A Maritime Girdle of Commerce: Asian Seaborne Trade 10th-13th Centuries

A. The Arab and Persian Worlds

1. Speaker: Maya Shatzmiller

Title: Islamic Trade with Asia in the tenth century or the lack thereof? The Evidence of the Baltic Sea and Persian Gulf hoards.

Abstract:

Documenting the state of Islamic trade with Asia -- India, China and Central Asia -- during the eighth-tenth centuries is still based mostly on literary sources - the corpus of the Arabic geographers. In this paper I would like to offer an alternative interpretation of the nature of the Islamic trade with Asia, by examining two premises with the help of monetary evidence from outside the region. The huge amount of Caliphate silver coins dating mainly from the eighth-tenth centuries, hoarded in the Baltic sea area, Poland, Russia Götländ, came from Asia, minted, as were the Persian Gulf hoards, from silver extracted from the Panjhir mines in Afghanistan. This may suggest a new assessment of the share of the Islamic seaborne trade in comparison to that carried by the overland route. Second, Islamic trade with Asia came to a momentary halt during the tenth century, seen as due to the political upheavals in inland central Asia. When we take into consideration the size of the Baltic Sea hoards, estimated in thousands of kilograms of silver, the tenth century interruption could actually represent an earlier shift in Asian trade, as well as an alternative explanation to the silver crisis of the Islamic world, noted by the eleventh century.

2. Speaker: Ralph Kauz

Title: Ports and persons of the Middle East involved in trade with Song China

Abstract:

During the major part of the rule of the Song dynasty (960-1279), China proper was confined to the southeast of the territory of the former Tang dynasty and the routes leading overland to Central and West Asia were mostly blocked by hostile kingdoms. The
orientation of the Song society was thus rather directed towards the sea, which led to a swift development of overseas trade and nautical techniques. On the other side of the Indian Ocean, we can observe the decline of the Abbasid dynasty and the fragmentation of the former grandiose Arab empire into various smaller political entities. This was especially true after the decline of the Seljuq rule in the course of the 12th century. Nevertheless, Indian Ocean trade continued during the entire period and the economical standard of the Song Empire was certainly not the smallest stimulus to this development. The aim of this paper is to examine the network which existed between the Western Indian Ocean and China during the period mentioned; special focus will be laid on the ports around the Arab peninsula (Persian Gulf and Red Sea) and the persons involved in these interactions.

3. Speaker: Seyed Hossein Barshan

Title: The Confrontation of the Persian Gulf Commercial Emirates in the Thirteenth Century

Abstract:

The wave of attacks and immigrations of the military migrating tribes into the southern regions of Iran which started from the half of the 12th century and continued till the late 14th century caused an irreparable damage to the urban life of this region of the country. Although the country's southern cities had survived the first Mongol all-over onslaught, the aggression and settlement of the Mongol – originally wandering tribes called in the literature as Negoodarian, Davaii, Choghataii and Garavonas- intensified the political and military turmoil and unrest of this region during the tribalism period (Ilkhanid era) and as a result of this situation the southern cities of Iran experienced the most difficult and agonizing days of their lives. Nevertheless, the flow of urban life never stopped in these regions.

The growth of the southern marine trade which had flourished during the era of Mongol domination would ensure the survival of urban life in this area of the country. The islands, secured against the Wandering tribes' attacks became suitable places for migration of human and economic capital of the country's southern cities. Although, the natural conditions in these islands were not suitable for urban life, the growth and development of industrial productions and commercial services caused the birth of new cities as well as the growth of old cities in the Persian Gulf islands during the 13th century.

On the other hand, the plentiful profit obtained by marine trade caused the emergence of different pretenders to the power and government in the Persian Gulf islands. The rulers of these islands, who generally were subject to the Fars and Kerman governments, had gained a huge wealth and full power through trade during this period and founded independent and hereditary family governments.

Obtaining the monopoly of trade in the Persian Gulf, which was the main goal of the new –established dynasties, caused the emergence of political and commercial
competitions and disputes would generally lead to military confrontations. During the 13th century, the Persian Gulf was the scene of bloody fights between the independent Emirates of this region and two Emirates called Hormoz and Kish were dominant and had influence over other rulers of the islands. The commercial and political fate of the Persian Gulf was dependent on the commercial and military fights of these two superior powers.

In this paper, the conditions of the formation of the independent commercial Emirates in the Persian Gulf's islands during the 13th century are examined. The goal of this study is to show the effect of military and commercial competitions of the independent Emirates in this region on the political face of the Persian Gulf during this century.

**B. South Asia**

4. Speaker: Sen Tansen

**Title: The Changing Nature of Maritime Trade between India and China, 1000-1300**

**Abstract:**

Commercial relations between India and China underwent dramatic transformation in the eleventh century. With the decline of some of the overland trade routes between the two regions, maritime channels became more viable and increasingly profitable for the itinerant traders. Muslim merchants replaced the Buddhist-leaning traders, who had played a significant role in Sino-Indian exchanges during the first millennium. In addition, non-religious luxury and bulk products gradually replaced goods related to Buddhist ceremonies and rituals. This paper examines the reasons for some of these changes by focusing on the new economic policies instituted in India and China, the spread of the Islamic trading network, advances in shipbuilding and navigation technologies, the expanding role of Southeast Asian kingdoms, and the entry of Chinese traders in Indian Ocean trade. It will also address the wider ramifications of these changes to Indian Ocean commerce from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries.

**C. Southeast Asia**

5. Speaker: FUKAMI Sumio

**Title: The Rise of Tambralinga and the Southeast Asian Commercial Boom in the Thirteenth Century**

**Abstract:**

The state of Tambralinga (Danmaling), located around Nakhon Sithammarat in the central Malay peninsula, grew enormously during the 13th century. It is first
mentioned in the Daoyizazhi (1270s) as having brought tribute to the Southern Song in 1196. During the reign of Candrabanu (Chaiya inscription of 1230) it advanced into Sri Lanka (1247-62), placing the northern part of the island under its rule, and also fought with the king of Pandya in southern India. According to the Dadenanhaizhi (1304), Danmaling was one of the leading powers of Southeast Asia along with Zhancheng (Champa), Zhenla (Khmer) and Shepo (Java), and the entire Malay peninsula fell within its sphere of influence. But Tambralinga's growth did not continue for long, and as Malayu, backed by Java, advanced from the south and the newly emerging state of Xian (or maritime Siam) advanced from the north, it fell into oblivion in the course of the ensuing conflict. By the second half of the 14th century, Java (Majapahit) too had recognized Nakhon Sithammarat as belonging to Siam.

In accounts of Southeast Asian history, Java, Cambodia, Burma and the Straits of Malacca (especially Srivijaya in the 7th to 8th centuries and Melaka in the 15th century) often play the leading roles, whereas the central Malay peninsula occupies only a secondary position. But in the 13th century Tambralinga was one of the leading players, and its military advance into Sri Lanka was a rare example of an advance across the sea to another region by a Southeast Asian power.

What brought about this enormous growth experienced by Tambralinga? M. Jacq-Hergoualc'h, in his recent opus on the ancient and medieval history of the Malay peninsula (2002: 391-441), attributes it to the commercial boom of the 12th and 13th centuries. It is necessary to examine this commercial boom in greater detail, for judging from the discoveries of trade ceramics it was a phenomenon not confined to the central Malay peninsula, but also to be observed widely throughout insular Southeast Asia. This raises the question of why this commercial boom should have benefited the central Malay peninsula in particular.

Behind the rise of Tambralinga, beside the expanding influence of China, was an increase in Southeast Asia’s own economic importance, accompanied by growing ties with Sri Lanka by way of Theravada Buddhism and the Pali language. Another factor may have been changes in the role of the Straits of Malacca. Whereas their former function as a centre of trade and maritime traffic had allowed the old piracy-based Sanfoqi to thrive, as described in the Lingwaidaida and Zhufanzhi, since the decline of Sanfoqi the Straits had become no more than a maritime passageway, opening the way for the rise of a different kind of state on the peninsula.

6. Speaker: Kenneth R. Hall

Title: “Sojourning Communities, Ports-of-Trade, and Agrarian-Based Polities in Southeast Asia’s Eastern Regions, 1000-1300”

Abstract:

The 1000-1300 era is especially vital relative to the increasing volume of maritime trade and networking among the Southeast Asian mainland (Champa), Java, and the island regions to the east, notably Borneo (gold) and the eastern Indonesian archipelago Spice Islands. There has been very little previous research on this trade, its contribution to emerging Southeast Asian polities, nor consideration of its relationship to wider
developments in the regional international trade. This paper explores the limited written records in relation to new archeological discoveries, with focus on the development of new trading relationships and their consequence to Cham, Java, and archipelago societies; the formation of multi-ethnic Southeast Asia-based sojourning communities, ports-of-trade, and agrarian-based polities during the 1000-1300 period; and how this regional trade was connected to the development of the new international trading patterns in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea.

7. Speaker: Geoff Wade

Title: Maritime Trade in East Asia 900-1300

Abstract:

On the basis of Chinese texts, Southeast Asian inscriptions and archaeological data (shipwreck and other), this paper will examine the changing characteristics of East Asian maritime trade over the period 900-1300 and the factors behind such change. It will examine Song trade policies, the initial encouragement of maritime trade and whether the monetary reforms and transition to a silver economy in the 1160s did in fact result in reduced overseas Chinese trade in the 13th century. The degree to which trade with and commodities from the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East changed patterns of maritime trade in East Asia over this period will be looked at, as will Yuan maritime trade policies, especially vis-à-vis the military expeditions launched by sea at the end of the 13th century. How the Chinese and Mongol trade policies affected the maritime trade of Southeast Asia over these three centuries, the commodities traded and the trade marts which flourished will be a major topic of investigation.

D. East Asia

8. Speaker: Ching-fei SHIH

Title: The changes in ceramic trade between China and the Middle East from 13th to 14th centuries

Abstract:

By the thirteenth century, a strong trade route system had been built up and this century saw a rapid expansion of international trade. Never before had so many regions come in contact with one another. According to a comprehensive study by Abu-Lughod, in the years between 1250 and 1350, an incipient trade economy system was developing, which stretched all the way from northwest Europe, through the Middle East (including the northern part of Africa), and Asia (coastal and steppe zones); it involved merchants and producers in an extensive if sometimes limited range of exchanges. Even though the economy in different areas of this world system had their own cycles of development, they were gradually integrated into a linked series of exchange. The effects of this period of promising economic growth were reflected in the increased size of cities involved, the
expansion of the numbers of areas from China to Europe drawn into trade and the increasing numbers of types and quantities of goods exchanged. Under these circumstances, the thirteenth century saw the rapid integration of a world trade system, which developed and reached its apogee at the end of the thirteenth century and first decades of the fourteenth century.

Within this maritime trade system, Chinese porcelains were significant goods. Throughout the pre-modern era, China remained almost unrivalled in the production of silk and porcelain in terms of quality, and was thus economically in a class of its own. During the Tang period (618-907), the principal goods imported to China were aromatics, medicines and spices; the major Chinese goods exported were textiles. Chinese ceramics as regular export goods joined this trade at least from the late eighth century, the mid-Tang period in China. Tang and post-Tang ceramics were not only a viable substitute for local pottery in many areas, but also created a demand for fine glazed wares from the Persian Gulf to Japan. The durable and elegant Chinese fine wares were superior to anything produced anywhere else in the world at the time. Thereafter, Chinese ceramics became a major export and maintained its monopoly position until the early eighteenth century.

However, not until the Song and Yuan periods, did the export of ceramics gradually compete with the export of textiles. We have archaeological evidence of an extensive ceramic trade in the large quantities of Chinese ceramic shards found all along the coasts and wealthy hinterland cities of the East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia, the Middle and Near East, and as far as in East Africa.

Contemporary written sources also testify to the great quantities of ceramics exported. It is apparent that ceramic trade in the thirteenth centuries was already very extensive and by that date, Chinese ceramics were distributed throughout South East Asia and even as far as Africa. It is obvious that trade in Chinese ceramics was well established before the emergence of Jingdezhen blue-and-white porcelain. These blue-and-white porcelains started as a local experimental product in the 1320s, at a time when internal and maritime trade was expanding. With its advanced technology and outstanding quality, Jingdezhen blue-and-white porcelain managed to penetrate and gradually take over the existing market. Its market was then expanded nationally and internationally. Fragments of Yuan blue-and-white porcelain have been found among other Chinese export ceramics in a wide range of areas from Japan to the Persian Gulf and Egypt.

In this paper, I will look at the appearance of blue-and-white porcelain in the history of Chinese trade ceramics and the impact of blue-and-white porcelain on existing markets of other contemporary trade ceramics. I will also look at the overall view of blue-and-white porcelain in overseas markets to see how Jingdezhen blue-and-white porcelain fitted into the local demands of different regions, how it penetrated the competition in the market. This study is an outline of the trade in blue-and-white porcelain from Jingdezhen rather than a comprehensive survey of Chinese trade ceramics. Below, we will look into the domestic and overseas markets to see Jingdezhen’s development in these markets during the period. The characteristics of the different markets will also be explored.
9. Speaker: Kent Deng

Title: Key Factors for the Growth of China's Traditional Maritime Sector

Abstract:

China's traditional maritime sector and its growth have received much scholarly attention largely due to its 'precocity'. One only has to mention Zheng He and his most publicised path-breaking voyages ahead of Europeans in the pre-modern world.

Two key factors that shaped China's maritime past: the state and the market. As both were necessary, the impact could either support growth or to stifle it. These two factors could also cancel each other out.

Overall, the Song Period was by far the most pro-market. It even had quasi-mercantilism. But the Song growth was unsustainable in the long run because of the mismanagement of China's national defence by the money-hungry state. This shows that the market is a dependent variable on the quality of the state. The Song failure was thus a state failure in the end. The Ming portrayed a false image of an Asia super sea power to the outside world. But inside, the market was extremely weak due to the state discrimination against private commercial activities in general and the state hijacking of the maritime sector in particular. A sharp decline in China's maritime growth was inevitable. The early and mid-Qing and the late Qing shared some features as the state behaved more tolerantly towards the private sector. During the late Qing, the state ceased making enemies with maritime merchants. Instead, it forged an alliance with merchants to operate the Canton-Cohong monopoly which undoubtedly benefited a lot of ordinary Chinese at the cost of the foreign traders. The opening up of China's foreign trade from the Qing monopoly helped the growth of in China's maritime trade until the very end of the Qing (1911).

The focal point of this paper is the Song-Yuan period.