IV, “Examples/Alternative Realms,” turns from broad-brush theoretical considerations to two case studies. Chapter 9 is devoted to the Ryukyu Kingdom or island chain off the central coast of China, revealing a veritable Oriental Venice linked by trade to practically every maritime port and polity in Southeast Asia until its abrupt eclipse triggered by the Portuguese conquest of the Malacca Sultanate in 1511. As discussed in Chapter 10, even allowing that Macau on the southern coast of China was a virtual New World creation, we can also see in this example a fundamental misconception on the part of the first-arriving Europeans as to local concepts of space and territorialization, especially as the age of imperialism closed in.

## An Indian Imaginary

Indic influences from the early years of the first millennium embraced until today by populations and polities from Tibet to Mongolia, from China to Korea and Japan, appears to be self-evident in the light of religious and philosophical borrowings of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Tantrism. This also holds for the interzone between India and China or, roughly, the lands and seas and archipelagos lying east of the Ganges as it was conceived by the ancient Greeks. In shorthand this is the area known today as Southeast Asia although, as alluded, that description is also problematic. It is also an area where popular beliefs as with localized versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata remain and where royal traditions where they have not been abandoned are matched with impressive monumental evidence from Prambanan and Borobudur in central Java to Angkor in Cambodia.

From a scholarly perspective, research conducted by outside researchers working under the patronage of, variously, the Dutch, British, and French colonial establishments—some of them Sanskritists—revolutionized understandings with respect to a range of ancient kingdoms, Funan, Champa, Angkor, and the Java-Sumatra-based Sailendra and Srivijaya Kingdoms included. Today such research is truly localized and each of the concerned states hosts its separate national archaeological research institutes. At the same time, they are no less engaged in heritage protection, museuming, and civic education, sometimes harnessed to national goals (see Braginskii 2002: 1–48 on British scholarship). As suggested in the Introduction, outsiders also bequeathed their interpretations of the Indic transfer to the interzone. These interpretations would turn on one dubbed the Farther India school (see Bayly 2004). This was not only an evocation announced by European Orientalists but one to which Indian scholars contributed and which, in its extreme version, posited an Indian colonization. On the contrary, an autonomous perspective acknowledges the priestly Brahmanic transfer but confers equal or greater weight upon native genius and creativity in its grafting with and adaptation to local traditions. Nevertheless, advances in carbon dating and other techniques along with concerted new fieldwork across multiple sites in both the mainland and maritime components of the interzone have pushed back the origins of the Indic transfer to even earlier epochs (see Simanjuntak et al. 2006).

The end of the Indochina wars also gave a fillip to such research in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, though the wars had inflicted major damage to a number of archaeological sites. Alongside locals in revived institutional settings, the new peace also brought back to mainland Southeast Asia a number of Western scholars. The new age also saw the application of a range of newer scientific techniques such as advanced radar remote-sensing mapping of greater Angkor, drone images of possible spatial patterning on the Plain of Jars in Laos with respect to prehistoric megaliths, among many other examples. To strike another postbellum example from the archipelago, East Timor today has yielded revolutionizing insights into settlement and migration patterns such as those drawn from prehistoric cave sites (Lape, O'Connor, and Burningham 2007).

Mindful of a scholarly trend gaining ground in the 1980s to essentialize a coherent “Southeast Asian” identity, we are concerned in this chapter to test such assumptions against the evidence provided by newer waves of research and reconsideration of bounded areas (and area studies) now stimulated by renewed interest in civilizational and other macro-exchanges. We should also be careful to note in discussions on Indianization that the elitism and relative exclusivity of the courtly world, with its cast of Brahmans and ritual practitioners along with inner circles of devotees, possibly little touched surrounding village life, at least on the mainland, until the reception of Theravada Buddhism and the creation of monastic communities. As in the mountain areas of northern Thailand, Laos, and Burma, including Yunnan in China, and so indeed across the archipelago as in Java and Bali today, the spirit world permeated belief and still does outside of official prescriptions (Indonesia under military and postmilitary rule; Laos, Vietnam, and China under homogeneous state-building projects; the Philippines and Timor-Leste under Catholic Church strictures; and Malaysia, Brunei, and Aceh under Islamic orthodoxy). First, this chapter offers a summary of Indian civilizational influences as they touched the Southeast Asia area. A second section examines deeper patterns from prehistory. A third section links the civilizational transfer with Indian trade activities, while a final section surveys the archaeological record as it pertains to Southeast Asia. This chapter also seeks to read out lessons from significant advances in prehistorical research since the 1980s and to contribute to the “identity” debate.

## **I. Indian Civilizational Influences in the India-China Interzone**

From the beginning of the first millennium, the major external civilizational influences reaching the India-China interzone were from India, the major exception being northern Vietnam, a virtual Chinese outlier from the early Han era (206 BCE–220 CE) and firmly within the Chinese orbit from around the eleventh century CE. Indeed, modern travelers to Java or Thailand today cannot but be struck by the frequency of Indian place-names, derived respectively from Pali and Sanskrit, bearing such suffixes as *pura* for “town” or *nagara* (sometimes *negara*)

connoting “state” (Raman 2006). Some of them are contrived, some have long ancestry. Bangkok has named its airport after Suvannabhūmi, loosely “golden land,” a toponym that appears in many ancient Indian literary sources and Buddhist texts but its actual location in southern India or on the Malay Peninsula is so contested that the matter has never been settled. Even Java has a Sukabumi, but this name was coined during the short British interregnum in the Dutch East Indies (1811–1815).

As alluded to in Chapter 1, just as colonial scholarship invented a Farther India paradigm to explain the process of Indianization in the broad region across the Bay of Bengal from the Indian heartland, the pendulum would subsequently swing in favor of an autonomous Southeast Asian narrative emerging from various scholars and schools. More recently, however, Pollock (1996: 123) has explained how an entire “Sanskrit cosmopolis” took root in nation-states now known as Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia, not to mention India, just as inscriptions in Sanskrit began to appear in this broad area from around the fourth century CE, enduring for one thousand years. To be sure, Sanskrit was not a lingua franca in this world. Rather, vernacular idioms played that role. If that is so, what purpose did Sanskrit serve? As Pollock answered, it served as a kind of aesthetic of power or code for literary and political expression. Of the concrete reality of the “Sanskrit cosmopolis,” he writes:

For a millennium, and across half the world, élites participated in a peculiar supralocal ecumene. This was a form of shared life very different from that produced by common subjecthood or fealty to a central power, even by shared religious liturgy or credo. It was instead a symbolic network created in the first instance by the presence of a similar kind of discourse in a similar language deploying a similar idiom and style to make similar kind of claims about the nature and aesthetics of polity—about kingly virtue and learning; the *dharma* of rule; and universality of dominion. A network, accordingly, wherein the élite shared a “broadly based commonality of outlook” and could perceive “ubiquitous signs of its beliefs.” (229–30)

In part, the following pages elaborate upon the Sanskrit footprint at least where it helps us to understand the way the broader region—the vast interzone between Indian and China—was part of a community of shared traditions and religious values, albeit one without a center beyond symbolic versions of the metaphysical Mount Meru standing at the center of the universe, as with those of the Sailendra kingdoms of central Java from about 750 to 850. This is also an approach adopted by Andrea Acri in a number of studies with respect to Nusantara, or the island world (Acri 2016; 2017; 2018).

### *The Kingdoms*

Of the many Indianized kingdoms found in Indochina, the pre-Angkorian kingdom of Funan was probably the most ancient, with its origins in the first century CE. With

its focus in the Mekong Delta zone around the ancient port city of Oc Eo, Funan undoubtedly served as a gateway for the long-distance trade from India to China, including both goods and pilgrims. Attested in Chinese chronicles, Funan was superseded in the seventh century CE by Chenla (a collective term). Also from the beginning of the first century CE, the Nha Trang area in southern coastal Vietnam was penetrated by Indian civilization (Briggs 1951: 12, 20). Another example was Dravavati, a kingdom and a culture identified with the Mons, flourishing in the sixth to ninth century CE, particularly associated with the site of Nakhon Pathom and the walled citadel of U Thong in what is today central Thailand. Archaeological investigation confirms the importance of Theravada Buddhism in this culture (Southworth 2004: 442–43).

Although brought within the orbit of China with the conquest of the Red River Delta in 221 BCE, we also include the Đại Việt among numerous precursor kingdoms and myriad smaller polities, especially among the Tai-Lao prior to their consolidation into larger political entities as the result of conquests or alliances. Yet another political constellation was the six or more polities that emerged in the Dali region of southwest Yunnan, including Nanzhao (737–937 CE) and Dali (937–1353 CE). The Theravada Buddhist Kingdom of Nanzhao imposed its own tributary overlordship over adjacent polities in present-day Burma, just as it benefited from the patronage of Tang China (618–917 CE) until it rebelled in 750 (Backus 1981).

We can appreciate that during the first centuries of the second millennium CE, the political map of the region known to Ptolemy as *India extra Ganges* began to change with the emergence of supraregional powers dominating large areas. This began in Cambodia with Angkorian civilization in the ninth century CE, perfected in Thailand under Ayutthaya from the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, with Pagan in Burma ruling over the western mainland zone. By the thirteenth century CE, Java was also part of this suprapolitical community with Majapahit, the last kingdom and empire of the Hindu-Buddhist period of the island world. But Angkor (a gloss upon *nagara*) was most successful in transforming autonomous centers into provinces and in building up a central bureaucracy (see Kulke 1986: 7–8, 17).

Typically, as Lombard (1997) cautions, agrarian-based kingdoms like their maritime counterparts were also woven into complex trading networks. As today, certain trade routes were by land, such as those connecting the Burmese and Tai-Lao Kingdoms with, respectively, Yunnan and Vietnam. Nevertheless, other networks were aggressively maritime, such as the trade plied by the Trịnh and Nguyễn kings of Vietnam. As discussed below, this also applied to Austronesian-speaking Cham predecessors and rivals, active even in the long-distance Arab trade with China.

All, to degrees, were hydraulic-based kingdoms of which Angkor astride the Tonle Sap, or Great Lake, and seasonally flooded by the Mekong River was paradigmatic. As revealed on a section of relief displayed on Angkor Thom from the ninth century CE, Khmer and Cham warriors also engaged in naval battles using galley-like vessels with massed rowers. But unlike the maritime world, where sea raiding

## Geographic Imaginaries of an Austral Land

With the northern coastline of the continent of Australia lying but 450 kilometers south of Timor across the Timor Sea, itself host to a number of shoals, the question has been raised in many circles as to pre-European contact with the “Great South Land” or Terra Australis Incognita. Setting aside an Australian aboriginal priority dating back to possible migrations between 65,000 and 40,000 years ago during the last Ice Age when the seas were narrower, or even direct contact between Timor and Bathurst Island lying north of the modern Australian city of Darwin as with a shared Totem culture, or early visits by “Indonesian” fishermen blown off course, as discussed below, assertions of a Chinese “discovery” of Australia have also entered Chinese and European language writing.

Practically unique in the history of world expansion down until the eighteenth—even early nineteenth century—the continent of Australia remained a geographical imaginary, more easily mapped on paper than actually attested through discovery. Certainly that description applied to the Malacca- and sometime Goa-based “cosmographer” Manuel Godinho de Erédia and to a French school of cartography. We have no specific evidence, but it undoubtedly applied to Chinese seafarers reaching Timor and the Timor Sea zone. In sum, this chapter raises the possibility of an Asian discovery of the Great South Land. It tests this against the case of China and, in more detail, against the experience of Sulawesi-based Macassan seafarers. Additionally, it gives credence to prior Portuguese discovery narratives as with those entering the cartographic imaginings of Erédia, placing him ahead of pioneering Portuguese and Dutch voyages plying midlatitude routes eastward across the Indian Ocean. A first section assays European discovery narratives. A second section discusses a body of work produced by Erédia around an Australia discovery. A third section examines real-world Portuguese-Dutch navigations. A fourth section examines contacts made with northern Australia by seasonal Macassan fisherman, while a final section puts to rest the notion of a proven Chinese discovery of Australia while conceding that it remains an imaginary at the same time.

## I. European Discovery Narratives

Standard narratives of the European discovery of Australia divide among those who assign priority to the westward-sailing Spanish expedition of Pedro Fernandes de Queirós and the voyage of Luís Vaz de Torres, who, in 1605, navigated the strait bearing his name; or, more definitively to the eastward-sailing voyage of the VOC vessel *Duifken*, captained by Willem Janszoon, who made landfall on the western part of the Cape York Peninsula in 1606, also mapping the coastline. The notion that it was the Portuguese who, first among Europeans, touched the coast of Australia received a major fillip in the late nineteenth century, with defenders down into the present.

Proponents of this view have looked to interpretations of European maps, for example, the sixteenth-century Dieppe world map rendition of *Jave-La-Grande*, said to be partly based on secret Portuguese information. Alternatively, they have sought confirmation in the discovery of exotic woods, coins, and objects in various locations in Australia and have examined archival materials (McIntyre 1977; Fitzgerald 1984; Michael Pearson 2005b). A recent artifact discovery is that of an antique cannon, “the Dundee swivel gun,” found in 2010 southwest of Darwin, the administrative capital of Australia’s Northern Territory. Scientifically tested, it is confirmed to be made of metal sourced from the Coto Laizquez mine in Andalusia in Spain. Even so, if the original gunmetal had been melted down and recast, as was local practice in maritime Southeast Asia, then the cannon could still be plausibly of Macassan provenance (anon. 2013).

Again, we may ask, having sailed to the end of the known world, why did the Portuguese stop at Timor? To answer this question, I am tempted to replay a version of the argument that applies to the Chinese case. That is, following the Arab navigators almost everywhere once they entered the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese retraced the known lines of trade, usually with an Arab or Malay pilot on board. No doubt, if Arab trade routes had reached Australia lured by a known trade commodity, then the Portuguese were bound to follow. In fact, Portuguese ships arriving in Timor from Goa or Macau were highly irregular, and frequently they arrived in poor condition after a long and difficult navigation through the straits. Invariably bringing or relieving governors and reinforcing beleaguered garrisons, the Timor voyages were simply not equipped or provisioned, much less sanctioned, for further hazardous explorations.

### *The Dieppe School and La Terre Australe*

Dieppe mapmakers gave special attention to a large landmass entitled “*Jave-la-Grande*,” located between the Indonesian Archipelago and Antarctica. Figuring in all the Norman mappemondes of the sixteenth century, albeit labeled “land not discovered,” *la Terre Australe* should not be conflated with Dieppe school renditions

of Java la Grande. This is not an island but a vast continent-like region to the south of the Indonesian Archipelago, recalling Ptolemaic renditions of an encompassing southern landmass. Binot Paulmier, sieur de Gonville, French navigator of the early sixteenth century, was also part of the myth-making about the great southern land. In 1505 he returned to France claiming to have discovered the “great Austral land,” which he also called the “Indies Meridionale.” Although disproved (as he actually sailed westward to Brazil), his ideas would also be revived through the centuries, at least fanning further French expeditions to the Pacific.

Information derived from the French expedition to Sumatra by the Parmentier brothers in 1529 also fed into Dieppe maps, as with the work of Jean Rotz, *Indes Orientales* (1542). Notably, to the south of Petit Java, he indicates a continent, “the lande of Java,” or Jave-la-Grande. As alluded to, the Rotz map with its depiction of an Australia-like continent south of Java has generated more heat than light in discussions of the European “discovery” of Australia. Such holds as well for the anonymously produced atlas of Nicolas Vallard (1547), also highly derivative of Portuguese cartography. As revealed by a facsimile of a chart from Vallard’s manuscript sea atlas (1547) showing Jave-La-Grande’s (Australia’s) east coast, the image fails to meet a minimum culture test, as with the faux depictions of an Asian prince on horseback sheltered by a yellow umbrella.<sup>1</sup>

Maps 30–41 of Guillaume Le Testu’s *Cosmographie Universelle* (1556) are also dedicated to la Terre Australe. This is represented as an enormous continent surrounded by an Antarctic sea, “like a spherical dome with uneven edges.” As Albert Anthiaume (1916: 103) commented, there are scarcely any other Norman mappemonde of the sixteenth century that dedicate such attention to this zone. As Le Testu added in a marginal note:

Certain Portuguese going to the Indies were, by adverse weather conditions, carried far south of the Cape of Good Hope. Certain reported some knowledge of this land. Nevertheless, it not having been otherwise discovered, I have merely noted it here, not willing to add credence to it. (Le Testu 2014a, cited in Gunn 2016: 141)

In another note, Le Testu added references to Jave la Grande (Java Major) and la Petite Jave (Java Minor), described as part of an unknown Terra Australis, or Southland, situated under the frigid zone. As he added, some were of the opinion that the lands of the Strait of Magellan and Java Major were joined together, yet he could not verify it (Le Testu 2014b).

In this age of European exploration, Le Testu’s rendition of *India intra Ganges* “*Asie. Mer de L’Inde Orientale de Ceylon et Sumatra*” from *Cosmographie Universelle* (Fol. 28v) is an improvement upon Ptolemy in allowing for a sea route to India. But still, an elongated Malay Peninsula takes classic form albeit conflated with the

1. Outside of the present discussion, the Vallard map has been the object of much discussion in connection with the “discovery” of Australia since the late nineteenth century. See Australasian Hydrographic Society (AHS) website 2014.



insular Java features. In Folio 32v and 36v, *Terres Australes. Grande et Petite Java, au sud des Moluccas*, the Moluccas are indicated but the *Terres Australes* appear wildly fictitious, with images of leopard-like animals, Middle Eastern kings, and an archer.<sup>2</sup> Rather than confirming a precocious Portuguese discovery of Australia, Le Testu's version adds weight to the fictitious imagining of the unknown continent.

## II. Manuel Godinho de Erédia's Australia

While an accidental Portuguese arrival on the coast of Australia cannot be denied and, indeed, has been the subject of much speculation, we nevertheless comb the evidence for a planned reconnaissance, say lured by the prospect of gold. Even setting aside the question of secrecy, the best evidence of Portuguese knowledge of Australia comes from the pen of geographer, or self-styled cosmographer, Manuel Godinho de Erédia, active in the last decade of the sixteenth century and the early decades of the seventeenth. Author of the manuscript "Declaração de Malaca e India meridional com o Cathay" (Goa, 1613) dedicated to King Phillip of Spain and with Portugal then under the Iberian Union, Erédia announced himself the "discoverer" of an Austral land, thus becoming the powerful progenitor of an Austral imaginary. Erédia remains a controversial figure practically until today, especially in bequeathing a series of text and map riddles for future generations to interpret. Born of a Portuguese father and a Buginese mother and Jesuit trained from an early age in Goa, Erédia was also a beneficiary of Asian maritime lore acquired from his twenty or so years' sojourn in Malacca.

With his major writings and maps remaining in manuscript, Erédia was practically forgotten until modern times. The reasons for this are various. But the recovery of his magnum opus "Declaração de Malaca" reached a new stage in the early seventeenth century when it fell into the hands of Jesuit researchers involved in a project on behalf of the Société des Bollandistes to write a history of the saints, the *Acta Sanctorum*. However, following the suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773, the manuscript was transferred to the Bibliothèque royale de Belgique. Languishing there under the obscure catalog entry F. Faveri MS.7264, it was rediscovered in 1871 and, with the encouragement of Portuguese diplomats, was published with French translation and commentary in 1882 by Léon Janssen under the title *Malaca, l'Inde méridionale et le Cathay: manuscrit original autographe de Godinho de Eredia*.<sup>3</sup> Janssen's publication, it turns, is invaluable insofar as it renders Erédia's handwritten document into modern Portuguese as well producing a translation into French. Along with his own introduction to the work, it was prefaced by Ch. Ruelens, conservator of the Royal Library of Belgium. In 1930, J. V. G. Mills produced an English translation of the Janssen volume, improving on the former in some regards but also

2. For a reproduction of the map, see Gunn 2016b: 140.

3. Nevertheless, Erédia's *Informação da áurea Chersoneso, ou Península, e das ilhas Auríferas, etc.* was published by António Laurencô Caminha, *Ordenações da Índia do Senhor Rei D. Manuel* (Lisbon, 1807).

## The Evidence from Marine Archaeology

In the previous chapter, we announced the importance of an interconnected series of port cities spanning the Indian Ocean trading network from Rome to the China coast, matched where possible with context offered by terrestrial archaeological research. By contrast this chapter shifts the focus to shipwreck and other marine archaeological data with a view to deriving comparative lessons on a number of interrelated facets in line with a general world regional history perspective. As cognate research reveals, by allowing for a *longue durée* analysis, such a macro-approach can offer informed lessons on early modernity, proto-industrialization, state consolidation, cultural-civilizational exchange, and maritime prowess (see Kimura 2015: 3).

Arguably, as this chapter presents, some of the most exciting research in the field of the historical East-West trade stems from advances in marine archaeological research, major discoveries, and new interpretations. In a large sense such research has revolutionized our understandings of the historical ceramic trade, marine technology of the ship types, the organization behind the trade, the cargoes, and multiple other details. Private investigators and national governments have all become stakeholders in these ventures. Needless to say, mounting such expeditions is fraught with risk, whether financial or legal, just as the stakes are often high for those who venture the capital as well as for the claimants of the sunken prize, both individual as well as national (Ruppé and Barstad 2002).

One point that should be made is that, relative to terrestrial archaeology of which there are many examples, because of costs and risks the number of marine archaeological sites globally is far more restricted, only a handful in the Eastern Hemisphere. Though it has ancient antecedents, marine archaeology really took off only in the 1950s, with the advent of scuba-diving equipment, and the number of known wrecks in the Mediterranean world has quadrupled since the 1970s (Göransson 2007: 208). Even so, as Lilian Ray Martin (2001: 59) writes in her study of Venetian ship archaeology, the number of medieval ship remains in the Mediterranean are “scant,” with the earliest Venetian ship construction treatises only dating from the fifteenth century. To make up for this lacunae in knowledge, she adopts the method of sifting through the pictorial imagery of which Venice is

rich to better understand the city's layered maritime traditions. It is also a method with application to Indian Ocean and China Sea navigation.

In particular, the new interest in marine archaeology/underwater heritage has been signaled by the appearance of such dedicated journals as the *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* and the *INA Quarterly* of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology with a focus upon the Red Sea. As Hyunhee Park (2012: 15–16) writes in her sweeping investigation of Sino-Islamic historical relations, “The archaeological evidence, therefore, helps us understand the conditions of contact that could have facilitated the transfer of knowledge between the two societies at a given period of time.” Still, very few synoptic works on the state of the art of marine archaeology in Asian waters have been attempted. In this sense the works by Seland (2010; 2014) on the archaeology of trade in the Western Indian Ocean, appear to be exceptional.

In recent times, at least two researchers or research groups have sought to compile data sets on East-Southeast Asian shipwreck sites: Kimura Jun (2010), identifying fifteen wreck sites in the China maritime area; and the late Roxana M. Brown (2010), identifying a somewhat larger number in Southeast Asian seas (and all of them dating from what might be called a late medieval epoch). Still, another caveat holds, namely conducive political conditions that would allow archaeological research of any kind have proven elusive across large parts of the Middle East and Southeast and East Asia over certain time frames. However, given that marine archaeology can be harnessed to national as much private interest, as with the recovery of “treasure,” a new impetus to such investigation can be seen across this vast region, where it serves scientific and historiographical ends.

As indicated, the number of maritime archaeological sites globally as well as regionally (East-Southeast Asia) are far fewer than terrestrial sites. But these sites, mostly pertaining to trading vessels (although we have one example of a war fleet), are likely to prove to be time capsules of trade activity and connectivity between port polities, although subject to much research and hypothesizing as well. Restricting our focus to East-Southeast Asia and again using ceramics as a proxy of trade activity, we also learn that a variety of port polities can be identified, along with a variety of merchant groups and shippers, revealing the internationality of medieval trade. First, the chapter elaborates upon the concept of ceramic trade as a proxy for overall trade, as corroborated by terrestrial archaeological discovery. In a second section, the chapter surveys a select number of marine archaeology sites from across the Indian Ocean realm. Third, it examines early modern trade polities in East-Southeast Asia with reference to evidence supplied by European shipwrecks. Aside from Chinese wrecks, this chapter also canvasses examples of “Austronesian” and Arab dhow-type ships, suggesting the regionality of the trade, even prior to the major entry of Mongol Yuan-era shipping into the Nanyang or South Seas trade.

## I. Ceramic Trade as a Proxy for Early Trade Activity and the Rise and Fall of Port Cities

With its roots in antiquity, Chinese ceramics entered the ancient sea silk roads as traded items. As Abu-Lughod (1989: 327) has pointed out, shards of Chinese ceramics are to be found strewn along the coastal zones of the Indian Ocean. The same could be said of Southeast Asian waters along with many terrestrial sites. But the first long-distance traded ceramics arriving in Southeast Asia were undoubtedly produced in south India, entering the Indian transfer of the first to fifth centuries CE. The tradition was also carried forward by Muslim traders reaching the coast of China, and, after Abu-Lughod, we hailed this event as helping to define the Thirteenth-Century Indian Ocean World System. To be sure, as developed below, China was not the exclusive producer and exporter of ceramics and earthenware. Vietnamese, Thai, Burmese, and Japanese kilns all entered the trade, with each finding its respective market niche and all entering the shipwreck and archaeological record. Important for our study, as Grave, Macceroni, and Lisle (2005: 165) explain, the analysis of specialized ceramic production sites can be a highly sensitive “proxy of political, social as well as economic change.”

The maritime trade in the western Indian Ocean and even the Southeast Asian area continued to be dominated by foreign (Arab, Persian, and Southeast Asian) shipping, at least up until the eighth century CE, when the first large oceangoing Chinese vessels began to appear (although Chinese vessels were by no means dominant until centuries later). With more consequence, the Mongol-Yuan (1271–1368 CE) dynasty initiated the construction of large naval vessels explicitly to enter Southeast Asian waters, a reference to the invasion fleets sent to Japan in 1274 and 1281, Đại Việt and Champa in 1283–1288, and Java in 1292. However, it would only be the early Ming-era expansion of maritime trade as signaled by the Zheng He’s voyages (1405–1424; 1433 CE) that virtually all of the port cities across the two oceans would be linked under Chinese as opposed to Arab auspices. After Needham (1971: 593), this we dubbed the “Chinese century” pending the great Ming withdrawal from the Indian Ocean.

### *East Asian Ceramic Production Sites and the “Ming Gap” Theory Revisited*

In the previous chapter, we alluded to ceramic production in the Chinese and Middle Eastern cores. But with the decline of the Abbasid Empire and withdrawal from the Indian Ocean trade, the center of gravity with respect to ceramic production and associated trade shifted back to East Asia. As attested by early arriving Westerners in China, Jingdezhen in China’s present-day Jiangxi Province, accessible to both resources and the Grand Canal, stood as the world’s largest porcelain production site from 1350 to 1750, alongside such other kilns then active at Dehua (Fujian), Cizhao (Hebei), Yi (Fujian), and Longquan (Zhejiang). The production

process in China, as well as the marketing and transport of the prized goods across local, regional, and long-distance markets, engaged tens of thousands of workers at numerous large-scale production sites. It also called down a high degree of proto-industrial activity and organization, although falling short of a capitalist revolution. Alongside a range of sites in China, including coastal Fujian, such other East-Southeast Asian production centers as Champa, Đại Việt, Thailand, Burma, and Hizen-Arita in Kyushu, would follow suit finding regional and long-distance markets, according to their niches (see Gunn 2011: chap 10).

Researchers such as Roxana M. Brown (2000; 2005; 2009; 2010) gave a major impetus to interpreting the often-conflicting evidence relating to a scaling back of early Ming trade. Notably, the Hongwu emperor (r. 1368–1398), the first in the Ming dynasty, declared private trade and overseas travel illegal, thus reversing the Song dynasty policy of open trade with major consequences for exports of much-esteemed Chinese porcelain. Internal strife touching Jengdezheng likewise impacted production and export.

According to Brown (2005: 78–79), the evidence from shipwrecks reveals a substantial shortage of Chinese ceramics in the early Ming dynasty. Notably, the plunge in Chinese exports emerges precisely after the last of Zheng He's voyages. This "Ming Gap," as it was earlier dubbed by Tom Harrisson (1958) from observations in Sarawak and Brunei, dates from 1380 to 1487. On the evidence of documented shipwrecks, China maintained a near monopoly in trade ceramics from at least the ninth to the early fourteenth centuries. But, c. 1368 to 1424–1430, the cargoes yielded only 30 to 40 percent Chinese ceramics, plunging to 5 percent in the mid-fifteenth century. A bubble appears again in the Hongzhi period (1488–1505 CE), but a moderate shortage remained until the Ming ban on overseas travel was lifted in 1527. Shortages in the sixteenth century were not as severe as those of the preceding century and not severe enough to lure Burmese and Vietnamese producers back into the market. But, between 1510 and 1580, Thai kilns were strong competitors of the Chinese until China regained its former monopoly.

In particular, the northern region of Vietnam emerged as a major ceramics production site as with the Red (Hong) River from Thăng Long (Hanoi) to Hải Dương Province, along with sites extending into the delta at Haiphong and reaching the historical island port of Vạn Đồn, north of Hạ Long Bay. It was here during the period of Chinese domination (111 BCE–938 CE) over the early Đại Việt that Chinese artisans set up. As evoked by trade ceramic specialist John Guy (2005:10), the major center of high-fired ceramics at Chu Đậu in Hải Dương Province was a veritable Vietnamese "Jingdezhen." Firmly under Ly (Li) (1009–1225 CE) state-backed enterprise, the Chu Đậu kilns were specially designed to compete with Chinese wares in the Southeast Asian market. In this maritime zone of intense activity, any number of ports could be identified as servicing the ceramic export trade.

As a maritime-oriented kingdom, Champa also mastered ceramic production and entered the export industry. As Guy (2005: 118) explains, the Cham kilns,

## Afterword

Returning to the trope of imagined geographies, we have offered multiple examples where both cartographic and chorographic representations reflect the world seen through the prism of civilizations. Many betray a loyalty to centers of empire or seek to honor their lords or patrons. Others have the presumption of superior technique or come in the guise of science. Still, others reflect aesthetic conventions. Maps matched by descriptive texts frequently evoke ownership or control, and some are suggestive of imperialist designs whether over water or land. We have to admit that in an age before imperialism and imperial geography, geographic space was a far more fluid concept in line with civilizational and religious verities. No one owned the borderlands—often badlands—and no one but pirates owned the seas. But in the age of imperialism, matched by the science of trigonometric measurement, geodesic survey, and the setting down of fixed coordinates and boundaries, geography appeared as its handmaiden.

Both ancient Rome and China knew measurement of distance just as the Arabs, and, in their wake, the Europeans knew navigation and their place on the globe. Europe also knew the classical or Ptolemaic world through recovered or reconstructed texts from the late medieval period. Such was the spell exerted by the Alexandrian that the classical template carried through practically into the early modern period (and even as a guide when it came to the disambiguation of the Australian continent from an encircling Great South Land) (see Gunn 2018b). The enigmatic figure of Manuel Godinho de Erédia is emblematic of the late Renaissance European mind-set in his fidelity to the classical imaginary of Asia even as he worked to fill in the blanks on the map and to create his own image-forming maps and texts.

Neither were Arab geographies immune to the spell cast by the Alexandrian, even if navigators knew the Indian Ocean route to China far better. Notably, while the al-Idrisi world map was not outside of Ptolemaic conceptions, it also improved upon the Greek tradition. As with the evocations of the Sinic world bequeathed by the merchant Sulaiman or the reference to Silla or Korea by Ibn Khordadbeh, so we realize that the Arabo-Persians demonstrated precocious geographical knowledge of this part of the world from at least the ninth century. Even so, while Arab

and Persian prowess in navigational skills, celestial observation, measurement, and mathematics was demonstrated, cartographic empowerment from within a mathematical tradition as evolved in Europe was another matter. Neither did Arab descriptive geography develop much beyond that bequeathed by the exceptional Ibn Battuta.

Just as Europeans and Arabs hewed to their civilization-bound imaginaries, so did China. From Song times, even obscure “ports” on distant Timor Island were logged, and the African coast also entered the Chinese lexicon. As a bureaucratic kingdom of long antiquity, China both mapped and recorded the ritual coming and going of foreign embassies and tribute missions. As we have seen, ranging back to Wang Dayuan’s Yuan-era *Dao Yi Zhilue*, itself building upon Song-era models, Chinese geographies amassed an amazing amount of critical data touching upon all the major polities spanning the Indian Ocean world system. However, as with the Arab and European itineraries of that era, they also propagated powerful imaginaries around the trope of the “barbarian” other. Chinese chronicles of history, such as the *Yuan Shilu* and *Ming Shilu* were not immune to this bias, especially given their seemingly unchanging Confucian worldview. Even so, we suspect that, as with the first Arabs, Persians, and Indians, followed by Europeans arriving in the China Seas, the Nanhai sailors overcame their wonderment—and sometimes dismay at repugnant practices—to log critical real-world navigational data and maritime lore necessary for future voyages. At least this seems to be the case with no-nonsense *Rekidai Hoan* documents compiled over an extensive period by the Ryukyu kingdom. It also appears to be evidenced by the drafters of the Selden Map.

## I. Alternative Realms

To be sure, the vast Eurasian space on which this book focuses can hardly be equated with the Middle Eastern world called up by Said. Rather, as discussed in Chapter 1, the act of reclaiming the centrality of an eastern world in the corpus of world history entails much rewriting, rethinking, and decentering. As this book has confirmed with respect to the maritime world, commercial exchange was not the only concern. Rather, new synergies were effected in the way of sometimes major cultural and civilizational transfers, as with the Sanskritic transfer to Southeast Asia and, with particular reference to the “Sinbad” routes leading east, Islamicization.

Neither can we discount degrees of Sinification bonding—although not necessarily binding—the Central Kingdom and the “Sinic” world of East and Northeast Asia, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and the Ryukyu Kingdom included. In this light the tribute-envoy system is not comprehensible without reference to the periodic voyaging of merchant envoys and return missions. In the hands of royal chroniclers, religious practitioners, sailors, and others, powerful imaginaries emerged across this arc long before the age of Western imperialism.

As our survey of maritime and terrestrial archaeological sites across the complete arc of the maritime silk and ceramic roads revealed, practically everywhere we find evidence of one or another of these civilizational transfers. Having taken cognizance of the circuits of trade linked by places of commerce, many of the port cities we have described were magnets for immigrant classes bringing money, skills, and labor. As administrative centers, such cities came to host sophisticated religious and governmental institutions. Their masons constructed defensive walls, palaces, temples, churches or mosques, and other distinguishing architectural features. Their marketplaces attracted silks and textiles and other value-added products entering the trade circuits, along with a range of natural products in demand (often generically termed “spices”). Their artisans built and repaired ships. Others specialized in metallurgy, including weaponry. Ruling classes drove demand for luxury items, and they paid in cash. With exchange at the heart of commercial operations, currencies circulated, whether in the form of cowrie shells, minted copper coins, gold, or silver. Merchant classes of many ethnicities often took the form of guilds offering credit to suppliers delivering the goods, and with profit in mind. Literate classes of scribes recorded the transactions. Schools and places of learning serviced the bureaucracies. Invariably subordinate to empires, as intimated, the port cities were also subject to the rise and fall of dynasties, environmental factors, epidemics, or warfare.

Where there was continuity in indigenous or folk tradition, there was change as well, especially in the political centers. Many but not all of the Hinduized charter states in both mainland and maritime Southeast Asia came to embrace Mahayana Buddhism from around the ninth century, with Theravada Buddhist influences expanding over the centuries. Islamic conversions of Hinduized polities touched Java from approximately the thirteenth century, and, with the singular exception of Hindu Bali, all the polities falling under the sway of Majapahit from Malacca to Brunei followed suit. As well noted, the Chinese dynasties made their weight felt as well not only on the frontier zones but across the seas. Thus civilizational and cultural contacts across this grand oceanic corridor were not only west-east or east-west, but north-south in the sense of a grand hybridization of indigenous and exogenous cultures or a fusion of the native and the imported.

Nothing better exemplified the linking of Asian states and polities into a coherent regional complex of producers and consumers than the ceramic trade networks. Unlike silk and textiles, ceramics are durable (and so, along with metal, are the most tangible artifacts recoverable from archaeological sites). The production and quality of earthenware including ceramics around the globe is often viewed as an index of civilization, just as the aesthetic and technical quality of Chinese ceramics over time and across a diversity of marketplaces was unequalled (allowing that the Abbasids not only imported Chinese ceramics but emulated and improved them, as with adding turquoise blue). As widely noted, ceramics in particular can serve as time capsules of long-lost or poorly recorded exchange networks, just as the expanding



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