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Title: Silk, porcelain and lacquer: China and Japan and their trade with Western Europe and the New World, 1500-1644. A survey of documentary and material evidence
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Historical Background
European entry into the Asian Maritime trade [1.1]

Building Iberian trading-post empires in the sixteenth century.

The Portuguese arrival in Asia, the establishment of Macao and the trans-Atlantic trade route monopoly to Europe [1.1.1]

The maritime voyages of exploration in the Atlantic Ocean in the late fifteenth century led the Portuguese down the coast of West Africa, and rounding the Cape of Good Hope and crossing the Indian Ocean, to India. Vasco da Gama’s voyage to India (1497–1498) opened up a new area for Portuguese settlement and trade. Once the Portuguese led by Governor Afonso de Albuquerque (1455–1555), established their headquarters (Estada do India) in Goa on the western coast of India in 1510, and gained the support of its Hindu inhabitants, Goa came to replace Calicut as the principal trading port of India, between Cambay and Cape Comorin. The Portuguese presence in Goa, regularly visited by merchants from all over India, led to the development of the first workshops in the coastal region of Gujarat producing luxury mother-of-pearl in Goa, regularly visited by merchants from all over India, led to the development of the Asian Maritime trade [1.1].

In 1511, Governor Albuquerque took Malacca, a thriving port city on the Malay Peninsula, which had been in the possession of the Muslim sultans of Bijapur, but had been previously a principality of Vijayanagara. In 1512, he crossed the Indian Ocean, to India, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. The Portuguese Empire, 1400–1800’, in Bethencourt and Ramada Curto, 2003, p. 146.

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written in India in 1522, a year after King John III (r. 1521–1557) had ascended to the Portuguese throne, states that one-third of ship's cargoes returning from China contained 'porcelains and damasks, and iron nails and leather shields and necessary things for stock'. This same year, the Portuguese attempted to renew trade relations with China, but were forcibly expelled from the Guangdong coast. An Imperial decree promulgated banning all trade with the "barbarians" – as the Portuguese were referred to – as well as with other foreigners. This kept the Portuguese from going directly to Canton to trade, but it did not prevent them from conducting business with Cantonese merchants outside of the city in Macao, Malacca, Siam and a few other ports in the South Seas.

Trade with China was so valuable that the Portuguese were not willing to relinquish this new and promising market without a struggle. Thus, Portuguese merchants continued to visit the south China coast, either clandestinely or sometimes with the support of local officials who were so anxious to do business with the Portuguese that they ignored the Imperial decree. In these circumstances, trade could only be conducted on the offshore islands, not in a major port. In the 1530s and 1540s illegal trade activities concentrated in the provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Fujian, where the Portuguese established temporary settlements. The province of Portuguese merchants in Fujian at this time is described in the *Book of History of the Ming Dynasty*, which indicates that about 500 Portuguese were living in Zhangzhou in 1541. Among the first Portuguese to visit Fujian during this period was George Mascarenhas, who was engaged in trade and became established at Quanzhou and Xiamen, two coastal prefectures that border with Zhangzhou and face the Taiwan Strait.  

In the following decade, the Portuguese were using temporary shacks and tents to store and display their goods in Shangchuan, the largest island west of the mouth of the Pearl River, in Guangdong province. In 1555, the Portuguese Jesuit Belchior Nunes Barreto (1519–1571) described Shangchuan as a centre for trade with the Chinese where 'silk, porcelain, camphor, copper, alum and China-wood are bartered for many kinds of merchandise from this land [Japan].' The Portuguese, as will be shown in section 3.4.1.1 of Chapter III, not only participated in a prolific trade of ordinary trade porcelain at Shangchuan, but also of porcelain made to order for them with European motifs. By this time large quantities of Asian goods were imported into Lisbon. João Brandão in his *Grandezas e abastança de Lisboa* written in 1552, informs us that eight hundred cases of Asian goods passed through the *Casa da Índia* that year.  

Once the Portuguese settled in Macao at the mouth of the Pearl River in 1557, during the reign of Jiajing (1522–1566), they secured a trading post and virtually monopolized European trade in Asia (Fig. 1.1.1.4). The Portuguese or *cadores*, who had retired from the service of the Crown, married and settled permanently in Macao, he *Cidade do Nome do Deus* (City of the Name of God), and consequently found great opportunities for acting as trading agents for the Chinese merchants. Their geographical location gave them the added benefit of fitting into the existing long and middle distance trade networks both in the China Seas and in the Indonesian archipelago centered on Malacca. By then, Portugal's overseas empire extended across the world, from Brazil in the west to Japan in the east. To do so, the Portuguese set up a 'good for goods' trade formula, where they acquired goods at local market prices in one part of Asia and offered them for sale at a profit in another Asian market. They also traded on their own account in pepper, cloves, sandalwood and other goods from
the Indonesian Islands and financed voyages to Japan, and later also to Manila. The total ban imposed by China in 1557 on all direct trade with Japan, and the continuing raids by Japanese pirates on the China coast, enabled the Portuguese to gain a virtual monopoly of this trade. In 1566, the Portuguese Crown granted Macao the status of a municipal council identical to that of Goa. The overall command of Macao was in the hands of the Portuguese captain-major of the Japanese voyage, who spent several months in Macao each year en route to Japan from Goa via Malacca. This situation continued until 1623, when the constant menace of Dutch raids in the early decades of the seventeenth century prompted the governor of the Estado da India to begin appointing a permanent captain in Macao.

The Portuguese trade from India eastwards beyond Cape Comorin to Indonesia and the China Sea introduced a range of new commodities carried from Goa or Cochinchin. In Goa – the Indian port city where East met West – the captain-major's ship, known as the Black Ship (esvarteiro), was loaded with goods of European origin including Flemish clocks, wine glasses, crystal and cloths, as well as Indian textiles. The ship sailed with the monsoon in April or May to Malacca, where much of its cargo was unloaded or exchanged. From Malacca, the ship continued to the East coast. After working for three years among the pearl fisheries of the Fishery Coast, he continued to the East Indies, Malacca and the Indonesian Spice Islands. Finally, he proceeded to Japan. The presence of Father Francis Xavier in Japan and his chief missionary work there will be discussed in section 4.1.1.5 of Chapter IV.

In 1542, the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (1506–1552) arrived at Kagoshima in southern Kyūshū to begin his missionary work. His voice was described as ‘like the screech of an owl’. One and all rushed to see him, crowding all the roads in a total lack of restraint. Visual evidence of the annual arrival of the Black Ship to Nagasaki and the exotic nature of the procession of Portuguese merchants and their attendants bringing foreign gifts, exotic birds and animals is provided by a number of extant Namban folding screens (yōdo), dating to the Momoyama period (1573–1615) (Fig. 1.1.1.5a and b). The Black Ship also brought a variety of both religious and secular goods required for the Jesuit mission in Japan. The Portuguese and their attendants (sailors, African slaves, Indians and Malay) were called ‘Namban’ by the Japanese. Namban, literally meaning ‘southern barbarians’, was a term used by the Japanese to refer to all foreigners except Chinese and Koreans.

In 1543, the first Portuguese ship arrived in Japan to take advantage of the Ming mariner ban on all direct trade to Japan acting as intermediaries between these two countries. Raw silk and silk finished products were in great demand in Japan, where Chinese and Japanese merchants had previously controlled a substantial trade of Chinese silk for Japanese silver during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Portuguese ships continued to visit Japan after the Ming ban was imposed, and thus allowed commerce for the Portuguese. According to Ribeiro and Godinho, 40 to 60 Chinese junks (the largest averaging about 600 tons) visited Japan annually between 1553 and 1640, mostly in the beginning of the seventeenth century, after the ban was lifted and also competed with the Portuguese. During O and Ribeiro and Godinho, 160 to 180 Chinese junks visited Japan annually between 1573 and 1640, mostly in the beginning of the seventeenth century, after the ban was lifted and also competed with the Portuguese. During O and Ribeiro and Godinho, 160 to 180 Chinese junks visited Japan annually between 1573 and 1640, mostly in the beginning of the seventeenth century, after the ban was lifted and also competed with the Portuguese. Finally, he proceeded to Japan. The presence of Father Francis Xavier in Japan and his chief missionary work there will be discussed in section 4.1.1.5 of Chapter IV.

The Japanese of the Namban tradition maintained commerce only with the Ryūkū Islands and Korea, in a limited civil war under the divided rule of feudal warlords. The ruling imperial house and the emperor were only symbolic figureheads and had no real power. The Ashikaga shogunate had established their government in Miyako (as Kyōto was then frequently called) and controlled all the court administration until 1573, when the powerful warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) eliminated this shogunate, bringing the Ashikaga dynasty (1333–1573) to an end.

In 1549, the Jesuit missionary Francisco Xavier (1506–1552) arrived at Kagoshima in the southern part of Kyūshū and travelled to Miyako to deliver his first sermons. An anonymous Japanese textual source, dating to 1639, informed us of the mixture of fear and fascination that the arrival of the huge three-masted Black Ship and the first sight of a Jesuit missionary caused in Japan some 90 years earlier. It reads: ‘In the reign of Mikado Go-Nara no In … A Southern Barbarian trading vessel came to our shores. From this ship for the first time emerged an unnameable creature, somewhat similar in shape to a human being, but looking rather more like a long-nosed goblin or the giant demon Mikoshi Nyūdo. Upon closer inspection it was discovered that this being was called Bateren [Father]. The length of his nose was the first thing that attracted attention: it was like a conch shell. His eyes were as large as spectacles and their inside were yellow. His head was small. On his hands and feet he had long claws. His height exceeded seven feet, and he was black all over … What he said could not be understood at all: his voice was like the screech on an owl. One and all rushed to see him, crowding all the roads in a total lack of restraint. Visual evidence of the annual arrival of the Black Ship to Nagasaki and the exotic nature of the procession of Portuguese merchants, Christian missionaries and their multitude of attendants bringing foreign gifts, exotic birds and animals is provided by a number of extant Namban folding screens (yōdo), dating to the Momoyama period (1573–1615) (Fig. 1.1.1.5a and b). The Black Ship also brought a variety of both religious and secular goods required for the Jesuit mission in Japan. The Portuguese and their attendants (sailors, African slaves, Indians and Malay) were called ‘Namban’ by the Japanese. Namban, literally meaning ‘southern barbarians’, was a term used by the Japanese to refer to all foreigners except Chinese and Koreans.

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European competition begins: The Spanish establishment of Macao in the New World and Asia, and trans-Atlantic trade route to Spain [1.1.2.1.2]

The Spanish, following their Iberian neighbours in the expansion to Asia, sent an expedition led by the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521) in search of a westward route to the Spice Islands, which after sailing around the southern tip of South America reached the island of Cebu in the Philippines in 1521.10 Its location was strategic, bordered by the Philippine Sea on the east, the South China Sea on the west, the Lusitania Strait on the north, and the Celebes Sea on the south. By the time Philip II succeeded his father to the throne in 1556, Spain had established a vast colonial empire in the New World that encompassed the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru.9 Nine years later, in 1565, the Spanish army led by Miguel López de Legazpi (1519–1572) finally conquered Cebu and established the first Spanish settlement in the Philippines. A letter written in 1567 by Legazpi to King Philip II describes the existing trade to the Philippines at the time as ‘farther north than our settlement, or almost to the northwest not far from here, are some large islands, called Luzon and Vindoro [Mindoro], where the Chinese and Japanese come every year to trade. They bring silk, wools, holls, porcelains, perfumes, iron, tin, colored cotton cloth, and other small wares; and in return they take away gold and wax’.3 Legazpi’s desire to establish trade relations with China is clearly stated in his Relation of the Filipino Islands of 1569, as he writes ‘We shall also gain the commerce with China, whence come silks, porcelains, bzenin, musk, and other articles. Thus partly through commerce and partly through the articles of commerce, the settlers will increase the wealth of the land in a short time’.4

Direct trade between the Filipinos and the viceroyalty of New Spain began four years earlier, in 1565, when the Spanish Augustinian friar and governor Andrés de Urdaneta (1508–1568) discovered a possible eastward course across the Pacific Ocean to Acapulco. We learn from a letter written in June 1565 by Andrés de Miranda, nephew of Legazpi and auditor of the Royal Treasury, that the ill-fated flagship that reached and King Charles V of Spain (r. 1516–1556) in 1556–1598), a member of the Habsburg family network connected Lisbon and Madrid with the imperial courts in Brussels and Vienna.

32 Ibid., p. 194.
33 Portugal’s royal charter of April 25, 1497, bound with the royal order of the king, one of the principal sovereign pronouncements of the time, was a double marriage celebration in 1502 and 1503 in Portugal. See R. M. S. Freire, The Portuguese Crown (1572–1576). His brother, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (r. 1519–1556), married the sister of King John II, Isabella (1503–1539). The vast Habsburg family network connected Lisbon and Madrid with imperial courts in Brussels and Vienna.
34 The expedition led to the death of Magellan and some of his men. The surviving Spanish departed to Spain across the Indian Ocean and around the Cape of Good Hope after relations with the local social group deteriorated. Magellan’s expedition caused immediate protests from the Portuguese Crown due to the impropriety of the Ivory Coast; the treaty for the economy of the Ivory Coast in 1526, and the Spanish rights for the ivory trade in the 1530s, 1571, and 1578.
35 In Japan, new deposits of silver mines were discovered in the 1530s, Japanese ships were trading large volumes of silver to the Spanish colonies in the New World and Asia, the Spanish establishment of Manila, and the viceroyalty of New Spain the territories in the New World up until 1821. The viceroyalty of Peru, established in 1542, initially included all land situated north of the isthmus of Panama. It later included upper and lower California, present-day eastern and western islands, the territory arranged along the Gulf of Mexico to Florida and the Caribbean. The viceroyalty of Peru established almost a decade later in 1563, included all the land coasted from Panama to Tierra del Fuego, present-day Chile and Argentina except for the coast of what is now known as part of Brazil that belonged to Portugal.
36 Ibid., p. 194, no. 20.
37 The Pacific World. Boxer and Cooper suggest that it was in the 1530s when the navigators of Spain and Peru.

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In the early 1580s, the term supposedly derived from ‘seng-li’, the word for business in the Hokkien dialect.

By the time of the unification of Spain and Portugal in 1580, when King Philip II became also King of Portugal, and Emperor Wanli (1573–1620) was ruling China, the overseas junk trade between the ports of Zhangzhou, Quanzhou and Xiamen prefectures in Fujian province and Manila was well established and highly profitable. In 1589 among the junks that were granted official licences for overseas voyages, sixteen went to trade in Manila. This number varied annually from only seven in 1616 to fifty in 1631. After 1645 the number of junks arriving in Manila decreased sharply as a result of the civil wars in China. The relatively short distance from Fujian to Manila – a journey of about 15 to 20 days that involved relatively few risks on the sea – as well as the exceptionally high profits derived from the junk trade encouraged a large number of Fujian merchants to visit Manila clandestinely. There was a large Chinese community, mostly merchants and craftsmen of Fujianese origin, living and trading in Manila. The Spanish authorities referred to them as Sangleyés, a term supposedly derived from ‘sang-il’, the word for business in the Hokkien dialect.

In the early 1580s, the Sangleyés were assigned their own quarter – the Parián or silk market – within the Spanish walled city, Intramuros. When the Parián or silk market was destroyed by fire in 1588 (only a year after it had been founded) probably in the northeastern part of the city, the fifth Spanish Governor, Diego Remón (1583–1586), relocated it to a marshy site on the Pasig River. The Bishop of the Philippines, Domingo de Salazar, gives a detailed description of the latter Parián in a letter written to Fray Sánchez dated June 2, 1588. He says ‘Inside this city is the silk-market of Parián or silk market’.

The huge profits earned from the trade with Chinese merchants and the potential for further riches that China offered induced the Spanish to try to enter Chinese territory. Between 1574 and 1590, they made several attempts to establish a permanent trading post on the south China coast, as the Portuguese had done earlier with Macau in Guangdong province. In 1599, the authorities in Guangzhou finally granted the Spanish a post in a place called ‘El Pinal’ somewhere on the coast between Guangzhou and Macao (its exact whereabouts are still unknown), but this was abandoned shortly afterwards. In 1626, they were successful in establishing Fort San Salvador at Keelung and Fort Santo Domingo at Tamsui in the north of the island of Formosa, from the Spanish ‘La Isla Hermosa’, the Beautiful Island (present-day Taiwan), and thus incorporated it in the Manila-Acapulco trade route. In 1646, however, the Dutch who were at war with the Spanish over the Moluccas and had taken control of the southern part of the island in 1624, expelled them and temporarily took over the island.

The so-called Manila Galleon – known in Spanish as Nao de China or Nao de Acapulco – that traversed the Pacific from the port of Cavité in Manila to Acapulco on the west coast of the viceroyalty of New Spain was the economic foundation of the Philippines and gave the Spanish Crown a foothold in the profitable Asian trade network. The so-called Manila Galleon – known in Spanish as Nao de China or Nao de Acapulco – that traversed the Pacific from the port of Cavité in Manila to Acapulco on the west coast of the viceroyalty of New Spain was the economic foundation of the Philippines and gave the Spanish Crown a foothold in the profitable Asian trade network.
The trade in Chinese silk from Manila to the Spanish colonies in the New World and its documentation are not systematically documented until the sixteenth century.  

In 1625, the English Dominican Thomas Gage, who travelled through the viceroyalty of New Spain and Guatemala until 1637, was quite impressed by the centrality of New Spain. Upon his arrival in Veracruz that year, in 1625, Gage regaled his readers with a lengthy inventory of the regions connected to the colonial New Spain. All of which, the traveller wrote “The great trading from Mexico, and by Mexico from the East Indies, from Spain, from Cuba, Santo Domingo, Yucatan, and by Portobello from Peru, from Cartagena, and all the islands lying upon the North Sea, and by the River Alvarado going up to Zapotecas, San Idelfonso, and towards Oaxaca, and by the river Grijalva, running up to Tabasco, Los Zoques, and Chiapa de Indios, maketh this little town very rich and to abound with all the commodities of the continent land, and of all the East and West Indies’ treasures.”

A small quantity of the Asian goods imported into Acapulco was then exchanged of silver became available following the Spanish conquest of the New World and the subsequent discovery of large quantities of Chinese and Japanese manufactured goods in both the New World and the Iberian Peninsula. After the Manila Galleon reached Acapulco in November or December, the imported Chinese porcelain, silver, and other Asian manufactured goods were sold in the Feria de Acapulco (Acapulco Fair), a wholesale and retail fair that was held in January. Merchants from all the Spanish viceroyalties attended (Fig. 1.1.2.2). Most of the cargo was intended for consumption in New Spain, and was carried inland by mule train on an arduous journey over the mountains to the viceroyalty’s capital, Mexico City, formerly the ancient Mexico city of Tenochtitlán. There it was sold in the city market (Pozas) of the Plaza Mayor (present-day Zócalo area) (Fig. 1.1.2.3). The Spanish Bernardo de Balbuena (1562?–1627) in his poem Grandeza Mexicana, published in 1604, mentions among other Asian goods that were imported from Spain, the rest of Europe, and Manila, ‘the fine porcelain of the Sangley medroso.’ In 1625, the English Dominican Thomas Gage, who travelled through the viceroyalty of New Spain and Guatemala until 1637, was quite impressed by the centrality of New Spain. Upon his arrival in Veracruz that year, in 1625, Gage regaled his readers with a lengthy inventory of the regions connected to the colonial New Spain. All of which, the traveller wrote “The great trading from Mexico, and by Mexico from the East Indies, from Spain, from Cuba, Santo Domingo, Yucatan, and by Portobello from Peru, from Cartagena, and all the islands lying upon the North Sea, and by the River Alvarado going up to Zapotecas, San Idelfonso, and towards Oaxaca, and by the river Grijalva, running up to Tabasco, Los Zoques, and Chiapa de Indios, maketh this little town very rich and to abound with all the commodities of the continent land, and of all the East and West Indies’ treasures.” A small quantity of the Asian goods imported into Acapulco was then exported to Mexico and the Iberian Peninsula, but the bulk of the cargo was kept in Mexico for consumption.

The trade in Chinese silk from Manila to the Spanish colonies in the New World and its documentation are not systematically documented until the sixteenth century. In 1625, the English Dominican Thomas Gage, who travelled through the viceroyalty of New Spain and Guatemala until 1637, was quite impressed by the centrality of New Spain. Upon his arrival in Veracruz that year, in 1625, Gage regaled his readers with a lengthy inventory of the regions connected to the colonial New Spain. All of which, the traveller wrote “The great trading from Mexico, and by Mexico from the East Indies, from Spain, from Cuba, Santo Domingo, Yucatan, and by Portobello from Peru, from Cartagena, and all the islands lying upon the North Sea, and by the River Alvarado going up to Zapotecas, San Idelfonso, and towards Oaxaca, and by the river Grijalva, running up to Tabasco, Los Zoques, and Chiapa de Indios, maketh this little town very rich and to abound with all the commodities of the continent land, and of all the East and West Indies’ treasures.” A small quantity of the Asian goods imported into Acapulco was then exported to Mexico and the Iberian Peninsula, but the bulk of the cargo was kept in Mexico for consumption.
In 1526, Emperor Charles V issued a royal decree stating that all ships were to travel across the Atlantic in convoy to counteract frequent attacks on their ships by English, French and Dutch raiders. By the 1560s, the Treasure Fleet system was well established and centered on two fleets that sailed from Spain to the New World every year: the Tierra Firme and the New Spain. The two fleets returning to Spain with treasures from the New World sailed to the Caribbean in early spring. The Tierra Firme fleet stopped at Cartagena in present-day Colombia to load gold and emeralds before calling at Nombre de Dios (after 1585 replaced by Portobello as port-of-call) in present-day Panama to load Peruvian silver and gold that had been packed overland across the Isthmus of Panama. The New Spain fleet went to the harbor of San Juan de Ulúa near Veracruz in New Spain (present-day Mexico) to load specie from the royal mint in Mexico City as well as colonial products, such as cochineal, cacao, indigo and hides. The two fleets would later meet up in the port of Havana to be refitted for the return voyage to Spain in the early summer. The bulk of the precious metals were carried in large, heavily armed royal warships, while smaller, privately owned vessels carried other goods.


Flynn and Giraldez, 2005, p. 41.

Schurz, 1959, p. 135.

Flynn and Giraldez, 2005, p. 60.

Fig. 1.1.2.5 Map of Seville from the city atlas Civitates Orbis Terrarum Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg Cologne, 1588 34.5cm x 51cm © Altea Gallery, London

carried by mules via Puebla de los Angeles and Jalapa to the port of Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico (Fig. 1.1.2.4), where it was loaded onto the Spanish Treasure Fleet that traversed the Atlantic to Sevilla in Spain (Fig. 1.1.2.5), after calling at Havana in present-day Cuba.

In addition to these trans-oceanic trading ventures, a significant coastal trading network serviced other Spanish colonial settlements and carried such goods, sometimes clandestinely, between the vicereigncies of New Spain and Peru.

By 1604 the Spanish and Portuguese had suffered great losses after the attacks of the Dutch in Asia. This is clear in a letter sent from Goa by the Englishman Thos. Wilson to the Secretary of State, Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury (1563–1612), in England in July of that year, stating that “The riches brought home by the Spanish ships, but for the Chinese stuffs were none at all; the Hollanders, by taking the year before the St. Tho and St. Valentine coming from China, one worth a million the other 400,000 (ducats? torn), having disturbed Goa and those parts of all China stuffs, which with other prizes since taken, had quite spoiled the commerce in the south parts, and no man dares budge forth or venture anything.”

A report to Emperor Chonghzen (1628–1644) written in 1630 by He Qiayuan (1558–1632), a Ming court official and historian from Fujian, clearly shows that silk was sold by the Chinese junk traders at a much inflated sale price in the Philippines, and that porcelain from Jiangsi, in all probability Jingdezhen, was sought after by the Spanish. This Chinese source records that “When our Chinese subjects journey to trade in the [Indian Ocean], the [foreigners] trade the goods we produce for the goods of others. But when engaging in trade in Luzon we have designs solely on silver coins … A hundred jin of Huzhou silk yarn worth 100 taels can be sold at a price of 200 to 300 taels there. Moreover, porcelain from Jiangsi as well as sugar and fruit from my native Fujian, all are avidly desired by the Foreigners.”

Although Macao and Manila were competitors in the global silk-for-silver trade in the 1630s, they sometimes collaborated with each other. According to Schurz, the value of the annual silk imports from Macao to Manila between 1632 and 1636 was estimated at about a million and a half pesos. This is, as noted by Flynn and Giraldez, six times greater than the legal limit imposed by the 1635 royal prohibition of the Macao-Manila trade.
By the end of the sixteenth century, the taste for acquiring Asian manufactured goods continued to grow, not only in Portugal, Spain and the Southern Netherlands, but also in the rest of Europe. For much of the sixteenth century, the Seventeen Provinces of the Netherlands in southwestern Europe were part of the Spanish Habsburg Empire. When Philip II of Spain invaded the region in 1568 to quell support of the Protestant Reformation, the seven northern, Dutch-speaking provinces revolted.* In 1585, Philip II of Spain divided his empire between his brother, Ferdinand, Duke of Austria, who in 1584 became Holy Roman Emperor, and his son, Philip (future King Philip II), who inherited the Iberian Peninsula. Prior to Philip's embargo, the Dutch served as middlemen between Northern and Southern Europe and used their position to make hefty profits reselling spices and exotic Asian goods imported by the Portuguese. Their desire to participate in the highly profitable trade of East Asia's spices drove them to search for a route to Asia and this ambition put the Dutch in direct competition with the Portuguese monopoly.

Dutch and English trading companies enter and partly gain control of the Asian maritime trade

The Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company or VOC) [1.2.1]

The Dutch East India Company (Dutch: Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC) was a chartered company to trade directly with Asia. The Dutch East India Company (hereafter VOC) became actively involved in the trade with Asia. In 1609, the Northern Netherlands became the Dutch Republic of the United Provinces (hereafter Dutch Republic). The VOC made several failed attempts to establish a permanent trading post in China. After numerous failed attempts to establish trade contacts with Asia, an expedition led by Cornelis de Houtman round the Cape of Good Hope and reached Bantam (near present-day Banten) on the island of Java (present-day Indonesia) in 1595 (Fig. 1.2.1.1). Two years later, in 1598, a fleet of eight ships under the command of Jacob Cornelis Van Neck (1564–1638) and Wilbrandt Warwick arrived in Bantam. Although the profits of these expeditions were not as high as expected, the voyages were instrumental in getting further access to the riches of the Spice Islands. The Dutch historian Pieter Christiaensz Bos (1559–1635), in his De oospronck, begin ende vervolgh der Netherlandsche oorlogen, published between 1595 and 1634, describes the treasures brought back to Amsterdam by Jacob Cornelis Van Neck: ‘Never had such ships with such rich cargoes reached Amsterdam, as they had 400 loads of pepper, 100 loads of cloves, except the mace, nutmeg and cinnamon, porcelain, silk, silk cloths and other valuable items (Fig. 1.2.1.2).’

The first contacts between the Northern Netherlands and Japan began during the Momoyama period, when the ship Li Fung, under the command of the Englishman Will Adams, arrived in Bungo by accident, in 1600. The following year, in 1601, Jacob Cornelis Van Neck left Ternate with two ships, heading for Patani on the northeast coast of the Malay Peninsula, but being blown out of his course by a storm near Borneo he arrived near Portoguese Macao. The request to conduct trade there was not granted. That same year, in 1601, Jacob Cornelis Van Neck arrived in the coast of China. Direct trade in China, then under the rule of Emperor Wanli, was not possible. The profit obtained from the sale of the cargo of the Portuguese carrack, the Sāt Zage, which was captured by the Dutch off St. Helena on its homeward journey from Goa to Lisbon, greatly stimulated the Dutch interest in trade with Japan. The Dutch VOC (Dutch East India Company) was formed as a chartered company to trade directly with Asia. The Dutch East India Company (hereafter VOC) became actively involved in the trade with Asia. In 1609, the Northern Netherlands became the Dutch Republic of the United Provinces (hereafter Dutch Republic) governed by the States General.

The VOC made several failed attempts to establish a permanent trading post in China. In 1609, however, the VOC was able to open a trading factory at Hirado on the western coast of the island of Kyushu, near Nagasaki. The VOC faced
Edo (present-day Tokyo) on a diplomatic mission. The delegation was received favorably at the court and the trade permit was issued.

The incident with the Portuguese carrack Nossa Senhora da Graça, which took place a few months after the Dutch factory was established, resulted not only in the loss of the ship and its cargo, but also in the reinforcement of the Dutch presence in Japan. C. R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549–1650*, London and Berkeley, 1951, pp. 272–285.

After 1644, the number of Chinese junks arriving in Formosa decreased considerably as a result of the civil wars in China. The lucrative VOC trade from Formosa was further impeded after 1655, when the first Qing emperor, Shunzhi (1644–1661), imposed a ban on foreign exports to eradicate Ming loyalist resistance harboured by the maritime powers. From then on, the junks trade fell into the hands of the Ming loyalist and powerful sea-merchant Zheng Zhilong, who wanted to overthrow the Manchu rule on the mainland.

When the Portuguese were expelled from Japan and the country was closed for all Westerners in 1639 (sakoku), with the exception of the Dutch, the VOC was then moved in 1641 to Deshima, a small artificial island in Nagasaki harbor, which had originally been built to house the Portuguese merchants and isolate them from the Japanese population. By then, the VOC had established itself in locations across the Indonesian archipelago. That same year, in 1641, the Dutch captured from the Portuguese the strategic port of Malacca.
In the early sixteenth century, English merchants traded with Antwerp but some of them traded directly with the Levant in the eastern Mediterranean. Trade with the Levant was resumed when the Levant Company was founded in 1581, initially as a joint-stock company and later becoming a regulated company with a monopoly over English trade in the Ottoman Empire, which primarily imported spices, and cotton wool and yarn. The remarks made by the German Leopold von Wedel, who travelled to England in 1584–1585, in his diary stating that ‘Rare objects are not to be seen in England, but it is a fertile country, producing all sorts of corn, but not wine’, indicates that the luxury imported objects that were seen in Germany were not available for sale in England at this time. As Lack has noted, only a few people in England would have been able to acquire Asian objects before the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603).8

At the turn of the sixteenth century, England was still dependent on Indian and Dutch merchants to acquire spices. In 1600, Queen Elizabeth I chartered the Governor and Company of Merchants of London into the East Indies (Fig. 1.2.2.1). This organisation later became known as the East India Company or EIC (hereafter EIC), and was granted a monopoly of trade in all lands touched by the Indian Ocean, from the southern tip of Africa to the Spice Islands for a period of 15 years.9 The EIC was founded to compete with the Dutch monopoly on the spice trade. The fleet of 1601, commanded by James Lancaster, went to Asia to set up the first EIC factory at Bantam, to purchase pepper and spices.10 Edmund Scott, who stayed at Bantam as one of nine factors from February 1602 to October 1605, described the city as ‘China towne’, where Chinese merchants residing there dominated the pepper trade (Fig. 1.2.2.2). This notion is enforced by a letter sent by George Ball in 1617, who describes the English trade at Bantam as ‘most with Chinamen’.11

In 1613, the English established a factory in Hirado, but failure to establish good relationships with the ruling shogun and continuous problems with the Dutch merchants led to their presence in Japan for only ten years, until 1623. As Lack has noted, William Adams sent a letter on January 1613 observing that on China goods great profit might be made, and recommended English merchants to ‘get the handling or trade with the Chinese’, as the EIC would not need to send money out of England, ‘for there is gold and silver in Japan in abundance’,12 as well as iron, copper and minerals.13 From a letter written in December 1613 by Captain John Sari to Richard Gisske, Captain of the EIC factory in Hirado, were lean that the EIC servants in Patani were instructed to ‘procure Chinese wares, and return to Siam’.14 The EIC also acquired Chinese goods at Macassar. George Cokayne wrote to Captain Jourdain the following year, in 1614, stating that ‘A junk from China, the first that ever came to this place, with great store of Chinese commodities’.15 Direct trade contacts between China and England began just over two decades later, during the reign of Emperor Chongzhen, when Captain Wedell landed in Canton, in 1637. His mission, however, to establish trade relations failed. From the early establishment of their factories, the EIC traded on credit with the Chinese as a measure to contain the Dutch political and commercial penetration into the region.

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