

History Without Borders

The Making of an Asian World Region,
1000–1800

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Introduction

The global trends that have seen the dramatic rise of Asian economies suggest a turning of the wheel. Students of world history will recall that China, Japan, and India held a central place in the premodern world as producers and exporters of silks, ceramics, and cottons, while their populations and economies vastly dwarfed those of medieval Europe. The sprawling tropical zone of Southeast Asia, known as a prime source of spices and natural commodities, also boasted impressive civilizations. Visitors to the temple complexes of Angkor and Borobudur, in Cambodia and Java respectively, still find themselves awed. Still we are perplexed as to how this historical region, boasting internationally known trade emporia, dropped off the center stage of world history. Did colonialism and imperialism turn the tide against indigenous agency? Or was stagnation an inevitable feature of life? Indeed, is it even desirable to write an autonomous history of a broader East-Southeast Asian region?

We acknowledge that a discussion of maritime trade in the development of modern economies in Southeast Asia is still controversial, especially with respect to the mix of social, economic, and cultural influences. But we seek to go further by asking a series of interrelated questions, as to whether nascent capitalism ever developed in this region, or whether the region remained peripheral to the European (and Chinese) core? We also wonder about the timing and nature of change called up by the European intervention. We wish to identify local production centers, such as for metallurgy, porcelain, and textiles, just as we seek to investigate the exchange dynamics between indigenous and foreign merchant communities? Allowing for an “age of commerce” fired up by the European intervention, can we adduce a 17th-century crisis in the broader East-

Southeast Asian world region from which it would not recover until modern times? (Reid 1993).

As with my earlier book, *First Globalization: The Eurasian Exchange (1500–1800)* (2003), the present book seeks to capture the fluidity and ambiguity of boundaries, both physical and cultural, especially prior to the emergence of the modern nation-state system. Even so, and reflecting newer concerns with the writing of global history, the present book seeks to position this sprawling tropical zone situated between India and China as both a globally connected and temporally correlated “world region.” While *First Globalization* stresses an intrinsic cultural or intellectual dynamic whereby Europe, emerging out of the intellectual crucible of the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation, trumped Asia in achieving early industrialization and modernization, the present work seeks to push an argument favoring early Asian economic precocity across an interconnected macro-region: one that trade built, but also one that stumbled toward the end of the 1000–1800 time frame, in large part owing to extrinsic factors, notably the rise of the West.

The East Asian Regionalism School

In so doing I am guided by a revisionist bloc of writing that departs from conventionally Eurocentric history by allowing that, at its height in the 18th century, East Asia achieved high levels of peace, prosperity, and stability. In this view, China and its tributary trade system underwrote this prosperity just as it provided a geopolitical framework in which non-official trade across the vast East-Southeast Asian region could also flourish. While it might be objected that both the Qing in China and the Tokugawa in Japan imposed strict maritime restrictions on overseas trade, trade nevertheless continued on the margins. Notably, the Fujian connection linked coastal China with the Ryukyus, Japan, and Southeast Asia, just as Japan (and Korea) maintained a window on the world, at various points on or off the shores of Kyushu, notably in Nagasaki where, successively, Portuguese, Dutch, and Chinese conducted mostly uninterrupted trade (Selden 2009).

Since Adam Smith, the importance of the global silver trade has always been acknowledged. But, in the new East Asia regionalist paradigm, an understanding of the Asian silver flows that preceded even the European

capture of American silver comes to the heart of an understanding of the exchange mechanism. Across the 1000–1800 period highlighted in this book, great volumes of Japanese silver (and later copper), rivaling even exports from Spanish America, were exchanged for Chinese and Vietnamese silks, aromatic woods, and other tropical zone commodities, just as newly arriving Iberians and northern Europeans traded a range of mostly indigenous Asian commodities, including Indian cottons and later opium, to acquire the silver to purchase coveted Oriental silks, ceramics, and, at a later stage, tea.

Setting aside East Asian Confucian heritages in favor of an analysis stressing interdependencies and interactions between groups of contiguous countries, we find that East Asia emerges as a super region, with China as the center of an interstate system bringing into play, besides Southeast Asia, Inner Asia and Northeast Asia. The impetus behind the emergence of an “East Asia Regionalism School” has come not from China but rather from a group of international scholars, including Japanese researchers.¹

“A Hundred Frontiers, A Hundred Horizons”

But why the need for a supra-national history or yet another history of Southeast Asia, however defined? Notwithstanding the challenges thrown up by the burgeoning field of prehistory, and by the globalization of knowledge via various new media, national history still dominates the writing of East-Southeast Asian history. Reaching back to James Warren’s pioneering study of the “Sulu Zone” (1981), a newer genre of writings has sought to re-center national narratives to fit longer-term patterns prior to the rise of nation-states. Coming under the broader rubric of borderlands studies, even powerful Chinese narratives have been re-examined with particular respect to the expanding frontier. For example, Giersch (2006) places the Tai people at the center of his study of the expanding Qing frontier, finding that multiple players from states and

1 These individuals include Hamashita Takeshi (1998; 1989; 1994) and Sugihara Kaoru (2005), along with North America-based scholars R. Bin Wong (1997), Kenneth Pomerantz (2001), and Mark Selden (2003). The late André Gunder Frank (1998) and Giovanni Arrighi (2003; 2007) also take their place within the “school.”

ethnic groups contested Han encroachments but also entered into hybrid relations as Chinese acculturation deepened. As Cooke and Li (2005) write of the “water frontier” of southern Vietnam and the Gulf of Siam region, there was always much fluidity in the shifting frontiers between peoples and states.

As James C. Scott (2009) has highlighted, the non-state people of this world, notably highland-dwelling ethnic minorities, often exist in “anarchic” relationship to local power constellations. But, in deliberately demarcating their separateness, they also challenge the civilizational narratives of the lowland states. Such conflicting visions of statehood have persisted over long periods, just as rebellion or flight was long the recourse of the marginalized at the hands of predatory states. Even today, we cannot ignore the faultlines within nation-states that threaten to tear them apart. It is no coincidence that modern Southeast Asia is riven with secessionist and autonomist movements, as modern states seek to consolidate territorial boundaries at all costs.

To be sure, the modern conception of the nation-state is a far cry from that with which rulers of the Indianized court centers of Southeast Asia sought to control their realms. Whether or not the kings of Angkor and Borobudur placed premium upon the control of manpower, resources, or territory is part of an extended discussion by specialists in the field. The influence of postcolonial studies on more recent research has led to characterizations of mainland Southeast Asian realms that bypass strictly Western geographical conceptions. Notably, Thongchai Winichakul (1997) has postulated a discourse of the “geo-body” to explain Siam/Thailand’s experience — essentially, an enduring cosmological view of space at great variance with the Cartesian understandings emerging in early modern Europe. Archaeological discovery can of course be harnessed for national projects, but can also be unsettling to official verities (Glover 2004).

By seeking to “decenter” national narratives in the framing of a world region, this work also seeks to de-territorialize such fixities as frequently accompany national narratives of state and boundary. At a more general level, this book acknowledges that key concepts at issue in the framing and writing of a world region narrative are a sense of porosity, permeability, connectedness, flexibility, and openness of spatial and temporal boundaries and borders. The world confronted by early travelers

and navigators is well captured in the Braudelian metaphor, at least as embroidered by Bose (2006): “one hundred frontiers, one hundred horizons” (Vink 2007: 52).

Rooted in the Cold War, with its nation-building concerns, Southeast Asian area studies have been painted by Kratoska et al. (2005: 10) as standing in “stark” opposition to the rising fashion of globalization studies. The present work would not deny this view; indeed, it would argue that the globalization perspective actually helps to rescue this inchoate collection of cultures, peoples, and “nations” by assigning and/or elevating them to world region status. In other words, this book seeks to tap into a trend in globalization studies that re-appraises not only the construction of national history, but also the history of region. Although the pivotal role of Asia in the early modern world economy is the subject of a considerable body of literature, the following pages also seek to set the record straight, especially where this literature is deficient as to meeting the criteria of world region/world history analysis and, especially, where it falls into the trap of nationalist narrative or worse, in the eyes of world historians, Eurocentric or Orientalist error.

Writing a Decentered World Regional History?

A broad consensus holds that world history prioritizes connections at the macro- and micro-levels, even above the level of civilizations (Manning 2003). In this sense, even an African tribal community could be brought into the picture, through an elaboration of the mesh of connections that draws this community into an ever-expanding hierarchy of relationships (commercial or cultural) with the wider world.

As Lewis and Wigen (1997: 157) have argued, even drawing attention to a Southeast Asian world is problematical, as continents and regions alike are metageographical constructs, subject to intellectual fashion and manipulation. The way that regions are framed and reframed in Washington, for example, are also grasped by local elites and socialized as such. Notably, modern Southeast Asia as a rigidly delimited macroregion came into being as a product of the Cold War. Still, these authors argue, a sense of world region is preferable as a unit of analysis to that of continents and civilizations. In their definition, world regions are “large

sociospatial groupings delimited largely on the grounds of shared culture and history.”

World history perspectives have been applied to such global or world regions as the “Atlantic World” (Thornton 1992; Canizares-Esguerra and Seaman 2007); Africa (Manning 1982; Gilbert and Reynolds 2004); and the Indian Ocean region (Kearney 2004), as well as to oceans in general (Buschmann 2007). The broader East Asian region, however, has not been examined in this light. To be sure, a limited number of regional histories of Southeast Asia have been attempted, though on a country-by-country basis. The multi-authored *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History* (Steinberg ed. 1987) was innovative for its part-thematic, part-chronological approach. Also deservedly celebrated is the *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* (1992). Highly conscious of a sense of region and to the risks of imposing periodization, the Cambridge approach nevertheless steps back from a coherent historical “world region” perspective.

My own sense is that writing on the global past answers the imperative to correlate over time and space the meeting and mixing of civilizations. In so doing, we observe the fascinating chronicle of the reception and rejection of practical technologies and innovations that pushed some societies and polities further ahead, while relegating others to obscurity. Viewed this way, even prehistory can reveal underlying constants of language and culture. Across East-Southeast Asia, exciting new developments in linguistic theory and archaeology (including in marine archaeology) allow a picture to be assembled, albeit one subject to constant debate and revision, stressing an underlying unity, later to be fragmented under the sway of external civilizational influences.

On a didactic note, Euro- and Americentrism is the conviction that Europe and/or America are blessed (even divinely, in some versions) with a higher form of civilization. We can see how legions of conquistadores, missionaries, slavers, and colonialists were guided by such superior and patronizing attitudes. All the European powers upheld some version of the civilizing mission in their quest for colonial domination. Even so, such notions are not specific to Europe, but found — and find — their echoes in all the great civilizations reaching back to ancient Greece, Rome, and China. Euro-Asian encounters over the millennium called up a number of centric views on the part of different civilizations. As recalled by the Reconquista and the crusades, Islamocentrism posed the

gravest challenge to medieval Christendom, just as the crusades became a byword in the European othering of Islam. In their first encounters with China, Europeans incredulously faced down a self-sufficient empire that placed itself squarely at the center of the world. Today, a rising China (and India) challenge views and attitudes associated with America's own rise to superpower hegemony.

In other words, the new world history method privileges a “decentered” perspective on the world, insofar as that is possible, given the obvious bias toward non-indigenous sources. Such a perspective allows us to transcend essentializing views of civilizations, by teasing out the crossover elements in peoples and cultures. Constructionism and post-modernist critiques allow us to see in cultural diffusions and borrowings a rich array of hybrid experiences and forms. World history also draws out the processes of interaction, migration, and conversion typically veiled in conventional history-writing. In contrast to national narratives, the new history actually celebrates the crossing of boundaries, not only between nations and peoples, but also across the social science disciplines. Only through a close study of such interactions can we attempt to construct our own notions of self and “other.” If that self is Europe or North America, then such understanding allows us to become that much less Euro- or Americentric. The same holds true for Sino- or Islamocentric or other essentializing views of self and “other.”

We may well ask what separates world-centric history from the great travel collections, from that of the Venetian Ramusio in the late 16th century to those by Hakluyt, Purchas, the great French compilers, and the encyclopedists of the Enlightenment (see Gunn 2003, ch. 1). Subrahmanyam (2005), for instance, finds that world historians of the 16th century were “handmaidens” of the European expansion. First, there is a consensus that the new world history is not national history, even if it can be harnessed to a national project or educational curriculum. Another difference is Immanuel Wallerstein's advocacy of the method of historical sociology applied over the *longue durée*. In this respect, connected histories of events have a long pedigree; we may recall Voltaire's pioneering global history, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756), critically pronouncing upon the general crisis of 17th-century Europe, but also remarking upon parallel uprisings in Europe, India, China, and Japan.

The new world history does not stand outside of Western academic and publishing conventions. It seldom acknowledges local historiographies and operates at the level of meta-narrative, oblivious of local languages and national scholarship. Closing the gap is easier said than done. I am aware that indigenous sources are almost always superior to European ones, especially in declaiming upon dynastic affairs and philosophies, where they survive. But the truth is that European sources often supply the only extant records of commercial transactions and of daily life across the centuries.

Oriental Globalization Explained

“Globalization” has a number of resonances. It is commonly linked with the rise of modern capitalism or Western modernity (Giddens 2000), but its origins are traced back to antiquity, with the flow of peoples, trade, and ideas across the Afro-Eurasian landmass. Such studies invariably emphasize civilizational exchanges, including the complex crossover of ideas, languages, and philosophies. Globalization, in this view, emerges out of the increasing interconnectedness of cultures across the continents, sometimes described as a “human web” (McNeil and McNeil 2003).

The hybridization of cultures is much remarked upon, especially with the advent of the Columbian, Vasco da Gama, and Magellan revolutions. Not only did the great discoveries herald the making of a modern “world-system” (Wallerstein 2004), they brought to Europe a wealth of riches, from new foodstuffs to new philosophies and even forms of governance that would change Europe forever. In a word, tracing globalization back in time helps us to understand how much we owe to each other in civilizational terms.

Not all historians of globalization agree on origins or time frames. Some emphasize prehistory (Christian 2002), some a long “Orient-first” period (Wong 1997; Frank 1998; Hobson 2004), and others the reconnection of the Americas to the rest of the world (Flynn and Giráldez 2006). Still others — actually in the mainstream — stress an “early modern” period with a rising West and a laggard or stagnant East. As correlated history, the new discipline of global history seeks to eschew the biases of traditionally Eurocentric history. As multipolar or multicentered history,

it unsettles our sense of a binary East-West divide, while challenging the notion that Europe alone was exceptional in its accomplishments.

In the Orient-first view of globalization, both terrestrial and maritime silkroads linked the Afro-Eurasian landmass, bringing paper, gunpowder, the compass, and the trapezoid lateen sail to Europe, along with a host of other technologies, philosophies, and world religions. From the west, Hellenic culture penetrated east; with the advent of Islam, Muslim traders forged “Sinbad routes” as far as the coast of China. In this view, the Middle East played a bridging role, as Mecca and Baghdad emerged from the 9th century as global trade hubs linked, respectively, to the Mediterranean world and to China. China and India, in this view, are seen as being even more central to the premodern world economy, having dramatically larger economies and populations than anywhere else, and with highly advanced scientific and technological achievements.

With the foundation of the Song in 960, China entered a phase of economic growth unprecedented in global history. Relative peace was important, as was the existence of a large internal market connected by impressive canals such as the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal. Increased foreign trade, expanded commercialization, urbanization, and industrialization (including the development of an iron and steel industry) turned Song China into a world leader in terms of productivity. Such innovations as paper, woodblock printing, and the compass were all put to use. Under the Song, Chinese ships ventured directly to Southeast Asian ports, trading silk and other textiles and iron and steel, in return for spices, sandalwood, and other tropical goods (Curtin 1984: 109–10; Wink 2002: 329).

The Orient-first argument stresses the predominance of cultural flows from East to West over several thousand years. By contrast, the Western ascendancy of the early modern period spanned but a few hundred years, with Europe catching up with China only by 1800 or, in some versions, 1870 (Hobson 2004: 36). Not surprisingly, some such as Pieterse (2006: 411) have pondered whether the Orient-first literature risks reversing the current of Eurocentrism by marginalizing the West and centering the East.

Crucially, however, Europe’s discovery and incorporation of the Americas, along with its engagements and conquests across the Afro-Eurasian landmass, truly ushered in the era of “first globalization,”

especially if the revolutionary economic, epidemiological, ecological, and demographic consequences stemming from these events are considered (Flynn and Giráldez 2006: 18). This was a Eurocentric world, as confirmed by the apparent lack of rationality and scientific logic in Asian courts of the time. Although some Enlightenment thinkers saw merit in Confucian government, early European praise for China turned to scorn for its despotic and other practices. Islam and Confucianism together were seen as barriers to economic advancement.

The reasons for the eventual “divergence” between rising Europe and “stagnating” Asia has spawned a body of literature, especially by economic historians (Pomerantz 2001). But far from stagnating and withdrawing completely from global commerce, China, through its active participation in the bullion trade in Japan, in Manila and other Southeast Asian ports, actually helped to dynamize the region, creating many pioneer industries just as Chinese settlers from the prosperous coastal provinces brought unprecedented commerce to Southeast Asian lands. These settlers introduced a range of practical technologies and commercial practices, in some cases even more sweeping than parallel transfers from Europe.

A “Long Orient-first” Periodization (From Song to the Opium Wars)

This book takes a “long Orient-first” periodization (c.1000–1800 CE), allowing for significant cultural and commercial synergies between, respectively, India, the Islamic world, and China, prior to the arrival in the East-Southeast Asian region of Europeans around 1500. By 618, at the start of the Tang dynasty, the maritime silkroad connecting Arabia and China was well established, undoubtedly contributing to the cultural and economic florescence of such maritime Southeast Asian empires as Srivijaya on Sumatra and the coastal urban site of Oc Eo in the lower Mekong delta. By 800, Indianization heralded the rise of the great charter kingdoms on mainland Southeast Asia as well as in the archipelago, establishing a Sanskritized community or identity among religious elites from Java to Champa. Meanwhile, dating back to Han times (111 BCE), northern Vietnam was a veritable Chinese outrider and did not regain its independence until 938 CE.

Under the Southern Song (1127–1279), commercial shipping became the major economic base of China, ushering in an era of even more intense linkages across the seas. With imperial support, private overseas trade also flourished and transformed the nature of tribute trade. Trade networks linking central and south coastal China with Southeast Asia via the South China Sea were entirely independent of the tributary trade system itself. Chinese marine technology reached a new level of refinement (Arrighi et al. 2003: 269–70). Meriting the status of an “early-modern” development state, the rise of Song China coincided with a radical increase in the scale of international trade, with parts of the Chinese rural economy directly linked for production for the overseas market (Elvin 1973: 171–77, cited in Abu-Lughod 1989: 11). By late Song, Chinese junks ranged beyond the Malacca Straits to the Indian coast, filling in the vacuum created by the end of Arab-Indian hegemony in the west (Abu-Lughod 1989: 274).

Although the Mongols under Khubilai Khan (1215–1294 CE) demonstrated their mastery of land and sea power from Burma to Java, it was under the Ming (1368–1644 CE) that the tributary trade system reached its apogee, just as large diasporic Chinese communities took root in Southeast Asia, such as those on Java and in the Malacca Straits zone that were touched by Admiral Zheng He’s famous fleets of “treasure ships” (1405–1433 CE). While China may not have been the dominant force in determining dynastic or political outcomes across the maritime world, its presence was felt from Melaka to Brunei and Java.

Outside of essentially Chinese dynastic reckonings of the East-Southeast Asian past, are there alternative, indigenous starting points? As discussed in Chapter 1, the advent of the bronze or metal age might be considered as foundational, especially as this cultural complex linked northern mainland Southeast Asia with a broader region outside conventional boundaries. Or, could the complex migrations of peoples, especially the “Austronesian dispersion” out of Taiwan, be considered to bind the macro-region? Or, the advent of the “Sanskrit complex,” as the Indianization process has been called? Islamicization might be another discrete marker of time. Still, these possibilities all appear as long-term processes shading into hybrid outcomes as opposed to discrete new eras. The decline of Pagan and Angkor, from c. 1300 to the 1500s, has been noted as a significant turning point on mainland Southeast Asia. As

historian Victor Lieberman (2003: 122) has highlighted, this “post-character era of fragmentation” also coincided with the rise of powerful new Tai states in the central mainland, witnessing a period of state consolidation. Within this time frame, in a complex process played out across maritime Southeast Asia, notions of Islamic kingship and governance replaced Hindu-Buddhistic ones, albeit in highly eclectic form.

While a “long Orient-first view” should not ignore deep historical precursors ranging back to earlier epochs, we highlight Song China as marking the advent of an East Asian commercial revolution. In particular, Southern Song China’s maritime orientation across and beyond the greater China seas best fits to our understanding of an emerging trade-oriented region binding East and Southeast Asia.

But nor should we neglect the impact of the West in shaping historical outcomes across Eurasia. Europe’s early modern period (1500–1800), broadly coterminous with the Ming-Qing transition in China, captures a long period of metamorphosis reflecting the ebb and flow of ideas, and their uneven receptions and adaptations across the vast Eurasian space. Few then could have foreseen outcomes, especially as Europe appeared weak and divided against the impressive achievements in Asia under the China-centered interstate system. But even by the 18th century, no part of the world save the most remote and isolated zones was outside some form of globalization and creolization of culture. By 1800, in the conventional understanding, the Mughal empire had submitted to English East India Company rule and the European powers, led by Great Britain, were chafing at the restrictions imposed by the Guangzhou (Canton) trading system.

Of no less consequence for future outcomes across the broader East Asian region was the First Anglo-Chinese or Opium War (1839–42), which saw the British navy defeat its Qing counterpart in a number of running engagements. By ushering in the era of “unequal treaties,” a succession of European powers, followed by Japan, sought and obtained “extraterritorial” rights, effectively ending the system of paying tribute to China for the right to trade. France, a relative latecomer to Southeast Asia, also entered this picture by wresting eastern mainland Southeast Asia from its traditional Chinese orbit. With the advent of the treaty port system in China (also Korea and Japan), East and Southeast Asia entered a new era (Gipouloux 2009: 173–203).

The age of Asian autonomy now shaded into the age of European imperialism. In many world histories, this book included, these events mark the end of an epoch, or at least the dawn of a new one. The age of piecemeal colonization of the globe now began in earnest, as markets became truly global. In Southeast Asia, only Siam/Thailand would stand outside of direct European colonization.

Southeast, East, or East-Southeast Asia?

The Japanese scholar Hamashita Takeshi (1994) has raised doubts as to the validity of a bounded Southeast Asia separate from East Asia. In his opinion, the East-Southeast Asian zones should be viewed as part of an integrated silver trading or tribute zone beholden to the Sinocentric tribute trade system. In this millennium-old trade system, many countries participated, from all over the southern oceans. This is not necessarily an “indigenous” perspective — after all, it is an attempt at social science concept-building — but it does offer yet another optic on the world region approach. The notion of China at the head of an Asian interstate system, long before the European concept of state sovereignty was institutionalized at Westphalia in 1648, is also heralded by Arrighi, Hamashita, and Selden (2003).

In reality, there was no system of equal, competing states in the pre-modern East-Southeast Asian world. In the absence of records on inter/intrastate relations, it is often only the Chinese record that remains on many of the Southeast Asian polities, with the exchange of envoys or trade missions substituted for diplomatic relations. Looking back reflectively on the scores, if not the hundreds, of polities (many ephemeral) that once ruled larger or smaller domains across this vast equatorial zone, there is reason to borrow from Hamashita’s tributary trade system model, while acknowledging that it is a late 20th-century model.

But even in bounding Southeast Asia, we would be advised, pace Victor Lieberman (1990: 70–90), to observe fundamental differences between island and mainland Southeast Asia that underlie variations in cultural and mercantile penetration. Contra Wallerstein, Lieberman contends that peripheralization proceeded at differential rates in island and mainland Southeast Asia. To greatly simplify, he argues that whereas the Dutch (unlike the Portuguese) had successfully imposed their hegemony

over large swathes of island Southeast Asia by the late 1600s, simultaneous attempts by, variously, the English, the Dutch, and the French to oust local competitors on the mainland were checked. Instead of a Wallersteinean world-economy, what we find on the mainland is a thriving multi-country trade involving the entire China coast through to the Indian subcontinent. Items traded ranged from Indian and Chinese textiles to — crucially, for the survival of the dominant mainland states — Japanese and New World silver and copper.

French historian Denys Lombard (1997: 125) has also remarked upon a basic opposition between maritime and terrestrial Southeast Asia, broadly analogous to that between continental Europe and the Mediterranean. Even so, he hedges, it is not a true dichotomy, as there were no terrestrial kingdoms without some elements of trade and no harbor cities without need for agrarian products or without some hinterland. Accordingly, we should be careful not to gloss all regional trade as maritime trade, because trading networks were equally maritime and terrestrial, especially considering the cross-border exchanges between the mainland Southeast Asian states, the Yunnan-Guangxi periphery, and the Chinese core.

The maritime trade-oriented eastern mainland (Vietnam and Champa), which tapped into the dynamic South China Sea trade networks, was also distinct from the relatively isolated central mainland states (the Tai kingdoms), which were nevertheless part of a broader, Yunnan-connected trading complex. Still, we acknowledge that the Chao Phraya, or Menam, River facilitated Ayutthaya's rise as a magnet for the maritime trade, just as the Lao and Cambodian kingdoms were connected with the maritime trade via the Mekong River. But, with the shift of the Burmese capital from the lower Irrawaddy River to Ava, the western mainland became less accessible to the traditional maritime trade. As demonstrated later in this book, such differences with respect to location and relative integration into a regional world economy would also translate into future autonomy in facing down external threats.

While the tropical-subtropical Southeast Asian zone tends to fall through the cracks in world regions literature, this book argues that a broader conception of East Asian regionalism opens up a range of additional inquiries, such as the question of European exceptionalism; of Euro- versus Asia-centrism — particularly Sinocentrism — in shaping the

modern world-system; of what the motor of capitalism or at least pre-capitalism is in this part of Asia; of Asian “stagnation” versus European dynamism; of the phenomenon of cross-cultural interactions; and of the origins of globalization.

An Oriental Mediterranean?

Unquestionably, the maritime world has held a fascination for students of world history; Fernand Braudel’s understanding of the Mediterranean Sea has added impetus to this focus. Again, as Lombard (1997: 125) suggests, even if Southeast Asia lacked the equivalent of the Roman Empire, which succeeded in unifying both shores of the Mediterranean politically during four or five centuries, there were sufficient shared linguistic, cultural, and even political features in Southeast Asia to suggest an Oriental Mediterranean. For Lombard, it is only by making use of a supranational framework and adopting an “integrated approach” that we can apprehend this reality (Wong 2001; Sutherland 2003; Brummet 2007).

François Gipouloux, in *La Méditerranée asiatique* (2009), has trained a Braudelian lens on a region that extends from the Yellow or East China Sea to the Sulawesi Sea. For our purposes, the Mediterranean analogy is another way of appreciating this region of shifting frontiers outside of any fixed conventions of nation-state. Although we have not sought to provide detailed or even selective cross-global comparisons à la Lombard or Gipouloux, the world history method does not ignore a second-tier analysis that accounts for major global conjunctures or correlated events.

What is compelling about the Mediterranean analogy is the notion of a partly enclosed sea or seas (if we separate the China seas from the Java seas). Both comprised complementary trading or commercial systems as well as discrete meteorological zones. But above all, they were interconnected maritime zones in which multiple actors participated. All participants in the China sea trade were in thrall to the regime of typhoon conditions; all who traded through the Malacca Straits were restricted by monsoons and raging tides. These conditions held for the merchant-pirate bands that plagued the coast of China from the 13th century; for the first Arab traders that arrived and for the Chinese fleets that ventured south. They held for the first arriving Europeans; the Fujianese fleets

testing Spanish power in Manila; and the Chinese Ming-loyalist outcasts on the coasts of Sumatra and Vietnam.

Even today, the modern traveler to the vast Indonesian archipelago will be astonished at the scale and scope of maritime activity, the varieties of hulls and sails. Buginese and other sea nomads figure in our narrative, but we cannot ignore the bit parts played across the region by innumerable *orang laut* (Malay for sea people), who even today depend on the sea for their livelihoods. Just as huge multisailed craft are but a recent memory in the Java Sea and along the coast of China, so modern East Asian cities such as Macau earned their living from fishing into the mid-20th century.

Whether above or below the wind (a reference to the crucial monsoon regime governing the safe departure of ships), the so-named Southeast Asian region was never framed in any way analogous to modern geographies. Peering over an ancient map — say the pioneering freehand charts of the archipelago and the coast of China executed by the Portuguese pilot Francisco Rodrigues in 1515, or the more elaborate and nuanced charts entering Portuguese and Dutch atlases of the 17th century — we find no boundaries. On close examination, there are some half-familiar toponyms: Sunda Kelapa (modern Jakarta), Cingapura (Singapore), and Malacca. Stand back, and Java, Cumatra (Sumatra), India extra Ganges, Mare Sinar, and Cipangu (Japan) all swim into view (Plate 16). In turn, Arab or Chinese maps of this southern world offered their own cultural constructions of place firmly embedded in their respective civilizational understandings.

The Framing of an East Asian History

Ten broad historical understandings inform the way I have conceptualized this book. They are, I contend, essential to the writing of East-Southeast Asia from a world history perspective. First, we must allow that even the study of proto-history is vital to comprehending certain shared anthropological givens. Second, we cannot ignore civilizational transfers — the Indic, the Islamic, and the Sinic (in the case of Japan, Korea, and Vietnam) — where they have contributed to the formation of larger communities. Third, we acknowledge the role of powerful regional tributary systems (which in the East Asian regional world system placed

China at the center). Fourth, we allow for the continuity of (Asian) historical processes transcending the formation of a (European-dominated) world-system. Fifth, we especially appreciate the role of diasporic trading communities as transmitters of cultures and regional (Asian) technologies. Sixth, we reject the notion of totally closed political economies in East Asia, such as Japan under the Tokugawa. Seventh, we underscore the crucial role of flows of bullion — East Asian bullion no less — in lubricating the “early modern” East Asian economy. Eighth, we reject crude versions of the Western “push theory,” implying that only Western imperialism jolted peripheral regions out of their stagnation. Ninth, we are at pains to emphasize transboundary relations over strictly international links, no matter the sway of powerful national narratives. Tenth, we allow dynamizing roles for regional world systems (the East Asian world system) in the emergence of the (European-dominated) capitalist world system.²

Historical studies — world history approaches included — are not frozen in some time capsule, but reflect a constant dialogue between what is conventionally known, or at least asserted, and what remains to be confirmed in frontier research, in itself often contestatory. Where possible, this book seeks to highlight the most recent research relating to world regional historical studies as well as empirical studies on the many polities and peoples that comprise the East-Southeast Asian zone.

Scope of the Book

The scope of this book is deliberately broad. Seeking to frame a region with no fixed geographical boundaries, we are obliged to range over a macro-region, from the Indian Ocean–Bay of Bengal in the west, to the Java, South China, and East China seas in the east, alongside a complex of smaller seas and straits at the western extremity of the Pacific Ocean. With the expansion of Chinese sea trade under Song China, and the retreat of Arab and Indian commercial activity from the broader China Sea area, we begin to see a more China-centered configuration of East-Southeast Asia, which held under the Mongol-Yuan and their Ming

2 Some of these understandings owe to the essay by Ikeda Satoshi, “The History of the Capitalist World-System vs. the History of East-Southeast Asia,” *Review* 19, no. 1 (1996): 49–77.

successors, albeit with frequent restrictions imposed on private trade until the Qing lifted the ban on overseas trade in 1684. As explained below, the focus is on the water world of Southeast Asia, as well as the important interconnections with East Asia. Having established the broad parameters of this East Asia dynamic, which includes parallel commercial activities radiating out of the Ryukyu and Kyushu island ports in Japan, coastal Vietnam, and other commercial and/or production sites, we also wish to investigate the kinds of synergies produced in the trading ports and markets of both maritime and mainland Southeast Asia.

Ending our narrative with the Opium Wars, this work also treats a European dynamic, variously Iberian, Dutch, and English. Progressively, under this dynamic, the number of ports and trading centers across maritime Southeast Asia increased dramatically. The bullion, copper, and ceramics trade not only fired up regional and European demand, but fed back into a veritable “industrious revolution” in the major production sites of Ming China and Tokugawa Japan. We examine indigenous, Indian, Muslim, Chinese, Japanese, and European contacts and how each group impacted upon the region.

To recapitulate, this is a *longue durée* perspective. The emphasis is on economic history (especially trade) and development of the region as a whole. As this work establishes, the years between 1000 and 1800 were formative in shaping the modern era that followed, prior to the full swing of Western imperialism.

A Water-Centered Approach

We take a maritime history perspective, viewing the larger world of East and Southeast Asia from the sea, not just from the land. Looking beyond geopolitical boundaries, we discover a highly porous region through which a variety of peoples passed, one that was peopled by sojourners and traders, in which new ideas and technologies were filtered and adapted to local conditions. This was a region of constant flux and oftentimes conflict, but there were also long periods of state consolidation and monument-building. But whether with regard to ancient migration, trade, or technology transfer, we feel that the water-centered approach best captures the spirit of this zone, plausibly fitting even classical Chinese, Arab, and Ptolemaic representations of open seas and narrow straits. By

placing the seas and maritime trade routes at the center rather than at the margins, the interconnectedness of the entire East-Southeast Asia region literally swims into view. In the words of Hamashita:

Looking at Asia from the viewpoint of the seas brings into focus the features that identify Asia above all as a maritime region par excellence. The seas along the eastern coast of the Eurasian continent form a gentle 'S' curve continuing from north to south. The chain formed by the seas that outline the continent, its peninsulas and adjacent islands can be seen as shaping the premises of Asia's geographical space (through history). (Hamashita 2003: 17)

Taking a dawn-of-history perspective, a first chapter offers a civilizational framing of the region, stressing prehistoric indigeneity, as well as broad macro-regional commonality, going back to a shared Iron Age. This chapter also calls attention to early arriving Indian, Muslim, and Sinic influences. The next two chapters showcase the Southeast Asian world. Chapter 2 traces the rise and fall of the major "charter" polities of Southeast Asia. Chapter 3 focuses on the key Islamic courts with which the Europeans related or sometimes sought to usurp, in their struggle to achieve monopoly status over coveted trade commodities. Chapter 4 sketches the origins of Chinese settlement in Southeast Asia, whether inside or outside the officialized tributary trade system, as Chinese communities would take on a permanent character across the region by the "early modern" period. Chapter 5 identifies the major commodities traded across the East-Southeast Asian world region, drawing the contours of exchange and trade mechanisms. Then three chapters profile the European (and Japanese) traders and settlements. Chapter 6 outlines the Iberian maritime trade networks, drawing attention to the key strong points and establishments of the Portuguese and Spanish empires. Chapter 7 explains the *modus operandi* of the powerful Dutch and English trading companies in Asian lands. Although not equal in impact to the European interlopers or Chinese sojourners, the Japanese diasporic communities of Southeast Asia are examined in Chapter 8, up to the point when Japan withdrew from direct participation in the Southeast Asian trade. Two thematic chapters together draw attention to individual traded items. Chapter 9 describes the pivotal role of the Asian bullion trade in early modern East-Southeast Asian economies, while Chapter 10 offers a case study of the complex Asian ceramics trade, both

as an index of early globalization and as an example of proto-capitalist endeavor, at least as it related to China and Japan. The final chapter summarizes what contributions India, the Islamic world, and China made to the East-Southeast Asian “regional technology complex,” alongside evolutionary trends in indigenous knowledge (outside of better-known Western technology transfers).

Conclusion

With China at its core, East-Southeast Asia today stands with India as the new century's global economic powerhouse. The world region that emerged out of the "first globalization" has obviously made its mark on the present-day globalized world. Such economic triumph, however, has not come without costs — rising income disparities, regional growth imbalances, major ecological damage, and the exhaustion of natural resources. The region is still subject to hiccups in the global economy; the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98 struck at the most vulnerable of the globally linked economies, Thailand and Indonesia. Nor were the more globalized parts of the region spared the full impacts of the Wall Street crash of 2008–09. Pieterse (2006: 412–13) cautions against a kind of glib "retroactive Sinocentrism or Indiacentrism" that pumps up or reads back a glorious past interrupted only by imperialism. Still, he concedes, there is a "global confluence" at work in the rise of China and India, as historiography catches up with facts of life unsettling to "the self-indulgent West-centric view of globalization."

A Greater East Asian Region

To what extent has this book confirmed the historical existence of a supra-East-Southeast Asian region or community? Although it is difficult to speak of a single united community — then or now — we are comfortable with the notion of multiple and shifting communities, frequently layered and oftentimes embedded within larger communities. Some of these communities were structured, as with royal or state-sponsored trade or tribute missions, or radically restructured as a result of dynastic changes, wars, or invasions. Although not well documented outside of

Chinese annals, many royal centers were in close correspondence with the central kingdom especially on trade matters; port cities acted as hubs connecting large and small polities alike. Outside the better documented official trade, many regional interactions were of a spontaneous or private nature, mounted by merchant-adventurers or even diasporic communities. Frequently, such communities were not even coterminous with state or polity.

Taken together as an historical ensemble — some parts Indianized, Islamicized, Sinicized, strictly indigenous, or coming under European merchant and missionary influence — a coherent East Asian community existed, in which many people, ethnicities, and creeds participated. Out of this community emerged myriad hybrid associations that render many essentialist notions of state and race questionable. Such communities included almost all the major Asian civilizational templates (Indian, Islamic, and Sinic). Yet other communities with a broad East Asian regional dispersion — Philip Curtin’s “trade diasporas” — emerged out of activities associated with the Tribute Trade, the Bullion Trade, and the trade of the European companies.

No Rome-like empire united the various shores of the Southeast Asian archipelago; nevertheless, commercial transactions mediated by the exchange of currencies against commodities in demand — the Bullion Trade Networks — welded the trading ports and agrarian cities together in a commercial network, across vast spaces and centuries. In this view, the Yellow, East China, and South China seas, the Gulf of Siam, the Java Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the all-important Malacca Straits — all unified rather than divided. Alongside silver, Japanese and Chinese copper cash-coins came the closest to serving as a common East Asian currency, with a great deal of convertibility across not only China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, but also in maritime Southeast Asia, as in Brunei and on Java, alongside the major trade destinations serviced by the Dutch East India Company.

Modifying Pacey’s (1990: 7, 31, 61) sense of a fixed and timebound regional “technology complex,” a layered series of technological complexes evolved and coexisted over long periods, in line with major civilizational influences and regional and global impacts. Even today, despite the homogenizing impact of globalization, the evidence for such premodern technological complexes survives, especially, but not exclusively, in

anthropological settings or as revealed through archaeological findings. Though uneven in reception, knowledge-technology transfers — certain some deeply embedded — greatly contributed to the making of a distinctive East Asian world region.

India imposed a major civilizational footprint upon the Southeast Asian world-region — the “Sanskrit cosmopolis,” as described by Pollack (2006: 123). In earlier times, southern India, Sri Lanka, and such maritime trade-oriented polities as Srivijaya on Sumatra, Pajajaran on Java, and Brunei on Borneo, along with the kingdoms of Angkor, the Tai kingdoms, Pegu, Pagan, and Champa on the mainland — all grafted Indian forms of religion, statecraft, writing systems, plastic arts, and monuments upon indigenous cultures. These were not isolated polities, but were connected in ways that are little researched. Certainly, all were involved in the transfer or reception of prestige goods, manpower, and ideas. The Indianized polities were also connected with China via the tributary trade. We learn of these kingdoms from Chinese chronicle accounts, just as the first Portuguese visitors recorded their impressions and even, in certain cases, entered into diplomatic relations with these Oriental courts.

The expansion of Islam across Eurasia from the 7th century CE onward had both political and commercial ramifications. Not only did Muslim trading networks re-energize the ancient silkroads, but powerful new Islamic polities emerged along these roads, even if the larger, agrarian-based polities of mainland Southeast Asia still remained Indianized to an impressive degree. No caliphate emerged in Southeast Asia along Middle Eastern models, though the spread of Islam within our time frame embraced an expanding community of believers, whether as majorities in the nations known today as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam or as important minorities in the Philippines and in the mainland states, China included. Even today, Muslim peoples in China and Southeast Asia sometimes place religion over state, though, notionally at least, no such contradiction is held in the Southeast Asian sultanates, where the ruler also serves as the head of religion.

Decline of the Tribute Trade System

China’s Tribute Trade System operated as both a symbolic and a functional system, notwithstanding the waxing and waning of dynasties and

the fluctuating fortunes of lesser tributaries. Often, tribute missions to China were called off, either because of dynastic change as in the Ming-Qing transition, or because of radical changes in the fortunes of ruling dynasties in Southeast Asia. Japan opted out of the China-centered Tribute Trading System, while Vietnam extended a version of its own. The eclipse of the sultanate of Melaka in 1511 by Portugal jolted the Ming, although, once lodged in Macau, Portugal entered China as a rent-paying tributary in a new guise.

It has to be explained why the Tribute Trade System, which had been perfected under the Ming, also fell away under the same dynasty. As Joseph Needham demonstrated of early Ming expeditions to Java, Melaka, India, and coastal Africa, the “Portuguese century” of Dias, da Gama, and Albuquerque was equally a “Chinese century,” in terms of shipbuilding, maritime exploration, and trade diplomacy. In its heyday, about 1420, the Ming navy probably outclassed not only any other Asian naval force but that of any European state or combination of states. But where the heirs of Henry the Navigator continued to make important nautical innovations, Chinese marine technology, impressive as it was, made no such revolutionary breakthrough after the 15th century. For a complex of reasons — part economic (drain on silver), technological (new inland water communication in China), and political — the Ming navy fell to pieces. By 1474, only 140 warships remained; shipyards fell into disrepair. By 1500, it became a capital offense in China to build a seagoing junk of more than two masts. By 1551, even trade in multi-masted ships was proscribed (Needham 1971: 508, 526–27).

The Ming and Qing codes ranked and modified, according to circumstance, the tributaries across Southeast, Northwest, Central, and Northeast Asia. Such tributary states as Korea, Vietnam, Siam, Champa, Java, Melaka, Brunei, and Angkor regularly sent missions to China bearing obligatory gifts, cementing diplomatic relations, facilitating trade with the Central Kingdom, and confirming the Son of Heaven’s imperium and majesty. Cultural borrowing, trade ties, and diasporic communities supplied the Sinicizing cultural element.

The Ming-centered tributary system took another blow in the wake of the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592. By dropping out of China’s age-old tributary orbit, Japan sought to establish itself as a tributary center, as demonstrated by the series of missions mounted by Korean

envoys to the Shogun court in Edo (with the Portuguese and Dutch in their train). Even so, informal trade continued with China via Nagasaki (and with Korea via Tsushima Island), albeit on a restricted basis (Swope 2002: 757).

Attacked by Ming armies in 1406, in turn repulsed in 1426–27, Vietnam obviously presents a special case. By restoring tributary relations with China as a cultural defense and by reaffirming Confucianism, Vietnam was able to create its own tributary system on the Chinese model, in relationship to Tai and other tribal minorities. Until their fatal demise, the Cham sought to play off both the Ming and the Vietnamese against each other as tribute-collecting overlords. Under the Nguyen, regular tribute missions took on a political character outside of trade considerations, as the court of Hue skillfully treated its neighbors (Laos and Cambodia) as tributary states.

As Stuart-Fox (2003: 115–20) explains, even in terminal decline, the Qing resolutely clung to the facade of the tributary system. Setting aside the Russians, who, because of geography, upheld a special relationship with China, all other European missions to Beijing under the Qing, namely the Portuguese (1670, 1678, 1727, 1753), the Dutch (1656, 1663, 1667, 1686), and eventually the British, fell under the strict protocol of the tribute system. Wang (2004: 352) confirms that the European interventions eventually rendered the Tribute Trade System obsolete. By the end of the 18th century, only Vietnam, Siam, and some of the Shan and Lao states still presented tribute regularly. The Lord Macartney affair of 1793, whereby the British envoy to the Qing court famously refused to kowtow, merely pointed up how irrelevant the protocol had become to the burgeoning maritime trade. The “hollow shell” of the system persisted for another 50 years, as confirmed by the Amherst mission of 1816, but the need for a new form of diplomacy was already apparent. By then, China confronted the most powerful navy on earth, namely that wielded by Britain, the nation that prosecuted the Opium Wars and, to its great profit, established the Treaty Port System.

East-Southeast Asia in the World Economy: Retreat or Subordination?

The scope, flow, and intensity of East-Southeast Asian trade and the nature of the “early modern” Asian world economy was dramatically altered by a convergence of events — the transition in Ming China from a fiduciary-based currency system to one based on silver; the near-contemporary insinuation of the Portuguese into China-coast trading networks, leading to permanent settlement in Macau in 1557; and the rise of the Nagasaki-centered Bullion Trade System, under which the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and Chinese, traded Chinese silk against Japanese silver and copper. The engine driving the bullion trade was the gathering of silkworms and the production and export of silks. Yet another event shaping the early modern East Asian world economy was the establishment of the Spanish Philippines in 1564 and the initiation of the Pacific galleon trade, linking Manila with, variously, China, Acapulco, and the New World in the silver-for-silk-and-ceramics trade.

Indian textiles remained in constant demand across East-Southeast Asia, both for luxury and everyday use. The participation of the Europeans in the ancient ceramics trade fired up both Chinese and Japanese production sites, but also left such excellent early producers as the Thai and the Vietnamese on the sidelines. Finally, the 300-year-old Bullion Trade System was wound down by the rise of the Guangzhou Trade System, a system that involved not only the Guangzhou-based junk trade, drawing in most of Southeast Asia, but also the European tea-for-opium trade, reversing the historical flow of bullion into China. By this time, the Tribute Trading System was honored only by remote and scattered princelings on the periphery of the Qing empire.

My argument has been, in line with van Leur, to stress continuity as opposed to a hypothesized retreat from the world economy (Reid 1993). But more than van Leur would have allowed, I concede the eventual subordination of local Southeast Asian economies to European capital. In Reid’s view (1999: 160), by 1700 it was already clear that the Southeast Asian states were not following the path of Europe. Compared to the century before, he states, cosmopolitan craft specialization, private concentration of capital, and curiosity about the scientific world were less rather than more important, suggesting a disengagement from technology

and its accompanying mindset. As a result, Southeast Asian states lacked the bureaucratic method, the national coherence, and, above all, the technology to face up to the Western onslaught of the following century.

A range of cultural factors mitigated against the rise of a merchant-banker class in Southeast Asia, such as emerged in China and Japan with respect to financing junk voyages and arranging collateral, as well as facilitating the complex proto-industrial activities associated with mining, metallurgy, and ceramics production and their marketing. The early curiosity evinced for Western science and technology by East-Southeast Asian monarchs did not translate into an Asian Renaissance. Even the arrival of Islam did not offer substantive practical technologies that might have led to a scientific breakthrough, just as Islam itself offered no Renaissance in learning, at least after its historical “golden age.” If anything, the gap widened between an exceptional Europe and a laggard Asia, but this was also because European control of the vital maritime trade deadened local industry, including the Indian textile industry.

Even so, regional East-Southeast Asian trade networks proved remarkably resilient through to 1800. The Japanese trade in silver was a magnet for the Chinese junk trade, alongside the more formalized VOC trade. The sugar economies of Java and Taiwan (while it lasted) boomed through the 1700s, fed by rising Japanese urban demand. Similarly, the regional trade in Japanese copper, especially to Vietnam, lubricated local commerce, as in the local silk industry. The Europeans fired up the Chinese and Japanese ceramic industries in ways that benefited Asian producers and entrepreneurs alike. The multiplier effects of this industriousness upon local patterns of labor and consumption cannot be underestimated, not excluding the sexual division of labor, with Southeast Asian women especially entering the textile industries.

But the 17th-century Southeast Asian “crisis,” as outlined by Reid (1993), was mitigated by proximity to China. Arguably, Chinese diasporic communities and their trading networks rescued Southeast Asia from a complete retreat from the early modern world economy. From Vietnam to Bangkok, the *pesisir* coast of Java, and Makassar, Chinese captains and *shahbandars* oversaw the busy, two-way junk trade between Fujianese and Southeast Asian ports. Alongside Arab, Indian, and indigenous agents, Chinese put up the capital and credit, while lubricating the interinsular trade. As suppliers of both prestige (high-end ceramics)

and everyday goods (utilitarian ceramic products and ironware), as well as a mix of proto-industrial products, including chemicals, Chinese operated virtual, regionwide department stores. Even during the “Ming gap,” Ryukyuan traders entered the Southeast Asian market, alongside Thai and Vietnamese, albeit in Chinese vessels. With the resumption of the junk trade, the Chinese market for pepper, sandalwood, *trepang*, and other natural and cultivated products offered substitute markets for those of distant India and Europe. In many ways, Chinese — especially the settler communities — served as more functional partners with princes and other Southeast Asian elites over a far longer period than the European companies, who often sought to gain by force what they could not obtain by guile. The Dutch loss of Taiwan was actually a boon to the Southeast Asian junk trade, just as the Portuguese in Macau survived only through entering into relations with Chinese business partners in the Makassar and Timor trade, alongside alternative destinations in southern Vietnam and on the two coasts of India.

It may be that, during 1740–80, Southeast Asia began sinking into peripheral status, but that was the fate of all world peripheries of that period, under the weight of metropolitan monopoly capital. Although it avoided the fate of Mughal India, large parts of Central and South America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia’s general connectedness to China via the all-important junk trade offered only a temporary crutch for the East Asia region, until China itself became supine under the weight of the Opium Wars and Unequal Treaties.

To take textile production as an index of local agency and industriousness in Southeast Asia through to 1800, the continuity in traditional forms of silk and cotton manufacture from Vietnam to Thailand, Java, and south Sulawesi is surprising, notwithstanding the influx of Indian cottons and the subsequent arrival of Dutch and English substitutes. Batik manufacture on Java, with its cultural traditions, actually revived at this juncture. One adaptation was the use of plain white imported Indian and, later, Dutch textiles as the base material. The industry further evolved under Chinese auspices, with a shift from the court centers of Java to north coast ports. “Innovation and change” came to be a successful survival strategy for many other “traditional” Southeast Asian industries under assault from new global forces and agents. Subordination did not necessarily spell collapse for these industries in this age.

Reading Back Regionalism Today

No regional identity emerges from “national” narratives in Southeast Asian historical texts and chronicle accounts. Seldom do these offer cognizance of a wider world, at least outside of religious (Hindu/Buddhist/ Islamic) world views. Even the tradition that produced the Tunis-born historian and polymath Ibn Khalud (1328–1406) did not apparently inspire emulators in Southeast Asia, though, unquestionably, a sense of Darul Islam touched all believers. By contrast, the Ming annals are exceptional as historical records, at least in the way of logging tributary missions and in naming rulers and realms. Spanning 444 years, the *Rekidai Hoan*, or Chinese-language Ryukyu diplomatic correspondence, also echoes this broader world of interconnected port cities and realms. At least in the Chinese world view, a coherent Nanyang was both known and imagined. Certain shared understandings of the expanded region also reached the Tokugawa and Choson courts, as reflected in new, hybrid indigenous-Western-inspired maps (Suárez 1999: 50; Gunn 2003: 130–35).

Today, archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, epigraphy, and cartography are all in the service of the modern East-Southeast Asian state, to impose order where often none exists; to strengthen boundaries even where they have been artificially imposed; to celebrate nation and race (Thailand, Malaysia); to impose as much as celebrate “unity in diversity” (Indonesia); as nation-building strategies (Philippines, East Timor); to create a sense of belonging (Singapore); to demarcate difference (Cambodia); to prevail over historical and other enemies (Burma, Laos, and Vietnam); or combinations of all of the above. Powerful national historical discourses and narratives have emerged, along with powerful state bureaucracies, state-controlled media systems, and educational curricula, wherever one-party or one-party dominant systems prevail (most of colonial and post-colonial East-Southeast Asia, most of the time). Proudly, such interpretations are announced in national museums, textbooks, parades, and dioramas, celebrated on national days and in the anointment of heroes and heroines.

Needless to say, history writing in North and South Korea has taken divergent paths. Communist North Vietnam and its former adversary in the Republic of South Vietnam also drew selectively from their respective historical corpora. But, as suggested by present-day conflicting

Sino-Vietnamese claims in the South China Sea, the former Confucianized states of East Asia have to degrees sought to assert control over history. This applies not only to China and the Koreas but also to Japan, especially through its ministry of education. The textbook wars between, respectively, Japan and Korea and Japan and China are illustrative (as indeed was the mass protest by Okinawans launched in 2007 against Tokyo's revision of war history). But Japan and China also disagree over imperial history, as do Korea and China, in ways that raise questions about the "ownership" of history in an age of international scholarship and information revolution.

Divergent Paths to Modernity

The striking feature of Southeast Asia was the ability of the region to absorb, adapt, hybridize, and improvise new knowledge and practical technologies. Reaching back to the Dong Son Age, this process was one of the active creation of regional technology ensembles, layered with the civilizational imprints of the Hindu, Muslim, and Sinic worlds. Nor can we ignore the impact of Europe on the East-Southeast Asian world region in terms of technology exchanges.

Again taking the example of batik-making on Java, the wax technique as applied to an ancient art continued to be developed and refined, just as the development of the copper *cap*, or stamp technique, rescued the industry from European competition. As Sekimoto (2003: 115) points out, we should not view the early batik industry on Java "as the antithesis to modern capitalism." Examples of indigenous creativity may be multiplied, just as newer techniques of Chinese, Islamic and European provenance became part of the 18th- and 19th-century repertoires of local craftsmen and artisans, within and without the workshops of Southeast Asian courts. Nevertheless, highly divergent paths to modernity were taken across the region.

Notwithstanding the weight of neo-Confucian doctrine, late Tokugawa Japan was exceptional in developing a mindset for scientific experimentation, just as national coherence and bureaucratic strength kept interlopers at bay. But the Japanese model had few emulators. Meanwhile, Europe did not stand still in terms of scientific and technological developments. This might sound like European exceptionalism, but Enlightenment

skepticism, feeding into a scientific revolution, did enable Europe, now wedded to the Americas, to emerge as the global core.

Willy-nilly, modernity arrived in Southeast Asia but only under the auspices of colonial capitalism — the British annexation of India, including Burma, along with Malaya and the north Borneo territories, including the sultanate of Brunei; piecemeal Dutch administrative consolidation over the East Indies; French control over Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; and the American eclipse of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines. The Thai state retained its political independence but looked to Meiji Japan (1868–1912) and Europe as a model for a modernizing monarchy. As European colonialism implanted its military-bureaucratic machinery in the Southeast Asian colonies, it turned to the scientific exploitation of resources, to the building of infrastructure, and the basic education of a collaborating cadre of local administrators. As triumphant colonial-capitalism promoted a teleological view of progress, so the universalism of science merged with or trumped local technologies. Undoubtedly, the advent of steam power was an early harbinger of this development.

Once the object of cartographic imperialism, postcolonial successor states in Southeast Asia inherited fixed boundaries and maritime claims. But as the new nation-states took their place as equals in a community of nations, so in a range of cases (Aceh, Patani, Papua, and the Iban/Dayak, Karen, Hmong, and Moro peoples), ethnic and religious fault lines leave legitimacy assertions highly contested. In other words, the post-charter polities that emerged on mainland Southeast Asia offered but symbolic recognition to non-state peoples or ethnic minorities (Scott 2009). The “little cultures” of the archipelago, from Borneo to Papua, have fared even less well in the transition to modern and mostly contrived centralized bureaucratic cultures.

With time, a second tier of East Asian port cities emerged as products of colonial capitalism and/or as key nodes in imperial commercial networks. Gipouloux (2009: 173–203) offers the examples of Surabaya, Haiphong, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tianjin (Tientsin), Hankou, Yokohama, Kobe, Pusan, and Inchon, with some thriving today as truly global cities. Taking a variety of political trajectories — Leninist (China, Vietnam, and Laos); military-led (Thailand, Indonesia, and Burma); multi-party democratic (Philippines); neo-traditionalist (Malaysia); and even absolute monarchical (Brunei Darussalam) — all the postcolonial

states of the region have embraced modernity, scientism, developmentalism, consumerism, and, to degrees, growth-without-limits doctrines. As an untoward consequence, the ecological devastation of Southeast Asia's tropical rainforests and marine and natural resources appears to be irreversible; even human habitat appears threatened across large swathes of the region, alongside rising incomes, showcase development, the amassing of sovereign wealth funds, and the emergence of middle classes and the super-rich.

As a world region, East-Southeast Asia is more coherent today, at least on paper, as suggested by the invention of such regional groupings as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and, since 1997, the ASEAN Plus Three (including China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea), especially in discussions on shared economic and financial issues, including even the (premodern) notion of a common regional currency. In the interim, both China and Japan have promoted alternative visions of an East Asian Community. Invoking the importance of the Malacca Straits at a forum in Singapore in November 2009, former Japanese prime minister Hatoyama Yukio talked (hopefully) of a "sea of 'yu-ai' (fraternity)," noting that "most regional commerce depends on sea-routes" (*Japan Times Online* 2009). With Abu-Lughod (1989: 293), we feel wistful at the virtual disappearance of the former "world cities" of Melaka, Palembang, Aceh, Champa, Hoi An, Quanzhou, and the many "pepper coasts," silk-for-silver marts, and ceramic production sites that once connected the Sinbad routes of another age, but it is important in this narrative to know and see where we have been.

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