

Introduction

From the fifteenth/sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries China experienced a significant economic upswing. This time period covered the Chinese mid-Ming 明 (1368–1644) through mid/late Qing 清 (1644–1911) dynasties. At the same time, for centuries China's political, economic, and cultural success and superiority had been reflected in the consciousness of the Chinese emperors of the traditional concept of the "Middle Kingdom" (Zhongguo 中國). The idea of being situated in the middle of the world also characterized and defined China's relations to her neighbouring countries: These were barbarian states which could only learn from China and otherwise were expected to subject themselves to and to accept Chinese suzerainty as tribute states. Foreign exotic goods and luxury articles from such "barbarian states" were almost always welcomed by the social and ruling élites, but such an attitude was not identical with a promotion of foreign trade. Often, the idea was rather to tolerate foreign trade under certain conditions and subsequently profit from it. Nevertheless, it would definitely be wrong to say that China was an enemy of trade. Over the centuries the Chinese government often sought to control foreign trade and exchange relations – be it in a positive or negative way. Tang 唐 dynasty (618–906) rulers, for example, had a relatively positive attitude towards foreign trade. But it was not before the Song dynasty that foreign trade was actively and extensively promoted, as it was considered a motor to enrich the state in the form of money as a general equivalent of value. The Yuan 元 (1279–1367) rulers, eventually, continued a "pro-foreign-commerce-policy".

Against this historical background the Ming dynasty may in fact be considered a turning point in the history of foreign trade, because the official state ideology and policy intended to curb the people's contacts with foreigners. With few exceptions, more trade than was needed to satisfy the élite's demand for foreign specialities was, as it would appear, at least officially not desired by contemporary Chinese rulers. The government practiced a "maritime-trade-prohibition-policy" (*haijin zhengce* 海禁政策), which had its effects upon the complete East Asian trade and exchange networks. The reasons for this policy and its abolition shall in detail be discussed in one of the following volumes.

Perhaps some of the major results of the new Chinese policy were the rise of piracy and illegal trade and the fact that merchants of other countries, such as for example the Ryūkyūs 琉球, could take over the part formerly filled by Chinese merchants, although the latter did not disappear completely from the scene. The strong presence of ceramics from countries in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam, Thailand or Cambodia in East Asian sites should be mentioned in this context. Obviously, wares from Southeast Asian production areas substituted the former Chinese wares, which were no longer so easy to obtain. But Japan and Korea tried to obtain Chinese products through indirect and secret channels. All in all, the system of mutual exchange prevailed – but under different signs and with different characteristics.

The maritime trade proscription of the Ming was lifted in 1567. This political step again caused changes in East Asian waters. Ryūkyūan merchants, for example,

lost their former intermediary position. In the late sixteenth century Southeast Asian ceramics, if they did not disappear, at least lost their former strong representation in East Asian archaeological sites. Other political decisions, such as the Japanese policy of “expansion” also effected the geo-political development. And at the beginning of the second third of the seventeenth century, at a time, when in China the interest in foreign trade gradually began to re-emerge and trade became more liberalized, Japan and Korea on the other hand largely cut themselves off from the outer world. For a time period of two centuries Japan’s relationships to the outer world seemed to have been limited to the trade with the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Thus, the picture and idea may emerge that in the fifteenth to early nineteenth century in East Asia there existed nothing more than a group of more or less isolated states. The articles in this volume intend to show that such a picture would be very misleading.

In reality, the East Asian world was far from being a group of isolated countries. Exchange relations and trade contacts rather continued throughout times of official seclusion. Parallel to the official foreign diplomacy, intensive economic, personal, cultural and knowledge exchange networks were maintained – certainly to a great extent but, as shall be shown in this volume, not exclusively on the basis of private initiatives. The centres of this exchange doubtlessly lay in China, Japan and Korea. But also smaller countries and regions in the north and south of the China Sea, such as the Ryūkyūs or even traders from an island as small as Tsushima 對馬, participated and were integrated into this supra-regional system. Its initiators were often private organizations and merchants who sought to maintain and cherish their contacts even under politically unfavourable conditions. In contrast to earlier times, when for example the Chinese government officially sponsored and promoted maritime trade, the quality and the characteristics of these exchange relations changed at the end of the fourteenth century. This is why we speak of a “new quality in the development of the neighbouring countries” of the East China Sea. In spite of all the private initiatives, we have to keep in mind that also government officials, even (sub-official) government organizations, privately and “illegally” participated in this trade. Simultaneously, even during times of foreign trade prohibition, official trade was maintained and continued.

Against this background one can understand why we speak of an “East Asian Mediterranean”. The idea of the “Mediterranean” – la Méditerranée – derives from the theory of the French maritime historian, Fernand Braudel, who emphasized the role of the Mediterranean Sea as a major channel promoting rather than preventing economic and cultural communication among the surrounding countries.¹ The expression has been selected to designate a larger geographic region, the parts of which are connected by sea and not by land. In our context the countries neighbouring this “Mediterranean” are primarily China, Japan, Korea, the Ryūkyūs, and Taiwan, although Taiwan is not discussed in this volume. We seek to show that

1 Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde Méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, 1–2. Paris: 1987; *Les mémoires de la Méditerranée préhistorique et antiquité*. Paris: Éd. De Fallois, 1998).

the countries being examined are characterized by connecting rather than separating factors – even during times of a country’s official “seclusion” from the outer world. Our concept of an “East Asian Mediterranean” does not imply that we intend to create a new geo-political model of early modern maritime East Asia which neglects or even negates a greater (world-wide) geo-political context, such as the influence and integration of Western or Indian Ocean merchants into contemporary trade networks. Our aim is to introduce and to explain the particulars of trade and exchange, of economic and personal networks including knowledge transfer between East Asian countries, the importance of which has for a long time been underestimated or misinterpreted, partly but not only because more emphasis was laid on Southeast Asian trading spheres and networks.

In this context, the present volume introduces documents and source collections, inscriptions, manuscripts (letters, diaries, commodity lists, etc.) and archaeological relics (ceramics, shipwrecks, buildings, etc.) that shed light on the particular nature of exchange networks in East Asia. Many of the sources have so far not yet or not yet sufficiently been investigated, especially in Western scholarship. We have selected several case studies of different integrated regions and different time periods in East Asia between c. 1400 and 1850, which all reveal the intensity of personal, commodity, trade and knowledge networks. Placed into the larger geographic context of East Asia, the present volume seeks to demonstrate the particular characteristics of exchange networks and the mutual interrelationships in this greater area. The studies are based, wherever possible, on a critical comparison of both written and archaeological sources. At the same time, we sought to approach the topic from an interdisciplinary angle avoiding for example a Euro-, Sino- or “Asia-centric” attitude. But it has, of course, to be emphasized that, first, China undisputedly disposed of one of the strongest economies of that time and was certainly a major player within East Asia and, second, that East Asia is the topic of our research.

Because not much attention has so far been paid to the exchange of technologies and the encounter of scientific and technological knowledge, this has become a focus of our research. In the present volume, the field of medicine has been chosen as a special theme. Not only medical products and drugs constituted one of the major trade items. Also the exchange of medical knowledge and of physicians played an important role in East Asia during the time period to be investigated.

The contributions have been subdivided according to topical themes. The first two articles by Maria Schreibweis (Munich University, Department of Asian Studies) and Ralph Kauz (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Iranistic) investigate Ming dynasty sea and land routes respectively. The subsequent three articles by Barbara Seyock (Munich University, Department of Asian Studies), S. M. Hong-Schunka (Munich University, Department of Asian Studies) and Billy Kee Long So, K. C. Tam (University of Oxford, UK) and Vincent W. K. Ho (Chinese University of Hong Kong, History Department) focus on trade and commodity exchange in the East China Sea, covering a time period from c. 1400 to 1800. The third great

section of the volume concentrates on the history of medicine, including the life of a Chinese physician in seventeenth century Japan seen against the background of Sino-Japanese relations in the area of medicine (Su Wang; Munich University, Institute for the History of Medicine and Department of Asian Studies), a nineteenth century written conversation between a Chinese and a Ryūkyūan physician discussing medical problems on the Ryūkyūs (Angela Schottenhammer; Munich University, Department of Asian Studies; Hamburg University, Asia-Africa-Institute), the problem of food provision and scurvy on sea-journeys in East and West (Mathieu Torck; Ghent University, Institute for Chinese Studies in cooperation with the Medical Faculty), and the origins of the transfer of medical knowledge from China to Europe (Ursula Holler; Munich University, Institute for the History of Medicine). The contributions by Mathieu Torck and Ursula Holler simultaneously draw the link to Europe. In this context, the last contribution introduces European, namely Portuguese, images of Fujian and Ryūkyū (Roderich Ptak; Munich University, Department of Asian Studies).

Maria Schreibweis investigates the sea route between China and the Ryūkyū 琉球 (Liuqiu) Islands (modern Okinawa) as described in the Ming period embassy report *Shi Liuqiu lu* 使琉球錄 (1534) by Chen Kan 陳侃 (1489–1538). This report is important in as far as it is the first representative of this category of an ambassador's official sea route report. It was repeatedly taken as an example for later reports. As the description of Chen Kan is generally designated as an “official embassy report”, our original idea was that it might perhaps contain technical details, such as navigation routes and charts, compass settings, winds, water levels and other quantities, which were important to reach one's destination. In reality, however, the report only once mentions navigational details. The *Shi Liuqiu lu* can, thus, be categorized as a sea route diary, but not as a nautical work. Remarkable in Chen Kan's report is at the same time the emphasis laid on religious aspects while traveling at sea. The goddess Mazu 媽祖 (i.e. *Tianfei* 天妃) is in this context repeatedly appealed to. Maria Schreibweis, consequently, describes the sea route between Fuzhou 福州, China, and Naha 那霸, the Ryūkyūs, and its way back, and thoroughly analyzes the religious aspects contained in the report. Her study includes an *in extenso* translation of the diary, critically comparing discrepancies between two different editions.

In contrast to Maria Schreibweis, Ralph Kauz looks at travel and exchange networks on the Chinese mainland and examines the “postal stations” (*yizhan* 驛站) in Ming China. At the same time, he extends the networks to parts of Central Asia. Foreigners could travel in China only when they had the status – received by legal or illegal means – of official emissaries or their servants. After arriving at the borders of Ming China at established frontier-points, they were thus treated as envoys and could entirely rely on the postal network system (*yichuan* 驛傳) for their transport to the capital. There they were lodged in the state guesthouse (*huitong guan* 會同館) and provided with food and other provisions. When they had finished their stay in the capital they were sent back to the respective frontier-point, controlled and

dismissed for their journey back home. This was the theory, the practise often differed significantly. In general, however, the system worked throughout the dynasty and served as a model for the respective institutions of the succeeding Manchu Qing empire.

In the first part of his paper Ralph Kauz concentrates on the travel of a Timurid mission (1419 to 1422) inside China, which was recorded by the envoy Ghīyās ad-Dīn. This journey is intermittently compared with travels of embassies from other regions. On the basis of Ghīyās ad-Dīn's report the main points of his journey are discussed: entry into China, journey to Beijing along the postal route, and sojourn in the capital. In the second part the main postal routes concerning tribute traffic are outlined, and in the last part the basic functions of the state guest-house are discussed. The tribute system was the basis of Ming foreign policy and the transport system inside China was a major part of it. It formed not only the framework of China's relations with other countries but also of the relations among the different Asian peoples who met on various occasions: *en route*, in the state guest house or at banquets given by the Chinese administration. The tribute system offered, thus, a number of chances to form political and commercial networks. His contribution shows that exchange networks in East Asia did in fact not simply end at the coastal regions of a country neighbouring the East Asian "Mediterranean".

Barbara Seyock investigates its northern edge – Korea-Tsushima-Japan – whereas S. M. Hong-Schunke and Kee Long So *et al.* analyze aspects of the Korea-Ryūkyū and China-Japan, namely Nagasaki 長崎, as well as cotton export trade in general respectively. The time period roughly covers the late fourteenth to the late eighteenth centuries.

Barbara Seyock provides a preliminary survey on the activities of Tsushima 對馬 pirates during the late fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries. Tsushima is located in the middle of the Korean Straits. The island has since early times functioned as a "bridge" between continental culture and island Japan. Not least the unsuitable local environment drove the local people into piracy. These pirates (Chin. 倭寇, Japan. *wakō*, Korean *waegu*) continued to constitute a great menace particularly to the Korean Chosŏn Court. Seyock compares entries in the written sources and recent archaeological evidence in order to obtain a better understanding of the particular role of the Tsushima pirates as traders and of the Tsushima trade in general. First evidence shows that apparently less international trade was possible, the stricter the Chosŏn Court tried to control the trade. Against this background, the late fourteenth to early fifteenth centuries seem to have constituted the peak of Tsushima as a supra-regional trading centre. The absence of Southeast Asian ceramics in the younger layers of Tsushima archaeological sites as well as the lack of detailed information in the Korean annals, on the contrary, suggest that at least the ceramics trade was limited to larger market cities in central Japan during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. At any rate, the Tsushima traders and pirates by that time seem to have lost their key role. The fate of Tsushima, thus, resembles to some extent that of the Ryūkyū Islands, which also played a major role as an "in-

ternational” transshipment centre during the late fourteenth until late fifteenth centuries. In the course of the early sixteenth century, running parallel to the extension of increasing private trading activities of Ming Chinese merchants, the Ryūkyūs gradually lost their decisive intermediary position.²

S. M. Hong-Schunka investigates the exchange of commodities between Korea and the Ryūkyū Islands as it is reflected in the so-called extra sheets (*pyölp'ok* 別幅) included in the Korean *Veritable records of the Chosŏn dynasty* (*Chosŏn wangjo shillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄) and the Ryūkyūan *Precious documents of successive generations* (*Rekidai hōan* 歷代寶案). The extra sheets were attached at the end of diplomatic documents exchanged between the Korean Chosŏn 朝鮮 dynasty (1392–1910) and the Ryūkyūs. In this context, these sheets shed more light on the question of which products and goods were exchanged between the two countries. The time span of these sheets covers the late fourteenth until the early seventeenth century (1389–1638). S. M. Hong-Schunka identifies the trade commodities as far as they are mentioned in the extra sheets. In this context, she provides detailed commodity lists and the dates of diplomatic documents to which these sheets were attached.

Diplomatic relations between Korea and the Ryūkyūs can generally be divided into three phases: (1) a period of direct diplomatic contacts through exchange of envoys, 1392–1527, (2) a period of indirect diplomatic contacts via Peking, China, 1527–1638, and (3) a period restricting mutual relations to the repatriation of castaways via Peking, 1638–1891. Her analysis covers a time period beginning, when the port of Naha in Ryūkyū still functioned as an international maritime entrepôt connecting Southeast with East Asia, going over to a period, when the island country gradually began to lose its intermediary position around the mid-sixteenth century. Many of the goods exported from the Ryūkyūs until the late sixteenth century were not produced in the Ryūkyūan archipelago itself, but originated in countries in Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East and even Africa. The Korean-Ryūkyūan maritime trade, consequently, represented a Northeast Asian branch of the international maritime trade network of that time. S. M. Hong-Schunka's analysis also suggests that within the mutual diplomatic relationship, the Ryūkyūs played an active role, whereas Chosŏn Korea remained apparently rather passive.

The article of Billy Kee Long So, Vincent W. K. Ho and K. C. Tam addresses the broad issue of economic integration between overseas trade and local industry by focusing on the domestic structure of the cotton textile industry in Jiangnan and in its relation to export business. The Jiangnan region in the Lower Yangzi Delta has long been recognized as the primary centre of Chinese cotton textile industry in late imperial China. The region produced the largest amount of cotton textiles in the entire empire in the late Ming, around the latter half of the sixteenth century, and in the mid-Qing, from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. The great majority of these textiles was transported and consumed within China. But the

2 Bodo Wiethoff, *Die chinesische Seeverbotspolitik und der private Überseehandel von 1368 bis 1567*. PhD. Dissertation. Hamburg, 1963. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Kommissionsverlag, 1963), pp. 126–140. *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens*.

high quality of these cotton textiles made it a profitable commodity even in the lucrative, but highly risky business of overseas trade. The analysis is based upon two empirical studies of the cotton textile industry in the Jiangnan region, that is, the eastern part of the Lower Yangzi delta, first, in the late seventeenth century and, second, in the late eighteenth century respectively. Cotton exports from Jiangnan during the late Ming mainly went to Japan and were carried out by some Zhejiang and, to a far greater extent, by Fujian merchants. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cotton cloth from this region, specified as “Nankeen Cloth”, also entered European markets. The major difference between late Ming overseas trade and that of the turn of the eighteenth century was that the former was dominated by Chinese merchants, whereas the latter was mainly carried out by Europeans. Critically analyzing sources and previous scholarship, the authors argue that the overseas market demand in the late Ming period was too weak to favour a booming export of cotton textiles to Japan, even though Chinese merchants participated very actively in this trade. During the later period, Jiangnan cotton exports were basically carried out by outside traders instead of Jiangnan locals. The failure to respond to overseas market demands, the authors argue, was mainly caused by a lack of integration between local producers and maritime trade, meaning the distribution of the product on markets overseas.

Su Wang examines the biographies of Xu Zhilin 徐之遴 (c. 1599–1678) as a case study for the investigation of Sino-Japanese relations in the field of medicine. Xu Zhilin was a Chinese physician who was kidnapped by Japanese pirates while on his way to the metropolitan examinations in Beijing. Before she analyzes Zhilin’s two tomb inscriptions, his biography in a Japanese local gazetteer and his genealogies, Su Wang first provides a brief general description of the history of Sino-Japanese relations in the field of medicine as well as on the reception of Chinese medical knowledge in Japan. This general description can be considered to be very helpful, as there is still a lack of literature on this topic in Western languages. The two best surveys on the history of medicine in Japan that also consider the reception of Chinese medicine are still Sugimoto Masayoshi’s *Science and Culture in Traditional Japan* (1978) and Erhard Rosner’s *Medizinesgeschichte Japans* (1989), which unfortunately does not include Chinese characters.³ In this respect, Su Wang seeks to provide a general survey that not only includes more recent research, but, above all, Chinese and Japanese readings and characters.

In the second part of her contribution, Su Wang introduces three biographical sources on Xu Zhilin. This is of particular interest because we do possess very few biographies of physicians, and our knowledge of their lives, social status, medical practice and their patients is very confined. A comparison of these sources, furthermore, provides us with additional information on historiographical aspects, as some

3 Sugimoto Masayoshi, Swain, David L., *Science and Culture in Traditional Japan. A.D. 600–1854*. (Cambridge, Mass., London: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1978). *M.I.T. East Asian Science Series*; Erhard Rosner, *Medizinesgeschichte Japans*. (Leiden, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1989), pp. 53–54, in Bernard Spuler *et al.* (ed.), *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Bd. III, Abschnitt V.

sources were written by Chinese and others by Japanese authors. Thus, we obtain further details on the different criteria the authors had when composing their sources. In this respect, the Japanese local gazetteer, for example, provides a great deal of information on Xu Zhilin's medical career – up to telling us for whom he worked and what salary he earned – but does not tell us much about his children and his life after retirement. In contrast, the Chinese tomb inscriptions lay more emphasis on the physician's genealogy, family, and life in seclusion after retirement. The case of Xu Zhilin can, thus, in various respects help us to better understand the reality of Sino-Japanese relations and their interconnected networks in the field of medicine.

My own contribution analyzes some sections of a medical manuscript called *Liuqiu baiwen* 琉球百問 (*A Hundred Questions from the Liuqius*; 1859) and describes certain aspects of the history and state of the practice of medicine on the Ryūkyū-Islands. In addition, the relation between China and the Ryūkyūs in the field of medicine during the early nineteenth century is examined. The *Liuqiu baiwen* is a collection of the correspondence between a Chinese physician, Cao Cunxin 曹存心 (Cao Renbo 曹仁伯; 1767–1834), and a physician from the Ryūkyū-Islands, Lü Fengyi 呂鳳儀. The Chinese name Lü Fengyi is most probably a pseudonym for Tokashiki Tsūkan 渡嘉敷通寛 (1794–1846), a famous royal physician from the Ryūkyūs and the author of the *Gozen Honzō* 御膳本草 (*Materia medica of imperial dietary*) who – besides taking care of the health of the royal family – was also very much concerned about general and basic health problems of everyday life in his country and about a correct diet of the local population.

I selected three medical cases dealt with in the manuscript that are of particular interest either because of the kind of disease, the kind of prescriptions and/or because they allow some cautious conclusions about the state of medicine on the island during that period: epilepsy (*xianzheng* 癲症), problems after childbirth, and diseases said to be typical for the Ryūkyūan people such as boils and ulcers. The latter are traced back by Lü Fengyi to the local climate and the fact that the people preferred to eat pork. The analysis of the three case studies provides us not only with information on how certain diseases were cured or at least treated, but also on what kind of medical knowledge was transferred between China and the Ryūkyūs. Combined with other sources such as tax lists, memorials by Chinese government officials, embassy reports, local gazetteers, and treatises on medicinal plants, we also obtain additional information on what kinds of medical drugs were imported and which were available locally. The manuscript is not only an example of an intercultural encounter in the field of medicine, but also contains interesting details on medical concepts, ideologies and practices on the Ryūkyūs during the early nineteenth century.

Examining the history of long distance navigation and seafaring, one is inevitably confronted with questions of medical care on board a ship. Scurvy, vitamin C deficiency, is one of the best-known diseases encountered by sailors when they spend a long time at sea without proper food provisions. Using a variety of texts

and cases Mathieu Torck tries to show examples of provision and preservation techniques to draw a picture of the Chinese (or Asian) sailor's daily menu and, thus, to obtain a better understanding of the issue of scurvy. He shows that Chinese ships were equipped with provisions since times as remote as the Warring States Period (481–256 B.C.). At least by Song times (A.D. 960–1279), it can be considered a fact that (salted) fruits were consumed on board the ships. A kind of land scurvy (*qingtui yagan* 青腿牙疳) was at least known since the eighteenth century. But we may conclude with near certainty that the Chinese were sensitive to the problem and that since earlier times sailors probably possessed a more or less extensive knowledge of the consequences of a lack of vitamins for the human body. Thus the present study, which was carried out in cooperation with the Medical Faculty of Ghent University and examines both biochemical details and Chinese historical texts, provides a valuable first step to understanding why Chinese sources appear not to mention scurvy and what kind of provisions and preservation techniques the sailors really possessed.

Ursula Holler introduces the origins of the transfer of Chinese medical knowledge to Europe. Direct contacts to Japan and China were established by the Jesuits in the middle of the sixteenth century. Of particular interest to the Europeans were *materia medica* or medicinal plants, pulse diagnostics, moxibustion and on a small scale also acupuncture. Holler describes the most important sources and the process of reception of Chinese medical knowledge among the Europeans. Generally speaking, only those parts of Chinese medicine were adopted which did not contradict the prevailing scholarly opinion. In this context, the interest in acupuncture, for example, received its first peak only after the consciousness about the origins of acupuncture had already been forgotten and only after it had been modified to suit individual requirements.

The final contribution by Roderich Ptak shows how two Portuguese living in the sixteenth century, Cristóvão Vieira and Vasco Calvo, perceived the contemporary Chinese province of Fujian and the Ryūkyū Islands – *Lequeios* in Portuguese. Their letters are among the best-studied Portuguese documents on early Sino-Portuguese relations. Yet some aspects still require a detailed examination. Ptak shows what valuable information both Vasco Calvo and Cristóvão Vieira had collected on southern China and some of the maritime locations which had close relations with China at that time. Their letters were not widely circulated, and it is of particular interest that they contain so many details pertaining to a major military strike against the Middle Kingdom. Calvo's and Vieira's letters are important not only in this respect, but they also reflect Portugal's interest in gradually exploring the regions beyond Guangdong – at a time when Sino-Portuguese relations were at a low point.

