



## **THE ANCIENT MARITIME SILK ROAD: A SHIFT TO GLOBALIZATION**

*Asst. Prof. Dr. Sanja STOŠIĆ,*

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philology  
Belgrade, Serbia

### **Abstract**

Travelled in ancient times and Middle Ages, and still in use in the 19th century, the Silk Road is surely one of the oldest in human history. The Silk Road concept refers to the terrestrial and the maritime routes connecting Asia and Europe. Collectively, these routes are known as the “Silk Roads” because high-quality silk from China was one of the principal commodities exchanged over the roads. The Maritime Silk Route, which is also referred to as the Maritime Silk Road, was “the first official international sea-trading route in Chinese history.” The cargo on the Silk Road also included many other goods like ceramics, glass, precious metals and spices, etc. However, traders from across the world also transported languages, technologies, artistic styles, religious beliefs, customs and people which enabled “transcivilizational” exchanges.

**Key words:** *Silk Road, maritime routes, Mediterranean, China, globalization*

### **Introduction**

The initial use of the sea route linking the Mediterranean basin and India took place during the Roman Era and reached its peak during the Mongolian Empire (13th century), when China and Central Asia were controlled by Mongol Khans.

The Silk Routes across land and sea, known as the Silk Road, were constantly shifting pathways of ancient trade across the Asian continent which connected China to the Mediterranean, the two extreme ends of Eurasia. Starting from Quanzhou Fujian Province, the Maritime Silk Road was the earliest voyage route that was formed in the Qin and Han dynasties, developed from the Three Kingdoms Period to the Sui dynasty, flourished in the Tang and Song dynasties, and fell into decline in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The Silk Road is a recent term coined in the mid-nineteenth century by the German geologist, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen (Drège and Bühner, 1989, p. 6). In order to distinguish it from the traditional Silk Road, this maritime trade route linking the east and west was given the name “Silk Road on the Sea”. Through the Maritime Silk Road, silks, tea, brass and iron were the four main



categories exported to foreign countries, while spices, flowers, plants, and rare treasures for the court were brought to China. Hence, the maritime Silk Road was also known as “The Maritime Spices Road”.

The two most favored courses followed by trade ships were those of the East China and South China Sea Routes. Silk in the form of both yarn and finished textiles was always inevitable part of this trade network. Because the sea transport was cheaper, more bulk goods were transported as textiles, pepper, timber, rice, sugar, wheat, etc.

In 1991, Cason gave an overview of the integration of sea and ocean basins emphasizing the fact that the Atlantic Ocean had a solid economic structure as early as the 16th century, while the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean Basin were much earlier significant arenas of cultural and economic activities (as cited by Curtin, 1985 and Wang, 1988).

Between the 1st and 6th centuries, ships were sailing between the Red Sea and India. Much of the trade was carried out by Arab, Persian and Indian ships called dhows. The Mediterranean witnessed large-scale trade as early as the third millennium B.C. and probably has the longest history of cross-cultural exchange (Blank, 1999, p. 266).

Under the Roman Empire, the Mediterranean permitted very close and enduring cultural, political and economic interactions of Roman, Greek, Egyptian, Persian, Carthaginian, Phoenician, Polynesian, Arabian and other civilizations linking them together. In other words, beside material goods, the Silk Roads enabled the exchange of customs, languages, religious beliefs, technology, people and livestock.

Although the premodern transpacific contacts were irregular, the development of new types of technologies facilitated the long-distance trade, and from 16th to 19th centuries the route between the Philippines and Mexico enabled the arrival of the “Pacific Century” which actually emerged as the result of the integration of sea and ocean basins.

Spain developed and maintained a monopoly over the transpacific trade route in which Manila’s port became the center of a major trade network that conveyed the goods from Southeast Asia, Japan, Indonesia, India and especially America and China to Europe. In that way, the Silk Road on the Sea led to early globalization or cultural and economic synthesis of East and West.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For much of its length, the Silk Road passed through or along the edges of arid steppes or desert lands, so geography completely determined the exchange process: what was exchanged, where and by whom. Merchants with caravans were transporting goods through the steppes, but had to



bypass several deserts such as the Gobi and Taklamakan (The Desert of Death), so the trade functioned as a chain or in stages. The route of the overland Silk Road started in the Han capital of Chang'an and went west to the Taklamakan Desert, then the road split into two main branches that skirted the desert to the north and south. The branches reunited at Kashgar (now Kashi in the western corner of China) and continued west to Bactria. There one branch forked off to Taxila and northern India, while the main branch continued across northern Iran. In northern Iran, the route joined with roads to ports on the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf and proceeded to Palmyra (modern Syria). There it met roads coming from Arabia and ports on the Red Sea. It continued west and terminated at the Mediterranean ports of Antioch (in modern Turkey) and Tyre (in modern Lebanon). The main maritime route started at Canton (Guangzhou), passed through Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea and then reached Alexandria. A significant part of the road went to the Spice or Maluku Islands (in today's Indonesia). Since the opening of a marine link between China and rest of the world for trade of silk, several countries began taking interest in silk trade.

To examine thoroughly the impact of the Sea Silk Trade, a number of things need to be considered. In particular, since both of oceans are involved, various influences of Mediterranean and transpacific trade and its consequent cultural interactions are to be examined. Further, by regarding inter-civilizational exchanges in terms of prehistoric globalization that strived for differences and distinctiveness, an appreciation of the maritime routes of the Silk Roads affects our understanding of the history of the entire Afro-Eurasian region as well as the question of Europe's domination of the world.

World historians have different interpretations regarding the rise of the European West to global domination between the 16th and 19th centuries and are more and more convinced of the unity of Afro-Eurasian history. In that sense, Andre Gunder Frank and Barry Gills have pointed out that the entire Afro-Eurasian region belongs to a single "world-system" from perhaps as early as 2000 B.C. (Frank and Gills, 1992). Similarly, William McNeill (1998) and Jerry Bentley have restated the case of the Afro-Eurasian integration (1998). By reviewing a remarkable body of research, a theoretical framework for understanding the importance of the role of the Marine Silk Roads and their impact on the rise of the emerging markets for the global world economy can be shaped.

In the period between 16th and 19th centuries a world made up of multiple political and economic centers had been transformed and evolved into overlapping webs of communication and transportation. With the founding of the city of Manila in 1571, the Manila galleons set the line of navigation between Asia and the Americas that launched the global economy and remained the lifeblood of world trade until 1815 when the last galleon left the port of Acapulco in New Spain (Mexico) for the Philippines. Although for almost three centuries, the strategic



commodity fueling global networks was silver, silk and other prestige goods were also part of the economic interconnections that deeply affected the economic world system even before the early modern period and stretching influences to the present (Frank and Gills, 2014).

This paper argues that the Silk Roads played a fundamental role in building the globalized world we know today. The major Asian ports and trade centers were interconnected from at least the first millennium of the C.E. The Maritime Silk Road brought foreign goods to China like glassware, agate and amber from Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean region, and as far away as the Mediterranean basin. China's Muslim maritime communities were part of a trade diaspora from Tang (618-907) in Guangzhou and at least the Song (960-1279) in Quanzhou. Moreover, the Chinese Muslim communities had great intermediary importance, occupying important nodes in the diasporic network of the maritime Asia (Chaffee, 2006).

Sericulture or silkworm farming, which originated in China and remained a closely guarded secret for centuries, probably entered Japan sometime between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200, during the time of the Han dynasty and then spread as far west as the Iberian Peninsula. There and in other cities of Ottoman Empire, skilled weavers produced luxurious silks.

### **Literary Research**

In his *Natural History*, written c. 70 B.C., Pliny described silk as the “wool” of the Chinese forests. However, in writing of the second century Pausanias stated that silk came from worms, but writing in the 4th century, Ammianus still believed that it came from trees. The ignorance of the sericulture persisted in the Mediterranean historiography until the 6th century, when Byzantium began to cultivate silkworms. Moreover, the Marco Polo's writings about China in the 13th century kept alive various misconceptions about China in the West, while, Chinese sources held an equal lack of knowledge about the Mediterranean (Boulnois, 1966, pp. 45-46, 68-69, 78).

According to the histories of Java and ancient Egypt, by the end of the first century B.C., a majority of Hindus went to Java, and the Indians were actively engaged in maritime enterprises, because of the dynamic commercial connection between Syria and Egypt. Nonetheless, after the conquest of Syria by the Roman Emperor Aurelius, the direct commercial relation with India and Syria gave its place to the connection of Egypt and Greece via Alexandria. Thirty years B.C. the Emperor Augustus conquered Egypt and the Romans became the main protagonist in commerce with India. After the fall of the Western Empire, when the capital became Constantinople in 324, the maritime trade between Egypt and the Red Sea stopped. The merchants of Alexandria became too expensive and the Arabian traders established commercial relations with India. Although the Persians were at first against the maritime trade, they established their relations with Indian merchants, so the



Egyptians acquired the goods from the Arabians and Persians. In that way, in the 7th century A.D. the Persians and the Arabs established monopoly over the Indian products. However, pretty soon the Persians completely prevailed upon the Arabs and monopolized the eastern silk trade.

Ming records of late 14th and 15th centuries give direct indication of the presence of the overseas Chinese communities resident in South east Asia. The communities consisted of full-time residents as well as Chinese sojourners whose voyages depended on the arrival of the Southeast Asia's seasonal monsoons. In that time were documented Chinese resident communities at Manila in the Philippines, Java's north coast ports-of-trade, Brunei in Borneo, Ayudhya Siam, Champa in Vietnam, Melaka, and the ports of Sumatra's east coast (Wang Gungwu, 1968; Soon, 2001).

Information about silk brought from China to the Roman Orient was frequently discussed and for some time it was a controversial issue. However, the material of the silk fabrics found in the tombs of Palmyra were definitely imported from China during the Han period or at the beginning of the Christian era. This information was confirmed by various scholars, and the inscription interpreted by Henry Seyrig proved clearly that merchants of Palmyra imported silk sailing to the coast of northwest India and its borderland in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea called Scythia. "From Barbarike, at the mouth of the Indus and Barygaza (the modern Broach) merchandise was shipped to the trading places on the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Silk was brought to the Scythian ports from Thinae (China) through Bactria" (Maenchen-Helfen, 1943, pp. 358-359, 362).

Certainly, considering Asia as an important international diaspora, it is crucially important to address the ancient maritime trade of the Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, to unravel the complex nature of premodern Asian maritime trade, we have to reexamine the primary sources, which are a mixture not only of archeological data, but also of the Chinese and Southeast Asia's records, and the accounts of Portuguese and Spanish overseas exploration and colonization. Furthermore, the critically neutral analysis of this kind require that we bear in mind authors' cultural biases and social prejudices.

The conflicts between Britain and Russia in the late 19th century inspired much interest in the issue of the Silk Road which consequently encouraged various expeditions into Xinjiang at the beginning of the 20th century (Hopkirk, 1980). As a result, the excavations of ancient towns along the Silk Road shed light on the significance of the trans-civilizational exchanges along the Silk Routes, promoting their further historical and archeological research. In that way, the Silk Road has become frequently discussed in the Chinese, the Mediterranean, and central Asian historiography, so there is a rich historical as well as modern literature on a subject. At the same time, due to its multi-dimensional networking of the Afro-Eurasian regions, the Silk Road is viewed as unifying factor of Eurasian trade and never before has played a more pivotal role in contemporary writings on world history.



Nevertheless, despite the impressive literature on the Silk Road, there is a gap in serious primary research necessary for the synthesis of historical and archeological findings and adequate holistic approach to the issue. Considering that for many years global history suffered from Eurocentric conception and Eurasian records didn't include historical knowledge about the rest of the world, we argue that a truly global world history has yet to be written. But since there is a growing consensus among many global historians that the East Asian, the Middle Eastern and South Asian maritime diasporas formed the most advanced regions of the World from around the beginning of the Common Era down to at least the 16th century. Hence, we need to gain a better sense of how this eastern-southern diasporas were constructed and how exactly they interacted.

Actually, recent literature of diasporic studies suggest that the Chinese overseas community has always consisted of geographically bound human interaction across global space as well as the localized diasporas' practices, not permanently fixed in particular places (Ma, 2003, p. 7).

### **Research Design**

The opening part of the paper looks at the ancient Greek and Persian trade, the Mediterranean trade with China, or the Asian maritime diasporas before Gama, while its final part treat the Asian trade in the east and European entry into the trade with maritime Asia.

According to Starr, due to the geographical conditions, the piracy in ancient Greece was prevalent in the Aegean and Ionian seas. As the Aegean civilization evolved in the 8th century, the state enforced the rule of law and regulations for sea activities (Starr, 1977, pp. 50-52). Moreover, as the Greek-city states had many foreigners engaged in maritime trade, historical records from 4th century shows that the ancient Greece had the Athenian maritime court obliged to have foreign defendants (xenoí) who acted as a guarantors bounded by contracts (Gagarin and Cohen, 2005, p. 301). During the 4th and 5th centuries, Achaemenid king, Darius, and Xerex, fought with the Persians and the Greeks. The Greeks first repelled the Persians and then, out of fear of being attacked again started to improve their army and navy. With Macedonian help, the Greeks were able to defeat the Persian Empire, and after their victory, they formed the Dalian League in 478 B.C. However, Persia also engaged in a great deal of trade. Indeed history shows evidence of ancient trade routes such as the Royal Road and the ancient silk trade routes in the first century B.C. According to Herodotus, the Royal Road spanned some 2.857 kilometers from the cities of Susa and Persepolis, the capitals of the Achaemenid Empire to the city of Sardis, Capital of Lydia. On this road there was a highly developed system of connecting posts well protected by the Achaemenid kings (700-330 B.C.).

There are various references to ancient India's voyages by sea, or more precisely by rivers. The earliest trade however, was by the overland route followed by the Phoenicians who are supposed



to have emigrated between 3.000 and 2.500 B.C., from the shores of the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean coast of Syria. Probably, the Indian navigators shipped the goods from the Indus to the south of Bombay, from where they were transferred by the Arabs or Phoenicians. Some Jewish merchants went to Babylon and due to the trading relationships between Babylon and the principal parts of Hindustan were able to participate in the lucrative commerce of India. In doing so, relationship between Assyria and Persia and Syria got stronger, and about 600 years B.C. the Jewish merchants began to settle in Malabar. After the Alexander's invasion, the trade between India and the West became regulated by the superintendents' provision and many ports on the Son and the Ganges witness to the flourishing commerce. According to The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, from the second century B.C. there was commercial connection between the west coast of India and the West, and over two centuries ships sailed from India to the ports of Sabaea. Presumably, the ships from India crossed the Persian Gulf and from the shores of Arabia sailed to the Red Sea. Then, after leaving the Red Sea, the Egyptian Greeks sailed across the Indian Ocean to the coast of Malabar. Through Berenice or Berenike, also known as Baranis, the ancient seaport of Egypt on the west coast of the Red Sea, the treasures of Arabia, India, Persia and Ethiopia were brought down the Nile to Alexandria, and transmitted to the West in exchange for the goods exported to the East (Samaddar, 1911, pp. 903-905).

After the fall of ancient Egypt, the Romans developed intense commercial relations with India. "(...) forsaking the old circuitous route, they began to sail from the coast of the Babelmandeb, and come direct to Malabar and Guzerat by sea". After adopting to the direction of the monsoons, they managed to shorten the voyages' time by half and establish the continuous trade.

Every year a fleet of 120 ships sailed from Myos Hormos and came to Mousiris Emporion and Bakarei on the Malabar coast, and thence sailed to Ceylon. Ceylon then was a great emporium, and merchants of Bengal, Orrisa and - Karnat (the present Carnatic), used to come there and exchange commodities (Samaddar, 1911, p. 906).

With the emergence of Constantinople, the Western Empire declined as well as the sea trade between Egypt and the Red Sea. Eager to spread Islam and at the same time skilled in the art of navigation, the Arab traders began to send their ships to the coast of Malabar. On the other side, the Persians, who had already known the route from the Persian Gulf to the Malabar coast, started to send ships to different ports in the Malabar coast, and when the products reached the Euphrates, they were carried by boats to Assyria and Mesopotamia. In short time, the Persians monopolized completely the silk trade of the East, but the Persian Empire came into war with Constantinople, so the Chinese silk that reached Greece through Tartary also became scarce. In order not to pay extremely high prices for silk, the emperor Justinian ordered that two monks, who had come to India and China to preach Gospel, and had seen the rearing of

silkworms and the manufacture of silk,



return and learn the art of manufacture of silk. After a few years in China, and having learnt the art of manufacture of silk, the monks took a few worms in their canes and turned back to Constantinople. After a short time, manufactories of silk were established in some of the Greek islands, and although the export of silk from China and India to Rome stopped, other products maintained their market in Greece (Samaddar, 1911, p. 907).

When Persian and Indian trade came under Islamic rule, the Caliph established a port at Basora through which the Arab traders brought Indian goods into Syria. After the fall of Egypt and Syria into the hands of the Caliph, the Alexandrine merchants were trade banned in Byzantine kingdoms. Due to the conflicts between the Mohammedans and the Greeks, Indian goods couldn't freely be transported to Italy, as well as Greece. The Arabian traders had a colony at Malabar and commercial relations with Bengal, Siam, and China. As the Amai and Archenzi (Archenzed) on the Oxus were also important trading centers for Indian and Chinese goods, some merchants of Constantinople managed to send commodities through the Caspian Sea and the River Cyrus, and after the goods were borne some distance by land, they were reshipped again by the Black Sea until reaching Constantinople (Samaddar, 1911, p. 907).

From the middle of the 5th century Venice had developed connections with Alexandria and Constantinople, and by the middle of the 6th century had imported silks from India and China. "From the beginning of the 9th century spices, medicines, and silk of India used to reach the marts of Venice, which (...) grow rich by this Indian commerce." After the Crusades, the route through Egypt was reopened, so the Indian goods again reached Europe. Although Genoa had some commercial connections with the East even before Venice, with the support of the Medicis, the Florentines also developed commercial relationships with the East, but after the fall of Egypt and Syria under the Mohammedans, Venice managed to monopolize the Eastern trade and Cyprus became an important trading center. However, the fall of Constantinople stopped the Genoese trade with the East by the Black Sea, and the Portuguese discovery of the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope ruined the Venetian trade by Alexandria. Actually, the Portuguese discovery of the sea route to India opened the sea-way through the Indian archipelago to other nations of Europe (Samaddar, 1911, p. 908).

Just like the Greeks developed polities along the northern Mediterranean basin, due to the rise-based irrigation system, by 500 B.C a few small states had emerged in the lowlands, especially in Cambodia and Vietnam. Roughly 2000 years ago, civilizations with various class systems were emerging in the river valleys, and engaging in intricate maritime trade. Around this time China and India began exercising a stronger influence. Han China conquered the already well-organized civilization of Vietnam and established a colonial rule that would endure for a millennium. Nonetheless, although Chinese traders regularly sojourned in many states over the centuries, strong





Chinese sociocultural influence was rather limited to the Vietnamese and a few small groups who migrated much later from southern China (Lockard, 1995, p. 17).

The Straits of Melaka between Sumatra and Malaya had long served as a crossroads for trade between different people and cultures. The climatic conditions in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean facilitated ships to sail southwest from China, Vietnam and Cambodia and southeast from India and Burma, and then meet in the vicinity, where their goods were exchanged.

Between the 4th and 6th centuries C.E. the overland trading routes of the Silk Road were blocked by political developments in central Asia, which increased the significance of the maritime trading routes. Little by little, emerged “a more complex and increasingly integrated maritime trading system that linked the eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, East African coast, Persia, and India with the societies of East and Southeast Asia”. As a consequence, gradually emerged mercantile variation of Indianized culture.

Between the 7th and 13th centuries many of the small trading states in the Straits region came under the control of Srivijaya, a great empire based in southeastern Sumatra which exercised considerable power over the international commerce of the region and maintained a close trade relationship with powerful China (Lockard, 1995, p. 23).

As we have already mentioned, India and China were connected by maritime routes by at least the first century B.C., when ports in southern Asia were important transshipment centers for Chinese and Roman goods. Chinese silk or Chinese cloth was imported into India during early Han times. It may first have arrived via Burma, but in larger amounts came via Xinjiang to Kashmir, or through Bactria and Kabul. Later, from the 8th century C.E. onwards, the maritime route steadily grew in importance for Sino-Indian commerce and the Chinese silk continued to arrive in India in the 13th and 14th centuries (Sen, 2003, p. 176). At the same time, due to the Chinese consumption of cotton, what was the Silk Road for Chinese silk was, in the reverse direction, the Cotton Road.

At the time of Han invasion Nanyue kingdom of northern Vietnam already participated in maritime trade as an important frontier center. Han maritime trade was for sure facilitated by the pre-existing maritime Nanyue network as well as the existence of developed native skills in ship construction and navigation. Under the Han the main ports were Rinan, Xuwen, and Hepu, and although Rinan was lost to the Champa kingdom in the latter part the Eastern Han, all ports were active in the Nanhai trade which involved both local and overseas commerce. The local products were pearls, fruits, and cotton, while oversea exports of goods involved the Chinese silk, jade, and gold, and the importation of glass, carnelian, lapis lazuli, amber, and crystal (Di Cosmo, 2009, pp. 210-211).

In the 12 century, with the

Song court’s (960-1279) encouragement



of maritime commerce, Chinese merchants began to travel to Indian ports, visiting the Coromandel and Malabar coasts of southern India as major transit points for their trips to the Persian Gulf. In that way, the Song-era expansion of commercial activities and the aggressive policies of the Yuan court under Qubilai Khan (1260-1294) surely contributed to the surge in maritime commerce and the creation of the Indian coast as a primary destination for the first two armada expeditions led by the Ming admiral Zheng He in 1405 and 1407 (Sen, 2006, p. 422).

During the 14th and 15th centuries, due to intensive demand for Southeast Asia's spices as well as the internal and external political context of the region, port-based commerce suffered radical changes. The most outstanding participants of Southeast Asia's 15th century diaspora were overseas Chinese, South Asians, and Arabian traders. In the 15th century Indian Ocean trading communities centered in Melaka which became "the international clearinghouse for the East-West trade route" (Hall, 2006, p. 455). The foreign Melaka's communities – Indian, Javanese, and the most prominent Chinese – had its "chief-of-port who received merchants on their arrival, presented them to the civilian head-of-state, found them lodging, storage, and shops to sell their goods". Also, according to the Portuguese sources, by the late 15th century the chief-of-port acted as merchants' trade broker in return for 1% of the value of their sales (Hall, 2006, p. 466).

Ming dynastic trade policies deeply affected the character and development of diaspora communities in 15th century Asia. While the earlier Song and Yuan dynasties encouraged Chinese trade in the maritime regions of China's south, the Ming at first forbade Chinese traders to sail to neighboring islands like Sumatra, Malaya, Sulawesi. Instead, under the Tributary Trade system, the local authorities commonly hired international sojourners to provide the Chinese market with the luxury goods. As reported in the Chinese dynastic records, foreign nations desiring a trade relationship with China had to send tributary or diplomatic missions "to present samples of the commodities available at their ports, to which the Chinese court might reciprocate by granting them favorable trade privileges" In exchange, the diplomatic missions were granted access to the China marketplace (Hall, 2006, pp. 456-457).

Although in the early 15th century the Ming court favored tributary mission representation by overseas Chinese traders, after 1430 when the voyages of the Ming fleet ended, and the Ming capital moved to Beijing in China's north, the Ming altered their Tributary Trade policies. In response, ethnically Chinese overseas residents who had previously backed the tributary trade began to build regionally networks from their local bases. By the 1440s, Chinese officials limited the size of diplomatic envoys, reducing the number of their personnel. A good example of this is diplomatic envoy of 1453, when Java's court was ordered to send only one mission every three years instead of annually, and without the usual person entourage, because the Ming officials considered it too



expensive and useless. However, Southeast Asians wanted to continue the tributary trade because it reinforced their local port's exchanges with China, and at the same time permitted to those who accompanied the missions to carry on their own private trade, whether on their own or their ruler's behalf. Finally, in the 1560s, the Ming rulers reversed their prior restrictions and licensed Chinese junks again sailed directly to Southeast Asia's ports (Hall, 2006, pp. 457-459).

After the 1430s, the Chinese marketplace became less important and an intra-Asian trade routes developed as the alternative, so Melaka evolved into the major center for the distribution of specialty products. The Javanese community at Melaka consisted of Muslim traders connected to Java's northern coastal region, Chinese traders, and some Malay merchant nomads of mixed heritage. "Javanese trades sailed not only to Java but also to Sumatra, Borneo, the Malukus, Banda, and Luzon in the Philippines" (Hall, 2006, p. 468). Banda also occupied a strategic position on the archipelago trade routes. In the 15th century traders from Java and Melaka sailed to the Banda Islands each year, taking with them cargoes of cotton and silk cloth from Gujarat, the Coromandel, and Bengal, as also Chinese silk, Java rice, etc. (Hall, p. 472).

With the appearance of a Spanish flotilla under Christopher Columbus which landed on a small island in the Caribbean, and then a Portuguese fleet in 1498 commanded by Vasco da Gama at Calicut India, the European colonial hegemony was finally imposed over the indigenous states. On the other hand, in 16th century China was one of the richest world's states, and obtained everything from its own resources or previously established commercial routes. However, the arrival of da Gama marked the beginnings of western hegemony in Asia, and in 17th century the East was subjected to European rivalries.

On their arrival in Asia, the Portuguese had encountered an ancient and complex commercial network reaching by land and sea from Europe itself to China. It was far larger, and probably handled traffic of far greater value than anything known in the West. Because of the constraints of distance and seasonal wind changes it was conducted through entrepots such as Aden, Hormuz and Melaka. (...) This economy was linked directly to that of Europe by the route pioneered by da Gama (Scammell, 2000, p. 520).

Meanwhile, the Asian economy had also been interconnected with the economy created in the Atlantic by the Iberians who shipped from early 16th century American silver to Europe. With the Spanish opening of the Pacific, from the mid-16th century American bullion was sent to Manila, from where it went to China and further, whilst the China Ships or Manila Galleons brought to Acapulco the cargoes of silks and spices and other precious merchandise of the East.

The silk industry had been an important part of Chinese history prior to the Manila Galleon



trade, but policies implemented by the Ming Dynasty allowed for further expansion that provided the base commodity exchanged for American silver. As early as 1393, the Ming government decided that those who planted mulberry trees were freed from the payment of land tax, which, in return, encouraged a dramatic increase in silk production by the peasant class. The production of raw silk allowed many people to enrich themselves, and created a highly developed textile industry based in several key cities of China with a decentralized silk raising industry in the countryside run by the average people (Chuan, 1973).

The Manila Galleons established the first permanent trade route across the Pacific, linking directly the continents of Asia and the Americas in a continuous trade. Using the Philippines as a hub for trade that reached from the Pacific coast of America to Malasya, China, Japan and India, the Iberian presence converted Manila to a cradle of world trade.

The impact of the West in Asia had far-reaching cultural consequences. Asian people emulated the impact of western technology, so Asian shipping absorbed European knowledge, and Indian Ocean shipbuilders started to make crafts with iron planks nailed together instead of traditionally sewn. By the 17th century Japan, China and Indonesia adopted European fashion of gun-vessels, whilst by the early 18th century the ships of the formidable Omani Arabs were of western design, and by the 19th century many Asians had become some of the world's greatest shipowners (Scammell, 2000, pp. 533-539).

## Findings

In ancient times, China conducted its trade with the West along the Silk Road, which traversed central Asia, bringing precious Chinese silks and other goods to the Roman Empire. However, the premodern intra-Asian interconnections were mostly build up through the maritime routes and subregional relations within the Afro-Eurasian networks of exchange. Those networks involved the intermediary states and certainly facilitated the formation of networks starting from the first millennium of the C.E. onward.

On the waters adjacent to monsoon Asia, long-distance sailing was comparatively easy, so over time rafts evolved into sailing ships of the Indian Ocean or dhows. Over time, techniques of fair-weather seamanship were transferred to the Mediterranean, which linked the shores and islands as never before.

Around the Mediterranean had existed an active textile trade. Commercial activities between Spanish, Italian, and Sicily's ports were very intense. Port cities such as Carthage, Alexandria, Smyrna, and Livorno linked the three continents facing the Mediterranean, and these maritime towns maintained political and commercial balance with the three powers west, east and north.



In world system development strategically placed regions or corridors have always been important. Frank Gunder considers that Western Asia three nexus corridors have played a particularly pivotal and inter-linkage role:

1. The Nile–Red Sea corridor (with canal or overland connections between them and to the Mediterranean Sea, and open access to the Indian Ocean and beyond). 2. The Syria–Mesopotamia–Persian Gulf corridor (with overland routes linking the Mediterranean Coast through Syria, or via the Orontes, Euphrates and Tigris rivers, to the Persian Gulf, which gives open access to the Indian Ocean and beyond). This nexus also offered connections to overland routes to Central Asia. 3. The Aegean–Black Sea–Central Asia corridor (connecting the Mediterranean via the Dardanelles and Bosphorus to the overland Silk Roads to and from Central Asia, from where connecting routes extended overland to India and China).

On the Inner Asian Frontiers of China a similar role was perhaps played by the silk road and the routes of migration and invasion by the Kansu (Haxi) corridor, the Tarim Basin oases, Kashgar and the passes to the southwest across the Pamirs and to the northwest across the western end of the Tien Shan mountains. These passes led to Taxila in Kashmir and to Samarkand and Bukhara in Sogdian Transoxania, where the silk roads connected to the West (Frank, 1992, pp. 67-68).

Over the 15th and 16th centuries China's silk exports to the West were carried primarily along maritime routes in Portuguese, Spanish and other European vessels. During the Spanish reign over the Philippines, the trade network had been establish in which silk was traded in Manila to the Spanish for silver, since the Ming Dynasty enacted the single-whip reform that allowed for the consolidation of taxes into the universal payment of silver. By the mid-16th century, the trade silk for silver was firmly established, and the Chinese silk crossed the Pacific to Acapulco.

Although the silk industry continued to grow several decades after the galleon trade was started, this could not have happened until the galleon trade started, because Europe's primary supplier of silk was Persia and not China.

Misunderstanding of global history is enhanced by the fact that the ancient historical facts can't be organized around the rise and fall of Empires and the precise details based on explicit literary evidence are usually missing. So we consider that the only way to properly understand the past is to use our own presumptions, and reconsider all available sources by continuously interpreting and reinterpreting the facts, hoping that the most accurate facts will prevail.

## **Discussion**

The Silk Road is not a clearly defined area, but rather simple way of referring to the diverse land and sea trade routes that formed an extensive network covering most of



Eurasia and parts of Africa. Thus, looking at its ancient history, it is essential to develop a more integrated approach between archaeology and history, and establish research questions that lead to a more holistic view relative to movements of commercial commodities. For example, there are various references to voyages by sea dating from the Rigveda's ancient collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns. Because of the prehistoric remains of iron tools and implements of bronze found in the West, it is indisputable that the ancient Hindus were maritime people whose immigration marked the earliest Phoenician trade with Europe by routes of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.

Also, from the references of the Old Testament we can conclude that the Mediterranean connection was primarily established by the Jews who appreciated the spices of India, as well as the precious stones and gold brought from Ophir to king Solomon. At the same time, that connection is visible also in various Hebrew words of Indian origin which leads us to conclude that the Indian sailors shipped the goods from the Indus to some part to the south of Bomabay, from where they were transported by the Arabs or Phoenicians.

### **Conclusion**

As the safest and cheapest way of transporting goods and people, the sea has always been the basis for trade and an important source of political and military dominion. Although the ancient trading maritime system of Southeast Asia functioned generally as a free-trade zone between proto-states and grew more or less naturally out of the interactions between imperial China and its southern neighbors (Mair and Kelley, 2015, pp. 1-14, 140-160), in the premodern East Asian Maritime Realm the maritime trading space of the Indian Ocean and the southern seas was fairly regulated by established trade patterns and naval warfare (Chandra and Ray, 2013, p. 102). Moreover, sea routes that linked the Mediterranean, Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and China were strategically as important as the land routes in maintaining the underlying unity of Afro-Eurasian history (Christian, 2000, p. 3). Accordingly, the expansion of maritime trade from the first millennium C.E. onward altered the Silk Road's landscape, from early Asian contacts with the Roman Orient, India, China, Arabia, and the continuing navigation towards the Pacific.

Inspired by the idea of accumulating great wealth and dream of extending the Christianity, both da Gama and Columbus followed the late medieval idea of discovering an easier sea route to the East. Whilst Columbus sailed westwards for Cathay, searching in vain the Caribbean for traces of the Grand Khan, da Gama searched for a sea route to Asia round or through Africa, and found the Cape of Good Hope till finally reaching India. In that way, in relatively short time, the Portuguese occupied the maritime routes of Asia establishing themselves in the Persian Gulf, Malaysia and China. On the other side, the Spaniards established Manila as the eastern entrepot whose commercial activities reached



from the Pacific coast of America to China, Malaysia, Japan and India. Although before the 18th century European hegemony over the maritime Asia was only partial, in the context of the integration of the Portuguese overseas empire in the Hispanic Monarchy (1580-1640) commerce with Asia brought not only great revenues, but also led to a considerable cultural fusion of eastern and western cultures.

Starting from the modern concept of the globalization as a process of interaction and integration among the people of different nations, there is an unusual correlation that shows how sea-based relations between alien cultures are transboundary, so that the multiple affiliations along the Maritime Silk Road can be viewed as a pure demonstration of early globalization.

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