Emory Endeavors in History: Volume III

Navigating the Great Divergence
Editorial Board:

Editor-in-Chief: Brian Goodman
Cover and TOC: Mark Everett Knapp
Design Editor: Yayori Takano
Formatting Czar: Jonathan Josh “JJ” Wang
Chief Copy Editor: Jessica Moore
Copy Editors: Josh Park, Daniel Gerstell
Marketing and Promotion: Heather Karellas
Introduction Composer: Tonio Andrade
Publishing Liaison: Daniel Sok
Cover Artist: Timothy Cole
Table of Contents

Introduction
DR. TONIO ANDRADE

India in the World Economy: A Response
JESSICA MOORE

Images of the East in Renaissance Art
HEATHER KARELLAS

An Assessment of the Military Revolution
DANIEL SOK

Portuguese Maritime Meddling in the Indian Ocean
MICHAEL HONIG

Administrative Adaptability: The Dutch East India Company and its Rise to Power
DANIEL GERSTELL

The Dutch East India Company and the Tea Trade
BRIAN GOODMAN

The Roots of Proto-Industrialization in Japan
JONATHAN WANG

Foreign Influence and the Transformation of Early Modern Japan
YAYORI TAKANO

Chinese Culturalism: The Underlying Factor
MARK EVERETT KNAPP

The Level of Elite Cohesiveness in East Asia Modernization
XUESHAN YU

Confucianism in Korea’s Economic Upheaval
JOSH PARK
Introduction

TONIO ANDRADE

In 2000, historian Kenneth Pomeranz published *The Great Divergence*, a landmark study which argued that there was no significant economic divergence between the most developed regions of Europe and the most developed regions of China until around the year 1800, much later than scholars had traditionally believed. Although he wasn’t the first to make such arguments (other notable examples include Andre Gunder Frank and Bin Wong), his book was unusually influential.

It’s no surprise that it has aroused a heated debate. A group of scholars defends the standard model of European exceptionalism, arguing that Europe’s technological, scientific, and economic lead over Asia began much earlier than Pomeranz suggests, to wit by 1500. They refer to Pomeranz and others who espouse similar views – most notably Jack Goldstone and Bin Wong – as revisionists, and accuse them of acting out of political correctness and an unreflective aversion to Eurocentrism, rather than scholarly interest. The revisionists have accepted the sobriquet and continue to defend their views. The debate, which has become known as the revisionist debate, seems far from resolution. If anything, it’s becoming increasingly strident.

In Fall 2010, I offered a course at Emory University on this controversy, in which the students read the relevant literature and developed their own research papers on the topic. We decided to publish the results of that research in this special issue of *Emory Endeavors in History*, and I am proud to introduce the papers here. Not all the papers touch directly on the debate, but all of them are informed by it, and readers will find topics ranging from European artists’ depictions of the Middle East during the 1500s to Korea’s remarkable modernization in the 1950s.

The volume starts with an article by Jessica Moore, who takes issue with one of the key figures of the revisionism debate, the late Andre Gunder Frank, who argued, in an influential article, that pre-modern India’s economy was every bit as advanced as that of Europe. Moore argues that Frank’s argument is factually and logically flawed, marshalling an array of statistics and pieces of evidence to back up her claim. She concludes that the revisionist case is not on firm ground when it comes to the Indian Subcontinent. Yet, she recognizes that much work remains to be done to truly answer the question of why Europe did eventually strike out on a divergent path from Asia. We certainly need more evidence from South Asia before there is anything close to a definitive view on the subject.

Heather Karellas examines a different aspect of the revisionist debate, by focusing on the way that the Middle East was represented in Renaissance Art. In 1979, Edward Said published his much debated book *Orientalism*. Heather ties the Orientalism debate to the revisionist debate,

---

showing that Said engaged in his own Occidentalism, by reifying European discourse about the East. In fact, as her article argues, although European images of the Asian Other were often hardened and stereotypical, as Said suggests, there were also countervailing tendencies. There existed ways in which artists and philosophers portrayed subtle distinctions among non-western peoples, and in which non-western artists themselves riffed on themes from European art, so that, as Renaissance scholar Jerry Brotton writes, “each artist draws on the aesthetic innovations of the other, making it impossible to say which painting is definably ‘western’ or ‘eastern.’” The early modern period was one in which the many varied peoples of the globe came into closer and closer sustained contact, and stereotypes were, if not obliterated, at least moderated and adapted.

Two articles in this volume touch on one of the most compelling theories to explain the early successes of European colonial powers in Asia: the justly famous Military Revolution Model. Inaugurated by Michael Roberts and modified and championed by Geoffrey Parker, the Military Revolution Model suggests that Europeans possessed, within a global context, unusually effective armaments and military techniques, which explain their ability to dominate many of the world’s shipping lanes and establish colonies across the globe well before the age of industrialization. In a perceptive article, contributor Daniel Sok suggests that military historians have tended to pay too much attention to land warfare and too little to sea warfare in their discussions of the military revolution. He draws on the intriguing work of Greek scholar Nicholas Kyriazis to re-examine the military revolution debate, arguing compellingly that the rise of naval power required fiscal and political adjustments that were quite similar to those brought about by the more terrestrial aspects of the military revolution.

Michael Honig’s article examines the role that the military revolution played in the expansion of one particular European power: the Portuguese. According to the military revolution theory, Portugal’s ability to expand so quickly and effectively in the Indian Ocean region is directly related to the military techniques and technologies that stemmed from Europe’s ongoing military revolution. Yet revisionists have argued, in contrast, that it was not so much superior military power that explains Portugal’s successes, but rather the fact that Portuguese mariners benefitted from a power vacuum on the seas, which is to say that existing Asian potentates in the area were relatively uninterested in expanding state power over oceanic space. Honig argues compellingly that that the revisionist theory and the military revolution model are not necessarily mutually incompatible. He suggests a middle way: both factors played a role.

After the Portuguese came the Dutch, whose seaborne empire was a marvel in its day. Daniel Gerstell’s article seeks to explain how the Dutch became so overwhelmingly powerful. He argues that the company’s administrative structure was unusually flexible and supple, and that this was responsible for its success throughout the seventeenth century. For one thing, he says, it was insulated from its own investors, protected by its government charter from meddling by stockholders. At the same time, he notes, it had a strong central administration of its own in Asia, which had unusual autonomy, yet benefited from administrative checks and balances, with the powerful governor-general’s authority limited by a council of advisors, the High Council of the Indies. Another strength was its local adaptability. Its outposts were not cookie-cutter copies of a

---

single model but were rather highly adapted to each local political and economic reality. As he writes, “The Dutch seemed to grasp the notion that each territory was unique and thus required a responsive tailor-made form.”

Yet this colonizing company, so powerful in the seventeenth century, collapsed in the eighteenth, and one of the enduring mysteries is why. In an article that is deceptively modest in scope, Brian Goodman investigates this question, and it turns out that he adduces some of the very same factors that Gerstell sees as providing an advantage in the seventeenth century. Goodman claims to treat merely the tea trade of the Dutch East India Company, but the significance of his argument is larger. According to him, the reason the company couldn’t compete with its more nimble competitor, the English East India Company, was because its structure was designed for a different world: the world of armed trade of the seventeenth century. Because the company needed a strong executive arm in Asia, its Asian headquarters in Jakarta, Indonesia, was highly autonomous and, as a result, jealous of its prerogatives. So, whereas the English could trade in China and then sail directly out of Far Eastern waters, Dutch traders were constrained either to buy their tea in Jakarta itself from Chinese merchants or, when they were able to purchase it directly in China, to call in Jakarta before they could take the tea to Europe. As a result of this ponderous trading structure, the Dutch saw their competitors across the English Channel taking a larger and larger slice of the tea trade, which became one of the most profitable parts of the growing English trading empire in Asia.

The second half of this volume jumps ahead to the late nineteenth century, and to one of the key questions of world history: what explains the variable timing of East Asian attempts at modernization? More specifically, why did Japan modernize so effectively and China and Korea so much less so, in the nineteenth century? Many scholars have suggested that Japan, which was the first non-western country to undertake a take-off to modern industrial forms of growth, was unusually poised for the process because it had undergone developments similar to those that occurred in Europe. In his article, Jonathan Wang examines this “proto-industrialization” debate, by referring to Japan’s unusual legacy of sakoku – literally the “closed country.” According to Wang, who draws on an array of Japanese and Western scholars to make his case, sakoku focused Japan’s energies inward. The development of the Tokugawa capital of Edo (present-day Tokyo) was directly stimulated by policies related to sakoku, and the rapid and thoroughgoing economic changes that occurred there became the crucible out of which later industrialization would be forged.

Yayori Takano’s well-written article also addresses the sakoku period, although her question is what prompted the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which saw Japan undertake a series of rapid reforms. The traditional perspective holds that the Meiji Restoration was sparked by the sudden appearance, in 1853, of American warships led by Matthew Perry. On the other hand, she notes more recent scholarship, which has focused instead on economic tumult and political breakdowns that weakened the Japanese state. Takano argues that the sakoku period, in many ways, laid the groundwork for Japan’s response to Perry. Far from being closed, Japan was actually quite engaged with the world, but on its own terms, through its own drive-through window, as it were: the port of Nagasaki, where certain foreign traders were allowed to call, whereas others were excluded. But the arrival of Perry made clear that a new approach was necessary. That’s not to say
that endogamous political and economic pressures weren’t important. Just that the urgency for fundamental reform stemmed from foreign pressure. “Had there been no contact and no pressure from foreign nations,” she writes, “the Japanese would not have approached modernization nearly as rapidly as [they] did.”

Two contributors take on China’s relatively ineffective embrace of modernization. Mark Knapp finds an explanation in what he calls, following the work of scholar James Townsend, “Chinese Culturalism,” a sense that China’s cultural legacy, rooted in Confucianism, is the one core civilization in the world. Distinguishing this culturalism from the concept of nationalism, Knapp investigates its influence on China’s development, drawing on the work of traditional sinologists, like the famous and deeply influential John Fairbanks. In a way, his paper reflects what we might begin to call a new global historical perspective on China. On the one hand, Knapp is persuaded by Pomeranz that China was, until the 1700s, not notably lagging behind the west in technology or economic development. Yet, he also updates Fairbankian ideas about China’s unusual form of “universal kingship,” which was deeply rooted not just in its reigning political philosophies, but in the very institutions with which it undertook relations with the outside world. Whatever you may think of Pomeranz’s argument or Townsend’s notion of culturalism, it is difficult to argue that China did not have significant problems adjusting to a global geopolitical system in which there was no Middle Kingdom.

Laura (Xueshan) Yu takes a different approach to the question of China’s relatively difficult process of modernization by focusing on the issue of elite cohesion. Whereas Japan’s elites, after a brief period of disunity that resulted in the Meiji Restoration, had relative unanimity about the need for reform and the shape that reform must take, China’s elites stayed divided. Its central government – the late Qing state – saw vacillating pushes toward reform and reaction for several decades, with the forces of reaction generally holding the upper hand. The impetus for reform was to be found, not in the central government, but in provincial reformers, who could not, of course, foist their ideas for reform on a center that did not wish for it. The notion that factionalism in the central government was inimical to reform is not new, but Yu cleverly applies the concept of elite cohesion, while at the same time arguing that it carries a certain amount of Eurocentric bias.

The last article in the volume, by Josh Park, focuses on China’s smaller and unduly neglected neighbor, Korea, exploring the factors behind South Korea’s extraordinary economic miracle in the 1960s and 1970s. He notes that in 1962, the country had a per capita GDP rate of around ninety US dollars (in 2009 dollars). By 2009, that figure had risen to more than $17,000, an increase of three orders of magnitude. How did Korea achieve this remarkable feat? Park believes that Korea’s Confucian heritage is partly responsible. Western social scientists have often considered Confucianism to be inimical to sustained economic growth because of its purported hostility to traders. Yet, as Park shows, drawing on the work of more recent social scientists, a modified form of Confucianism actually provided some of the stimulus to growth. Indeed, one can argue, as Park suggests, that the Confucian respect for education is highly adaptive in today’s economy, which increasingly relies upon knowledge-based industries. When we compare the percentage of GDP spent on education in Korea to that spent in the USA, we can see why that the US is beginning to fall behind Asia.
Does that mean that another Great Divergence is before us, with the USA and the European Union stagnating or even declining as the increasingly advanced economies of East Asia and, to a lesser extent, South, Asia rocket forward? It is difficult to say, and history is full of surprises. The next few decades will be eventful ones in world history.
“India in the World Economy”: A Response

JESSICA MOORE

Comparatively little is known about the history of the Indian subcontinent. A lack of hard facts empirically made it easier for individuals to assert seemingly plausible theories with little or no evidence; while few facts exist to bolster their position, even fewer exist to disprove it. During the past century, a number of groups have interpreted India’s economic history to suit their agendas. The British crown justified a century-long rule and harsh treatment of native Indians with the “orientalist” (or “imperialist”) view that the British Empire’s rule “heralded modernity in India” and thus, India was lucky to play host to colonization.¹ The British brought the “self-legitimating ideas of colonial domination;” the subcontinent did not possess western social philosophy and economic policy, ergo the British were obligated to forcibly institute them.² After British control ceased, Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister, told the citizens of India that capitalist exploitation produced the nation’s economic woes, legitimizing strong protectionist measures for decades to come.³ As present day India becomes a rising power in the capitalist system that Nehru blamed for a dark past, questions remain about the reality of India’s economic history. Did the British, in fact, bring the shining beacon of capitalism to the East or were the peoples of the subcontinent already well on their way to a modern market system? Was the region actually as backward as the British crown led the world to believe?

It is not my goal in this essay to develop a theory about India’s recent history or what its future might look like. Rather, I elect to focus on the economic explanations for India’s fall to the British East India Company in 1757, as they shed light on how the region developed before the British and bring us closer to a historically accurate analysis of whether the subcontinent would or could have reached European-levels of advancement. Andre Gunder Frank proposes one theory regarding India’s pre-British economy. In “India in the World Economy, 1400-1700,” Frank posits that the subcontinent maintained a thriving center of commerce, which only fell prey to British expansionism due to problems caused by its own rapid development.⁴ I find Frank’s explanation lacking in both historical fact and causal logic, insofar as he focuses too greatly on the overall picture of the Indian economy, missing important details. The most historically accurate view of pre-modern India likely lies between the two most prominent ones. One side of the debate indicates that pre-British India experienced a complete lack of development, while the other portrays the region as economically flourishing during that time period.

Before understanding the debate, however, a basic history of the region must be noted. For the purposes of this paper, “India” does not refer to the present-day nation, but rather the approximate area it encompasses, south of the Hindu Kush Mountains and Tibetan Plateau. Hunter-gatherers originally populated the subcontinent. These early peoples arrived as far back as 30,000 BC; their descendants gave rise to Harappa, the earliest major civilization in India, between 2600 and 1900 BC. Harappa contained mostly farming villages, along with some minor cities, setting a precedent for an agriculture-based economy that would not be broken until industrialization. The Vedas, a set of religious hymns and one of our only sources of information about this era, indicate that the northern-based Indo-Aryans swiftly conquered large portions of the subcontinent around 1200 BC. Their abilities to craft iron weaponry enabled their rapid domination, and resulted in bloody competition between various Indo-Aryan tribes until around 400 BC. The spread of the Indo-Aryan religious practices, based on the Vedas, established most of the foundation for today’s Hinduism and planted the seeds of strict caste regulations. Over the course of the next millennium, a number of powers solidified parts of India, but their rules were consistently brief. During this era of rising and falling empires, the subcontinent’s overland trade with distant regions expanded, bringing the subcontinent increasing quantities of precious metals in exchange for textiles and agricultural products.

A series of European invasions characterized the next period of Indian history. The first Europeans to enter the Indian Ocean arrived by sea in 1498, flying Portuguese flags. The Portuguese dominated trade in the ocean for the next century and established control of some ports, but never made an effort to control land internal to the subcontinent. In the early 1500s, the Mughal Empire consolidated power over most of northern India, though southern India largely remained untamed. The mostly agricultural, village-based society contained significantly more urbanization and division of labor than previous civilizations in the region. The Mughals also aided in scaling up India’s previous experiences with monetization, making trade simpler both within the empire and with outside powers. During the reign of the Mughal Empire, the Dutch East India Company followed the Portuguese into the Indian Ocean and established a much larger trade regime than their predecessors ever maintained. The British East India Company, in its attempts to out-do the Dutch, declared war on the Mughal Empire in 1686, just at the peak of the empire’s power, resulting in a massive set-back for the British. European competition for trade dominance over the Indian Ocean continued for the next century, with little impact from or on the Mughals.

6 Ibid., 16.
7 Ibid., 20.
8 Ibid., 23.
9 Ibid., 35-54.
12 Ibid., 5.
13 Ibid., 4.
14 Ibid., 4.
16 Ibid., 13.
Many theories exist as to why the decline of the Mughal Empire ultimately began. Some historians suggest that the ruling power taxed its citizens beyond the point they could bear, while others posit that social divisions caused internal competitions for power. A number also put forth the theory that sudden economic disturbances created problems for the rulers’ attempts to fund their pursuits. Whatever the cause, as the Mughals’ power crumbled in later 1700s, the British East India Company became the most powerful force on the subcontinent. The British declared their second war on the rulers of India just as its decline began; this one ended in their favor. The Dutch company was losing strength, and the British poured significantly more money into the war than the Mughals were capable of spending. The British also possessed a more advanced infantry, which decimated the Mughal army. After removing the previous power, the British continued their trade circuit on a much larger scale and slowly advanced inward to establish control of overland trade.

While the extent of British Company rule fluctuated constantly, its continuous presence subjugated India, making it a dependent, mostly agrarian state. The British continued the Mughal’s practice of collecting taxes, but rather than being spent in India, the company transported this income back to Europe. Some speculated that British transfer of wealth from the subcontinent to England both enabled the industrial revolution in England and prevented it in India. About a century into British rule, the British Crown took control of the subcontinent from the British East India Company, immediately following an uprising by the Indians that threatened European dominance. The British left the subcontinent in 1947 in reaction to an increasingly violent independence movement, which arose from nearly two hundred years of British rule. Recent Indian economic success seems surprising given its colonial history and delay of industrialization.

**Historiography**

In spite of agreement about the historical events leading up to the British conquest of India, a significant issue of contention remains among historians. Before the British invasion, was India already behind economically or was the subcontinent’s economy comparable to any European nation’s? If India were underdeveloped prior to Company conquest, it would seem that its modern issues with underdevelopment were inevitable, regardless of its colonial experience. However, if the Indian economy thrived on a similar level to that of its conquerors, one would conclude the opposite, that the nation’s modern economic problems are primarily a function of British conquest.

---

21 Ibid., 18.
22 Ibid., 18.
23 Ibid., 18.
Historians seem divided on this issue. A majority indicates that the subcontinent’s economy lagged far behind that of the Europeans. David Ludden, history professor at the University of Pennsylvania, indicates that Indians simply did not have the technology to expand economically in a manner similar to their European counterparts. Urbanization drove technological progress, which fueled further economic growth and urbanization. Europeans began this self-perpetuating cycle; Indians did not. Shaibal Gupta, an Indian economist and social scientist, offers another theory. He noted the lack of capitalist drive for expansion in pre-modern India prevented growth. A growing minority, however, disagrees with these earlier historians’ conclusions. These “revisionists” describe a technologically advanced Indian society engaging in large quantities of trade. They accuse the more traditional scholars of writing tautologically the east succumbed to the west, ergo the west must have been stronger. For instance, David Washbrook, professor of Oriental Studies at Oxford, criticizes the dichotomy drawn between subsistence and market economies and argues that it is possible for a nation to have a combination of the two. While the revisionists, for the most part, recognize the pre-capitalist nature of pre-modern India, they refuse to embrace the characterization of the subcontinent as “backward.”

Frank falls decidedly in the latter camp. In “India and the World Economy,” he indicates that pre-modern India dominated Indian Ocean trade due primarily to its skilled and flexible textile workers and the diversity of exports provided at Indian ports. Frank contends that sea-based trade created prosperity for India, resulting in European trade deficits to the region, while internal, overland trade functioned similarly for more regional exchanges. In spite of minor trade deficits with the Chinese to the north, overland and sea trade complemented each other to make the subcontinent one of the most profitable areas in the world. Frank continues by arguing that the influx of silver from European colonization of the Americas improved the Indian economy by stimulating transactions. He posits that, in spite of the drastic increase in the quantity of silver imported to India, little inflation resulted and the large amounts of specie actually stimulated both Indian supply and demand. The resultant economic expansion in the subcontinent drove territorial expansion, greater trade and a population boom. Moreover, Frank notes that historians give science and technology on the subcontinent significantly less credit than it deserves. Misunderstandings and outright racism prevented an accurate look at these developments. India possessed some of the most advanced ship building techniques in the world and its textile industry was far and away the most innovative. Indian metallurgy and financial systems, as well, appear to have functioned at a level similar to those in Europe. Ultimately, the fall of the subcontinent to

28 Frank, “India in the World Economy,” PE50-PE55.
29 Ibid., 95.
30 Ibid., 95.
British rule, Frank concludes, cannot be attributed to the inferiority of any aspect of Indian economics or culture. Instead, a rise in the subcontinent’s population (due to economic expansion) produced major resource competition and social polarization in Indian society, allowing the British to enter a weak India and pit certain groups against others to the benefit of the company. I believe that Frank’s assessment of Indian levels of development is inaccurate. The subcontinent’s trade system, its economy’s ability to handle large specie influxes, and the regional technology all existed at much lower levels than Frank indicates.

I. Trade

In the first section of his paper, entitled “An Introduction to India in the World Economy,” Frank contends that India’s status as a major trade center indicates pre-modern economic success. He cites urbanization figures for port cities and large balance of trade surpluses with European nations in order to prove his theory. Frank, however, ignores the underlying problems that plagued the subcontinent’s economy in favor of the simpler picture given by the numbers. In spite of the large quantities of trade, many fundamental issues indicate that the Indian economy was not nearly as advanced as Frank would have us believe.

The people of the pre-modern subcontinent moved far more frequently than those in other Western Europe. Because Indian farmers relied on flood and rain as their crops’ primary sources of water, alterations in weather patterns forced families to move in order to maintain their agriculture-based livelihoods. The constant need for labor in most regions further encouraged a migratory lifestyle; it meant that there would always be opportunities elsewhere, potentially ones that would offer a higher rate of return on one’s labor. Construction work, in particular, attracted large numbers of laborers and artisans and then forced them into lifestyles of constant movement. The work “occurred everywhere and continually,” making the original job relatively easy to locate and attain, but the project was soon finished and those hired for it must then leave to find other sources of work. The pattern repeated every few years as most individuals could not find regular employment within a reasonable distance of one’s home. Moreover, the large quantities of trade to which Frank refers required transportation, taken care of by the Banjaras, a group whose primary source of income was to “transport bulk commodities.” Their lives, and the lives of their families, consisted of “travel from one daily encampment to the next.”

Frank credits the migrant nature of a large portion of the subcontinent’s populous with India’s “flexible adaptation to shifting market demands,” but that interpretation seems overly simplistic. The ability to relocate significantly decreased the incentive to invest in basic infrastructure; both the Chinese to the north and the arriving Europeans considered the irrigation

32 Frank, “India in the World Economy,” PE50-PE52.
33 Washbrook “India,” 91.
34 Ibid., 94.
36 Ibid., 94.
37 Ibid., 91.
38 Ibid., 91.
39 Frank, “India in the World Economy,” PE55.
networks that had been established to be “technologically deficient.”\textsuperscript{40} The low levels of infrastructure later constrained per-worker productivity.\textsuperscript{41} The economy reached the point of diminishing marginal returns; adding another person to a project did little to improve production (or decreased net product) because of the minimal original capital investment. The variability within the economy also prevented strong divisions of labor. In order to decrease the risk that a family would lose its whole income due to one crop failure, most farmers “mixed farming with other activities- weaving, laboring, soldiering.”\textsuperscript{42} Labor’s fluid movement tended also to prevent stable governance over small territories; “faced with an oppressive power, labor and capital were inclined to move.”\textsuperscript{43} Individuals avoided exploitation either by threat of movement or physically leaving, thus minimizing total surplus extracted from their work. Gupta states the effect:

In occidental countries investment of capital in mechanical devices provided the basis for technological change, because capital was mobile and was available for industrial investment. The productive use of ‘social surplus’ was the special virtue that enabled capitalism in the west to outstrip all prior economic systems.\textsuperscript{44}

Quite simply, it is difficult to justify investing significant time and capital in creating a large mechanical device if one will have no way to take the technology with him, when he is forced to move. It is true that this would still enable small technologies, but the movement of peoples certainly eliminated a significant amount of potential technological advancement. In India, movement of labor ensured that at least a few regions or industries would be producing efficiently, and most of the surplus could be redistributed to underperforming regions.\textsuperscript{45} Such redistributive trade between regions frequently took the form of land-based trade, the analysis of which is also crucial.

The unstable nature of overland trade not only indicates economic instability, but calls into question Frank’s thesis about India as a center of exchange. Weather determined most caravan routes, and so the variable weather of the subcontinent, including frequent floods and dry spells, made for irregular patterns of trade.\textsuperscript{46} European shipping company records indicate long import wait times due to stymied overland trade and broken contracts.\textsuperscript{47} In comparison, the fact that European ships’ logs express annoyance with India traders’ lack of timeliness indicates some variety of regularity existed in Europe.\textsuperscript{48} By convention, producers possessed the ability to cancel contracts without repercussions, so long as any down-payment was returned to the purchaser.\textsuperscript{49} Many scholars have also concluded that that the majority of merchants who operated caravan routes within India could not garner enough revenue to expand their operation due to caravan

\textsuperscript{40} Washbrook, “India,” 92-93.
\textsuperscript{41} Roy, “Economic History,” 110.
\textsuperscript{42} Washbrook, “India,” 96.
\textsuperscript{44} Gupta, “Potential of Industrial,” 474.
\textsuperscript{45} Washbrook, “India,” 95.
\textsuperscript{46} Washbrook, “Merchants,” 278.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 278.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 278.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 278.
robbery, the arbitrary hand of the Mughal Empire and the trade monopoly possessed by ruling elites.\textsuperscript{50} Furthermore, during the centuries between Portuguese arrival and British colonization, overland trade routes to and from the subcontinent became increasingly lengthy as Middle Eastern and then European markets craved ever greater quantities of Indian products, only compounding the likelihood that some factor would disrupt them.\textsuperscript{51}

The insecurity of trade routes carries implications about Frank’s conclusion. Frank quotes Das Gupta to show that “most of the time sea activities had less influence on those on land than vice versa.”\textsuperscript{52} Sea traders desired goods only available through over-land trade; thus, if caravan routes were unstable, sea routes also did not run efficiently. Frank claims that the port traders functioned in “organic symbiosis with caravan routes,” but I find that claim to be an exaggeration at best.\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, Frank cites the trade between different regions on the subcontinent as a chief indicator of economic success, but given the instability of the trade routes that would have transported goods within India, the numerically-based “big picture” of trade misses the point. The apparent inefficiency of trade within India significantly decreased the likelihood of capitalistic expansion. Insecurity minimized risk-taking, and low profits decreased the extent to which Indian commercial powers could grow. While fortunes could be made, they were easily lost.\textsuperscript{54} Irritation with Indian merchants’ ability to deliver products to ports “on time” provided an additional impetus for European conquest of the subcontinent as a method of regulating delivery and maximizing profit.\textsuperscript{55} Even if one agrees with Frank’s argument that pre-modern India was a center of flourishing and efficient trade, some historians believe that the merchant capital (capital accumulated in an economy reliant on merchants as intermediaries) that was accumulated could not be transformed into industrial capital (capital accumulated in a capitalist society of price-takers).\textsuperscript{56} The latter must be highly investment-based and alienating—neither of which are features of merchant capital. Merchant capital-based economies also frequently allow producers to determine price because they are often the only supplier of a given good. In systems of industrial capitalism, however, producers are always subjugated by a higher class, which enables sufficient accumulation of capital and a drive to accumulate more.\textsuperscript{57}

Numerical totals of trade to and from India over time hide the drastic year-to-year problems. The subcontinent’s economy experienced violent fluctuations; “growth in every sector tended to be highly unstable.”\textsuperscript{58} The agriculture-based society depended largely on rainfall, which, in a dry year, caused problems for the subcontinent’s economy.\textsuperscript{59} India often experienced mass

\textsuperscript{51} Washbrook, “Merchants,” 282.
\textsuperscript{52} Frank, “India in the World Economy,” PE51.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., PE51.
\textsuperscript{54} Washbrook, “Merchants,” 279.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 282.
\textsuperscript{56} Habib, “Potentialities of Capitalistic,” 75.
\textsuperscript{58} Washbrook, “India,” 91.
\textsuperscript{59} Roy, “Economic History,” 114.
famines, as indicated by large changes in the price of food from year-to-year. As a general rule, “when a crisis developed within the agrarian system, it was bound to extend to the entire structure of the Indian economy.” Lack of Mughal commitment to food storage and the majority’s strong dependence on the market to overcome difficult times only compounded the problem. Lack of consistent food supply clearly reduced productivity. Famines also imply a decline in agricultural exports such as grain and indigo, which constituted the majority of long-distance trade leaving the subcontinent. Fluctuations in growth indicate that even though trade increased over long periods of time, India was not advancing economically. Frank’s analysis of Indian economic growth clearly misses a number of fundamental issues in the Indian economy that would have prevented the subcontinent from achieving European-like success.

II. Specie

The large quantities of trade on which Frank focuses in the first section of his criticism also become significant in his analysis of the specie influx into India. Upon arriving in South America, Europeans discovered a new method of paying their Indian trade partners, South American silver. The newly discovered specie took time to cross the Atlantic and Eurasia. Historians note a 30 year difference between the silver’s arrival in Spain and its first appearance in the Ottoman Empire. Using coin records and their knowledge of the time goods usually took to cross Eurasia, they conclude that silver’s introduction to India could not have occurred earlier than the first decades of the seventeenth century. Frank indicates that the silver European merchants paid to their Indian counterparts significantly stimulated industry in India; he concludes that “new means of payment generated new effective demand.” Frank also credits the silver influx with India’s population growth and territorial expansion.

Frank’s analysis of silver in the subcontinent does not sufficiently account for inflationary pressures on the market. William Hawkins, Captain of the first East India Company ship to arrive in India commented that “India is rich in silver, for all nations bring coin, and carry away commodities for the same; and this coin is buried in India, and goeth not out.” Even early observers noted the Indian dilemma: avoid trade with Europeans bearing silver or face upward pressure on prices. In response to this logic, Frank cites an article by Joseph Brenning, but gives no analysis as to how Brenning arrived at his conclusions. This absence of explanation is particularly relevant given that little price data exists and the records historians located are at best “scattered and fragmentary.” Anyone basing their understanding of pricing on written records would have

---

60 Washbrook, “India,” 91.
61 Habib, “Potentialities of Capitalistic,” 78.
62 Washbrook, “India,” 93.
65 Ibid., 478.
66 Frank, “India and the World Economy,” PE53.
not been privy to information about a great deal of market transactions, and thus, analyses of prices across time based on such data are likely incomplete.

Shireen Moosvi recently conducted what I would consider to be the most accurate study yet regarding Indian silver in the 17th Century. She noted that because the Mughal Empire required that each year all citizens bring their precious metals to a mint to be formed into coins, she could analyze the silver entering the economy by looking at the number of coins minted in a given year that appear in present Mughal coin collections. Moosvi showed that quantities of silver changed drastically from decade to decade; the amount entering the subcontinent declined from 290.72 tons per year between 1596 and 1605 to 121.46 tons per year between 1616 and 1625.\(^6^9\)

Early in the century Moosvi notes a “wholesale absorption of silver in the Mughal currency system, where it practically entirely replaced copper money.”\(^7^0\) The silver would not have caused price inflation during the early 1600s (while the system could absorb it without price increases by abandoning copper), but a few decades later, after silver replaced copper as the primary medium of exchange. Moosvi concludes that there must have been a price change because the monetary supply grew larger without a corresponding increase in demand as indicated by unused coins (i.e.: coins not re-minted).\(^7^1\) Moosvi’s figures work out to show that price level of a given basket of goods increased 27% between 1615 and 1705, due in large part to the silver influx.\(^7^2\) Frank asserts that demand increased at the same time, but offers no figures to support that conclusion. He seems to avoid a fundamental question concerning the less than benign effects of European silver on India. Frank also indicates that population growth and growth in demand overcame potential inflationary pressures, but Moosvi’s evidence to the contrary is ultimately more compelling. Other historians similarly conclude that “the stream was so big that it led to a price inflation in spite of this absorptive capacity.”\(^7^3\)

The Frank article also glosses over the possible effects of inflation, which are critical to a discussion of Indian economic success. In India, prices were based on an amount of specie, thus, when large quantities of silver entered the economy, all goods priced in silver had to be re-priced. Inflation can also stymie economic efficiency, because rapid price changes prevent the market from reaching a stable equilibrium. By avoiding the discussion of effects and focusing on the question of whether or not inflation occurred, Frank implicitly concedes that inflationary pressures on the subcontinent would have produced mostly negative impacts. Thus, I believe some amount of inflation likely did happen due to the specie influx, and its benefits (evidence for them being less than convincing) were outweighed by the disadvantages brought on by upward pressure on prices.

The evidence regarding whether Europe suffered from similar problems during its own “Price Revolution” is, as yet, inconclusive. Europe possessed the benefit of exporting a significant quantity of the incoming specie to India and the East, thus preventing as much accumulation of

---


\(^{7^0}\) Ibid., 85.

\(^{7^1}\) Ibid., 85.

\(^{7^2}\) Ibid., 88.

\(^{7^3}\) Rothermund, “An Economic History,” 5-6.
silver as would otherwise have occurred. In fact, John Richards went so far as to say that “the Dutch East Indian simply acted as a European way station for the flow of New World silver and pumped this out to its trading stations in the east.” While I could not locate records of European inflation during this time period, the Ottoman Empire’s average price of goods (which should somewhat reflect Europe’s due to proximity and trade relations) increased only 11% between 1600 and 1700. Ultimately, we need more data to reach a conclusion on the issue of inflation, but even if one assumes the Europeans faced similar levels of price change, Frank’s argument still appears to be in error. Similar levels of inflation and similar quantities of silver passing through the two regions logically aided European growth just as much as they did Indian growth. Such a conclusion eliminates silver influx as a logical reason for Indian economic advancement and, at worst, puts the two regions on the same level, all else being equal.

III. Technology

The third argument Frank posits in “India and the World Economy” is that present Eurocentric views of history have created a perception of technical superiority. He indicates that many historical conclusions about European superiority were drawn based on the tautological notion that because Europeans succeeded, they must have been more advanced. However, Frank believes that Indians possessed technology that put their European counterparts to shame, specifically more durable ships and more efficient textile production. I believe his conclusion is factually incorrect. Records of Indian technology do not indicate that the subcontinent raced toward modernity nearly as quickly as the Europeans. Moreover, I find that such technological development might have been very difficult given Indian economic structure during the period.

Frank’s analysis of pre-modern Indian technologies glosses over many of the areas in which the subcontinent was lacking. Early European travelers to the region “found Indian implements of production rather simple and crude.” Frank references Indian wootz steel exports to England, but India itself lacked either the desire or the capability to use its own product. European explorers noted a “sparing use of metal, wood often serving where iron might be expected” as well as a decided underdevelopment in terms of mining technologies. Artisans used tools sparingly, if at all. Many of the tools they attained were based on developments that occurred outside the region. Indians did not build deep mines, but instead collected iron ore through surface excavation.

Frank’s analysis revolvs predominantly around the advanced nature Indian of ships and textiles. These items are less relevant to the discussion of Indian potential for an industrial revolution than are modern uses of metal, which drastically increased the precision of European

77 Habib, “Potentialities of Capabilities,” 62.
78 Ibid., 62.
79 Ibid., 62.
80 Ibid., 62.
technologies. Substitution of metal in place of materials such as wood also increased the life of any technology. Both improvements became critical to other technological developments, such as the steam engine. In general, Indian technologies existed on a comparatively small scale. The people of the subcontinent considered family-scale equipment to be “appropriate technology” as the small family farm was the predominant method of agricultural production. Even the large irrigation system Indians eventually established only came to exist due to its benefits to individual farmers, who at first worked alone to construct private systems for watering their own crops. It appears that Frank uses one example to prove a general statement, which does not hold up to scrutiny.

The lack of modernity in Indian technology likely arose from structural factors in the subcontinent. While some capital accumulation occurred, indeterminate ownership of the means of production hindered progress beyond that point. According to the Europeans who encountered this situation, “the question whether the land was owned by the raja, the talukadar, zamindar, the cultivator or the king was not a real question” because “each had claim based upon custom or upon grants made by the king or a raja, or upon grants made by a talukdar or zamindar.” Multiple individuals owned the land in different ways, meaning none of them possessed a solid claim to it. The constant question of who owned the land complicated any process of land development; fewer marginal benefits to development existed because all of the land “owners” shared revenue and control. The number of people in charge of a given piece of land also stifled invention. Intellectual property ownership is a key incentive to innovate. A worker who invented a new technology on the land did not truly own the technology, and thus had minimal incentive to invent it in the first place. Moreover, records of the subcontinent's history tend to lack mention of exploitative production, or surplus extraction on par with those occurring in Europe. In Europe, capital accumulation from surplus extraction “provided the basis for technological change,” as it was available for investment in such developments. India, lacking the former, became unable to do the latter. Ultimately, it seems that “the weakness of Indian technology was not that it was primitive but it was unprogressive.”

82 Ibid., 8.
83 Ibid., 5.
88 Ibid., 1171.
90 Chatterjee and Rudra, “Relations of Production,” 1172.
91 Gupta, “Potential of Industrial,” 474.
92 Ibid., 474.
Conclusion

Frank concludes that the expansionary nature of the Indian economy ultimately led to overutilization of resources and social polarization due to resource constraints. Frank’s explanation of the resource crunch necessitates the concession that India faced issues of resource depletion, a fact which indicates the region could not have expanded for long due to its inability to effectively utilize resources. Excepting the regional constraints on resources, Frank concludes that India was highly advanced. I have concluded, however, that instability of trade prevented economic regularity and thus, consistent economic growth. The large influx of silver, which occurred as a result of India’s large trade surplus with Europe, may have contributed to the subcontinent’s economic decline. Regional technology seems to have been extremely unprogressive and not nearly as advanced as that which the Europeans utilized.

Thus far, no historian has explicitly taken issue with Frank’s “India and the World Economy.” Few have even responded to revisionist historians’ theories on India, but based on my analysis of Frank’s views, revisionist beliefs may not have historical grounding when applied to the subcontinent. The lack of discussion regarding pre-colonial India seems odd since it presents a fundamental historical question: What differentiated Europe from the rest of the world and enabled it to dominate only centuries later? Today, India thrives economically, but in spite of this overt growth, the nation possesses less obvious tendencies toward rural poverty and religious extremism. A lingering question exists as to whether history will repeat itself, if less than apparent issues will ultimately constrain future possibilities.

---

93 Frank, “India and the World Economy,” PE60.
Images of the East in Renaissance Art

HEATHER KARELLAS

Introduction

The Renaissance, which most scholars agree links the Middle Ages to the Modern World, included a dramatic shift in thought and culture in Europe. It was a period of new ideas, a revisiting of classical thought, and an effort to bridge ancient concepts with the modern world. French historian Jules Michelet described the Renaissance as a movement that witnessed “the discovery of the world and the discovery of man.”¹ For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the Renaissance as a discovery of the world and increasing European interactions with the Middle East.

European Renaissance art reflects the fact that Europe was engaging heavily in trade with the Middle East during the Renaissance and constantly receiving their ideas as well as goods is certainly reflected in European Renaissance art. The significance of Eastern imagery in Western art can offer key insights into the Western perspective toward the study of the East as a whole, which some have described as Orientalism.² Specifically, this imagery in Renaissance art serves as an ongoing basis for debate among history and art scholars, as they continue to analyze the complicated relationships between Europe and the Middle East in an increasingly globalized world.

During the Renaissance, Europeans saw themselves as being in the center of the universe – quite literally, according to the geocentric model. In many instances, Europeans believed themselves to be superior to people of other nations. Because of this, it is ironic that Europeans relied on Middle Eastern goods and trade as symbols of wealth and opulence. One of the ways that powerful Europeans expressed their power was by commissioning paintings and portraits that included Middle Eastern and other exotic images and motifs. Even as Europe saw itself as a self-sufficient and dominant force, it relied on so-called inferior countries for its true expression of power. I will begin by detailing the existing debate on the topic of Orientalism, and then providing background information about the Renaissance before specifically analyzing where and how these two topics intersect.

The Orientalism Debate

The word Orientalism originally referred to “the study of the languages, literature, religions, thought, arts, and social life of the East in order to make them available to the West.”³ In 1978, scholar Edward Said released a book called Orientalism that changed the meaning of this word. Said’s main point was that Orientalism had in itself become a field of thought that was

³ Ibid., xii.
inherently biased. He noted that Orientalism involved seeing the East through a Western viewpoint, which often resulted in stereotypical portrayals rather than genuine reflections of Eastern culture. His has become the modern definition of Orientalism – a term that now has negative connotations - and it has formed a basis for heated debate among scholars in the past thirty or so years.

Many followers agree with Said, and lament the Western bias that often exists in analysis of Eastern cultures, the Middle East in particular. Others note that Said’s theory was an attack on Western thought, and make the case that Said “occidentalized the West, by ‘essentializing’ - describing by means of essences or stereotypes - the characteristics of European powers no less than they ‘essentialised’ the East.” John MacKenzie, a respectful Said skeptic and leader in this area of study, notes that “in this field perhaps more than any other, a particular selection of paintings, or a specific set of quotations can be used to prove anything.” He also points out that some of Said’s devotees have produced work supporting Said’s thesis that is “both subtle and crude, some of which the master might [have] wish[ed] to disown.” Some followers, such as Chandreyee Niyogi, even dedicated their books to Said. Though mostly supportive of Said’s work, Niyogi points out an irony in the debate – Said had wished to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western thought, but instead, Said acknowledged that in many ways, he widened the gap. This is because scholars are now engaged in a complex argument regarding how the East should be viewed as a whole; instead of working together to form a common basis of thought, many Eastern and Western scholars are instead disagreeing on what constitutes a respectful view of the East.

While the finer points of this debate are lengthy and complex, suffice it to say that Edward Said started a debate in 1978 that continues in literature and classrooms all over the U.S., Europe, and the East. It is unlikely that this debate about what Orientalism means and what affects it has on academia will be resolved anytime soon, but it is an increasingly meaningful discussion as the Western and Eastern worlds work more closely together than ever before.

Renaissance Overview

It has been said that “if there is one movement at which most people define the birth of modern European civilization, it is surely the period between 1400 and 1600 known as the Renaissance.” Although the term Renaissance was not used until the 19th century, Europeans certainly acknowledged the period as a time of rediscovery, rebirth, and creation while it was occurring. There are several reasons why the Renaissance began where and when it did. First, the classical civilization of Rome certainly influenced Renaissance artists, and “a growing sense of the past prompted the study of [Roman] remains.” Additionally, northern Italy was incredibly wealthy due to flourishing Mediterranean trade in ports like Genoa and Venice. Florence and Milan were also vital centers of manufacturing and distribution for the whole of Europe as well. This wealth meant that there were a large amount of benefactors eager to employ Italian artists, the most

---

4 Ibid., 5.
5 Ibid., 5.
famous example being the Medici family in Florence. Furthermore, institutions like the Roman Catholic Church often commissioned expensive and intricate works by artists and architects.\(^{10}\) Finally, Italy’s city-state structure at this time meant that the country shared many attributes with ancient Greek and Roman society. Italians had civic pride and a love of their home cities, and acknowledged and appreciated their heritage and traditions. Because of its location, trade, and traditions, Italy in the 1400s was the prime location and time for a shift in thought and culture.

Once Italian artists began to experience a shift in their outlook and thought, the rest of the European world followed suit. With an increased number of foreigners traveling through Europe, as well as the invention of the printing press, the Renaissance movement quickly spread to other countries. Renaissance themes included the rediscovery of antiquity and classical studies, a renewed interest in the individual and humanism, a curiosity for science, mathematics, anatomy, and nature, and a fascination with Eastern goods, people, and society.

In 1482, Ptolemy’s *Geography* was published. This world map detailed over 8,000 places, and popularized latitude and longitude as a way to lay out the grid of the Earth. Ptolemy centered his world around Constantinople, Alexandria, and Baghdad. This shows that although Europeans considered themselves the most dominant people in the world, they recognized that power lay in the East. As mapmaking improved and each subsequent map became more accurate, trade and exploration flourished. This expanded trade allowed for an increased presence of foreign goods, people, and ideas in Renaissance Europe, thus fueling the frequency of Eastern themes seen in Renaissance art.

Without wealthy patrons backing the artist community during the Renaissance, we might not see such obvious and frequent images of the Middle East in famous works. Vasari’s *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* details more about the lives of specific Renaissance artists and works. Vasari elevated artists to a high status, portraying them as noble and selective creators rather than as dirty workers.\(^{11}\) Because artists were increasingly seen as elite, they began conversing and networking with the powerful and the wealthy. Through these connections, they received commissions of work from prestigious leaders, who often requested Middle Eastern themes in their portraits to show opulence and wealth. If artists like Michelangelo and da Vinci were not backed by wealthy patrons and encouraged to explore exotic themes, the Renaissance may have looked very different.

**Trade and Exploration: Growing Curiosity During the Renaissance**

One historian writes that “To fully evaluate the artistic achievements of the Renaissance, it is necessary to acknowledge that the art that emerged from it was deeply imbued with the worlds of trade and politics, both of the east and of the west.”\(^{12}\) Around the year 1500, European countries were actively engaged in trade all over the world. Black notes that the “endless curiosity that characterizes ‘Renaissance man’ can be seen as the mainspring of the exploring impulse that was to take European culture across the world.”\(^{13}\) Groups like the Dutch East India Company and the

---

\(^{10}\) Black, *Cultural Atlas of the Renaissance*, 22.


British East India Company made it their business to travel to new and exotic lands, including the Middle East, in search of wealth and luxury goods to introduce into the European market. However, trade is never a one-way process; as European culture traveled East, Eastern ideas and imagery traveled West. The Renaissance period was the so-called Golden Age of exploration, when famous figures like Bartolomeu Dias, Vasco da Gama, and Christopher Columbus set sail. Exotic goods like musk, ginger, Arabian horses, and Chinese porcelain indicated that Eastern countries could make powerful trading allies. Brotton indicates that these goods and luxury items made a powerful impression on artists and architects like Masaccio, Filarete, and Mantenga, who made an effort to incorporate images of exotic animals, Islamic script, and Eastern materials like silk and woven carpets into their works.\(^{14}\)

Traditionally, scholars have believed that the Renaissance involved a return to classical Roman and Greek ways of thinking, and that Renaissance artists incorporated Eastern ideas as a curiosity when it suited them or their benefactors. Brotton argues that this traditional view simply is not true. Instead, he says that Eastern countries played an active role in shaping the course of the Renaissance. I believe that both the traditional view and Brotton are partially right. While Brotton’s argument that the Middle East was a critical force in the European world is certainly valid, I believe that Renaissance artists liked to have fun with their themes. They probably found it interesting to scatter exotic imagery throughout traditional works, and most likely found amusement in the fact that their wealthy patrons placed so much emphasis on the inclusion of exotic goods and symbols in commissioned works.

Despite the Inquisition’s widespread emphasis of traditional European customs and values, many people remained actively curious about the unknown. One such individual was the French writer Pierre Belon, who headed east in search of wonders in the mid-16th century. Belon wrote books about his accounts, popularizing his journeys and prompting other explorers to venture East as well, also writing accounts of their trips. These tours became like Oriental sight-seeing for adventurous Europeans. The wealthier the traveler, the better they were received by what could otherwise be hostile groups of people. In this way, high-ranking travelers like Jean Palerne, who went abroad in 1581, could attest to Eastern atrocities and brutalities without ever truly experiencing them. This kind of morbid curiosity contributed to the sense of wonderment about these exotic people\(^{15}\). Additionally, possessing Eastern goods and wealth became seen as a status symbol; Europeans began to define themselves by “purchasing and emulating the opulence and cultured sophistication” of Eastern lands.\(^{16}\)

As we must now reexamine our traditional beliefs about the Renaissance, so Renaissance artists too had to reexamine their views of the world. In sculpting and painting the perfect human specimens, artists generally created European figures. Michelangelo’s David, for example, looks very European in physical traits and stature. The idea of perfection seemed synonymous with European culture. This raises some important questions: why would a group of countries who were


so prosperous and self-sufficient demand faraway goods from Eastern lands? Why were other countries so fascinating when they were so “obviously” inferior? These are questions that many Europeans tried to avoid. Renaissance artists, however, seem to have picked up on this contradiction, displaying their understanding in interesting ways.

**European Impressions of the Middle East**

In the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, scholars struggled with attempting to understand Islam more accurately. This was also the period during which the Crusades were active. One scholar writes that, during this time, “everyone in the West had some picture of what Islam meant…but it was not knowledge, and its details were only accidentally true.”\(^{17}\) For the most part, Islam was perceived as a dangerous force that had usurped lands in which Christianity had previously dominated, “and which continued to constitute a serious threat to Christendom.”\(^{18}\) Fortunately, no one regards Islam as such today.\(^{19}\)

Historian Zachary Lockman proposes that Islam served as a mirror for Europeans; it was a culture that they could compare themselves to in order to feel better. Much like how modern Americans watch reality television for the comforting notion that at least they are better than these classless, obscene characters, Europeans in the twelfth and thirteenth century looked to Islam as an inferior ideology that bolstered their self-confidence. Lockman indicates that “it was in part by differentiating themselves from Islam...that European Christians, and later their nominally secular descendants, defined their own identity.”\(^{20}\) Another scholar agrees, noting that the Middle East became something of a laboratory for information gathering. Additionally, the exploration of the Middle East raised questions about history, human origins, and the definition of human nature itself, as Europeans realized more and more that what they considered normal and civilized – a belief in Jesus as God, in city living as a sign of wealth, and proper manners and civility - often conflicted with the ideas of Middle Eastern culture.\(^{21}\)

**Examples of Middle Eastern Imagery in Renaissance Art**

Many Renaissance artists incorporated imagery of the Middle East into their work in quite interesting ways, as the notion of Islam as a serious threat faded somewhat during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.\(^{22}\) Scholars argue that the Renaissance is what allowed for a de-emphasis on Christian thinking, and a weakening of the church. Therefore, the Renaissance as a movement allowed for freer expression and permitted individual artists to incorporate Middle Eastern imagery into their works. Anna Contadini, a scholar at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, points out that Middle Eastern elements were incorporated into Renaissance works for four main reasons. The first was to show exotic goods as valuable objects that provide opportunities for wealth through trade. The second reason was to denote power and status to the patron or subject of a portrait. The third reason for including Middle

---

\(^{17}\) Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{19}\) Yes, that was a joke.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 37.


\(^{22}\) Lockman, *Contenting visions of the Middle East*, 39.
Eastern motifs was to creatively experiment with new themes and ideas. Lastly, artists could show Islamic and Middle Eastern ideas as prototypes for imitation and learning. For simplicity’s sake in future reference, I will name these four motivations for including Middle Eastern imagery Prospects, Prestige, Playfulness, and Prototypes.

One interesting study is the imagery of Islamic and Middle Eastern textiles in Renaissance art. Europeans, especially Italians, valued trade with the Middle East, because it resulted in a wealth of luxurious cloth to be used in Italian clothing for those who could afford it. Walking down the street, Italians could distinguish between basic Italian textiles and Middle Eastern ones, and the latter evoked a sense of respect and admiration of the wearer. One early example of Middle Eastern textiles in Renaissance art is Cimabue’s paintings from the thirteenth century. Cimabue’s *Madonna and Child with Angels* incorporated imagery of Islamic textiles with Arabic inscriptions. In the fourteenth century, Giotto’s frescoes include textiles with Kufic-like scripts. Kufic was an early calligraphic form of Arab writing.23 In the fifteenth century, Frá Angelico’s *Madonna and Child* incorporates Arabic inscriptions and cloth - a stunning combination of Christian icons surrounded by Islamic influence. These works incorporate the concepts of Prestige and Playfulness. The textiles denote power and sovereignty, but at the same time, we can imagine that Renaissance artists noted the irony of using Islamic motifs to depict Christian figures. Contadini notes that as the Italian textile industry grew in the fifteenth century, the presence of Oriental textiles in paintings decreased; they are seen only in the borders of clothing made of otherwise Italian cloth, such as in Botticelli’s “Fortitude” in 1470.24

Middle Eastern trade also brought coveted and prestigious Oriental carpets to Europe. These carpets were typical of Anatolian Turkish workshops, and were often used in paintings to denote status or even holiness at the feet of the Madonna or Saints25. This idea of Islam and Middle Eastern motifs as a sign of holiness is ironic, since the Western idea of holiness was fundamentally tied to a belief in Jesus Christ as the son of God and part of the Holy Trinity – ideas which Islam rejected altogether. As the carpets became more common, the wealthy bought them more frequently for use as interior decoration, and they were increasingly seen in portraits of nobility to signify authority and power.

Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*, at left, includes several examples of Middle Eastern imagery. The carpet on the table and lush green backdrop are examples of the aforementioned Turkish imports, signifying the importance of the subjects in the painting. The inclusion

---

of furs is meant to be a sign of opulence gained from international trade.\textsuperscript{26} The terrestrial and celestial globes and navigation tools reference the emphasis on exploration and trade during the Renaissance. While this painting has many interpretations and much symbology, one clear message of Holbein’s portrait is that exploration very often leads to opulence and wealth – it invokes the themes of Prospects and Prestige.

Another fascinating example is Benozzo Gozzoli’s The Journey of the Magi, above, which can be interpreted appears to be a celebration of the Medici’s role in uniting the Eastern and Western churches.\textsuperscript{27} Gozzoli painted John VIII, Joseph II, and Lorenzo de’Medici as the three Magi. The Medici family negotiated commercial access to Constantinople in 1439, as Lorenzo de’Medici saw this as a critical connection between the East and West. Unfortunately, the general population of Constantinople rejected the agreement, and the Italian state refused to provide military assistance to the Byzantines in their fight against the Ottomans. In 1453, the agreement ended.\textsuperscript{28} Though the contract dissolved, the painting remains an important source of Middle Eastern ideas incorporated into Italian artwork. It shows the Prestige associated with embarking on a grand journey to the East, and depicts the travelers as wealthy explorers and diplomats forming critical connections between Europe and the Eastern world.

Another interesting work is Costanzo da Ferrara’s Seated Scribe, which was painted during Costanzo’s trip to Istanbul in the 1470s. This portrait is painted in the traditional Ottoman and Persian style of portraiture\textsuperscript{29}. Costanzo’s subject is a young scribe, seated and writing in Arabic. The scribe wears a turban, traditional Ottoman dress with a rich pattern and velvet sleeves, and a golden earring. The 15\textsuperscript{th}-century Persian painter Bihzad created a response to this work, called Portrait of a Painter in Turkish Costume. Interestingly, Bihzad changes the scribe into a painter who is shown working on a painting quite similar to Costanzo’s. Brotton notes that “each artist draws on the aesthetic innovations of the other, making it impossible to say which painting is definably ‘western’ or ‘eastern.’”\textsuperscript{30} While Italy and Turkey exchanged money and goods, they also exchanged artistic ideas and skills. Brotton notes that to ignore the fact that Renaissance art owes a debt to Islamic techniques is to only tell one side of the Renaissance story. In this way, the painting evokes the idea of Prototypes, showing that the exchange of ideas and thought is beneficial. Costanzo shows a respectful admiration for Islamic study and the tradition of discipline and learning in Middle Eastern culture.

Jan van Eyck’s Arnolfini Portrait (1434), on the following page, is a classic portrayal of the opulence of exotic goods. The painting shows Giovanni di Arrigo Arnolfini, a wealthy and

\textsuperscript{26} Contadini, Islam and the Italian Renaissance, 9.
\textsuperscript{27} Brotton, The Renaissance Bazaar, 101.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 116.
powerful Italian merchant, with his wife, Giovanna (who came from wealth herself). The couple stands in a room overflowing with symbols of their wealth: Baltic furs, Spanish oranges, Venetian glasswork, Ottoman carpets, and German woodwork. It was said of the city of Bruges, where the couple lived, that “anyone who has money and wishes to spend it will find in this town everything that the whole world produces.” This painting shows the themes of Prospects and Prestige – this couple delights in their Middle Eastern goods, even though they are part of a European society that thinks of Middle Easterners as barbarian or inferior. The mirror in the back of the painting also shows the growing field of optics. Interestingly, van Eyck has painted himself on this mirror, placing his likeness directly in the center of his painting. Brotton notes that this was a daring and groundbreaking move – van Eyck stressed the artist’s importance alongside that of the patron or sitter. This was an important trend throughout the Renaissance – even as countries and continents became more interconnected, there was still a movement toward individual thought and the importance of the self, potentially growing Europe’s sense of superiority.

Gentile Bellini’s Venetian Embassy in the East shows Venetians and Turks engaging in dialogue. Venice’s Jewish population served as an important link to the Mediterranean trading business, and merchants from the Ottoman Empire often visited Venice to engage in contracts and to warehouse items. Black notes that “although Christians and Turks were often involved in open conflict, the channels of communication through diplomacy and trade remained open.” In this painting, it is apparent that the Venetian and Turkish merchants set aside their cultural and religious differences in acknowledgment that they and their people shared similar goals of trade – a clear example of Prototype, in which the exchange of ideas is beneficial.

Finally, Leonardo da Vinci’s ceiling frescoes in the Sals delle Asse in Milan show crosses side-by-side with eight-pointed stars and looped knots, traditional symbols of the Islam faith. Albrecht Durer imitated these themes. Contadini explains that this is an example of Playfulness, because da Vinci incorporated unorthodox symbology into a traditionally sacred space for apparently no other reason other than the fact that he could.

One unifying theme throughout these examples Middle Eastern imagery in Renaissance art is that as Eastern goods showed status, so did custom paintings and works that incorporated Eastern ideas. This is a bit humorous in the sense that Europeans at this time generally considered themselves superior to their Middle Eastern counterparts; yet, when they wanted to convey their wealth, power, and authority, one common request was for the artist to paint the patron

31 Ibid., 135.
32 Ibid., 136.
33 Ibid., 137.
34 Black, Cultural Atlas of the Renaissance, 135.
surrounded by Middle Eastern goods. It is ironic to think that Western rulers relied on dominance in Middle Eastern trade as a symbol of power.

**Additional Thoughts**

After exploring how Renaissance artists incorporated Middle Eastern and Oriental ideas into paintings as a way to show Prospects, Prestige, Playfulness, and Prototypes, we must consider an important question: why did some artists choose to not incorporate images of the exotic when it seems to be so popular and lucrative? Did images of the East inherently contradict the idea of the Renaissance as a return to more classical/traditional works? It is my opinion that the Renaissance is often described using two conflicting characteristics: the movement was a return to classical thought as well as a time for exploration of new ideas and cultures. In this way, we are able to see such interesting and unique juxtapositions like the Virgin Mary adorned with Islamic calligraphy. Rather than seeing this as confusing or nonsensical, we can instead view these images as a glimpse into the Western mindset regarding the Middle East during the Renaissance. The artists who did not incorporate these themes may simply not have been backed by wealthy patrons, may not have had a strong preference for new or exotic ideas over traditional imagery, or may not have believed that Middle Eastern imagery was necessary for creative thinking and portraying the world around them.

**Conclusion**

It has been said that “the history of the Arabs has been written in Europe chiefly by historians who knew no Arabic, or by Arabists who knew no history.” While this is a sharp comment, it is relevant to the analysis of Middle Eastern imagery in Renaissance art. As we have examined, much of what Europeans during the Renaissance knew about places like Egypt or the Ottoman Empire was from stories of others who had visited, from viewing other artists’ work on the subject, or from hearsay by way of sailors and merchants. Very few artists who incorporated Middle Eastern ideas and themes into their Renaissance works had actually been to these places or conducted detailed studies of the cultures and traditions of the Middle East. In other words, their knowledge of Middle Eastern culture was based on embellished stories and superficial interactions with exotic goods rather than an in-depth understanding of Middle Eastern thought.

On one hand, we can argue that this limited the artists’ ability to accurately and respectfully depict Islamic themes, and that by throwing calligraphy and Middle Eastern goods into paintings, they cheapened the image of the East. On the other hand, we can note that the Renaissance artists were not limited by a need to understand everything about Islam – instead, they experimented with Middle Eastern imagery in interesting and fun ways that provide scholars today with a quite intriguing topic to study.

In this way, it can be argued that Said’s argument was right – Orientalist imagery became more and more stereotypical throughout centuries of artistry, culminating in the work of 19th century artists, which some feel border on racist. Linda Nochlin, a leading critic of Orientalist art, argues that most exotic imagery is incredibly stereotypical and shows “a childlike indifference to the need to preserve culture and tradition.” She indicates that artists used Orientalism as an area

---

in which to explore fantasy and imagination. She sees this as a negative aspect rather than liberating idea. For better or worse, Middle Eastern imagery in the Renaissance had a direct effect on how the Middle East was viewed by Europeans for centuries after it had been created.

In sum, we can say with confidence that there is an element of humor in Europeans’ elevation of Middle Eastern goods as a status symbol. Much like how a Swiss watch or Egyptian cotton sheets carry an element of sophistication and refinement today, Middle Eastern produce, textiles, and spices allowed the owner to feel like they had conquered a small part of the world for their own pleasure. We may conclude that the man who treasures his German-made BMW is not inherently more special than any other person – it is the possession that differentiates him. Similarly, we can speculate that Europe in itself was not the epitome of perfection during the Renaissance. Europeans relied heavily on the support and trade of other countries, particularly in the Ottoman Empire and North African regions, to define their high status and provide them with the luxuries they coveted.

---

An Assessment of the Military Revolution

DANIEL SOK

Introduction

“Goat Gone. Will Navy Send Seals?” was the December 2002 New York Times headline that stemmed from West Point cadets kidnapping or in this case goat-napping the Naval Academy’s famed mascot ‘Bill the goat’ before the annual Army-Navy football game. Another prank involved Naval Academy midshipmen mule-napping the Army mascot, which resulted in an interstate chase by Army helicopters and federal agents. The Army-Navy football game played at the end of the college football regular season embodies the intense rivalry found between the military and naval academy of the United States. The steep old traditions found in the Army-Navy game typify the time-honored rivalry between armies and navies of old. There have always been quarrels between each branch regarding the question of which branch is better. The same can be said in assessing the military revolution. Was it the land based army revolution or the sea based naval revolution that was the moving force behind the military revolution theory?

Over the course of academic history many historians have attempted to explain how Europe was able to control wide expanses of territory around the world. How was this technologically backwards civilization coming out of the Middle Ages into the 14th century Renaissance able to gain a toehold on six continents in less than 300 years? When China was enjoying considerable prosperity and technological advances, it was sending large treasure fleets as far as Africa, Australia and maybe even the Americas by the early 15th century. The flagship of the Chinese treasure fleets were four hundred feet long. Christopher Columbus’s St. Maria was only eighty five feet and Columbus came a hundred years later. What gave Europeans the edge over the older and more advanced civilizations? Historian Geoffrey Parker attempts to answer this question by explaining his addition to Michael Robert’s theory of the military revolution. Michael Roberts explains that the radical change in military strategy and tactics resulting from the advent of portable firearms in 16th and 17th century Sweden led to major changes in government structure. This eventually led to the modern European state. Parker adds to Roberts’ theory by linking the rise of the modern state and the military to Europe being able to conquer massive amounts of territory.

I agree with the theory of military revolution in explaining how the advent of gun powdered weapons and the strategic and tactical changes that resulted from it led to the modern European state, and in turn was the impetus to Europe’s ability to conquer a greater part of the world. However, I also believe the development of naval forces must be discussed equally with the development of land based forces in the military revolution of the European states. Until recently

---

many scholars have failed to mention the singular importance of a naval force and how its
development have been the stimulant in the creation of the modern European state. I believe a
comparison is needed between the developments of armies and navies and how both factors can be
viewed equally in the creation of the modern European state. I will assess the land based military
revolution and naval revolution separately, and lay out a case for how both revolution led to the
military revolution and the modern European state.

The Land Based Military Revolution

The military revolution was a theory espoused by the late historian Michael Roberts that
“exercised a profound influence upon the future course of European history.” Roberts also claims
the military revolution was “like a great divide separating medieval society from the modern
world.”

With the advent of firearms and subsequent changes in military strategy and tactics, the
professional military came into existence. This new professional army was a standing military
where the members were conscripted, better disciplined and better trained than previous armies.
They were also clothed and fed by the government. To maintain such an army, the state had to
adapt to the changing circumstances, and there was a huge growth in bureaucracies, treasuries, and
economic methods (new methods of taxation and loan financing). Roberts believed these
adaptations led to the fruition of a powerful modern European state.

Roberts singles out four changes in warfare that led to the military revolution: 1) a
revolution in tactics, where the old lance and pikes along with their armored cavalry were rendered
useless by en masse muskets, 2) tactic changes resulted in larger militaries, 3) the adoption of
complex and intricate strategies to effectively implement large armies during a war and 4) these
changes impacted society due to the higher burden for conscripts and resources for war. Thus,
there was a greater need for bureaucratic and logistical efficiency by the respective state.

Many scholars after Roberts have accepted the main argument found in Roberts’ theory on
the military revolution, but have added their own additions to the theory. Many of the additions
involve the chronology of Roberts’ time period. Historian Jeremy Black believes the main time
period of the military revolution to be from 1660-1710, when the sizes of most Europeans armies
were increasing the fastest compared to any other time. Some scholars such as Clifford Rogers
state the military revolution was more of a punctuated equilibrium. Punctuated equilibrium is a
term used by evolutionary biologists to describe the theory of evolution. Instead of a slow,
continuous movement, evolution tends to be characterized by long periods of virtual standstill
“equilibrium”, “punctuated” by episodes of very fast development of new forms. Rogers states

5 Geoffrey Parker, The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West 1500-1800 (Cambridge University
6 Jeremy Black, “Was there a MILITARY REVOLUTION in Early Modern Europe?” History Today 58, no. 7 (2008): 34
41.
7 S.J. Gould and N. Eldredge, “Punctuated Equilibria: The Tempo and Mode of Evolution Reconsidered,”
Paleobiology 3, no 2: 115-151, 145.
parts of the military revolutions such as tactics changes and artillery warfare occurred drastically and then followed by long standstill periods.\(^8\)

Of the many historians who have devoted their academic careers to the discourse of the military revolution, Geoffrey Parker has most notably expanded the theory to explain how Europe became the dominant world power that managed to conquer nearly thirty-five percent of the world’s landmass from the period of 1500 to 1800. Parker links the rise of European dominance to three factors: the development of cannons and the arms race that developed between cannons and fortresses, the subsequent rise in the size of armies, and the development of European naval forces. Parker discusses the development of the *trace italienne* in 15th century Italy in response to the arrival of effective cannon warfare brought to the Italian peninsula by the invading French forces. The *trace italienne* was a low thick-walled fortress that was usually built in the shape of a star, with many triangular shaped bastions on the points of the stars. At each point there is a spade shaped structure known as the bastion. The bastions and the general star-shaped nature of the fort allowed the defenders to have open access to all fields of fire, preventing the enemy from being able to sneak up on the fort to undermine the structure by planting mines under the walls.

The low thick walls of these large fortresses were usually built of brick and earth, allowing the wall to absorb the impact of cannonballs with little adverse effect. Compared to the old, tall stone walls of medieval Europe (the old stone walls chipped when hit with artillery, making it dangerous for the defenders) these walls were almost indestructible. Along with the general evolution of fortifications, engineers expanded the fortress by adding moats and earthen works such as ramparts and trenches further out from the established forts. These earthen works were in essence another layer of fortresses outside the main fortress. The earthen works were cheap to build and easy to defend. Additionally these defensive works added another layer of difficulty for besieging forces to take care of before even laying siege on the fortress proper. Besieging armies had to use their forces on these defensive works before laying siege to the main fortress. The evolution of fortresses made wars costly in terms of manpower and resources since sieges could last up to months at a time.

The cost of constructing these massive fortresses with bastions was extremely high for the time. In 1542, there was a plan to surround Rome with eighteen bastions, but the plan was discarded because each bastion would cost nearly £10,000 (almost £4,000,000 by present standards). In some Italian republics, the cost of building these new fortresses either bankrupted them or made them so destitute that they could not afford relief armies or navies for their fortresses. Other states were careful with their financing of fortresses such as the Dutch, who were able to afford the £100,000 fortress of Antwerp. From 1529-1572, the total cost of fortress construction in the Netherlands exceeded £1 million.\(^9\) Clearly, the Dutch were able to afford such intricate defenses without bankrupting themselves compared to their Italian counterparts. This was probably a result of the development and maintenance of an intricate taxation system and government financial network to construct and maintain these fortresses.

Parker notes that the evolution of fortress engineering in response to the evolution of cannon warfare led to longer and costlier wars. This created the need for a large besieging army (since sieges could take months at a time) as well as a large covering army to prevent attempts by the enemy to bring relief to the besieged fortress. In addition, the evolution of portable firearms led to the initiation of linear tactics, where the army would line up in a line across the battlefield as to maximize their firepower. Along with these linear tactics, military strategists such as Counts Maurice and William Louis of Nassau realized that they could increase their musketeers’ rate of fire by adding lines of men behind the first line. In a battle, the first line of men would fire, then march backwards and reload while the second line would come forward and fire and then march backwards and reload. Then the third line would fire and so on and so on to create a contingent of musketeers that have a continuous rate of fire. The army needed more men to lengthen battle lines to prevent flanking actions and to plug breaches in the line during battles.

Strategies such as these required an exponential increase in military sizes and thus, set off a military size arms race through Europe. States such as Prussia could bring as many as 1 in 13 of their population as soldiers during times of war. By 1692, there were more than 495,000 on the militia rolls of Spain. From 1547 to 1598, the Spanish military expenditure rose from £200,000 a year to nearly £900,000 a year. Military expenditures rose for all Europeans states during this period. Feeding, clothing, and arming thousands of men bankrupted some states such as Spain while other states such as the Dutch formed novel ideas such as securing war-loans on future taxes with an interest rate advantageous for the lender. In addition, the supply nightmare that resulted from maintaining these fortresses and armies required a streamlining of government acquisition and payment to producers. This helped certain industries such as cloth making, metal works, and farming onto the path of industrialization. Governments subsidized the development of military specific industries, allowing them to become proto-industrial and thus, setting the framework of industrialization.

Unique ideas such as these led to an evolution in financial structure of governments, a key aspect of the military revolution. The cost of supplying the fortresses and armies of Europe led to the evolution of government logistics and finances, helping create the modern European state. Parkers’ explanation of the need for a larger army was critical in tying Roberts’ theory of the military revolution with Parker. However Parker also notes the creation and maintenance of artillery-proof fortresses contributed to the revolution in government structure. Roberts and Parker both agree that the military evolution of strategy, tactics and technology led to the creation of the modern state structure. In Parkers’ point of view, this revolution allowed Europe to control nearly thirty-five percent of the world by 1800.

The Sea Based Military Revolution

One of the main criticisms of Roberts’ theory on the military revolution was the insufficient attention paid to naval development during the era. Many scholars of the military

---

14 Parker, The Military Revolution, 2.
revolution including Parker have discussed the importance of naval development in the evolution of the European state towards its modern form. Some scholars claim the naval revolution was the most important aspect of the military revolution and was the key factor to Europe’s ability to dominate the world by the 1800s. Some scholars such as Nicholas Kyriazis and Michael Duffy have looked specifically at the rise of naval power in England and the United Republic (Dutch) as the primary movers of the military revolution within these respective states. The naval forces of Britain and the United Republic were built in response to the grave danger they both faced from the seas, primarily from Spain.\footnote{Roberts, The Military Revolution, 84-87.}

Up until the 1500s, the standard tactic of warfare at sea was ramming then boarding the enemy ship. Evidence of gun-powdered weapons on ships date back to the 1300s, but it was not until the middle of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century that gun-powdered weapons were a standard for all ships. Ships soon evolved to accommodate more guns of a wider variety. Shipbuilders began building castles on the aft and stern of ships to create a downward plain of fire. As gun sizes grew, builders began placing guns lower in the deck to maintain balance. Ships effectively became floating fortresses. With the advent of gun-powdered weapons aboard ships, the naval revolution finally began.

In 1514, at the end of the First French War, King Henry VIII of Britain only had twenty-three Royal Navy ships and thirty-six hire merchant vessels, manned by 4,429 men. By the end of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the Royal Navy maintained one thousand warships manned by over 130,000 men. In less than three hundred years, the British were able to increase their naval power forty-four fold and increase their manpower by nearly thirty fold. That’s pretty impressive for a country the size of Kansas in land area putting together one of the greatest and far reaching navies of the world. The early 16\textsuperscript{th} century British crown lacked the financial capacity to build and maintain a navy. Most of the ships of the Royal Navy built at the time were from the proceeds of Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries. It was also cheaper to hire merchant vessels in times of emergency. Such was the case during the Anglo-Spanish war in 1588 when Elizabeth I hired out merchant vessels to defend the British Isles.

The construction of a British navy was more a result of the lucrateness in raiding Spanish ships laden with booty crossing the Atlantic from the Americas. In essence, British naval strength in the late 16\textsuperscript{th} century to the early 17\textsuperscript{th} century was maintained by the private enterprise and capitalistic mindset of entrepeneuring state-licensed privateers. Private enterprises were developing cutting-edge ships that were able to sail around the Atlantic terrorizing Spanish vessels. Even by 1625, the crown was relying mostly on merchant ships to complement their fleets. Pressure mounted for the development of a better British fleet. Charles I sought funds from Parliament to create a Royal Navy. This created controversy and led to the dissolution of Parliament and then war. It was not until the days of the Republic in the mid 17\textsuperscript{th} century that the construction of a naval force would be a reality.

According to Michael Duffy the development of the Royal Navy could be divided into three stages in the latter half of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. The first stage was during the days of the
Republic; the government realized the need for purpose built ships, a code of discipline and an official set of fighting instructions. This stage also saw the development of smaller ships. The second stage came under Charles II and James II, during which larger ships with expanded manpower were built. The second stage saw the ascendancy of the British Royal Navy, but during the third stage; the Royal Navy shrunk a little bit but saw the maintenance of smaller vessels to combat privateers instead of large ships of the line. The Royal Navy continued to expand until more than 130,000 sailors served aboard more than a thousand ships. The British developed such an effective system of maintaining its sailors and fleet that during times of peace, a great majority of the sailors would be paid off to return to the merchant marine to practice their trade skills until a time of war. This saved the British government a great amount of money and also allowed their sailors to contribute back into the British economy compared to their standing army, where in peacetime, all the army could do is stay in its barracks.

This pursuit of naval supremacy by the British altered government, finances and foreign policy. To build such a fleet the British had to create facilities and train people to build and maintain a fleet and find the necessary raw materials for ship construction. This required the construction of a merchant marine fleet capable of transporting the necessary supplies for naval ship construction. According to Nicholas Kyriazis of the University of Thessaly, a state that pursues “sea power necessitates a wide alliance of interests, which brings with it more democratic regimes, develops new more efficient and complex forms of organizations, [and] requires the acquisition and diffusion of new knowledge and expertise, which brings with it institutional change and economic growth.” Kyriazis also makes an interesting comment in “Seapower and Socioeconomic Change” that as societies turn to the sea, they are paralleled with the development of more representative political institutions. The naval revolution was not only the main mover of the military revolution in Britain and the United Republics, but it also actually helped each respective state become more democratic (albeit in a lesser form than democracies today).17

The nascent British ship building industry developed trade lines from other areas of the British Isles, Russia, the Baltic states, and the Mediterranean states. The British also exploited the fisheries of Newfoundland and Iceland, and developed a favorable trade system with the Caribbean, North America and India. Complex forms of organization structure developed to maintain such trade and expansion. British shipping tonnage rose from 50,000 tons in 1572 to 752,000 tons by 1786.18 This growth in trade increased the amount of money the British government received from customs and excise taxes, while accord on internal and foreign policy between the Crown and Parliament led to lucrative land taxes and a system of government borrowing.

The rise of the British merchant marine created a system of shipbuilding and docks giving Britain the ability to learn from their merchant marine to build their own Royal Navy shipbuilding docks and become even more entrenched in the economy. The construction and maintenance of the navy became the largest industry and employer in Britain. Some 6,000 to 8,000 civilians were employed in the dockyards by the British naval industry. They were one of the major single

The necessity for resources drew the government more into the economic sphere and influenced its imperial and foreign policy. By the 18th century the naval industry spurred the need for self-sustainment to remain unchallenged by other states. The British government supported development of industry involved in areas of shipbuilding by providing subsidies for industries such as sailcloth production and iron and copper works. The move towards a naval revolution helped the British industry prosper during this time, setting the groundwork for Britain’s ascendancy during the industrial revolution.

The British naval revolution led to an expansion in bureaucracy to maintain such a force. The Navy Board was developed to maintain the navy and new subordinate bodies such as the victualing office, pay office, sick and wounded board and a transport board were established. Later, the Navy Board was formed into the Admiralty Office, where the Admiralty became one of the major forces of the British government. This increased bureaucratization was synonymous with the bureaucratization found in European states that developed large armies. Once the British government was able to overcome antagonisms between the Crown and Parliament, and a taxing and borrowing system was established, the British Royal Navy never looked back. Lord Halifax can best explain the reason the British placed such an importance on the development and maintenance of a naval force:

To the question, what shall we do to be saved in this world? There is no other answer than this, look to your moat. The first article of an Englishman’s creed must, that he believeth in the sea... 

While states such as Holland created maritime forces that matched Britain at times, there was no vital need for a superior naval force. Their survival did not depend on having a fleet. Holland, along with continental Europe, was more worried about land based armies and fortresses than Britain was. This allowed Britain to gain an upper hand over most of the Earth’s waterways by the dawn of the 19th century. These terrestrial worries created a defensive mentality for many European states, while the naval strategy of Britain created an aggressive and offensive mindset, allowing them to control a wide swath of the world by 1800. Naval forces operated thousands of miles from their homeport, setting the mentality of kill or be killed. Retreat was never an option for British fleets, thus, creating the aggressive mindset of British navies and their complement marine forces. Britain’s total and undying commitment to a naval force and merchant fleet expanded the its government and economy by leaps and bounds, allowing Britain to grow into its modern state. The creation of a naval force was Britain’s military revolution.

The Dutch were like the British in that they also had to turn to the sea to defend their nascent republic during the War of Independence against Spain from 1568-1648. When they declared independence from the Spanish, the first thing they did was to create a tax structure to fund their struggle against Spain. The Dutch, during the 17th century with a population of 1.5 million, were able to hold off the Spanish empire, fight the British, successfully repel a French invasion and fight the Swedes to keep Baltic Trade lanes open. In addition, the Dutch expanded

---

19 Ibid., 59.
21 Ibid., 79.
their territory into South America, Africa and Asia. The nascent Dutch fleet was comparable to their British counterparts. The Dutch mainly used armed merchantmen converted into privateers. By 1620, they had twenty-nine warships; by the end of the 17th century the Dutch had more than a 100 warships with 20,000 sailors.\(^2\) By 1636, the Dutch merchant marine was shipping up to 600,000 to 700,000 tons of trade. The British didn’t even reach these numbers until the mid-late 18th century. Dutch naval success both militarily and commercially can be linked to the development of cost effective ships that were more suited for the surrounding seas and the development of fisheries. Fisheries employed Dutchmen into all sectors of employment that involved ships, ship construction, sailing, timber and sawing mills, food production, sail makers, rope makers, etc. This gave the Dutch an edge when it came to naval warfare, allowing them to militarily convert all these industries.

Overall, the Dutch benefited with such a move to the sea. Their increase in trade with all parts of the world made the United Republic the center of the trading world. Amsterdam built an exchange that became the largest “entrepot” in Europe. The Dutch subsequently developed a banking system to accommodate such increases in trade. This system allowed an exchange between different banks as well as granted credit to merchants. Amsterdam in turn grew in population from some 50,000 in 1600 to 200,000 in 1650. With a modern banking system and increase in population, many Dutch industries ranging from brick manufacturing, textile, soapmaking, to printing developed to accommodate the needs of its populace. This proto-industrialization laid the groundwork for the industrial revolution.\(^2\)

Naval forces were an expensive investment for both the English and Dutch. While the initial cost for developing an army was relatively small. An army generally required the same things a naval vessel required. This included artillery, guns, clothes, shot and gunpowder, but a field army could easily sustain itself in a field of battle by plundering. In contrast, naval forces had to plan for months in advance since they operated in a range of thousands of miles. The development of a naval force was an expensive and long-term undertaking. Acquiring the necessary supplies to construct such a ship required massive amounts of money and a complex logistical system. This required more innovation in part of the bureaucracies. Naval forces have very high operational costs. Ships required sail changes, painting, and a massive overhauling at the midpoint of a ships lifespan. A ship of the line could be expected to be operational for 50-60 years at a time. A British 100 gun ship of the line cost the British government £63,174 to build in 1765, by 1815, the total bill for ship upkeep was at £371,922.\(^2\) Such high costs for construction and upkeep required a strong system of logistics and a very wealthy treasury. The naval revolution was the primary mover of the military revolution in both Britain and Holland. The naval revolution laid the groundwork for industrialization, giving both states an advantage over states such as Spain and France in the 19th century.

The French tactician Morogues, most succinctly sums up the naval revolution with a quote he wrote over three centuries ago: “Naval tactics are based upon conditions the chief causes of which, namely the arms, may change; which in turn causes necessarily a change in the construction

---

\(^{22}\) Kyriazis, Seapower, 89.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 90-94.
\(^{24}\) Duffy, The Military Revolution, 62.
of ships, in the manner of handling them, and so finally in the disposition and handling of fleets. Tactics may change due to the evolution of arms and ship construction but the most important aspect is “in the disposition and handling of fleets”. A naval force requires a complex organizational structure and a government structure that can fund such a force. This is exactly what the British and Dutch provided for its navy. Allowing the build up of naval forces helped achieve a “military revolution” and the subsequent domination of other areas of the world.

Conclusion

The military revolution itself led to revolutions in medicine, education, and science. The concern for the welfare of the soldiers led to revolutions in medicine. Military hospitals specifically built for injured soldiers came into existence along with the addition of a permanent hospital corps. In turn, this increased education and the standardization of medicine, and doctors were required to attend 'medical schools' (in this case, the Prussians created the Anatomical Theatres and College of Medicine and Surgery). Treatises regarding research on diseases such as scurvy were produced. Some naval doctors began the first mass vaccinations against smallpox in 1798. The military revolution itself produced many innovations that were beneficial to society and to the military revolution.

The development of naval forces can be considered equivalent to the development of land-based military development in the military revolution. Both revolutions stemmed from a gun-powdered weapons arms race, leading to a revolution in strategies and tactics. This resulted in an evolution in government methods and structure, thus creating the modern European state. It also must be noted that certain European states could not take part in a naval revolution due to geographic constraints. Therefore, one cannot conclude that the development of a land based force was better than a naval force or vice versa, since all states could not follow the same path. The military revolution laid the groundwork for Europe’s ability to conquer wide expanses of the world. The creation of organized military and naval forces backed by a government that could supply and maintain forces stretched around the world allowed Europe to conquer territories from Chile to China.

---

27 Ibid., 74.
The Arab ship burned brightly on the Indian Sea. A pillar of flames leapt from the water. A funeral was underway. But this was not a noble burial like the Vikings of yore. Portuguese adventurers seeking to establish a trade route and eager for plunder boarded this merchant vessel and ravaged it thoroughly. They then locked the Arabs, many women and children, below the deck and burnt it whole. Such were the methods of the Portuguese. They did not come in peace but in pursuit of prosperity, by any means necessary.

Born in a Reconquista, militaristic culture, the Portuguese on the edge of the European continent took to the seas on the eve of the 16th century embarking on an odyssey which by century’s end would result in a far-flung thalassocracy. This maritime empire would dot the coasts of Africa and India and would possess certain Southeast Asian posts. This maritime endeavor represented Europe’s first direct forays into Asian maritime trade. It sought to bypass the middlemen Muslim traders of the continent. The purpose of this essay is to explore in no uncertain terms how the Portuguese managed to achieve this awesome feat. It is not an attempt to recreate linearly all the details of expansion such as legal promulgations establishing the Estado da India. Instead it will illustrate through key details and broad and consistent themes a central question. The essential question is: did military tactics and engineering associated with the military revolution as addressed by Geoffrey Parker in his seminal work The Military Revolution 1500-1800 account for Portugal’s ability to loudly insert itself into the bustling Indian Ocean trade; or was it an absence of power or neglectful apathy, referred to by some as maritime exceptionalism, which permitted Portuguese colonial polity? Special emphasis will be placed on its establishment and early years roughly from 1500-1550.

The majority of historians today emphasize the serendipity of the Portuguese in arriving on the scene at a uniquely advantageous time. Malyn Newitt, Jack Goldstone, Tonio Andrade, and others all state quite clearly in their works on the issue that the Portuguese entered the Indian Ocean in a period when the major Asian states were tending more to the turmoil within their vast land based empires. They hardly cared who dominated the maritime trade as long as taxes and goods flowed inland. The Portuguese did not interrupt this flow. They were very eager to trade silver and gold for the precious and rather inexhaustible Asian spices and commodities.

The traditional perspective of Western superiority has given way to this much more historically accurate framework for understanding Portuguese expansion. However, their military advantage was not to be ignored. Portugal enjoyed, at least for a long enough period to establish themselves, naval superiority and an artillery edge. Michael Pearson notes the insufficiency of Asian states’ naval power. This insufficiency allowed for ostentatious Portuguese claims to a sovereign-less sea. Furthermore, Geoffrey Parker outlines in his salient treatise The Military Revolution: 1500-1800 reasons for why early modern Indian states were unable to imitate the
European military revolution in field warfare. He cites the 1571 siege of Chaul, where 140,000 Indian troops were eventually routed by just 1,100 Portuguese defenders, as an example of “the superiority of Western techniques of both offence and defense [being] proved time and again, even against the most powerful adversaries.”

This paper seeks to demonstrate through the facts and through the analyses of these eminent historians the reality of what allowed the Portuguese to establish themselves in the Indian Ocean economy. An accurate historical perspective is one that incorporates both the aforementioned approaches to understanding Portuguese expansion.

The scene the Portuguese arrived upon in the Indian Ocean was an established and thriving trade network of various port cities. Due to specialization and large heterogeneous communities, segregated by sectarian differences like religion and ethnicity, these mercantile cities operated with high levels of autonomy aside from paying deferential taxes to whoever ruled the specific port city. In effect many of these most important ports were city-states with a lack of intrinsic allegiance to the ports’ rulers and an abundance of money to pay tribute to whoever happened to be or become the rulers. Faced with these circumstances the Portuguese realized the difficulty it would take to break into and dominate the well-established markets. Use of force was definitely an option, one exercised almost immediately. In addition, precipitating the difficulty of peacefully inserting itself in the complex and well-established markets of India was a heavy Islamic presence. Detest and suspicion mutually shared by the Catholic Portuguese and Islamic merchants quickly resulted in an inescapable cycle of violence and retribution.

After initial contact was made by a small expeditionary fleet led by Vasco de Gama, Pedro Alvares Cabral, a minor fidalgo, was dispatched in March 1500. His voyage was of mixed fortunes for the Portuguese. He made the trip to Calicut in only six months, half the time it took for da Gama. Also, initially Cabral was successful in Calicut, a port city highly important in the pepper trade. He was able to establish a factory and curry some favor with the Samudri Raja, the ruler of this port, by capturing an enemy vessel. However, the Portuguese irrevocably burned bridges with Calicut when they retaliated against a perceived Muslim conspiracy, by capturing a ship from Jiddah. This resulted in their factory being attacked. Cabral than bombarded Calicut with his ships and set sail to Cochin and Cannanur who being rivals to the Samudri Raja were quite happy to meet him. Cabral traded with both Cannanur and Cochin before making a return to Portugal. The poor relations Cabral initiated with Calicut were exacerbated by a follow-up expedition under the command of Joao da Nova which continued the pattern of trade with Cochin and Cannanur and belligerence towards vessels from Calicut. This voyage which was dispatched before Cabral’s return indicates an elevation in importance the Portuguese court placed in its Eastern enterprise from a fledgling query to a genuine interest. Da Gama set sail again in 1502 with around twenty ships. Da Gama utilized a militaristic approach subjugating and forcing tribute from Kilwa in

---

Eastern Africa, systematic piracy of Muslim Arabian vessels and attacks on ships from Calicut. He also established factories and fortifications in Cochin among others.

Da Gama and Afonso de Albuquerque, the latter a commander of a fleet sent in 1503, were effective in establishing trading factories and a network of alliances with Melinde, Kulam, Cochin, and Cannanur. The importance of naval superiority in establishing the Portuguese is exemplified from a passage in Revista de Cultura (International Edition 26). It describes Civente Sodre’s successful command of 18 vessels against some 90 ships from Kerala. The Portuguese obtained victory by firing broadside at the Indian vessels with heavy guns as well as smaller munitions. They targeted the body of the ships with the large guns and with the smaller weapons fired on the masts and crew from Kerala. Meanwhile, the Indian vessels made no significant damage because they possessed only small guns incapable of structural damage and the Portuguese crew kept mainly below deck. Rivalries among these port city-states enabled the Portuguese to develop a foothold. However, Portuguese emphasis on gunpowder was critical to maintaining its hold. A Portuguese controlled town would have heavy guns placed on bastions in the new style of geometrical forces, while harbor defenses allowed relief from the sea. A major Portuguese fortress was not taken until Ormuz in 1622.

However, the various Asian powers were not entirely void of gunpowder and artillery. The various polities responded by habituating quickly to the new emphasis on artillery. Whereas Cabral’s bombardment of Calicut in 1500 was heavily one sided, only two years later when da Gama engaged the port he was met by a stockade of palm trees and artillery pieces. Although this was overcome quite easily it shows a certain readiness by the natives to adapt quickly to the new threat. On land too adaptation was quickly pursued. Goa which Afonso de Albuquerque took in 1510, lost, and retook was heavily fortified by the natives. Albuquerque declared artillery and guns were “better produced from iron in Goa than in Germany.”

Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Geoffrey Parker argue that the ports and states of India turned increasingly to firearms between Portugal’s arrival and 1520 for several reasons. These are the presence of Portuguese and Portuguese renegades, connections with military specialists from the Ottoman Empire, and indigenous innovation in metal munitions. So, it would seem that militarily speaking the indigenous peoples were not far behind the Europeans (indeed if at all.) How then did the Portuguese successfully establish the Estado? At the time of the first Portuguese forays into the Indian Ocean the sea was a vast untamed expanse with no civilization laying claim to it in its entirety. Piracy was ubiquitous yet the Asian states lacked effective navies. The navies they possessed were mostly used as auxiliaries to their land forces. They did not force ships to call. Instead, they attempted to entice them with low taxes and safe cities to conduct their business in.

---

3 Ibid., 68.
4 Parker and Subrahmanyam, Revista de Cultura, 20.
5 Newitt, A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 90.
6 Parker and Subrahmanyam, Revista de Cultura, 19
7 Ibid., 21.
8 Ibid., 21.
Portuguese forts at strategic locations, especially Diu and Ormuz were very effective in forcing ships to call to port for trade and ‘safe’ passage.\textsuperscript{10} The Portuguese introduced a completely new mode of thinking when they arrived and Dom Manuel asserted himself ‘King of Portugal and of the Algarves on this side and beyond the sea in Africa, Lord of Guinea and Lord of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce, of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India.’\textsuperscript{11} Tonio Andade concurs with this interpretation quoting the eminent Indian historian Kitri Chaudhuri:

Before the arrival of the Portuguese in ... 1498 there had been no organized attempt by any political power to control the sea-lanes and the long distance trade of Asia. The Iberians and their north European followers imported a Mediterranean style of warfare by land and sea into an area that had hitherto had quite a different tradition\textsuperscript{12}

The Portuguese enforced this concept of sovereignty of the seas with true naval superiority.  
Jack Goldstone summarizes the situation:

The Portuguese entered the Indian Ocean with a clear advantage in naval armaments over the Muslim vessels operating around the coasts of Arabia, Africa, and India. The latter had small guns mounted fore and aft, whereas the Portuguese ships were built to hold larger cannon all along their sides. European naval artillery was thus far more powerful than any ship-mounted weapons in Muslim navies\textsuperscript{13}

This is not to say that Muslim navies were totally inept. The Battle of Chaul represented a devastating defeat to Portuguese forces. A combined Mamluk, Gujarat, and Mappila fleet attacked a fleet commanded by the viceroy’s son Dom Lourezo de Alemedia. Both sides utilized artillery but apparently preferred grappling and boarding techniques. Dom Lourenzo would lose his life in the battle.\textsuperscript{14} This confrontation seems to have occurred in direct conflict to orders of engagement provided by the King Manuel. Several years before this disaster Dom Manuel instructed Cabral that he was “not to come to close quarters with them if you can avoid it, but only with your artillery are you to compel them to strike sail... so that this war may be waged with greater safety, and so that less loss may result to the people of your ships.”\textsuperscript{15} The Portuguese rallied a year later defeating the aforementioned Mamluk fleet near Diu. Professor Vitorino Godinho contends that this victory was due to the Mamluks naval inferiority as they “did not possess a body of well-trained marines.” Yet, others argue that the problem was more the lack of assistance from their Diu allies and not true naval inferiority.\textsuperscript{16} Portuguese naval superiority was further cemented following the siege of Diu in which a large Ottoman fleet was repulsed by a much smaller Portuguese garrison.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 65. 
\textsuperscript{11} Newitt, A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 73. 
\textsuperscript{13} Why Europe? 56 
\textsuperscript{14} Parker and Subrahamanyam, Revista de Cultura 20. 
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 19. 
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 20.
Portuguese fortifications consolidated their territorial gains. The geometric designs of the
trace italienne entrenched Portuguese gains. The map of Diu above is an excellent example. A star
shaped design of the main fort allowed canon fire to cover all angles. Additionally, bastions and
crownworks can clearly be seen. The fortresses of Ormuz, Diu, and Malacca were critically strategic
choke points in the international trade of this region and were extremely effective in projecting
Portuguese influence. So it would seem that military innovations consistent with the Military
Revolution were critical in establishing the Portuguese thalassocracy.

Unions with various indigenous polities were also critical in lodging the Portuguese firmly
in place. "Portuguese maritime strength led to their friendship being sought by the states that
bordered the Indian Ocean and to the Crown’s factors being able to trade profitably in one new
market after another."

Ambassadors from Persia, Ethiopia, Siam and a multitude of Indian and
Indonesian states courted Governor Albuquerque. Enemies were made but this network of allies
was effective in neutralizing any true threat. Despite the apparent influence the Portuguese were
now able to exert, Jack Goldstone declares:

The Portuguese’s main advantage was that the true powers in Asia—the Mughal rulers of
India and the Ming rulers of China—cared little who managed trade along their coasts, as long as
taxes and trade continued to flow inland. Most of all, the scale of Portuguese activities was never a
threat to anyone other than the local rulers of small coastal kingdoms or of island states.

Tonio Andrade concurs with this assessment arguing for a maritime exceptionalist model. He
draws support from Historian Michael Pearson who believes Indian states were funded by

18 Ibid., 85.
19 Jack Goldstone, Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History 1500-1850
agricultural rather than commercial revenues and were thus indifferent to maritime trade. Even Gujarat, one of South Asia’s most maritime-oriented states, drew only six percent of its revenues from sea-trade, which is why... it did not busy itself with the ocean.

Furthermore, Newitt and others acknowledge that Portugal entered the scene at a fortuitous time. The Ottomans, the imperial Chinese, the Delhi sultanate et al. were all dealing with political upheavals in the continents interior. Newitt cautions, however, that “the role of gunpowder in... European expansion is not to be easily dismissed [remaining] an important line of argument.”

I concur with Newitt in his assessment on the importance of artillery and naval supremacy. Large naus stocked with bombarda grossas could deliver 90 pound shots per cannon. Artillery lined the broadsides as well as the bow and stern. (Pictured is the Victoria a naus under the employ of the Portuguese explorer Magellan. It excellently illustrates the 360 degree range of fire.) Landing craft often had light artillery mounted on the prow; effective in shocking defenders immediately prior to invasion. Also, by arguing Gujarat was uninterested in sea-trade as it represented a fraction of its revenue Pearson contradicts himself. In an Essay previously referenced to in this paper (footnote 10 ) Pearson states “[Portuguese] forts at Diu (and others) enabled them to inspect most ships.” Diu never fell until the modern Indian state invaded in 1961. The fortress was a prime example of the trace italienne design and withstood multiple sieges by the Ottoman Empire with the support of the Gujarat Sultanate.

The maritime exceptionalist model is inherently laudable and accurate but it does not tell the whole picture. Portuguese concepts of the priority of naval supremacy and bombardment strategy, and fortifications in the new geometric design, and militarily sound strategic alliances established the Portuguese in such a way that they did not face serious threat until other European forces especially the Dutch and English began arriving in mass. Newitt strongly insists on Portugal’s nautical prowess as the key to their Estado. He claimed:

The Portuguese had a system of communication and an ability to mobilize resources that enabled the silver of South America, the armaments of the Netherlands, the ships built in Portugal... and the manpower of Asia and Africa to be brought together for service literally anywhere in the world. Not even the greatest of the Asiatic powers could remotely emulate

---

21 Newitt, A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 89.
this. Only the Turks came close to replicating the global spread of Portuguese power, and their major preoccupations were in the Middle East and Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{22}

Geoffrey Parker argues in The Military Revolution 1500-1800 that by the 1550's a trio of Islamic empires, the Safavids, Ottomans, and the Mughals were capable of resisting Portuguese monopoly of the seas.\textsuperscript{23} While it is true that Portuguese monopoly of the seas and Indian spice trade was nominal rather than factual,\textsuperscript{24} these great Muslim powers were either unable or unwilling to dispel the Portuguese. Despite united attacks against them in 1509 at Chaul, 1538 and '46 at Diu, Goa in 1571, and East Africa in 1631 each met with Portuguese victory.\textsuperscript{25} It was only in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century with the dogged assaults of powerful Dutch fleets and overextension of forces pursuing territorial gains in Ceylon and Mozambique which saw Portuguese presence wane.\textsuperscript{26}

In conclusion, the Portuguese went from a rag tag expeditionary force led by Da Gama at the dawn of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century to under a hundred years being a major presence in the Indian spice trade, and the dominant naval power operating in the Indian Sea. They attained this amazing feat in several ways. First, they exploited rivalries of coastal states and merchant towns such as Cochin and Calicut. Second, by preferring to stick to coastal fortifications over land conquests they created a thalassocracy which was able to maintain sea influence. Finally, they achieved the creation of the Estado by utilizing aspects of the military revolution described by Geoffrey Parker specifically the use of heavily armed naval vessels and geometric fortifications employing bastions, bulwarks, crownworks etc. pursuant to the trace italienne design.\textsuperscript{27} The Portuguese arrived on a scene ripe for the tactics they gravitated to. They were not desirous of land conquest but wanted to dominate the maritime commerce of the Indian Ocean. They filled a seaborne power vacuum, introducing a new political concept to the region—that of sovereignty of the seas. They were aided in their endeavors by superior nautical force and fortifications each employing broad use of artillery. Thus, in answer to the premise the Portuguese were able to create a thalassocracy because of an initial void in Asian civilizations’ emphasis on maritime trade, referred to by some historians as maritime exceptionalism, and because of military supremacy connected to the military revolution of early modern Europe.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 268.
\textsuperscript{23} Parker, The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 105.
\textsuperscript{24} Newitt, A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 88.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 268.
\textsuperscript{26} Parker, The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 106.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 11-12.
Administrative Adaptability: The Dutch East India Company and Its Rise to Power

DANIEL GERSTELL

The Dutch East India Company was the world’s first multinational corporation. For nearly two centuries, from its inception in 1602 to its demise in 1798, the Dutch East India Company, or Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), set the standard for maritime trade in the East Indies. The VOC was a beacon of Dutch maritime prowess and administrative ingenuity. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the rapid ascension of the VOC coincided with the Dutch Golden Age, a period in which Dutch trade, technology, military and arts were at the world’s forefront. By the mid seventeenth century, the VOC had established trade routes through India, China, and Japan, while warring for territories in the East Indies that eventually became official Dutch colonies in the early 19th century. Thus, from the Company’s original charter in 1602 to roughly 1670, the VOC prospered mightily, due largely to Europe’s insatiable demand for the once exotic spice, pepper. Yet, it was not merely a growing demand for East Asian spices that enabled the VOC to flourish. Integral to the prosperity of the VOC was its unique charter and the malleable administrative structure it outlined both domestically and in the East.

While many scholars have correctly identified the 1602 Charter of the VOC as a revolutionary acquiescence of sovereignty and bestowal of support to a state-chartered company, few have discussed the strong administrative bridge that the charter established both temporally and spatially. Temporally, VOC administration was rooted in a system of power structures established by the Unified Dutch Nations decades earlier in the 1570s. Many of the notions that undergirded the administrative structures of the nascent Dutch-state later surfaced in the initial VOC charter. While this temporal bridge of administration grounded VOC governance within the larger framework of the United Dutch Nations’ organizational strategy, the VOC was always attune to local political circumstances, and they adapted keenly and accordingly. Due to the practical and versatile essence of VOC governance in the East, this temporal bridge should be understood as a bridge still in progress by 1602. This bridge, by the time of the Company’s inception, merely outlined a foundation, which the two subsequent centuries of adaptive VOC administration would build upon. The spatial bond of administration that connected the Dutch Nations to imperial nodes in the East complimented the temporal linkage of administration, fostering a nexus of administrative network that spanned decades and miles.

VOC and early modern Asian maritime scholars have long overlooked the role that flexible VOC administration played in the Dutch dominance of the spice-trade and inclusion into the intra-Asian trade. Historians like Femme S. Gaastra and Douglas A. Irwin embrace a strictly economic lens through which to study the VOC. Gaastra and Irwin both point to the 1602 Charter as a key factor behind VOC success. Favoring an analysis of the Company’s import and export numbers, both Gaastra and Irwin highlight the reducing influence of shareholders and the
economic shifts in managerial incentives that the 1602 Charter ushered in.\(^1\) Gaastra and Irwin attribute the divergence of English and Dutch trade policies to these economic shifts produced by the original VOC charter.\(^2\) For Gaastra and Irwin these divergent profit strategies, as later detailed, are the prime reason for VOC dominance.

Other VOC literature has focused on the indigenous side of the seventeenth century Indian Ocean market. Burmese historian Wil O. Djik credits the intricacies and breadth of the Asian market as it extended out from Burma as integral to Dutch success. Yet, Djik fails to mention any administrative advantages the VOC possessed, and instead concentrates solely on the natural and geographical value of Burma.\(^3\) George D. Winius and Marcus P.M. Vink center their analysis of the VOC on India. Winius and Vink, dismiss the economic scholars too concerned with numbers, and attribute Dutch success to VOC “emporialism,” or the targeting of markets and not territory.\(^4\) Om Prakash ascribes VOC prosperity to the Company’s solidification of trade with Japan, but fails to expand on the administrative adaptability the Dutch exhibited in maintaining that tenuous relationship.\(^5\)

Reinout Vos and Karen Ward both address the pliable VOC administration, yet neither scholar considers this flexibility a fundamental facet of Dutch success. Vos’ study of the Palembang tin trade during the eighteenth century attempts to dispel the notion that the Dutch political trade system, or simply, monopoly, was doomed to failure.\(^6\) Indeed, Vos attests this system was directly responsible for two centuries of VOC dominance. Vos’ Janus image of the VOC, which is discussed later, reveals the adaptability essential to monopoly. Vos details the Company’s art of deciding when to use the soft skills of diplomacy or the soldier’s iron hand. Yet, while Vos highlights this administrative adaptability, his work aims to reexamine the causes responsible for the VOC demise around 1800. Ward too emphasizes the Company’s dynamic administration, but examines it with regards to the burgeoning of the Dutch imperial web. Ward focuses on the network of forced migration to explain how the Company coalesced as a system of intersecting fields of partial sovereignty.\(^7\) While Ward addresses this administrative pliability, she fails to connect it to VOC economic success. Thus, building off of Ward and Vos, I hope to illuminate the fruitful impact that administrative adaptability had on the rise of the VOC.

---

\(^3\) Wil O. Dijk, Seventeenth Century Burma and the Dutch East India Company 1634-1680 (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 5.
\(^7\) Kerry Ward, Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.
Through this contingent nature of administration, the VOC gained entry into the notoriously exclusive and restrictive markets of China and Japan. Trade with these introverted nations not only assured the VOC a vital position within the intra-Asian trade market, but also, and equally significant, kept competing European powers on the outskirts of Asia’s domestic trade. The 1602 Charter reinforced the Dutch belief in balances of power through the method of administration it established for the VOC. Thus, VOC administration and sovereignty, both afforded in the initial charter, stimulated Dutch fortune in the East.

However, before delving into a discussion regarding the initial VOC charter, it is essential to first outline the aims of this paper. Broadly, this paper seeks to illuminate the factors responsible for the VOC’s sweeping success during the first half of the seventeenth century. While focusing on the administrative and relatively sovereign natures of the VOC, this paper intends to elucidate why the Dutch East India Company and not, say the English East India Company, came to monopolize the Asian spice trade from 1602-1670. By chronicling the VOC network throughout the East Indies, China, Japan and India, this paper endeavors to capture both the magnitude and breadth of VOC influence in Asia. In order to begin this analysis, it is necessary to examine the events that induced the capricious geopolitical landscape of Europe at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Portuguese explorer Vasco Da Gama ushered in a new era in the history of Euro-Asian relations with his arrival in Calicut, India on May 20, 1498.8 Da Gama’s discovery of the all-water route to the East Indies, via the Cape of Good Hope, served to integrate the Indian Ocean into the nascent global economy. The three principle segments of this economy, Europe, Asia and the New World (Americas), were drawn in to a vortex of global trade that relied critically on the growth of trade in each region.9 This burgeoning world trade was so revolutionary that the progenitor of capitalism and modern economic thought, Adam Smith, in his work *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, declared the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope, along with the discovery of America, ‘the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind’.10 While there is undoubtedly an element of hyperbole in Smith’s assertion, Da Gama’s discovery in 1498 had immense implications on European interests and affairs both domestically and in Asia for the next three centuries.

Capitalizing on Da Gama’s exploration, the Portuguese quickly became the dominant European force in the Indian Ocean by the early sixteenth century. With its headquarters in Goa on India’s west coast, the Portuguese traded precious metals in return for spices, most notably pepper.11 Although Portugal’s royal monopoly of the Cape route was unchallenged during the majority of the 16th century, shortage of capital and poor profitability forced Portugal to reconsider its participation in the Asian trade.12 By 1570, Portuguese withdrawal from intra-Asian trade was virtually complete, as the spice trade opened to free competition.

---

9 Ibid., 40.
10 Ibid., 29.
Meanwhile, in Europe, a revolt against King Philip II and his sprawling Spanish Empire threatened to upset the delicate balance of European powers in the late sixteenth century. Led by William of Orange, the united Seventeen Provinces of the European low-countries rebelled against the Spanish in 1568. This rebellion, known as the Dutch Revolt, signaled the beginning of the Eighty Years’ War. Although by 1579 Philip II had managed to quell the majority of the rebellion, seven united provinces continued to revolt in the north. In 1579 these Seven Nations came together formally via the signing of the Union of Utrecht, a treaty that pledged each province’s communal support in resistance against the Spanish. The Act of Abjuration signed in 1581 reaffirmed the Union’s solidarity, as the Seven Nations declared formal independence from the Spanish Crown. Nevertheless, in 1580, following the death of Sebastian I, Philip II capitalized on the succession crisis in Portugal, by declaring his right to the Portuguese throne, thus forming the potent Iberian Union.

Philip’s annexation of Portugal had two particular effects that ultimately fostered the impetus for Dutch entry in the Asian spice trade and, in turn, the spawning of the VOC. Firstly, the closure of Seville and Lisbon in 1585 to Dutch vessels marked the end of Dutch trade with Portugal. This, coupled with the loss of Antwerp in 1585 via siege, forced the Dutch out of the European spice trade. Prior to the siege, Antwerp was not only the capital of the Dutch Revolt, but also the staple market for Asian goods in northwestern Europe. Thus, the ensuing Dutch blockade of the Scheldt River crippled Antwerp, but left the Dutch devoid of any access to major international trading ports. Excluded from three European centers of Asian goods markets, Dutch merchants were compelled to somehow gain access in to the spice trade. For many Dutch merchants, a strong incentive to challenge the Portuguese monopoly of the Cape route emerged. In short, there seemed no better option than direct Dutch participation in the Euro-Asian spice trade.

Dutch involvement in the Indian Ocean trade arose in the 1590s. Harboring political animosity, Dutch merchants sought to injure Spanish commercial interests, while ensuring the maximization of their personal profits. Renowned military historian, Geoffrey Parker described this retributive impetus as the Dutch waging “an element of economic warfare.” By the turn of the seventeenth century, there were six Dutch pre-companies that had formed for trade in the East Indies. With Amsterdam, Zeeland, and Rotterdam each housing two pre-companies, competition became fierce. Inevitably, cost prices of pepper and other spices rose while their sale prices declined. Some Dutch statesmen, like Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, quickly realized the economic

---

14 Ibid., 61.
17 Ibid., 15.
18 Ibid., 15.
19 Ibid., 16.
20 Parker, “Why Did the Dutch Revolt Last Eighty Years?”, 63.
potential of the East Indies trade and the pressing need to restrict intense competition among the several Dutch companies.\textsuperscript{24} Van Oldenbarnevelt was instrumental not only in petitioning the States-General (Dutch parliament) for a united company, but also in his mediatory role that brought the various companies together.\textsuperscript{25} The States-General was interested in a united company for two primary reasons. First, by curbing competition via a united company, trade in the East Indies would be conducted more profitably. Second, a united company would be better equipped to challenge Spanish and Portuguese competition in the East Indies. In this capacity, a united company could then be used as a potent agent in the war against the Spanish.\textsuperscript{26}

For many Dutch statesmen, economic and political aspirations turned into reality, when on March 20, 1602 the States-General chartered the Dutch East India Company.\textsuperscript{27} The charter granted the VOC a twenty-one-year monopoly over all trade east of the Cape of Good Hope. Further rights were extended to the VOC via its founding charter, such as the ability to pass and enforce its own laws and the power to engage in war with other nations.\textsuperscript{28} While the charter did not allow the VOC to declare war on foreign forces, the VOC’s ability to engage in warfare would prove to be extremely influential over the next century, as Portuguese and Spanish imperial nodes became ripe targets for Dutch merchants.\textsuperscript{29}

While the 1602 Charter was revolutionary in granting such relative sovereignty to a state-backed company, the charter drew heavily upon the political structures outlined by the United Provinces in the groundbreaking Union of Utrecht in 1579.\textsuperscript{30} Through the charter, the States-General sought to establish a town-based corporate structure while capitalizing on the firm bonds among Dutch patrimonial elites: philosophies that had fostered the Dutch State’s rapid ascension. \textsuperscript{31} Headquartered in Amsterdam, the VOC resembled an administrative microcosm of the United Dutch Nations’ governing body. Like the States-General, which was divided into regional and civic chambers, The VOC was composed of six chambers—Amsterdam, Zeeland (Middleburg), Rotterdam, Delft, Enkhuisen and Horn.\textsuperscript{32}

Each chamber had roughly fifteen directors, or the so-called bewindhebbers. These directors were major stockholders who supplied and outfitted ships for the Asian spice trade from their respective chamber. Central authority of the VOC rested in the Heeren XVII, or The Seventeen Gentlemen. Selected from the bewindhebbers of the various chambers, The Seventeen Gentlemen served as the Company’s Board of Governors. Amsterdam had the most influence in this directorate, as eight of the Seventeen Gentlemen were selected from Amsterdam’s chamber. Four delegates were selected from Zeeland, and one delegate each from the smaller four chambers. The

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{27} Dijk, Seventeenth Century Burma, 58.
\textsuperscript{28} Ward, Networks of Empire, 53.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{32} Dijk, Seventeenth Century Burma, 58.
seventeenth seat rotated amongst all the chambers aside from Amsterdam, as the smaller chambers were wary of an Amsterdam majority within The Seventeen Gentlemen.  

The overlapping patrimonial networks of the States-General and the VOC ensured protection for the Company and a vested interest in its success. In a state where merchant elites formed the backbone of the wealthy and influential population, many men emerged as prominent figures in both the States-General and the VOC. Although the VOC was inextricably linked to the state through the 1602 Charter, this linkage was greatly bolstered by the overlapping network of merchant elites. The political discord, struggle for power, and quest for sovereignty that typically defined the relationship between the state and its sponsored ventures never manifested in seventeenth century VOC history. Instead, this elite merchant network obfuscated any political and ideological separation between the States-General and the VOC. As historian Kerry Ward attests, “the States-General protected the monopoly of the VOC from its inception until its final dissolution and did not effectively interfere directly in the empire.” The Company’s incestuous relationship with the States-General garnered a great deal of sovereignty for the VOC, as interests between the two bodies were almost always shared. This sovereignty was no more evident than in the States-General’s allowance of the Company’s creation and circulation of its own currency, a right certainly not granted under the charter.

As renowned economic historian Douglas Irwin asserts, the VOC was able to promptly distinguish itself as the premier force in the spice trade through its unique institutional structure and economic objectives, both of which differed greatly from that of the rival English East India Company. The 1602 Charter heavily diminished the role of the stockholders in Dutch maritime trade. In effect, as Irwin succinctly details, “stockholder control over the management of the company was supplanted by the government.” Unlike the English Company, which was fueled by stockholder authority, the VOC charter served to reduce stockholder influence, while giving directors interests outside of the goal of high dividends. The charter created managerial incentives to augment shipping volume, while insulating managers from the demands of investors. This in turn allowed the VOC to prosper through a strategy of maximizing a mix of profits and revenues, which encouraged the Dutch to market a larger quantity of more goods, yielding ever-increasing, steady profits. The English strategy of profit-maximization proved less fruitful than the Dutch method of constantly increasing shipping revenue. Thus, while the English Company received no government stake or involvement (aside from the granting of the monopoly charter), the 1602 Charter cultivated close governmental ties for the VOC, ties that propagated the Dutch dominance of the spice trade.

33 Ibid., 58.
34 Ward, Networks of Empire, 52.
35 Ibid., 52.
36 Ibid., 53.
37 Irwin, “Mercantilism as a Strategic Trade Policy”, 1307.
38 Ibid., 1307.
40 Irwin, “Mercantilism as a Strategic Trade Policy”, 1308.
41 Ibid., 1308.
The tightly organized, responsive Asian branch of VOC administration facilitated the domestic administration of the Company directed by the six chambers and the Seventeen Gentlemen. The Dutch administrative structure in Asia greatly resembled administrative structures of both the VOC domestically and, more broadly, the United Dutch States. Integral to Dutch success abroad was the keen and progressive reliance on systems of checks and balances. Established in 1610, the post of Governor General served as the greatest Dutch authority in the Asian theatre. \(^{42}\) As a measure to guard against a despotic Governor General, the VOC established the Council of the Indies, a board of typically seven delegates who oversaw everything from the auditing of books to military affairs in Asia. \(^{43}\)

Administratively, the Dutch learned a tremendous amount from the blunders and overall ineffectuality that mired Portuguese involvement in the sixteenth century spice trade. Success, as the Dutch quickly realized, was predicated on a distinct, regionally bifurcated view of the Euro-Asian trade market. The Portuguese failed to realize that like Europe, the Asian trade market was multi-dimensional. \(^{44}\) This error was manifest in the myopic and cursory nature with which the Portuguese managed their trade posts in the East Indies. Moreover, the Dutch understood the necessity to establish administrative and trading centers, not merely posts, in Asia. Prominent VOC scholar, Femme S. Gaastra adds, “The Portuguese example taught [the Dutch] the need for a center of shipping, trade and governance in the East.” \(^{45}\) Largely speaking, the Dutch were able to avoid the detrimental affairs involving Asian political dynamics that plagued the Portuguese. \(^{46}\) The futility of the Portuguese abroad engendered a Dutch regional focus on the Asian side of the spice trade, with great import placed on assessing the various indigenous political structures of the Asian market.

The VOC divided their trading enterprises into three categories. \(^{47}\) Trade the VOC acquired via conquest was the first grouping, while trade conducted by virtue of exclusive contracts formed the second option. The third category was reserved for trade conducted by virtue of treaties. This organized, lucid method of categorization served to distance the Dutch from the Portuguese legacy of mismanagement in the East Indies and proved vital to the Company’s overall success. Indeed, seventeenth century Burmese history expert, Wil O Djik asserts that “the political structure of any region in Asia was a major factor in determining the degree to which the [VOC] could assert its influence.” \(^{48}\)

Naturally, the VOC would custom mold its dynamic administrative presence throughout the East Indies to the distinctive political structures of individual posts. For instance, the Dutch established a Gouverneur (Governor) in the small, vulnerable states of the Archipelago. In areas like Bengal and Surat, where trade was the foremost operation, the Dutch put a Directeur (Director) in power. Locations whose primary function was military (Malabar) called for a Commandeur

\(^{42}\) Djik, Seventeenth Century Burma, 58.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 59.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 59.
\(^{45}\) Gaastra, “War, Competition, and Collaboration,” 50.
\(^{46}\) Djik, Seventeenth Century Burma, 81.
\(^{47}\) Winius and Vink, The Merchant-Warrior Pacified, 10.
\(^{48}\) Djik, Seventeenth Century Burma, 59.
(Commander), while authoritative empires like Japan and China had an *Opperoofd* (Resident). Unsurprisingly, each office, regardless of its status or importance, was, as Djik details, “run like a mirror image of Batavia,” the VOC headquarters in Asia. Thus, the Dutch ability to tweak their administrative and diplomatic endeavors in the East Indies within their larger, universal framework of governance proved vital to prosperity.

Any analysis of the VOC presence in the Indian Ocean almost certainly starts in one place—Java. In 1619, under the guidance of Jan Pietersoon Coen, the fourth Governor General, the VOC invaded Jayakarta, a small port town on the island of Java. Jayakarta, renamed Batavia by the Dutch, became the new VOC headquarters, leaving behind the former VOC headquarters in the poorly situated Java town of Banten. As the 1602 Charter allowed, Coen used military force to annihilate the indigenous inhabitants of Batavia. Battles on Java during the seventeenth century were bloody and for the most part, extremely one-sided. Batavia quickly grew in to the central hub of the VOC government, the meeting point for fleets, and the imperial capital of the East. The Governor General and the Council of the Indies, together as the High Government, exercised *de facto* independence over the East Indies, as the time and distance required to communicate to and receive instructions from the Seventeen Gentlemen became too much of a hindrance for both parties. Indeed it took as long as two and half years sometimes to write and receive a letter on the Batavia-Amsterdam route! Thus, the evolution of VOC law in Batavia was determined locally by the High Government.

In 1620 Governor-General Coen designed the separation of the government and the judiciary in the East with the creation of the Council of Justice. This signaled a shift in the administrative structure of the VOC away from European oversight. Time and distance between Company nodes in Europe and in the East forced local officials to act independently. With its President and nine members, the Council of Justice had jurisdiction over all civil and criminal cases concerning VOC employees, servants, and soldiers. Judicial administration of the VOC, like its governmental administration, was greatly influenced by the structures and customs of the United Provinces. In forming its principles of jurisprudence, the Council of Justice developed the “Concordancy Principle,” which determined the hierarchy of legal application. Predominance was granted firstly to specific laws the VOC had established that catered to local circumstance, while the laws and procedures of the United Provinces fell next in line. Third in the order was the application of the laws of Holland and its cities. Thus, the formation of councils and legal hierarchy within the Eastern legal administration of the VOC continued the trend of adopting native Dutch administrative structures and customs.

Although judicial administration of the VOC was shaped by local Dutch strategy, the political landscapes indigenous to the East often greatly dictated the tone and presence of VOC

---

49 Ibid., 59.
50 Ward. Networks of Empire, 67.
51 Ibid., 67.
52 Ibid., 67.
53 Ibid., 68.
54 Ibid., 69.
55 Ibid., 71.
56 Ibid., 71.
The VOC developed the “Conflict of Laws” theory to address the plurality of laws that applied within the imperial network. Like the Concordancy Principle, this theory established a hierarchical system that determined jurisdiction, law, and enforcement for subjects who normally came under different legal codes. Batavian legal historian Remco Raben argues that this plural structure was not a Dutch invention, but rather the Company’s adaption to local Asian economic and social customs. This accommodation to local practices was fueled exclusively by VOC desire to do business in the particular regions. Raben adds, “The plural structure offered a practical solution to the Dutch authorities, who refrained from interference with the indigenous population. The Company...left complicated issues such as civil jurisdiction to indigenous political leaders.” Indeed VOC administration in the East embodied a practical and contingent nature. Only rarely did the VOC impose direct territorial sovereignty over its imperial nodes, as the Dutch proclivity for trade often trumped the hazardous urge to usurp local authority structures.

The VOC deferral to adat (the civil and customary laws of Indies societies) in many Eastern territories marked a prime example of the conditional nature of Company administration. Relationships between the VOC and indigenous rulers emerged out of negotiations and treaties based on regulating trade. As the VOC was primarily concerned with securing revenue via trade, Company officials were often forced to comply with local guidelines for foreign traders. Indeed, as foreign merchants, the VOC assumed a relatively submissive position when dealing with authoritative nations like China and Japan. As Karen Ward states, “The extent to which the Company incorporated, adapted, or ignored local laws in crafting their own legal network was not uniform and could not be generalized across the empire except in terms of general principles.” The VOC masterfully modified its administration in Asia to protect its trade interests. Thus, the Company’s ability to acclimate to local legal systems in the East exposed new Asian markets and furthered VOC prosperity.

Renowned early modern Indian historian, Om Prakash is so emphatic about the importance of Dutch trade with the Japanese that he suggests it was one of two factors, along with the spice trade monopoly, that enabled Dutch trade to prosper. While there is perhaps a slight hyperbolic tone to Prakash’s assessment, the significance of Dutch trade with Japan cannot be overlooked. Under the direction of Governor-General Jan Pietersz Coen, VOC focus in the 1620s shifted from securing a monopoly over the spice trade (which they had already done), to establishing intra-Asian trade networks alongside their intercontinental trade with Europe. The impetus behind this decision, as Prakash attests, was simple, “[Europeans needed] to find means of replacing exports of bullion from their home countries and pay less dearly for the Asian goods they

57 Ibid., 71.
58 Ibid., 72.
60 Ward, Networks of Empire, 74.
61 Ibid., 73.
62 Prakash, Bullion for Goods, 76.
sought.” In short, the Dutch sought to capitalize on the irresistible abundance of silver that Japan produced.

As arguably the largest indigenous producer of precious metals, Japan was willing to trade its metals against high value goods, particularly raw silk from China. Thus, Japan became a hotly contested region amongst the embattled European powers, which all suffered from chronically low supplies of precious metals necessary for the procurement of return cargo from India. Yet, the true potential of this Japanese-centered trade was never fully realized, as the inherently restrictive and sea-wary Japanese often stymied potential foreign fortunes. Fortunately, for the administratively pliable Dutch, an assurance of exclusive trading privileges with the Japanese in 1639 brought seismic prosperity and, less fortunately, a myriad of headaches.

The lure of silver compelled the Dutch to open their first Japanese factory at the port-city of Hirado in 1609. From the onset, the Dutch were aware of the precariousness of their presence in Japan, understanding that business on Japan was nothing like business as usual on Java. Yet, in typical Dutch fashion, VOC merchants were able to maintain a trading relationship with the Japanese through the mid 1630s, while the respective English and Portuguese companies clumsily fell out of Japanese favor. However, a shift in Japanese foreign trade ideologies in the late 1630s and 1640s pushed Dutch trade with Japan to the brink. Distinguished early modern Sino-European relations’ scholars, Tonio Andrade and John E. Wills Jr. both highlight the Japanese philosophical transformation as a perplexing deviation from over a century’s worth of openness to European merchants, religious tolerance, and zeal for the expansion of Japanese maritime trade. Andrade cogently argues that the emergence of small Japanese autonomous states in the sixteenth century, directed by lords known as daimyo, precipitated both foreign trade and maritime expansion. The Warring States Period, which covered much of the daimyo era in the 1500s led many financially desperate lords to turn to foreign trade. Daimyo rivalries drove maritime expansion by Japanese traders’ creation of routes throughout Asia and Southeast Asia.

The Sakoku edict of 1635 cemented the transformation of Japanese sentiments toward foreign trade. Mounting fears over the destabilizing influence of Catholicism and escalating anti-European attitudes compelled the Shogunate to enact the edict of 1635, which forbade Japanese citizens from leaving the country, extirpated Christianity, and confined Dutch trade to the one port of Nagasaki. These “closed country” policies marked the expulsion of the Portuguese from Japan and greatly altered the Japanese trade-relationship with the Dutch. The Dutch were spared the fate of the Portuguese, as issues of religion never obfuscate trade for the VOC. Although Dutch trade in Japan still possessed a pulse after the edict of 1635, it did not appear destined for

---

61 Ibid., 76.
62 Ibid., 132.
63 Ibid., 126.
66 Ibid., 434.
67 Ibid., “Maritime Asia”, 103.
success with operation in only one port. Indeed, as the only European presence left in Japan, the Dutch were subject to demeaning physical and social restrictions.

Prakash discusses the commercially injurious limitations the VOC faced at Nagasaki. “The restrictions...both in matters of cultural interaction with the Japanese as well as in those of trade, were both severe and humiliating and represented a total departure from [Asian trade] norms.”

The number of Japanese allowed direct interaction with the Dutch was kept to a minimum, with trade as the sole purpose. The transferring of languages between the Dutch and Japanese was prohibited, as all communication went through interpreters in Portuguese. Commercial restrictions leveled upon the Dutch included a ban on the export of gold, the application of the *pancando* system, and the specification of days on which the Company could trade in Japan. Arguably the most constraining measure imposed upon the Dutch, the *pancando* system, a holdover from the days of sixteenth century Portuguese trade in Asia, placed pricing power on the Chinese raw silk imported by the VOC in the hands of the Nagasaki guild. Yet, despite these commercial and social impediments, the VOC maintained successful trade with Japan well into the middle of the eighteenth century. Thus, the Company’s knack for adaption and perceptive assessment of indigenous administrative structures and customs was tested and verified in Japan.

Perhaps the most intriguing storyline of land claimed by the Dutch during the 1600s is that of Chinese Taiwan. By the early 1620s, the Dutch desperately sought to usurp the Portuguese as China’s premier European trading partner. After an unsuccessful Dutch siege attempt on Macao in 1622 and subsequent occupation of the nearby Penghu Islands, Chinese officials offered Taiwan to the Dutch in 1624 and assured Sino trade opportunities there. The ability of the VOC to contour to local circumstances so as to maximize revenue was glaringly evident in the tale of Taiwan. In 1629, the Dutch urged Chinese immigrants to plant sugarcane, providing them with plows, cattle, and money. What began as an experiment soon became the *modus operandi* for Taiwan, as a thriving, land-oriented economy emerged in the 1630s. In 1636, the ruling body of Dutch Taiwan, the Council of Formosa, invited swarms of Chinese settlers to Taiwan through an enticing four-year tax-free period. Within roughly a decade, the Dutch had transformed Taiwan from a strategically positioned jumping pad into a self-sufficient agricultural powerhouse. Indeed, by the mid 1640s, Taiwan was exporting sugar and rice to China and other locations for profit.

A brief examination of the chief sources through which the Dutch drew revenue in Taiwan reveals the financial ingenuity of the island’s economy. Andrade divides these sources into three categories. The first source of income for the Dutch was profits from Taiwanese goods sold abroad. This included Taiwanese sugar and deerskins, both of which demanded high prices in the Asian market. The second came from a set of taxes the Company imposed upon the Chinese settlers.

---

74 Andrade, “The Rise and Fall of Dutch Taiwan”, 437.
77 *Ibid.*, 441.
The third and most significant category of income was various licenses the Dutch sold to the Chinese immigrants. These licenses ranged from the deer-hunting license, to fishing passes, to trade rights with the indigenous Taiwanese.\textsuperscript{78} Needless to say, these licenses fetched high prices from Chinese entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{79} Dutch income on Taiwan had become entirely dependent on the Chinese settlers. Andrade posits that the Dutch revenue in Taiwan revealed, “that nearly all of the Company’s profits came through Chinese intermediaries [, with] little revenue [coming] directly from aborigines or Dutch colonists.”\textsuperscript{80} While Andrade accurately views this economic reliance on Chinese settlers as a precursor to the tensions that would culminate in Zhen Chenggong’s successful invasion of Taiwan in 1662, the striking ability of the Dutch to fruitfully tailor motives, systems, and policy to indigenous circumstances is undeniable.

Since its inception, the VOC was always a revenue-seeking commercial enterprise. While the Company never strayed from this objective, the sovereignty afforded in the 1602 Charter threatened to cloud economic interests, as the Company also became a political entity. As VOC historian Reinout Vos asserts, the Company transformed “into a hybrid creature—at once commercial and political.”\textsuperscript{81} Vos sees this creature as a “Janus: a two-faced figure with a merchant on its European side and its princely visage turned towards Asia.”\textsuperscript{82} Vos’ analysis is valid in that despite the overwhelming, potentially muddled course that this merchant-prince faced, financial success was a staple for nearly two centuries. The question this paper sought to answer was how exactly did the VOC balance this precarious, ostensible dichotomy of duties? As evidenced by the VOC legacy in Java, Japan, and Chinese Taiwan, this mercantile-political balance was maintained by Dutch adaptability. Whether it was through establishing or dissolving administrative structures, enforcing legal codes, or shifting economic motives, the Dutch seemed to grasp the notion that each territory was unique and thus required a responsive tailor-made form of the Company.

In examining the early modern European presence in Asia through the Dutch experience, three keys to prosperity emerge. Firstly, state backing, both financially, and politically was integral. While the VOC was a private company by name, it was in actuality, as Andrade states, “an official arm of the Dutch state.”\textsuperscript{83} Companies like the English East India Company suffered greatly during the seventeenth century from a complete lack of governmental financial support. The second ingredient to success in Asia was a focus on the intra-Asian trade market. Once the VOC gained entry in to this wildly profitable, highly practical market, the Company’s foremost position was solidified. Thirdly, and most importantly, in order for a European nation to have\textsuperscript{84} prospered in Asia, great attention must have been paid to local circumstances and customs. A haphazard, cursory assessment of indigenous conditions often resulted in expulsion, as evidenced by the Portuguese. The ability to not only properly evaluate local environments, but also to adapt to them, if necessary, gave the Dutch a tremendous edge. This flexibility opened new markets, new

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 441. \\
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 441. \\
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 441. \\
\textsuperscript{81} Vos, Gentle Janus, Merchant Prince, 1. \\
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 1. \\
\textsuperscript{83} Andrade, “Rise and Fall of Dutch Taiwan”, 435.
\end{flushright}
routes, and new goods to the Dutch. Thus, the VOC legacy owes much to this administrative practicality.
The Dutch East India Company and the Tea Trade

BRIAN GOODMAN

Tea, the most ubiquitous of drinks, preached as an elixir of life by the ancient Chinese and more a way of life than a beverage for the British, is more than a few leaves in boiling water. It's the determinant of entire trade routes and the success or failure of entire companies and even nations. Many are familiar with the Boston Tea Party and the Opium Wars, but well before the British East India Company ever amounted to the greatness it is remembered for, there was the Dutch. The Dutch East India Company, or VOC, was, for over a century, the largest company in the world. Initially specializing in its monopoly of various spices and near monopoly in others, VOC branched out into tea as European demand shifted. The Dutch Tea Trade grew to prominence out of the existing spice network and prospered through reorganization of the VOC. However, the VOC shifted its focus of trade toward tea. Tea was a market with different suppliers and different competition. The VOC was slow to change to the demands of the tea trade, but refused to exit the market, which contributed to their eventual collapse.

Many scholars cite widespread corruption of the VOC as a major, if not primary reason for its ultimate collapse. While there may have been more corruption than some of its competitors such as the English East India Company because of its different managerial design from its founding. The VOC had always had a single agent handle the purchasing process, while the EIC had a committee which would make the decisions together, thereby limiting the opportunity for corrupt deals designed around personal gain. Furthermore, the Dutch refusal to trade with Chinese merchants who dealt with other European powers undoubtedly led to long term relationships between Dutch agents and Chinese merchants, where personal loyalties could trump those of the company. These business methods, however, were initiated from the start of the company when the VOC's Asian trade was highly profitable and were still in effect during its return to profitability after the reorganization of the Dutch trade around the China Committee. This suggests that while corruption may have led to inefficiencies, it was hardly the determining factor in profitability, assuming that corruption would have remained fairly consistent throughout the existence of these business practices. Moreover, the personal side deals by seamen were largely curtailed with a shift in policy regarding personal storage on board. To prevent sailors from bringing back excessive amounts of smuggled goods on board, the VOC instituted a policy of recognizance. It permitted all VOC servants to ship tea and other goods back on board and the VOC would then auction these goods at market and give 60% of the proceeds from auction to the servant in question, taking 40% for themselves as a freight charge. This policy was an immediate success and constituted up to 40% of all tea imported by the company in 1750.

---

2 Ibid., 191.
Other scholars cite problems back in Amsterdam as the main cause of the collapse. Indeed, Mansvelt claims “the war might well have been the final blow for the company.” And, while the war may have been the final blow, the collapse of the VOC appears to have been predetermined prior to the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war in 1780. In the six years leading up to the war the VOC had lost 14 million on the Asian trade, which was equal to the company’s total profit in the prior decade.

Still other scholars conclude that the demise of the Dutch East India Company lay upon the hands of its rivals, such as the EIC. Els M. Jacobs specifically names the “successful duplication of their standard trade practices” by competitors as the need for the VOC to take a step backwards in the 18th century. However, the other European trading companies were almost all practicing a direct trade route with China as opposed to intra-Asian trade measured long established by the VOC. The cause for the Company’s reorganization was due to internal structural inertia from being built around the spice trade of Indonesia, as opposed to the tea trade of China. The pressure from competitors surely acted as a catalyst but increased costs and outdated business practices necessitated the reorganization of intra-Asian trade to fit the new tea focus.

So, what was the original business plan that had made the Dutch East India Company the single largest company in the world? Founded in 1602, the Dutch East India Company was not the first of its kind. Several nations had already established state trading companies, most prominently the British EIC just prior. The Dutch company had an initial capital of 6.5 million Guilders, ten times the capital of the EIC. With this comfortable financial advantage the Dutch expanded aggressively into Asian Trade largely at the expense of the Portuguese and native Asian traders. The VOC Governor General, Jan Coen, justified the ensuing situation: “There’s no trade without war; there’s no war without trade.” The ensuing trade wars between the Dutch, Portuguese, British and the various native people altered the history for much of the eastern Asia. The Dutch took the strategically located and spice rich Moluccas Islands from the Portuguese in 1631, giving the Company a monopoly on cloves, mace, and nutmeg. Later they would gain a monopoly on cinnamon upon the conquest of Ceylon. Indeed, by 1685 the Dutch had over 20 different settlements and military control of Ceylon, Java, and the Moluccas. Based out of Batavia, modern day Jakarta, the Dutch had the strongest position of Asian trade out of the European nations and were one of the only two European countries to have commercial goods the Chinese sought, Asian goods.

The initial capital was put to use in a very different and yet extremely effective strategy than many would believe. The Gentlemen Seventeen, the board of directors, sought a very long-term strategy without shortcuts for wealth. In contrast to the Portuguese, who attempted to limit military engagements and territorial expansion and thereby limit expenses, the Dutch were focused on obtaining and maintaining a monopoly on as many goods as possible. This goal involved

---

3 Femme Gaastra, The Dutch East India Company (Walburg 2003), 173.
4 Ibid., 173.
5 Yong Liu, The Dutch East India Company’s Tea Trade with China (Boston: BRILL, 2007), 7.
6 Jacobs, A Merchant of Asia, 194.
8 Jacobs, A Merchant of Asia, 1.
9 Jacobs, A Merchant of Asia, 3.
multiple fleets sent out each year, all heavily armed, with the express purpose of destroying Portuguese possessions before accounting for their own profit-bearing venture. The Dutch spent 15 million Florins by 1619 on military expenditures in the Far East, resulting in 6 million Florins of debt. One must keep in mind that their entire initial capital was 6.5 million Florins. Easy access to the most extensive financial system of the day in Amsterdam allowed the VOC to take on this kind of debt almost entirely in short term one year loans and advances. This resulted in, at the time, an unparalleled level of expenditure for foreign trading. Their investment in long-term military conquests of territory was extremely successful, as the Portuguese were left with a mere 79 ships compared to 246 of the Dutch.

The Dutch continued this long-term approach and high expenditure well after the conquest, fortifying each of the settlements with impressive and expensive European style forts with walls up to 30 feet thick and as many as 12 Bastions. The Dutch lived up to their motto, “no profit without power,” without any concern of the cost. This fact was illustrated by the Company spending upwards of 50% to 70% of their annual expenditures on military costs alone and, in the case of the Moluccas, fortifications a third of their initial capital in 7 years time. These expenditures installed the Dutch trading network for the long haul and insured their monopoly on the spices of the Moluccas for decades.

With their vast eastern empire of largely ex-Portuguese trading posts, the Dutch were in prime position to act as middlemen for the far-reaching intra-Asian trade network. This position entailed many advantages including early and regular contacts with various Asian empires. Particularly, early contact with the Chinese Empire, which had a near monopoly on tea well into the 19th century, would prove crucial to the early success of the Dutch tea trade. Furthermore, their many various bases gave the Dutch access to goods, other than silver, that were sellable in China.

To paraphrase the Chinese Emperor Qianlong when replying to a letter sent by King George the III regarding British and Chinese trade, there is nothing we lack and therefore nothing to trade with you, the Europeans. Despite its terseness the Emperor was more or less correct, as the Europeans had little to offer the Chinese in terms of home made goods beyond precious metals like silver. The result was a huge trade imbalance between the West and the East with European silver going to China and returning with Chinese silks, tea, and spices. From the European mercantilist perspective, this was blasphemy and yet, they all had to comply, except for the Dutch. With their extensive intra-Asian trade, the Dutch could trade lead, carpets, textiles, and wool to other Asian nations through Batavia for tin, pepper, cotton, wax, and spices that were in demand in China. These goods accounted for a fifth of the cost of Chinese purchases, thereby decreasing the amount of precious metal being sent from the Netherlands. An extra bonus of this trade was that the reduced ballast or weight of the outgoing ships made the trip to the East substantially faster.

---

11 Ibid., 106.
12 Ibid., 132.
13 Liu, *The Dutch East India Company’s Tea Trade with China*, 28-34.
The merit of the using intra-Asian trade to pay for Chinese goods is largely for cost reductive purposes. The sale of goods in China helped keep expenditures down, gold reserves back home high, and occasionally would get a higher than expected return. The Dutch entered into a niche market of low-grade teas. By keeping their costs down the VOC could, for much of its existence, make a healthy profit selling these cheaper teas. And, as tea became a drink of the people and, in the case of the English, a national pastime, the Dutch were able to undersell many other European teas for consumers willing to sacrifice quality. While the market remained unsaturated and demand outstripped supply, as was the case in England until 1740, this market niche was a viable business plan.14

The first tea import to Europe was actually from Japan not China and is accredited to the Dutch in the year 1610.15 Tea, however, was initially relegated as a luxury good or medicine, as opposed to the common beverage it is today. Its market was relatively small for years, particularly in comparison to the big spice imports of the VOC of pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon, and cloves. A pound of Dutch imported tea cost 60 shillings in London in 1660 and with the average daily wage for a laborer less than a shilling a day tea was well out of the average price range.16 Tea was clearly a luxury good for much of its early European history. Indeed, the first English tea was a gift to the King from Dutch merchants in 1664. Popularity and opinion began to change as doctors began to write about its medicinal effects. Writers, such as, Dr. Bontekoe who, in 1683, claimed enough cups of tea could cure any fever.17 As tea went from the medicine cabinet of the apothecaries to the coffeehouses and salons of the day its popularity soared, particularly in England. As the English imposed an import tariff on tea, up to 119%, from which the EIC was not exempt, the Dutch tea market simply went underground. Half or even two-thirds of the tea consumed in England throughout the 1700s is thought to have been smuggled.18

Despite being the first to import tea from Asia, the Dutch imports remained relatively small. It took almost 60 years, from the first tea import to the first public auction in Amsterdam in 1667, only two years before the first British auction. Fortunately, contrary to the VOC’s expectations, it found a ready market.19 Tea’s share of VOC ship traffic, however, remained relatively modest, filling about one full ship out of the 14 arriving from the East each year from 1690 to 1718. Meanwhile the EIC carried over 2,000 million pounds of tea in 1718 and far surpassed the Dutch at the beginning of the 18th century.20 Furthermore, the EIC had issued more stock and raised its capital to 35 million florins, while the VOC had remained at their initial 6.5 million. Clearly, it was a time for reappraisal and reorganization from a Dutch perspective.

Sensing the need for change the Gentlemen Seventeen altered trading tactics. After more than a century of importing goods from China at their port in Batavia from Chinese traders, the

---

14 Jacobs, A Merchant in Asia, 190.
15 Hohenegger, Liquid Jade, 72.
16 Robert Martin, The past and present state of the tea trade of England and of the continents of Europe and America : and a comparison between the consumption, price of, and revenue derived from tea, coffee, sugar, wine, tobacco, spirits, &c (London: Nabu Press, 1832), 16.
17 Hohenegger, Liquid Jade, 69.
18 Ibid., 92.
19 Jan Parmentier, Tea Time in Flanders (Ghent, 1996), 78.
20 Ibid., 80.
VOC began a direct trade route from the Netherlands to the one free Chinese port, Canton. This was in hopes of increasing profit margin by direct trade, thereby cutting out the Chinese middlemen, increasing their bargaining power for quality goods, and decreasing transport time by going directly to the market. Instead of waiting on Chinese junks to arrive at Batavia according to their schedule, the Dutch were in control. This move to direct trade was substantially later than many of its rivals. In fact, the EIC had begun direct trade from London in 1664.\textsuperscript{21} This new trade strategy would be in direct control of the Gentlemen Seventeen for the next five years. Until yet another reorganization would take place.

From 1734 until 1756 the lucrative China trade would be under the control of the High Government of Batavia in an effort to increase flexibility of trade between the two empires by focusing the decision making locally. The Governor-General of the Batavian government, on payroll of the VOC, which controlled all the Dutch East Indian assets, had a free hand in the decision making process. In large part, due to the sheer distance between the two centers of commerce, it could take months for a ship, therefore a letter, to travel from one locale to the other and generally the point was moot upon arrival. The Governor-General need only send an annual statement to the Gentlemen Seventeen regarding costs and revenues. While this increased the flexibility of the VOC with faster major decisions, since most day to day activity was centered around the ship’s Captain and supercargoes, the incentives and goals of the High Government and the Gentlemen Seventeen were not always the same. There were events of the High Government keeping some of the higher quality goods within Batavia for local consumption or intra-Asian trade as well as hesitancy to supply extra precious metals to supplement the purchasing power of the VOC agents.

Despite this ongoing issue of corruption common among all European trading companies, the VOC faced an important dilemma of time at port. Since tea quality is greatly affected by the time of delivery, the increased time at port in Batavia had a major impact on the timeliness and quality of the return cargo to the Netherlands. While it is noted that many if not most European ships stopped at or near Batavia for supplies for the return journey, the Dutch ships were subject to increased inspections. Inventory needed to be taken and any discrepancies handled here instead of back in the home country. While this may not seem like a terrifically long time period, one must keep in mind that the competition was on its way since most expeditions left at approximately the same time of year to catch the same monsoon winds to carry them across the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, the Company’s direct trading competitors would return to Europe a full two months earlier than VOC ships.\textsuperscript{22} The later arrival of the VOC ships could mean a decreased market price for their products, as much of the demand in Europe was already met by the previous arrivals. For the last 38 years of direct trade with China the VOC was reorganized around the China Committee.

This reorganization of the VOC direct trade with China would result in both the resurgence and eventual demise of the Dutch tea trade. The China Committee answered directly to the Gentlemen Seventeen and held supremacy in all issues relating to the China trade, surpassing those of the High Government of Batavia. A ship carrying the intra-Asian trade goods

\textsuperscript{21} Hohenegger, \textit{Liquid Jade}, 91.

from Batavia would meet the direct trading vessel in open water for the transfer, instead of docking at Batavia and increasing travel time.

During the direct trade era of the VOC from 1729 to 1794, tea made up roughly 70% of the total purchase on the canton market by volume and 20% by value, but was only 14% of the VOC’s total proceeds at auction on average. This is a testament to the sheer size of the VOC. At the Dutch were the second largest importers of tea, after the British, with 22.5% of the market. However, the increased competition and the Dutch niche of cheaper tea resulted in much lower profit margins. The huge scale and expenditures of the VOC to control their many far-flung outposts strained their capital investment, resulting in increased loans and advances. This, in turn, culminated in the Dutch occasionally paying for their tea in kind. Typically, they would trade with their monopolized Asian spices, which were still in demand in China. This became a self-fulfilling prophecy, as this further decreased their purchasing power resulting in ever-cheaper quality teas to market and therefore ever lower profit margins. Despite the temporary boost in profits from the Seven Year’s War, reaching 135%, the boom years for the Dutch Tea Trade were over soon after the European powers stopped fighting.

Which leaves us with the question, what caused the downfall of the world’s greatest trading company? The venerable Dutch East India Company was organized around the 17th century European-Asian trade in an 18th century world. The VOC was built and organized around the prospect of monopolizing the lucrative spice trade of pepper, cloves, and mace, which had made them so profitable. To do this they conquered and retained control of no less than 30 settlements throughout Asia and the entire archipelago of modern day Indonesia. While this was an extremely successful business model in the 17th century, the obtainment of monopoly positions through the conquest of entire islands, it became a burden as time elapsed and focus shifted away from the spice isles and towards mainland Asia. The VOC was slow to respond to this shift as it had become “more of an administrator than a merchant,” with the vast holdings it was required to defend. In 1625 the VOC had 2,500 servants settled in the east, by 1700 this had grown to 13,000 and by 1750 increased to over 20,000 men, hiring 5,000 replacements annually for those who died or quit. This huge labor cost of soldiers, sailors, and clerks took a deep toll on the profits in the East. Furthermore, the strategic value for many of these outposts had been drastically reduced as the continent’s demand shifted from spices to the new hot commodities of tea and cloth, which were found not in Indonesian Islands, but on the Asian mainland.

The Dutch were the first to bring tea into Europe, but its domestic market remained relatively limited throughout the 17th century. It was often marketed as a medicine for headaches and other illnesses, while coffee from the VOC controlled island of Java was the drink of choice among the Dutch people. Perhaps, partially for this reason, the VOC was particularly slow to adapt to the shifting European demand for tea. This hesitation allowed its main competitor, the

---

23 Liu, The Dutch East India Company’s Tea Trade with China, 3.
24 Jacobs, Merchant in Asia, 191.
25 Ibid., 196.
26 Ibid., 193.
28 Ibid., 77.
29 Ibid., 84.
Honorable English East India Company, to gain a major foothold in the tea trade, which centered around China. The Chinese had a near monopoly on tea exports until the mid 19th century, when plantations were founded in India and Ceylon. From 1719 until 1833 between 70% and 90% of all outgoing cargoes from Canton was tea. For the Dutch, roughly 70% of all purchases by the VOC from 1729 to 1793 were tea. A change from the 17th century, where spices comprised 60% of all cargo for the VOC, but less than a third by the end of the century despite no decrease in quantity. The VOC had expanded well beyond the market it controlled and was organized around the spice trade. At the turn of the 17th century the Dutch had virtually no trading relationship with Chinese merchants, after losing Taiwan in 1662 to the Chinese pirate Koxinga. Afterwards, the only point of trade between the VOC and China was through Chinese Junks visiting Batavia for trade. The Gentleman Seventeen’s failure to find alternative trade routes with China is inexcusable. At this time the VOC was the main tea importer into England as the EIC didn’t make its first direct Chinese trade until 1664, but shortly afterwards secured a factory at Amoy in the mid 1670s. The EIC quickly supplanted the Dutch as the primary importer of tea for England, soon to be the largest tea consumer in Europe. Despite this change in positions, the VOC failed to establish another trading point with the Chinese until 1720, well after being supplanted as the preeminent tea exporter by the British.

All was not immediately lost with the newfound competition of the EIC in the tea market, however, as the British government instituted an egregious tea tax beginning in 1660, which was incrementally increased throughout the years. This tax, however, was subject on tea from the EIC and led to a lucrative smuggling opportunity to foreign tea suppliers such as the VOC. With a relatively small home market for tea, much of the VOC’s tea was auctioned off to smugglers with the intent of bypassing the British tax and selling the tea in England for a large profit. This re-export market was lost in 1784 with the passage of the British Commutation Act, which reduced the import duties on tea from over 100% to 12.5% ending the profits of continental smugglers who bought VOC tea. While the law mandated that the EIC be able to provide all tea for the domestic market, it allowed the Dutch to sell some tea to the EIC directly when it was unable to satisfy all demand. However, it was only a matter of time before the EIC could provide enough tea for the entire British market thereby limiting the number of potential buyers for the VOC.

The problem of lower demand for VOC tea was deeper than taxation policies in England. Dutch tea was widely known for its poor quality across the continent. The VOC niche of cheap teas for the masses did not kill the company in itself, but made it particularly vulnerable to both supply and demand shifts by forcing it to rely on lower profit margins. The profit margin from 1660 to 1760 decreased by 60% after accounting for inflation. But why were the Dutch resigned to this market?

31 Hohenegger, Liquid Jade, 91.
32 Parmentier, Tea Time in Flanders, 79.
33 Hohenegger, Liquid Jade, 92.
34 Liu, The Dutch East India Company’s Tea Trade with China, 152.
35 Jacobs, A Merchant in Asia, 6.
First, the Dutch resignation to receiving all its tea imports from Chinese junks trading in Batavia meant that they had little purchasing power, but were instead forced to buy what was brought to them, or not buy anything at all. Furthermore, it meant the tea wasn’t as fresh since it had spent a longer time in transit than the VOC’s competitors. Later, when direct trade with China resumed in Canton, the VOC demanded exclusivity agreements with any Chinese traders it did business with. This trading position may have been a successful strategy earlier in the Asian spice trade to gain monopolies, but it failed miserably with the huge increase in European competition within the tea market. The most acclaimed Chinese tea merchants could make more money playing the Europeans off of each other than deal solely with the Dutch and therefore were immediately excluded partners. This limited their supply of tea and excluded the VOC from many of the highest quality blends.

Beyond purchasing issues, the Dutch retained their previous business strategy of purchasing Chinese goods in full or in part with the proceeds of the intra-Asian trade well after it made economic sense, in order to cut down on precious metal shipments from the Dutch Republic. For much of the 17th century this remained a very viable alternative to exporting silver from Europe, because they could purchase silver in Japan with spices and other Asian goods under their control. This Japanese silver would then be used to purchase goods in China, since there was little Chinese demand for other Dutch owned products. After Japan limited its exports, even to the Dutch, who were the last remaining Europeans on the Island, the VOC could no longer use Japanese silver or metals to trade with China, which in its peak constituted 1.4 million guilders a year more silver than was taken from Europe from 1640 to 1670. This silver supplement was completely lost in 1670, yet the VOC was hesitant to use hard species of Dutch silver as a replacement. They instead attempted to make up for this loss with other, less demanded, Asian trade goods. As a result, they had to spend more time in Canton trading these goods before they could purchase tea.

The reasons for poor quality tea continue with a clear failure on packaging of the teas. While most of its rivals, including the EIC, packed their teas in large chests lined with lead to prevent spoilage, a method long understood by Chinese merchants, the VOC did not. They stored their tea in canisters lined with Bamboo. Despite recommendations from the Gentlemen Seventeen, this tradition continued. The bamboo resin would contaminate the tea and the tea therefore lost both “freshness and fragrance.” This oversight illustrates the difficulties in governing such an extensive body as the VOC, particularly from such great distances. Inertia continued poor practices.

Additionally, the insistence on retaining the supplementation of intra-Asian trade goods for Chinese purchases hurt their purchasing power, as some of the best tea merchants in Canton would not accept this trade in kind. After all, the European competitors did primarily use silver for tea purchases allowing them the first opportunity on the best teas leaving the Dutch with the leftovers. The use of better bartering material by its ever increasing competitors and the VOC failure to alter their business plan to the new reality drastically reduced their purchasing power. While the Dutch trading policy in China reduced their costs, it seriously damaged the quality of

---

37 Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade*, 221.
their product, which resulted in lower profits upon sale of the tea back in Europe. With nothing but the cheapest teas, the VOC was reduced to working with much lower profit margins than many of its competitors and thus, was more susceptible to price changes. They attempted to remedy their quality issues introducing more silver in their cargo, increased pressure on their agents to purchase better quality teas, and packaging protocols but financial strains and sheer distance impeded the success of these reform efforts.

Ultimately, competition within the tea market doomed the Dutch tea trade. The other European trading companies’ large purchases of tea glutted the market. Supply exceeded demand even in Britain beginning in the 1740s, with 11 million pounds per annum. It diminished profits for everyone, but hurt the VOC more because of its inferior grades of tea. With the price so low for all, tea consumers bought the higher quality brands. Even back in the Netherlands, where VOC tea had a legal monopoly, smuggling of higher quality teas for the wealthy became widespread and became the biggest market of tea for the Flemish East India Company. As prices dropped universally for tea, the Dutch were hurt most. There was a brief reprieve during the Seven Years’ War, when the neutral Dutch could maintain steady supply for re-export while the agitators could not. Upon the end of the British and French wars, conditions returned and excess supply decreased profits once more. The EIC was henceforth more powerful as it had a better trading position with China and was better financed to purchase tea with silver than were the Dutch.

The final nails in the coffin for the VOC were events back in the Netherlands. A series of devastating wars with Britain dealt a heavy blow to the Dutch maritime trade. The much larger and more powerful British Navy captured 200 Dutch vessels in January 1781 alone. In the peace treaty the VOC lost their monopoly on access to the Moluccas and a key port on Ceylon. During the fourth Anglo-Dutch war, VOC ships were captured and virtually ended exports from Canton. The estimated loss of the VOC during this time was 43 million guilders. Finally, with the French invasion of 1795 the VOC was forced to be taken over by the Batavian Republic and was henceforth forced to sail under foreign flags. These domestic events appear to be almost after the fact. The VOC was well on its way to second-rate status before these events ever took place.

The Dutch tea trade itself killed the Dutch East India Company. The VOC failed to adapt their business model from one based on Indonesian spices to Chinese tea and yet insisted on remaining a leading member in the European tea market. They were too slow entering the Chinese tea market and remained convinced that their outdated model of intra-Asian trade goods to cut initial capital expenditures would increase profits well after their competitors proved catering to consumer demand was a better business model. As a result, when the European political climate turned against the Dutch Republic, there was little interest in retaining an unprofitable enterprise, even one as great as the VOC.

39 Liu, *The Dutch East India Company’s Tea Trade with China*, 149
40Ibid., 150
The Roots of Proto-Industrialization in Japan

JONATHAN WANG

Trendy cell phones, cheap and durable cars, nifty and fun cameras – these are just a few of the many products that are commonly associated with Japan. The export of such goods has allowed Japan to stand at similar heights in comparison to other world powers today. Yet despite these worthwhile achievements, many individuals fail to remember Japan’s most laudable exploit. Unlike her neighboring countries, Japan was the first nation in Asia to enter into the era of modernity through rapid industrialization. Such brevity in the modernization of Japan overshadows the centuries of time it took the West to achieve the same feat. Ultimately, the overthrow of the bakufu (Tokugawa Shogunate) and the establishment of Emperor Mutsuhito as the sole ruler of Japan resulted in a unified and centralized government that provided impetus for capitalism, as well as industrialization into the 1900s. And so, by the end of the 19th century, the presence of such developmental revolutions were evident: railroads and steamships provided efficient and speedy transportation of goods; the installment of banks supported the population and its growing levels of consumerism; the mass dissemination of information informed the remote areas of Japan through telegraphs and newspapers; and lastly, the implementation of clocks and compulsory education transformed society and laid the foundation for many of Japan’s modern industries. Together, these were a few of the plethora of factors that changed Japan from a conglomerate of rulers into a unified nation that would eventually become a world power.

At this point, it’s crucial to step back and reflect upon these accomplishments that were made in such a short span of time. How did the Land of the Rising Sun thrust itself into the age of modernity so quickly? How was Japan able to modernize if it was isolated from the rest of the world? And above all else, how was Japan able to industrialize if it experienced no growth during the Tokugawa period? Such topics have evoked significant levels of controversy between scholars and historians alike.

The idea that sakoku was beneficial to Japanese development parallels the arguments that many modern scholars have proposed. This is not a new argument. Tashiro Kazui provides how sakoku protected the Japanese economy during the Tokugawa period. Kazui as well as Ronald Toby attribute sakoku as a policy of foreign relations in which Japan sought to free itself from Chinese control and influence. Whereas Kazui and Toby emphasize on the economic benefits of sakoku, I focus more on the political aspects during this period of time which parallels Toby’s notion of sakoku as a means of legitimacy. Unlike Toby however, I go beyond to propose how the mixed political success of the Tokugawa regime caused the bakufu to shift its focus towards internal developments such as the relocation of the capital to Edo. As Kato Hidetoshi perfectly states, the

---

2 Japanese modernization took less than a century.
period of sakoku should be viewed not as a “contraction... we should probably refer to it [sakoku] as intensification or concentration. The energies that until then had been allowed to dissipate toward the outside were redirected internally where they now had to be coped with.” Such energies and concentration manifested in the form of societal, economic and above all else, political developments. The capital was relocated and power was centralized. Thus, all roads pointed to Edo. Like Gilbert Rozman, my argument takes into account the significance of Edo in the development of Japanese society. Whereas Rozman provides how Edo’s significance as capital led to internal progression, I go beyond that to suggest that such progressions were specifically the proto-industrial sectors that led to Japan’s rapid modernization. My research on preindustrial Japan has provided me with the belief that true isolation did not occur between Japan and the rest of the world. On the contrary, the misconstrued notion of isolation, or sakoku, was not a period of seclusion. Rather, it was a time of controlled economic and political policies that allowed for the establishment of trade as the foundation for political ties and foreign recognition of Tokugawa sovereignty. The ultimate result of these ties was the centralization of power in Edo. Tokugawa’s relocation of the capital subsequently catalyzed proto-industrialization developments within the nation.

The rapid development that occurred puts into question the portrayal of Japan as a stagnated and backwards state prior to its modernization during the Meiji Era. As a result, Japan must have established certain proto-industrial sectors during the Tokugawa Era in order to have laid the foundations for its later industrialization. Furthermore, sakoku (or Japanese isolationism) must not have prevented the development of society but rather, potentially furthered internal progress to some degree. Thus, this essay seeks to dissipate the inaccurate portrayals of Tokugawa Japan as a stagnated and backwards state through the analysis of the following topics: the traditional view of sakoku as an economic and political tourniquet that prevented Japanese development, as well as the importance of Edo as a catalyst for proto-industrialization during the Tokugawa regime. Together, the careful examination of these two topics will not only demonstrate how Japan continued to develop during the Tokugawa period, but also suggest how sakoku brought about an area of focused and controlled development that was beneficial to Japanese industrialization.

The traditional view of sakoku not only fails to take into account the rapid development and industrialization that occurred 200 years after the edict of isolation was passed, but also oversimplifies the economic and political objectives of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Such a perspective, albeit incorrect, is completely understandable as the literal translation of sakoku is “closing the country”; from such a definition, the connotation of restricted isolation became associated with this period of time from the 1600s until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. According to this perspective, the hypervigilized imposition of sakoku was a reaction against the influence of Western ideas. The result of this was a geopolitical lockdown in which Japan was able to better

---

5 Specifically Portuguese Christianity due to a rebellion of 40,000 converted Japanese farmers that not only threatened the shogunate but also the political stability of the nation.
monitor the incoming and outgoing of goods, people and subsequently, foreign (especially Western) influences. With the restricted flow of ideas, goods and people under the overly restraining control of the bafuku (Tokugawa Shogunate), the nation lost its prestige and power as it slowly failed to absorb technological, economic and scientific advancements accomplished by the rest of the world. Thus, the period of sakoku from the 1600s until the Meiji Restoration of 1868 is characterized as a time in which economic and societal progression was stifled by government intervention due to xenophobia. Contrary to this traditionalist belief, history provides that the bakufu attempted a different approach towards foreign relations that not only counters the common notion of restricted trade and subsequent stunted growth, but also reduces the restrictive environment in which the sakoku allegedly imposed.

In short, trade is observed to have occurred within and beyond governmental regulation, and relations with other nations were not completely severed during this period of time. In fact, the bakufu established and maintained “formal relations with two of its neighbors in Northeast Asia: Korea and the Ryukyus. With each of these the “Bakufu established different kinds of relationships, handling each in a distinctive way.”

This aspect is not only exemplified by political tension that existed between Japan and the majority of its trading partners, but also the exchange of goods that flowed between these neighboring kingdoms and Japan. The Tokugawa Shogunate promoted the trading interests of certain daimyo (feudal lords) in an attempt to diversify and further trade. History provides that “It was the Bakufu that authorized [daimyos] Satsuma to trade with Ryukyu and China, and Tsushima to trade with Korea.” At the same time the “Korea trade, a monopoly of the tozama fief of Tsushima, was greater in volume than the Nagasaki trade, which the Bakufu controlled only administratively.” Thus, it becomes clear that the bakufu did not exercise complete control over all exchanges of goods between the Japanese and its neighboring countries. Rather, the Shogunate allowed levels of independence in trade between neighboring kingdoms and its own daimyos. Another example of extensive trading is again evident in Korea as Tsushima “maintained a permanent trading factory... and ceramics manufactory in Pusan, Korea.” This clearly challenges the overly restrictive and closed portrayal associated with sakoku as Japan possessed trade relations with neighboring countries during this period of time. Sakoku did not prevent trade; rather, it granted the Japanese government control of whom to trade with.

As a result of its trade relations, the Shogunate sanctioned, established and regulated specific ports for other kingdoms besides that of Korea and Ryukyu. As mentioned before, the port city Nagasaki was one of the few windows to the world in which foreign nations, specifically the Dutch East India Company and private Chinese trading partners of the Ming and Ch’ing dynasties, would be permitted access to the exchange of goods. Historical evidence of rangaku (Dutch learning) in the form of medicinal practices, military science, geography and politics also existed as a byproduct of the exchanges of goods between the Japanese and the Dutch. Such

---

7 The only exception to this political tension is observed in Japan’s relationship with Korea.
9 Ibid., 326.
10 Ibid., 326.
evidence reduces the xenophobic fears that the traditional view associates with sakoku and clearly demonstrates how the diffusion of ideas was still absorbed into Japanese learning and culture. The transmission of ideas and technologies is also observed between Japan and China. The exchange of ideas and goods revolutionized farming practices within Japan, due in part to the Chinese farming techniques that “were imported in book form during the seventeenth century, and were localized and elaborated throughout the Tokugawa period.” Not only did such techniques transform agriculture within Japan, it eventually led to the development of proto industrial institutions that would eventually act as the primary impetus in propelling Japan in the modern age. This is another source of evidence that reduces the severity in which sakoku was enforced and observed in maritime policies, especially with regards to Japanese sailors. With goods constantly traveling between Japan and these northeastern Asian countries, it was inevitable that accidents would have resulted in the displacement of Japanese seamen. As a result, the notion that Japanese individuals could not travel in and out of the country is somewhat unfounded as Japanese history provides instances in which displaced Japanese seamen were repatriated.

Ultimately, the evidence provided above supports the notion that the Tokugawa Shogunate pursued security, trade and economic as well as cultural goals, which clearly challenge the closed nation policy that sakoku is commonly associated with. In one sense, it is true that the bakufu maintained foreign relations, albeit limited, to East Asian countries and the Dutch; however, to suggest that such ties were only maintained for economic reasons fails to acknowledge the true objective in imposing sakoku in the first place. From its inception, sakoku was a means to achieve political recognition domestically and internationally from China, Korea and the rest of East Asia. Japan’s greatest goal would be to obtain political recognition from the most powerful state in East Asia, Ming China. And so, it becomes clear through these political deeds that sakoku was not an attempt to isolate the nation; rather it was an endeavor to control trade and political ties to obtain legitimacy within and beyond the nation. Unfortunately for the Tokugawa Shogunate, “such temporal legitimacy as existed on the national level was entrusted to Hideyoshi’s seven year son Hideyori, even after... Hideyoshi’s seven year war in Korea had left Japan the outlaw of northeast Asia.” As a result, the bakufu was required to rebuild the bridges in which the Hideyoshi had so conveniently destroyed. Resulting tensions between Japan and her neighbors only increased the difficulty in establishing political recognition from her trade partners after the rise of the Tokugawa regime.

Much of Japan’s mixed political success in acquiring foreign recognition of its sovereignty was based on the nature of its economic relations. Spending the most effort in reestablishing ties with the Yi dynasty because of its history of economic relations with Korea, Japan sought to build upon this foundation in order to earn Yi recognition of the Tokugawa Shogunate in hopes that the Ming Dynasty would eventually follow. And so early negotiations were made with Korea even before and while the bakufu came into power starting in the “1590s, through the missions of 1604-05 and 1607, the Trade Articles of 1609, and the reopening of trade in 1611.” Eventually, ties

---

13 Toby, “Reopening the Question of Sakoku: Diplomacy in the Legitimation of the Tokugawa Bakufu,” 326.
14 Ibid., 329.
15 Ibid., 329.
were established during *sakoku*, through the help of the daimyo of Tsushima, who acted as the mediator between Korea and Japan. Evidence of renewed relations is observed in Korea’s presents to Japan:

The new Bakufu was successful in bringing to Edo and Sunpu an extravagant embassy of some 467 persons, bearing letters and presents from Korea’s King Sonjo to the Shogun. This act was to be interpreted by some Japanese as recognition of the Ieyasu’s unification of Japan. This ultimately fulfilled one of the primary goals that Japan attempted through *sakoku*: political recognition by an international power. In this sense, *sakoku* acted not as an obstacle that prevented the development of political ties, but as a selectively permeable barrier that allowed relations with the Yi Dynasty to be possible. The “Bakufu regarded the restoration of Korean relations as a major victory” along with Korean sent embassy as evidence of Korean recognition. Such an emphatic response is hardly observed in the Ryukyu’s formal acknowledgement of Japan. On the contrary, the Ryukyu kingdom did not acknowledge Tokugawa sovereignty over Japan. As a result, the Tokugawa Shogunate invaded its own vassal country in order to force King Sho Nei to “pay tribute... to submit as a vassal of Japan.” Regardless of the aggressive coercion of its own territory, Japan viewed this “submission to vassal-state status... as further evidence of the legitimacy of the Bakufu in correspondence with the Ming.” Contrary to the exclusive portrayal of *sakoku*, Japanese efforts clearly demonstrated an attempt towards the establishment of political ties between Japan and its neighboring countries. Ultimately, these attempts were just a few of the many ways in which Japan attempted to politically persuade the Ming dynasty to recognize the sovereign power of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Unfortunately the bakufu’s endeavors were for naught, as the Ming dynasty never fully recognized Tokugawa sovereignty. Japan also never entered legitimate trade with the Ming; from the perspective of the Ming Dynasty, all trade that occurred with China was reduced to smuggling. As a result, instead of recognizing the Tokugawa Shogunate, the Chinese offered the opportunity to be a vassal state in which the Chinese would not only acknowledge the Shogunate, but also provide direct trading through the administration and distribution of *kango*: licenses that authorized the exchange of goods for Japanese merchants. Obviously, acceptance of such condescending terms would have challenged the notion of Tokugawa sovereignty and contradicted bakufu’s desire to legitimize itself as the sole authority of Japan. Had the Tokugawa Shogunate accepted such conditions, the newly formed nation would have existed as an extension of Chinese power, rather than an autonomous and developing new nation. The Tokugawa Shogunate would have ultimately compromised “the very independent legitimacy and sovereignty it was seeking to establish... at the price of injuring that legitimacy in the eyes of Japanese political society.” Due to the failure of the Chinese to meet Japanese expectations, the Tokugawa changed its focus from

---

16 Ibid., 330.
17 Ibid., 330.
18 Ibid., 330.
19 Ibid., 330-31.
20 Ibid., 332.
21 Ibid., 332.
exogenously obtaining international political recognition (especially relative to China), to endogenously legitimizing its power through domestic endeavors that transformed Japanese society.

Thus the Land of the Rising Sun began to shift its focus away from adherence to Sino-centric policies and recognition, towards establishing its own means of legitimacy through internal measures.\(^{22}\) In the early years of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan’s identity was relative to the economic and diplomatic recognition it earned from neighboring countries. Due to the lack of Chinese recognition, an identity crisis ensued and manifested, as Japan had focused on obtaining external recognition to bolster support for internal legitimacy. As a result of the varying levels of success in obtaining internationally recognized legitimacy, the Tokugawa Shogunate began to focus on developing its own identity through internally based measures. Thus, one of the most important measures in developing an internally nationalistic identity was for Tokugawa to bestow himself a title: the “result of this identity crisis was the title *Nihon-koku Taikun* (Great Prince of Japan).”\(^{23}\) This was not only a response to the limited success of its international economic endeavors in obtaining foreign legitimacy, but also an attempt to distance itself from sovereign-vassal implications that king or Shogun implied. The designation of king had been abandoned, as such a status had become tarnished with the Yoshimitsu regime’s submission to the Ming dynasty as a vassal state in order gain political legitimacy and trading benefits.\(^{24}\) Furthermore, the acceptance of such a title not only indicated Japanese compliance to the Ming dynasty, but also revealed how politics were Sino-centrically oriented.\(^{25}\) The Tokugawa regime refused to follow such means in establishing legitimacy. Even the title of Shogun was abandoned as the Chinese had (perhaps unknowingly) and disrespectfully addressed members of Tokugawa’s cabinet as such when it was exclusive to Tokugawa.\(^{26}\) And so, the fruition of the new designation of Great Prince of Japan not only marked Japan’s new internally based developmental approaches, but also represented a significant divergence from its previous adherence to sino-centric policies. Japan’s rejection of Ming order and titles demonstrates how it “was unwilling to maintain diplomatic relations [that challenged its sovereignty]…with China, once revered as its suzerain, and seems to have had no desire to take part again in an unequal liege relation.”\(^{27}\) In the purest sense, this rejection of foreign influence epitomizes the policy of *sakoku* as the Japanese abstained from adopting the identity that China had offered that ultimately would have challenged the legitimacy and sovereignty of the *bakufu*. Shifting its policies, the Tokugawa Shogunate was able to focus on internal development as a means for obtaining internally recognized legitimacy through the reorganization of the *daimyos* into a relatively stable and centralized government. In doing so, the Tokugawa Shogunate gained greater administrative control through the bureaucratizing of government that led to “economic growth and urban development”, as well as “peace for two and

\(^{22}\) Japan had sought external recognition to bolster internal acknowledgement from its populace.

\(^{23}\) *Ibid.*, 349.


\(^{25}\) Compliance to the Ming Dynasty through the physical need to pay tribute and the adoption of a Chinese bestowed status.

\(^{26}\) A letter written to Tokugawa Hidetada was identical to the one sent to Hasegawa who was the Nagasaki deputy at the time; both were addressed as *nihon shogun sama*, which is translated as Japanese king. Through this, the Chinese failed to differentiate the status between lord and subject which the Japanese deemed extremely disrespectful in the diplomatic context.

\(^{27}\) Kazui, “Foreign Relations During the Edo Period: Sakoku Reexamined,” 289.
a half centuries. The lack of international acknowledgment (even though economic relations were successful) of Japanese sovereignty ultimately drove the nation to focus on internal development as a means for the support of the populace.

Thus, in the end sakoku did not stifle the development and growth of Japan but rather acted as the primary factor in encouraging internal development through the reestablishment of economic relations with neighbors and the subsequent recognition (or lack thereof as demonstrated by China) of Tokugawa sovereignty. Sakoku was not an attempt to isolate Japan. History has demonstrated that it acted as a selectively permeable barrier in which the Shogunate was able to control and monitor the flow of commodities, people, and ideas in an effort to develop economic ties. Through the establishment of economic relations between Japan and its neighbors, Japan sought to build upon such ties in order to obtain recognition of its sovereignty. The mixed success of these political endeavors caused Japan to shift its focus from obtaining international recognition to domestic developments that would justify its sovereignty. Trade in turn was controlled. In doing so, the result was the growth and development of Japan’s proto-industrial institutions that would eventually allow for rapid modernization.

And so proto-industrialization occurred in Japan. During the Tokugawa period (1600s-1868) the nation transformed and experienced revolutionary levels of growth and development. Standards of living changed as cities and villages became intertwined into more networked markets. Despite all of these laudable accomplishments, what exactly constitutes as proto-industrialization? How is it defined and what are characteristics of pre-industrialization? In a broad yet simplistic definition, proto-industrialization can be defined as the movement from subsistence level living towards a lifestyle dictated by mass consumerism. Franklin Mendel postulated that

Pro-industrialization was an identifiable stage in industrialization, characterized by the rapid growth of traditionally organized by market oriented, principally rural industry. It was accompanied by regional specialization, some regions turning to industry and others to commercial agriculture. And it fostered industrialization proper (factory production of foods for national and international markets) by creating “capital accumulation, market connections, entrepreneurial skills, and agricultural progress

The result of this progression is commercialization observed in two specific forms. The first is the decline of regional self-sufficiency as “each region no longer produces all the food and manufactured goods it needs, but has begun to depend on other regions for some of its needs” (Moulder, 31). The second form of commercialization is observed in the decline of local self-sufficiency through the agricultural lifestyle in which peasants no longer produce simply for their own consumption and no longer consume only what they have themselves produced; they are part of a trading network or hierarchy of urban

centers, producing goods that are shipped “upward” to the higher urban levels and consuming goods that are produced in or channeled through large urban centers.\textsuperscript{31}

Cities develop not only as urban centers, but also as hubs for local goods to be sold and transported. As history has demonstrated, these features of pro-industrialization defined by Moulder and Mendel were apparent in Japanese society during the Tokugawa period. The following paragraphs will not only illuminate such characteristics that were present during this time, but also demonstrate how the designation of Edo as the capital catalyzed the development of proto-industrialization.

Without a doubt, one of the primary factors that allowed proto-industrialization to be feasible was the organization and bureaucratic structure of the government between the 1600s until 1868. Prior to the Tokugawa period, Japan was a land plagued by incessant wars between local warlords for hundreds of years. Upon his ascension into power, Tokugawa declared the capital of his nation to be Edo and shortly after, implemented the \textit{bakuhans} system, in which a \textit{daimyo} was granted rule over a specific region. At first glance, the \textit{bakuhans} system was, from a structural perspective, almost identical to the feudal castle towns that predominated Japan for most of its history; the addition of Tokugawa as the head and unifying authority of these warlords was greatest structural difference. Furthermore, \textit{daimyos} were given relatively high levels of independence in governing their own provinces, evident through the levying of taxes, the administration of justice and the legislation of laws.\textsuperscript{32} From this perspective, there appear to be no distinct changes at all, relative to the centuries prior to Tokugawa rule. However, careful analysis demonstrates subtle differences that allowed significant economic growth to be possible.

Upon declaring Edo as his new capital, Tokugawa strategically implemented the \textit{sankin kotai} system, one that “required the \textit{daimyo} to install their families in residences at the capital and to divide their time between the capital and their domains.”\textsuperscript{33} This forced the \textit{daimyo} to prostrate themselves to the Shogunate’s rule as their families, in a manner of speaking, were held hostages. Tokugawa even went further to control the marriages of his subjects in an attempt to establish familial ties and squelch potential sources of rebellion. Together, these aspects controlled and insured the cooperation of the \textit{daimyo} with their new lord. Furthermore, it becomes clear through the implementation of these edicts that Tokugawa sought to control his subjects from his domain and castle in his newly declared capital; the reorganization of government and the subjugation of the \textit{daimyo} allowed Tokugawa to control Japan. Thus, Edo became the center of the nation as it not only housed the ruling families, but also opened high levels of consumerism and demand for this new economically dependent population. Rozman attributes “the system of alternate residence ranks as the single greatest accomplishment of Japanese leaders precisely because it built on the already considerable scale of urban and commercial development to accelerate the mobilization of

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, 31-32.

\textsuperscript{32} The \textit{daimyos} were able to exercise their own discretion with regard to the legislation and execution of laws in their region so long as they did not conflict with Tokugawa’s decrees.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, 82.
resources at both national and local levels. The establishment of Edo as the capital would, in turn, transform and revolutionize Japanese society more than ever before.

And so centralization of Edo, along with its subsequent growth during Tokugawa rule, was impetus to the commercialization of agriculture and the manufacturing of goods in order to meet the demands of the city. Prior to his ascension, Edo was a small and prolific fishing town. However over time it was “transformed from a small town into vast city of over a million. Over half the population was composed of the families of the Tokugawa rulers, the daimyo, and their retainers; the remainder consisted of artisans and merchants. Obviously, such a population was unable to sustain a self-sufficient lifestyle. To meet the high levels of demand, agriculture efficiency and productivity, along with the manufacturing of goods, increased in order to supply the consumerist attitudes in Edo. Thus, Edo’s significance epitomizes Moulder’s notion of a dependent population that was unable to provide for itself through the production of its own goods and crops. The following excerpt epitomizes its role in being the center of economic change within the nation:

During the seventeenth century Edo’s special significance for overall urban growth in Japan stemmed above all from new patterns of elite migration associated with sankin kotai system of alternate residence from the continually rising demand for goods and revenues to meet the responsibilities commensurate with each elite position with the city’s finely stratified population.... Daimyo transformed their castle cities to support new mobilization of local resources to meet expenses in Edo. Centralization in Edo spurred increased accumulation and production also in Osaka and Kyoto and in smaller cities, reaching eventually the local commercial nexus subordinate to castle cities

And so, the once independent provinces in Japan became intertwined with one another, as economic dependency, as well as consumerism demanded the establishment of trade between these regions. Out of this necessity came the development of specialized regions that focused on one industry, rather than multiple ones to sustain themselves. Large cities such as Osaka and Kyoto became hubs in which local a substantial amount of goods would be gathered, sold and shipped to Edo. Agriculture, in turn, proliferated during this time period due to the needs of those residing within capital as well as the growing populations of other major cities. Thus, it becomes clear that the economic needs of Edo stimulated the development the nation. Much of the origins of proto-industrialization can be thereby attributed to reorganization of the government and more importantly, the establishment of Edo as the capital. In doing so, the non-productive population residing in the capital became a rapid source of change in Japan through a “rapid increase in demand, caused by the sudden urbanization of much of Japan’s upper class at the outset of the Tokugawa regime. The nation, in turn, developed. Growth and increase in standard of living spread from Edo into other cities as well as rural areas.

Away from the urban cities and within the rural regions of Japan, agricultural efficiency as well as productivity increased substantially during this period of time. Much of this was due to the

---

35 Moulder, Japan, China and the Modern World Economy, 82.
37 Moulder, Japan, China and the Modern World Economy, 82.
increased demand from the economically dependent urban centers in Japan; at the same time, agricultural technology improved, which also gave way to commercialization as well as capital accumulation.\textsuperscript{38} And so the lifestyle of farmers changed drastically, as many of them turned to commercialized farming in order to provide for themselves. This emphasizes one of the many aspects that characterizes proto-industrialization as farmers began shift from subsistence level farming towards commercialization as well as specialization. Evidence of this change is highlighted by the agriculturally focused regions of Japan, such as the Bizen province in which over "80 per cent of the population was engaged in agriculture in 1707; even at the end of the Tokugawa period, Bizen was overwhelmingly rural."\textsuperscript{39} At the same time, the emergence of other forms of agriculture also emphasized the growing proto-industrial sectors. Cotton became an increasing lucrative crop, one in which many regions sought to capitalize and base their lives around, as exemplified by the regions of Kojima, Kamimichi, and Oku.\textsuperscript{40} Ultimately, Hanley attributes and notes how the "development of cotton cultivation and the commercialization of agriculture fostered the emergence of a cotton textile industry as a handicraft enterprise in the home."\textsuperscript{41} And so, Japan experienced levels of diversification with regard to regional industries due to the growing Japanese consumerist market. Families shifted from subsistence level farming towards more lucrative and commercialized means in order to better sustain themselves.

At the same time farmers began to invest in new industries in order to provide for their families during seasonal periods in which there was no harvest. The structure of individual farming units also encouraged the expansion of industries as "family farming was essential to the integration of farming and other occupations, since it was by the discipline and sentiment of the family that nonagricultural earnings, often the product of highly individual skills and work way from the farm, were captured for the benefit of the farmer."\textsuperscript{42} And so began the investment in other forms of capital during this period of time as it became clear that "rural Japan shared in dynamism with respect to population growth [especially with regards to Edo], to commercial specialization, and to social differentiation in the seventeenth century."\textsuperscript{43} Thus began the development and proliferation of nonagricultural related industries as well as the foundations for specialization. Evidence of this is observed in the varied sources of incomes of districts within the Yamaguchi prefecture in southwest Japan. Smith provides how the incomes of some districts were overwhelmingly rooted in agricultural profits, while others were based on nonagricultural related goods:

About three-quarters of income in Ohana and Kamitafuse came from farming, but less than one-quarter in Murotsu, Befu, and Sone. Despite these differences, most districts earned a substantial amount of income from nonagricultural production, but they earned it in notably varied ways. Industry accounted for the largest single share of income in Saga, Hirao, and Sone; trade contributed more than all other work combined in Murotsu. Wage

\textsuperscript{38} Smith, \textit{Native Sources of Japanese Industrialization}, 51.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}, 629.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}, 629.
\textsuperscript{42} Smith, \textit{Native Sources of Japanese Industrialization}, 84.
\textsuperscript{43} Rozman, "Edo’s Importance in the Changing Tokugawa Society," 98.
remittances were a significant source of income in Usanagi, Ogori, and Okuni, earnings from transport in Befu and Okuni. Based on this excerpt, it becomes clear how commercialization changed the way in which many individuals chose to orient their lifestyles. As sources of income gradually changed, new occupations developed. No longer were these families focusing on subsistence level farming. Rather, a division of labor became apparent, which signifies the development (or even the foundations) of specialization. And this manner, proto-industrialization is again exemplified by the change in self-subsistence towards a greater perspective of the network of interregional economic relations. In short, “market consciousness, active participation in rural trade and handicraft production, and integration into regional market systems characterized the economic activities of many villagers by the end of the Tokugawa period and provided a head start on both human capital and capital stock, which would be essential to the post-1868 experience of modern economic growth in Japan.” Families sought to capitalize on these changes in order to maximize profit. In doing so, they left behind the tradition of regional as well as individual self-sufficiency and entered the network of economic and interregional dependency that had begun to permeate all of Japan.

Beyond this change in market orientation (from self towards commercialization), the family structure of the rural community began to transform as well. While some families sought other industries to sustain themselves seasonally, others hunted for work in nearby cities. The occupations in which these individuals participated included the production of sugar, salt, tea, oil, sericulture, textile industries, as well as alcohol and the production of wax. Studies have demonstrated how “men and women who left their districts to work outside for a year or more regularly sent their earnings home” in order to supply the family with a means to survive. In fact, some would claim that “more and more peasants were neglecting farming to spend additional time at by-employsments because the latter were more lucrative and physically less taxing.” As a result, a mobile labor force of sorts was formed. Migration towards major cities (especially Edo), as exemplified in the following excerpt, became another opportunity for individuals to earn an easier (relative to farming) and high paying income through participation in other industries:

While the number of individuals moving in and out of Edo each year totaled some tens of thousands, a much larger number, certainly reaching into the millions, participated in the production, transportation, and exchange of goods bound for Edo. Indirectly nearly everyone in Japan contributed in some way to the sizable han revenues and the lively national commerce which supported new habits of consumption in Edo. In turn, behavior and attitudes reflected the decreasing self-sufficiency and growing outside orientation.

44 Smith, Native Sources of Japanese Industrialization, 87.
46 Smith, Native Sources of Japanese Industrialization, 93.
47 Ibid., 85.
48 Ibid., 91.
Changing family patterns resulting from popular aspirations for a higher living standard most likely closely corresponded to the commercialization of rural life.\(^{49}\)

Again, the notion that Edo as well as urbanization of the upper class stimulated the economy is apparent, as these migrant workers sought industries that were directly involved in production, transportation and exchange of goods going into Edo. Participation in such fields provided substantially easier work and also added another source of income during off seasons of agriculture. Much of this can be attributed to the increased efficiency and productivity of farms. On the other hand, the notion of dependent cities with growing consumerist attitudes also promoted the opportunity of alternate sources of income through migration. Ultimately, these proto-industrially induced features were based on the relocation of the nation’s capital to Edo.

As time progressed, the foundations of proto-industrialization that Japan had developed during this period of sakoku would prove to be the primary factors in propelling Japan into modernity. Sakoku provided and allowed for the inflow of economically beneficial ideas, goods, techniques as well as peoples. At the same time, Japan would also benefit from its economic relations with other nations, as it too exported a substantial quantity of crops and goods to its neighbors. Sakoku not only protected the political interests of the daimyo, but also prevented the establishment of foreign policies or ideas that could have easily undermined and destroyed the initially fragile state the Tokugawa had conquered. While sakoku provided economic benefits to the nation of Japan, it also was an attempt on the bakufu’s part to earn the recognition of its neighboring countries as the legitimate ruler of Japan. Due to the mixed successes of its diplomatic relations with China, Japan, Ryukyus and the Dutch, Japan thereby shifted its focus from obtaining foreign recognition towards internal developments that would justify its legitimacy. The first step towards this was not only through the self-bestowed title of “Great Prince of Japan”, but also evident through the relocation of the capital to Edo. Ultimately, these two actions can be characterized as a shift away from a Sino-centrically oriented diplomatic policy that had dominated Asia for centuries. Japan’s reluctance to establish equal diplomatic relations with China marked its newfound independence that did not revolve around the Middle Kingdom, but rather around the interests and policies of an exclusively Japanese approach towards development.

Much of the economic as well as societal developments occurred as a response to the designation of Edo as the new capital of Japan. The consolidation of the large populations of non productive workers (officials, daimyos, artisans, merchants, etc) and the implementation of the sankin kotai system created extremely high levels of demand that forced the rural areas and nearby cities to change. To capitalize on this new market, the lifestyles of farmers changed drastically, which ultimately laid the foundations for proto-industrial sectors. No longer was agriculture the exclusive way to earn money for peasants in Japan. Rather, a diversification of occupations became available through the advancement of agricultural technologies as well as the need to fulfill other industries that the cities demanded, or that the farmers deemed as more lucrative than farming. Thus came about the shift from subsistence level farming to commercialized agriculture and industries. Evidence of “increased commercial agriculture, handicraft production, and trade all run counter to the image of a static society in rural Japan. Most villages were integrated into local marketing networks and many were tied into one of the large regional networks focusing on

\(^{49}\) Rozman, “Edo’s Importance in the Changing Tokugawa Society,” 105.
Osaka, Kyoto, Edo or the local castle town... The image of self-sufficient villages with subsistence levels of living conflicts with evidence on market responsive cropping patterns and new sources of non-agricultural income. In short, this newfound economic orientation towards Edo marked the development and existence of proto-industrial sectors within Japan. On the regional level, castle cities that the daimyo ruled became hubs for collecting revenues to send towards Edo. In major cities, farmers as well as merchants from nearby locales would travel to sell their goods in which a substantial quantity would go directly to appease the highly marketable population in Edo.

And so, it becomes clear that Tokugawa era was a period of growth in which Japan developed many of its industries that would eventually lead to its modernization in the late 19th century. Traditional views of this period of time portray the Japanese economy as stagnated and backwards due to the restrictive environment that sakoku imposed. However, history suggests that sakoku was extremely beneficial for the development of Japan and its proto-industrial sectors. The Tokugawa Shogunate’s shift from exogenously derived sovereignty towards an endogenous one allowed the nation to focus on internal developments. Because of its strong economic foundations during the Tokugawa era, Japan would rapidly industrialize during the Meiji at a faster rate than the Western world; the rapid economic growth of the Meiji period (1868-1912) was a continuation of trends visible during the Tokugawa period. What specific features within Japanese society allowed it to modernize so quickly? Although this essay does not exemplify nor highlight any of these possibilities, it does raise this new question for future scholars to debate upon.

---

51 Ibid., 575.
Foreign Influence and the Transformation of Early Modern Japan

YAYORI TAKANO

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 is known as one of the great turning points in Japanese history. An event unique to Japan, it was the Meiji Restoration that set Japan apart developmentally from its Asian neighbors. However, to fully understand the nature of the Restoration and how it occurred, examination of the preceding years is necessary. We can thus say the nineteenth century, or more specifically, the years from 1853 to 1868, identified as the bakumatsu, were a watershed in the history of Japan. The bakumatsu, whose characters give it the literal meaning “end of the bakufu,” was the transition period from the Edo period to the new Meiji era. It was during this time that Japanese political thought changed radically, shaking up the entire nation. After two hundred years of seclusion, the Japanese finally made the decision to end its sakoku foreign policy. Central authority in Japan underwent a huge transition as the power of the Tokugawa bakufu, the governing body of the Edo period, slowly deteriorated, and the foundation for the new Meiji government emerged. While other Eastern nations fell further behind Western powers in the changing world, Japan strode forward, maintaining its sovereignty and quickly catching up to the other major foreign powers.

Over the years, historians have studied and analyzed the complexities of these years and their implications repeatedly. Interpretational differences regarding the significance of the Meiji Restoration, as well as differences of emphasis, or even fact, have given rise to many scholarly debates. The biggest controversy, however, surrounds the causes of the Restoration. As one historian states, “it is primarily in the assigning of causes and motives that the most obvious weaknesses of the various approaches to the Restoration history have been revealed.”

I address several questions in this essay that such historians have approached: understanding that Japan’s seclusion policy proved successful for two hundred years, why did the nation suddenly feel the need to change its policies? How did Japanese political ideology make its transition from isolation and “expelling the barbarians” to opening its ports to foreigners? Were the Japanese driven by internal factors, such as their political structure and ailing economy? Or were they driven by external forces and foreign influence? And even further, to what extent did foreign powers influence the Japanese?

Early narrative historians attribute various causes – ranging from weakness of the Tokugawa bakufu to the overbearing strength of Western nations to rivalry between feudal lords within Japan – to the Restoration and Japan’s transformation. However, their approach is often criticized for being too fragmented, and fraught with unexplained causes. Recent historians have taken a more general approach, attempting to find broader causes for the Restoration. These include economic historians, who view the Restoration as a result of the deterioration of the
feudal economy and the rise of Japanese capitalism, and political historians, who study the motives of political leaders during the period.¹

In this essay, I take on more of a world historian approach, and seek to identify the causation of Japan’s transformation from a closed, feudal society to a modern state during the *bakumatsu* period. I examine the interesting nature of foreign relations within Japan not just during the *bakumatsu* period, but also during its two hundred years of seclusion. I argue that even during the Tokugawa hegemony, during which Japan was thought to be secluded from the rest of the world, the Japanese did maintain contact with other foreign nations, and that such communication with other nations did have a role in Japan’s reason for change. Having analyzed the relationships between Japan and other nations, I argue that increasing foreign presence and foreign persistence to open Japanese ports were the underlying factor in Japan’s rapid change during the nineteenth century. Though foreign nations approached Japan in an attempt to open its ports for various trade and naval purposes, these pressures had other implications for the Japanese. The foreign nations not only had direct influence in opening Japanese ports, but also instilled fear on the Japanese that spurred their modernization. During the Edo period, Japan was unified under the Tokugawa *bakufu* and its desire to preserve its sovereignty after years of civil wars during the Sengoku period. However, as contact with foreign nations increased, the Japanese grew divided regarding how to best maintain national sovereignty. Such political and ideological divide challenged and thus weakened Tokugawa rule, setting up the foundation for the new Meiji government. Though it is undeniable that Japan also faced significant domestic issues, I argue that the growing foreign presence was ultimately responsible for pushing Japan to its transformation. As foreign nations began to approach Eastern shores more frequently, the Japanese grew increasingly aware of their lagging position in the changing world. Foreign, and I do not only mean Western, pressure challenging Japanese national sovereignty and independence pushed Japan to pursue intense modernization and industrialization, and thus led to Japan becoming the leading nation of the East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Following the Portuguese discovery of Japan in 1543, under Japan’s first great unifier, Oda Nobunaga, trade with Western nations initially flourished in Japan. Contact with foreign powers also led to the introduction of Christianity into Japanese society. However, hostility towards foreigners grew as Oda’s successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, came to power. The arrival of Spanish Franciscan and Dominican monks introduced an element of national rivalry between factions, and Japanese leaders began to feel that it could lead to eventual military conquest by Spain or Portugal, pushing Toyotomi to pursue a persecution of all Catholics until his death. After Toyotomi’s rule came the third great unifier of Japan, Tokugawa Ieyasu, also the first leader and founder of the Tokugawa shogunate of Japan that ruled from 1600 until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Tokugawa rulers, like Toyotomi, grew skeptical of Portuguese and Spanish intentions for Japan, and felt that the entry of Christianity brought corruption to their nation. In the early 1600’s, Tokugawa leaders decided to implement a restrictive policy on Japanese presence abroad and foreign presence in Japan known as the *sakoku* foreign policy, which essentially sealed Japan off from the rest of the world. No Japanese could travel abroad or return to Japan, and apart from the

Dutch trading post on the small island of Deshima off of Nagasaki, Japan had no official trade relations with any Western nation.  

Sakoku, which literally means “closed country,” thus implies the idea of total isolation from foreign contact and was used to justify Japan’s rejection of the West. Driven by the Tokugawa shogunate’s desire for sovereignty, political stability, and most of all national unity, foreign influences thought to endanger Japan’s peace were expelled. However, it is important to note that ties were not severed with all nations, as the term would seem to suggest. Japan maintained friendly diplomatic relations with Korea throughout their centuries of seclusion, as well as commercial relations with both China and the Ryukyus. Furthermore, not only did contact with other Asian nations continue, but Japan also communicated with the likes of Russia and the Netherlands during this time. While contact was limited, it had significant impact on Japan’s modernization and added to later pressures from other foreign nations seeking to open Japan’s ports.

The Dutch approach to maintaining a relationship with Japan differed from that of every other European nation, and resulted in their trade monopoly with the Japanese. The Dutch complied with all Japanese orders, and were thus officially allowed to reside in Japan, though under close monitoring. The Dutch, furthermore, were able to escape the anti-Christian sentiment of the bakufu by displaying their loyalty by means of attacking a Christian rebels’ castle. Dutch relations with Japan during a majority of Tokugawa rule were strictly commercial. The Dutch in Japan were simply agents of the Dutch United East India Company, and did not exchange official diplomatic correspondence with the shogunate. Though the Dutch followed strict Japanese orders to maintain friendly trade relations, even they eventually forecasted Japan’s necessity to end its isolationist foreign policy. The Dutch realized quickly after Great Britain’s victory over Imperial China that it was inevitable that some other Western power would eventually open Japan’s ports. Seeing that they could benefit from being part of the process, in 1844, the Dutch made their first attempt to go beyond trade relations and establish friendly relations of diplomatic nature with Japan by sending a warship with a personal letter from the king along with various gifts to the shogun. Though the bakufu denied the request, as the Japanese felt that establishing such relations would weaken Tokugawa authority, the expedition made apparent to the Japanese that the influence of foreign expansion was slowly, but undeniably making its way to Japan.

The Dutch, as the only European nation to maintain consistent official relations with Japan during its period of isolation, also supported other foreign powers in their quest to open Japan by providing the United States with the maps necessary for their expedition to Japan. However, the Dutch were not overly enthusiastic about the American expedition. They feared that

---

3 William McOmie, The Opening of Japan, 1853-1855: a Comparative Study of the American, British, Dutch and Russian Naval Expeditions to Compel the Tokugawa Shogunate to Conclude Treaties and Open Ports to Their Ships (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2006).
6 Ibid., 31-36.
if the Americans were joined by the British and were similarly rejected by the Japanese just the way they had been, the outcome could potentially result in warlike conflict and with it Dutch complicity against their will. The Dutch strove for a foreign policy of neutrality and non-interference to keep their status with Japan.7

Dutch influence on Japan extended far beyond trade. To the Japanese, the Dutch were sources of information from the outside world, and provided them with Western knowledge. Dutch studies were of great interest to Japanese scholars, and were superior to those of the Chinese in various fields. Despite its relative isolation, the Japanese were able to keep up with Western nations in terms of technology by consistently studying translations of Dutch books on science, medicine, geography, and armaments. To respond effectively to growing pressures from foreign powers, the Japanese found it necessary to increase and improve their development of weaponry, and had no alternative method but to do so through Dutch learning. Utilizing Dutch instruction and supervision, the Japanese were able to build establish successful iron, shipbuilding, and armaments industries. Japan, however, suffered from a weak economy at the time and thus lacked the finances necessary to fund such developments. Therefore, the Dutch provided the Japanese with great assistance not only in terms of technology, but financially as well.8

Dutch influence also had significant impact on Japanese political ideology at the time. Japanese scholars of Dutch studies, called rangakusha, understood the superiority of Western military science and knowledge, and were well aware of the weak position of Japan relative to the rest of the world at the time. These scholars, including the Lord of Satsuma, Shimazu Nariakira, acknowledged Japan’s need to change in order to maintain its sovereignty from other nations. Dutch, or Western, studies were most highly developed in two locations in Japan, one of them being the Satsuma region.9 The Satsuma Domain, as one of the largest feudal domains during Tokugawa Japan, played a major role in the overthrow of the Tokugawa hegemony and the Meiji Restoration. While the Satsuma clan was a nationalist group, advocating expulsion of foreigners from Japan, they were also huge advocates for, and perhaps could even be considered the leaders of, Japan’s modernization.10

Though Japan was technically secluded from all Western nations besides the Dutch, Russo-Japanese communication did exist during Tokugawa rule. In terms of Japanese foreign policy, Russia was set apart from other Western nations in its geographic proximity to Japan. While many assume that the United States and the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry were the main cause for the opening of Japan, the influence of Russia has become better understood in recent years. According to the National Archives in Tokyo, Russia, and not the Dutch or the Americans, was the first foreign country to request Japan to open its borders to increased trade.11 Russian contact with Japan officially began in 1792 with Russia’s first government sponsored naval expedition to Japan to seek potential commercial benefits. The Russians hoped to develop a relationship with

---

7 Ibid., 65-69.
8 Thomas C. Smith, "The Introduction of Western Industry to Japan During the Last Years of the Tokugawa Period," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 8, no. 2 (1948): 130-52.
9 Ibid., 133-34.
11 McOmie, The Opening of Japan, 477.
the Japanese for the sake of their remote settlements in Siberia, which they felt could benefit from its close distance to Japan. Despite the purely economic nature of Russia’s intentions for Japan, geographic proximity, Russia’s military and technological strength had different implications for Japan. Russian military superiority was clearly evident to Japan, and the Japanese felt that they were constantly at risk regarding attacks from the north.\footnote{Ibid., 4-19.}

Despite the geographic proximity of the two nations, the strict Japanese isolationist policy and Japanese fear of its giant neighbor made trade relations between Russia and Japan difficult. Though the Russians proposed several trade pacts, the Japanese were unwilling to open their nation to foreign merchants. For example, the Russians suggested utilizing the Kurils, a chain of islands north of Hokkaido, as a gateway to contact and trade with Japan, however, the Japanese declined. The Kuril Islands, furthermore, were a sensitive subject to both sides. The existence of a Russian colony on these islands aroused fear within Japan regarding a potential invasion by the Russians. To legitimize Japanese sovereignty to the Russians and out of fear, the shogunate extended its rule to the Kuril Islands. They declared the area Japanese territory, thus leading to the elimination of all Russians from the area.\footnote{Ibid., 4-19.} Regardless of territorial and commercial disagreements, however, Japan and Russia maintained relatively friendly relations through most of the eighteenth century.

However, as western expansion in the East grew, the Russians grew less complacent, and increased pressure on the Japanese to open their borders. In 1802, the Imperial Russian government made another attempt to enter Japan and convince it to open its borders for commercial purposes. Led by a distinguished envoy named Nikolai Rezanov to represent the Emperor, Russia also hoped to explore the islands and sea between Siberia and Japan. Though the Japanese rejected Russia’s proposals, Japanese awareness of changing times was increasing. The Russian mission proved to be the start of a change in Japanese mentality towards foreign relations. While the Japanese denied Russian requests out of fear that the Russians would bring Christianity back into Japan, it was becoming increasingly evident to both sides that the seclusion policy would not last forever.\footnote{Ibid., 10-14.}

Following the mission, the Russians attacked Japanese settlements in the north with the intention of intimidating the Japanese. Though the raids did not result in an immediate opening of Japanese ports, they certainly caught the bakufu’s attention and confirmed the Japanese as a weakening state. Understanding the strength of the Russian nation and taking into consideration the distance between the two nations, the need for modernization of Japanese military technology and tactics became even more evident. Despite debates regarding how to deal with the situation, Japanese leaders all agreed that the proximity and military might of Russia could potentially be devastating to Japan, and that contact with the Russians needed to be handled with care to avoid giving them any legitimate reason to attack.\footnote{Ibid., 14-18.} Russia’s decision to engage in joint efforts with other Western nations in the early 1850s instilled even greater fear on Japan.
Pressure exerted on the Japanese to reassess its foreign policies and modernize rapidly was not only from the West. The decisive British victory over China during the Opium War of 1839 to 1842 served as a symbol of the rapidly rising West and equally rapidly declining East. Such devastating defeat of an Eastern power as large as China implied the worst for other Asian nations in years to come, affirming the infiltration and increasing dominance of Western powers across the world. China, who the Japanese had previously looked up to as the center of the world, had not only lost the war to the British, but had also been forced to sign treaties favorable to foreign powers that opened various Chinese trading ports and gave Britain full sovereignty of the island of Hong Kong, indicating the unequal nature of Eastern and Western powers.

Though China and Japan did not have formal diplomatic ties during the Tokugawa hegemony, relations between the two nations differed from those between Japan and any other foreign power. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Japanese perceived itself to be part of a unique world in which China sat at the center as the world’s greatest power. Compared to China, Japan was small and weak, and Japanese leaders looked to the Chinese for their inspiration. Japan’s implementation of its sakoku foreign policy reflected foreign policy in China at the time—it had been the Chinese who had initially limited contact with foreign nations, and forbade its nationals from travelling abroad. Furthermore, Tokugawa thinkers believed China and Japan to be closely interdependent, utilizing the metaphor “teeth and lips” to describe their relationship. The metaphor implied that in terms of strategy, Western powers would conquer the weaker Japanese nation first, and then move forward to take on the more powerful China. The outcome of the Opium War radically changed such a perception.

Britain’s conquest of China sent three distinct messages to the Japanese: the clear superiority of Western military, technological, and tactical strength, the importance of national unity, and the need to rethink Japan’s foreign policies. British victory and dominance over China validated the military and technological superiority of the West, highlighting the vulnerability of Japan in its current state. Until the Chinese defeat, the Japanese had not fully comprehended the power of Western nations. Moreover, the interdependence of China and Japan implied that an attack on China could be a threat to Japanese sovereignty as well. The Opium War, to the Japanese, essentially showcased the military and technological superiority of Western nations, further confirming Japan’s need to industrialize.

In an account of the First Opium War by Japanese scholar Mineta Fuko, he makes the conclusion that “England did not win the war as much as China lost it.” China’s defeat during the war can be attributed to the weak state of China’s corrupt political regime, which led to a lack of national unity and patriotism. British victory cannot be attributed to military superiority, as China had not stood up to Western pressures, and its relatively complacent in its trade with the West. China had not stood up to Western pressures,

---

18 Wakabayashi, "Opium, Expulsion, Sovereignty," 10-12.
and allowed the West to exploit them through unequal treaties. The lack of Chinese trade control allowed opium trafficking by Western nations, which is attributed to China’s severe poverty and weakness during this time. The Japanese, in addition to catching up to foreign nations technologically, had to keep China’s error of complacency in mind. Understanding China’s fate, many Japanese thinkers and leaders became highly aware of their need to strengthen and unify their nation, as well as their need to maintain a strong front against foreign pressures. The Japanese, having learned from China’s fate, acknowledged the need to manage and control its contact with foreign nations. The Japanese realized that they would have to establish their own conditions in terms of trade with foreign nations, and control foreigners admitted into Japan. Trade would also need to be supervised very strictly, mainly to prevent opium trafficking. China’s lessons for Japan thus strengthened the nation as a whole. Though there was an ideological rivalry between Japanese leaders, all were unified under the desire to preserve national sovereignty and avoid conquest by Western nations, as was the case with China.21

China’s downfall challenged the isolationist foreign policy that Japan had maintained for so long. Japan, having drawn its seclusion policy from Chinese example, realized that it needed to undergo a revision if it wanted to avoid a fate similar to that of China.22 The Japanese, however, were not in ideological or political agreement when it came to foreign policy. Japanese attitudes toward foreign policy during the bakumatsu were divided into a rivalry of two policies – that of kaikoku, or “open the country,” and that of joi, or “expel the barbarians.”23 However, the downfall of China made it apparent to even the strongest supporters of the isolationist policy that the development of trade and diplomatic relations with foreign nations was inevitable. The question then became that of how to effectively manage such relations for Japan to maintain its sovereignty and territorial jurisdiction. Both sides saw that if Japan could properly control its foreign relations, it could potentially benefit from foreign trade and maintain its autonomy.

Despite the heavy influence other foreign nations on Japan, no nation went quite as far as the Americans did in changing Japanese history. It was not until the American expeditions to Japan that the Japanese made its first legitimate step towards ending its seclusion policy. Furthermore, American pressure to open Japan’s ports affirmed Japan’s need to modernize and spurred the bakumatsu. The aggressive nature and military superiority of the Americans intimidated Japan into signing their first official treaty with a foreign state since the beginning of Tokugawa rule.

In 1852, Commodore Matthew Perry led an American expedition to Japan carrying a letter from the President that requested negotiation with the Japanese government for the benefit of American ships and their expeditions in the Pacific. At this time, the Americans were in need of ports on a trans-Pacific steamship line, and sought to establish a depot for coal on one of the Japanese islands. Such demands were not unheard of on the Japanese side, as other Western nations had attempted to achieve similar objectives. However, Commodore Perry’s expedition differed from that of others in that regardless of the friendly nature of such requests, it utilized a

21 Ibid., 16-24.
strategy of intimidation. The Americans displayed their military force through steamships and guns, and were open to utilizing force in order to achieve their goals, coining the term “black ships” in Japan to symbolize the threat of Western technological superiority. Important to the American success was also in that they assured the Japanese that they had no religious intent, and that while they were a “Western nation,” that they were separate from the European nations. Moreover, the United States sought to establish commercial relations with the Japanese to advance themselves in their commercial rivalry with the British.24

The American expedition of Commodore Perry shook Japanese history. The Americans took a firm and bold approach, entering Edo bay, which no foreign power had been able to do previously. By challenging Tokugawa rule, the Americans made it clear to the Japanese that the dominance of Western nations and its threat to Japanese sovereignty was growing even larger. Commodore Perry’s visit thus made it clear to the bakufu that their foreign policy of over two hundred years could no longer be upheld. Continued refusal to open their ports outside Nagasaki would clearly be impossible, and perhaps even dangerous considering the military superiority of the Americans and their willingness to utilize it in achieving their goals. American might highlighted the weakness of the bakufu, and made the lagging nature of Japanese society very evident. Furthermore, the American display of military superiority emphasized the precarious financial condition that Japan was in. Due to Japan’s disorganization political order and dwindling economy, the Japanese lacked the funds and resources necessary to build any sort of defense. In addition, Japanese responses to the American expedition only added fuel to the existing debates regarding Japan’s foreign policy. While many, understanding the potential implications of American willingness to utilize their military and technological strength, felt that Japan needed to honor American demands, Others, however, felt that responding to American requests would only serve to confirm Japan’s relative weakness, and would challenge national prestige and independence.25

It was Commodore Perry’s second visit, however, that affirmed the rapidly approaching end of Japan’s seclusion policy. In 1854, the Americans bore increased pressure for the Japanese to open its ports and develop friendly relations with them. In addition, they brought gifts for the emperor, such as a miniature locomotive that served as the foundation for the development of Japanese trains in later years, and a telegraph system. Such gifts would later play a key role in Japan’s industrialization and modernization during the Meiji period. Most importantly, however, was the American desire for an official treaty between the two nations. The expedition resulted in the development of the Treaty of Peace and Amity between the two nations, which opened the ports of Hakodate and Shimoda to the United States for trade purposes, officially established friendly relations, and specified that the Japanese would assist shipwrecked American vessels. The treaty also included a “most favored nation” clause, in which the United States would be granted any of the same privileges that Japan may grant to other foreign nations. Despite the unequal nature of the conditions, the Japanese agreed to it out of fear of conflict. American intimidation played the main role in Japan’s cooperation with the United States.26

26 Ibid., 229-275.
However, the treaty was highly controversial, contributing to the growing conflict between Japanese political ideologies. Those opposed to the treaty argued that Japan had been too passive in its agreement with the treaty. Many argued that the treaty’s conditions, which clearly favored the United States, confirmed Japan’s relative weakness, and challenged Japanese sovereignty. Such a treaty, they stated, could open the gates for other unequal treaties. Others, however, countered the argument, stating that had they rejected the treaty, the Americans would wage a war on Japan, a war which the Japanese had little to no chance of winning. They argued that Japanese defeat by the Americans would have worse implications, and would ultimately strip Japan of its autonomy and independence.27

Regardless of the controversy surrounding the American treaty, however, Tokugawa bakufu’s agreement to it symbolized Japan’s willingness to move towards an open country policy and the beginning of the establishment of relations between Japan and other foreign nations. The treaty was only the first of many to follow with various nations. Upon hearing of the American success in its entry to Japan and the development of a relationship with Japan, other foreign nations followed suit, demanding that Japan open its ports. However, compliance with the American treaty also had negative implications for the bakufu. The general population perceived the shogunate’s compromise to unequal treaties as a sign that the shogunate could no longer effectively guard national interest. Resentment for the Tokugawa hegemony grew throughout Japan, further weakening the existing political structure. Japan’s move towards a more open policy, therefore, asserted the need for a new political order to maintain control over the nation.28

Foreign pressures exerted on Japan from various nations only heightened the Japanese need to undergo political, social, and economic transformation. Western powers scrambled to establish ties with the Japanese in order to gain trade and naval advantage over rival states, increasing the frequency and intensity of foreign visits to Japan. Foreign powers refused to give up – they approached the likes of the Ryukyu islands and Okinawa in an attempt to intimidate the Japanese.29 In an act of fear and self-defense, and out of necessity, Japan began to prepare itself militarily in the case of conflict with foreign nations. The race to open Japan, therefore, spurred Japan’s industrialization and modernization. In addition, as foreign pressures on Japan increased, so did the perceived threat to Japanese sovereignty. The Japanese needed to revisit not only its sakoku foreign policy, but its fundamental political structure as well. Japan, in order to preserve its autonomy and independence, needed to grow stronger, and thus undergo significant restructuring and change.

As mentioned previously, Japanese political thought was divided into two separate factions regarding foreign policy and the future of the nation. Those who advocated kaikoku felt the need to embrace and learn from foreign powers, arguing that refusal of foreign demands was impossible and that such relations could be a benefit for Japan. Joi advocates initially argued otherwise, stating that succumbing to foreign pressures would have a negative effect on Japan in terms of sovereignty, society, and the economy. They felt that opening the country to other nations would provide

29 McOmie, The Opening of Japan, 73-88
foreigners with the opportunity to corrupt and divide Japan the way that it did with the introduction of Christianity centuries before. However, in reality, the two sides were more similar than they were different because both policies strove for the same end result. Both sides of political and ideological debates at this time were founded on the same ideas: to maintain Japan’s sovereignty and reinstate political stability. The rivalry between the two factions stemmed from the ways in which the two felt Japan should reach its goal. W.G. Beasley, a major pioneer in English studies of Japanese history, in his Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy, 1853-1868 views the kaikoku-joji rivalry as “a contest between a rational, responsible, progressive attempt to adjust to a new, inevitable, and implicitly preferable world of Western-style state relations and an irrational ‘xenophobic’ impulse to hold back the tide of historical progress.”

Kaikoku advocates argued that in order for Japan to maintain its autonomy and independence, it would need to look outward and embrace Western ways and teachings. By opening the nation to foreign influence, they maintained, Japan would be able to strengthen their nation and catch up to leading Western states. Sakoku advocates, on the other hand, argued that Japan should focus its efforts internally, and strengthen the nation from within. However, supporters of joi were not entirely opposed to Japan establishing foreign relations. Well aware of the changing international environment, joi advocates understood that foreign contact was unavoidable. They argued, however, that Japan should dictate the terms of trade and other relations, and that the Japanese should not submit to unequal Western treaties; hence their resentment towards the Tokugawa bakufu.

The divide between those for opening Japanese ports and those for expulsion of the barbarians was more concerned with the stability and sovereignty of Japan. It was more or less a divide between advocates of peace and advocates of war, respectively. Kaikoku advocates were not necessarily enthusiastic about opening the ports, but felt that in order to maintain peace, responding to foreign demands would be necessary. However, they were not entirely supportive of letting foreigners into Japan. Abe Masahiro, the bakufu leader who accepted Commodore Perry’s treaty, argued that taking into consideration the increasing pressures from foreign nations to open Japan’s ports and Japan’s lack of military strength, accommodation to foreign powers would give Japan time to prepare defensively. On the other hand, rejection, he stated, would invite war and, without question, Japanese defeat. Kaikoku thinkers agreed with the joi party that ideally, Japan should engage in trade abroad, rather than foreigners coming to Japan to trade. Proponents of joi, on the other hand, were not opposed to war. They felt that while it would be preferable to avoid war, the Japanese should still stand up to foreign powers and should not fear the use of force. By doing so, the Japanese, joi supporters argued, would be able to avoid unequal treaties or conditions set by Western nations, and therefore would be able to maintain its autonomy. Joi supporters suggested strengthening the nation internally through economic and military recovery and recognition of the domestic needs of the country by unifying the nation under the emperor. Though Tokugawa Nariaki, leader of the joi party, was clearly xenophobic in some aspects, his main concern was not as much expelling barbarians but to preserve Japan’s

---

30 Totman, “From Sakoku to Kaikoku,” 1-17.
31 “Opium, Expulsion, Sovereignty,” 17-23
32 “From Sakoku to Kaikoku,” 1-17

91
sovereignty by making clear to the Americans that “force would be met by force.” Nariaki was in fact quite interested in foreign military technology, expressing curiosity regarding Western guns and cannons and advocating learning from them.

However, over the bakumatsu period, the joi party grew smaller as the general consensus in Japan moved from that of joi to kaikoku. Having observed the military superiority of various Western nations, most significant being the Americans and their “black ships,” the risks of war and its outcomes were far too high. Under the conditions of the ailing Japanese economy, the shogunate fell short on resources and financial means and could not build the defenses sufficient for a war with the Western powers. China’s unfortunate fate in its war with Great Britain made it clear that in the case of war with the Americans, in which Japan would not even have a chance at victory. Realistically speaking, conflict with the Americans, or any other Western nation for that matter, would destroy any hope of Japanese sovereignty. In order to avoid war and maintain peace, the Japanese had to make concessions. The move towards a kaikoku policy, therefore, was more a tactical move by Japan in their strategy to defend its independence.

Also contributing to the decline of the joi party were the violent outbursts of overzealous advocates. In the early 1860s, radical joi advocates of the Satsuma and Choshu clans took matters into their own hands in order to prevent the increasing foreign contact. The Satsuma and Choshu conducted several bombardments on foreigners in Japan, humiliating and discrediting the bakufu. The bakufu, in response, punished many of these advocates, executing some and forcing the others to withdraw from political participation. The most significant of these bombardments is the Namamugi incident, in which the Satsuma clan attacked several foreign nationals, resulting in a war waged by the British against the Satsuma clan. The British had a decisive victory, and managed to impress the Satsuma party, who strayed from their joi ideology to seek trade relations with Great Britain as a result.

The decline of the Tokugawa hegemony and necessity for the implementation of a new order strengthened the kaikoku policy. Increased contact with foreigners brought about significant expansion in the amount of information and intelligence available about other nations having successfully pursued such ideas. The Japanese found that the powerful nature of European states and their ability to expand were a result of their political and social structure. New knowledge about the great monarchies of France, Great Britain, and Russia validated the bakufu’s idea of imperial rule. By looking outward and learning from Western powers, the Japanese could strengthen their nation and legitimize their role in the world.

The critical condition of domestic issues in Tokugawa Japan were major factors in Japan’s need to change and hence the cause of the Meiji Restoration. The latter years of the Edo period were characterized by the failing Tokugawa shogunate, a necessity for economic and social reorganization, increasing financial troubles, and domestic conflict between feudal clans. The Tokugawa bakuhansystem, which was meant to maintain a power balance between the shogunate,

33 McOmie, The Opening of Japan, 99.
34 Totman, “From Sakoku to Kaikoku,” 1-17.
36 Totman, “From Sakoku to Kaikoku,” 17-18.
the imperial court, and regional domains, broke down over time. Though the Tokugawa shogunate initially solidified control and maintained a political hegemony over its domains by keeping them weak, this later served to be one of its fundamental weaknesses. Financial impoverishment plagued the nation, and as the shogunate continued to implement prohibitive and prejudiced restrictions on the domains to preserve control, domain resentment towards the bakufu increased. Lack of financial reserves, furthermore, restricted political and military actions for both the shogunate and the domains.37 Furthermore, emotional distress across the nation was evident, and resulted in a massive outburst directed toward the bakufu in the 1860s.38

However, it was the increasing unavoidable contact with foreign countries that truly aggravated the Tokugawa bakufu and its weakening condition. The threat of foreign powers only served to further highlight the weaknesses of the Tokugawa hegemony. The growing frequency of foreign warships and vessels approaching Japanese shores confirmed that times were changing and both Japan’s sovereignty and independence were being threatened. Advanced western nations expanding rapidly were exercising their power across the globe, and their shadows were looming over Japan. Foreign military superiority accentuated the problem of Japan’s weak economic health, as the Japanese lacked the financial means to invest in military technologies and sciences to develop a strong defense. Pressure from various Western nations, namely the Dutch, Russia, and the United States urged the unstable Japan to revisit its foreign and political policies. Additionally, the defeat of the Chinese by Great Britain served as a lesson to Japan, indicating their need to respond quickly to changes in its external environment if it wanted to maintain remain autonomous. As the shogunate attempted to respond to pressure regarding its policy, economy, and military, the political structure grew increasingly fragile compounded with mounting pressure from foreign countries, Japan’s need to modernize became progressively obvious.

Had there been no contact and no pressure from foreign nations, the Japanese would not have approached its modernization nearly as rapidly as it did. The rapid transformation of Japanese ideologies during the bakumatsu can be attributed not only to the direct pressures exerted on Japan to open its ports, but to the sheer presence of the foreign powers. Contact, even if by force, with foreign states made Japan aware of its declining position in the world. Awareness, in combination with Japan’s desire to maintain national sovereignty and jurisdiction, drove Japan to pursue radical modernization. Foreign emphasis on the fundamental weaknesses and issues in the Tokugawa regime and its policies made the necessity for Japanese change clear. Pressures from Western powers to end the seclusion policy radically changed Japanese political ideology, which led to the decline of the bakufu, paving the way for a new form of government. Increased knowledge and information of foreign nations, in combination with the need for a new governing body, led to decision to implement a centralized bureaucratic authority, or monarchy, and consequently, the Meiji Restoration.

Chinese Culturalism: The Underlying Factor

MARK KNAPP

Introduction

With unification in 221 B.C., China has an expansive history spanning over two millennia, longer than any other modern state. Why then, if China has existed and thrived for so long, does the world function more or less on a Western model? What allowed the West to dictate the structure from which the world was to form? Why not China? These questions make up the colossal debate in which scholars are presently engaged: Revisionist model vs. Standard model. The Revisionist model challenges the accepted Eurocentric view on world history supported under the Standard model. Furthermore, even under the revisionist model, the focus generally is towards why Europe pulled ahead, rather than why China did not. Many scholars argue that China and Europe developed comparably in regards to quality of life, economic growth, and other indicators of development up until the Great Divergence around 1800. Most revisionists try to target a specific event or reason that Europe prevailed over China, but I believe the causation cannot be constrained to a single factor. Rather, the reason the Chinese fell short of Europe, in regards to global influence and power, is its long history of extreme culturalism, with a foundation in Confucianism, a term on which I will expound.

Scholar James Townsend uses the term “culturalism” to explain why China remained distinct from the rest of the world. Townsend suggests that two elements contributed to the construction of culturalism in China. The first is the belief that China is the only true civilization and, while other countries may be military threats, in reality they are not considered rivals, because they could never rule China. Second, strict political adherence to Confucian principles must be followed by leaders and their subjects, for these principles are of universal value. Because China considered itself supreme and viewed no other nation-state as its equal or even a threat and enforced a strong adherence to Confucian culture, the xenophobic spirit found in the region is considered “culturalism” rather than “nationalism.” The difference between nationalism and culturalism lay in the roots from which they grew. Nationalism is based on the modern concept of a nation-state, whereas culturalism finds its roots in a common cultural heritage and beliefs. In “Chinese Nationalism,” James Townsend explains that the allegiance to China by Chinese citizens was based on a shared common culture rather than an allegiance to a nation-state. Therefore, because of its emphasis on cultural heritage and lack of allegiance to a nation-state, China had no reason or desire to alter their cultural traditions in order to strengthen the state. Although culturalism allowed China to stay essentially isolated and flourish across the centuries, it also provided the roots for the eventual divergence between China and the West. By looking at China

---

4 Ibid., 98.
and the West comparatively from 1500-1800, I hope to understand the effect that culturalism had on issues such as economics and politics, specifically foreign policy and trade, and how those may have led towards the great divergence.

**Historiography**

Scholars studying the revisionist theory often disagree about the development of China in comparison to the West. Although it is difficult to know exactly how the two entities compared, I find confidence in the case presented by revisionists, who argue that China and the West advanced comparably, and at times China led the race, up until 1800. While this is a complex debate and constantly evolving, I have chosen to base my argument on the evidence I find most plausible. I know that, when looking at this revisionist debate, there are a multitude of factors to consider, including sheer luck. However, I believe that by looking at a few main factors and trends, we are able to understand the impact that culturalism had on the economic and political development of China in comparison to Europe, mainly England. By analyzing the economical and political trends of Confucian China, it is possible to understand how these two societies developed so similarly yet also so distinctly from each other. Furthermore, when assessing the effect of culturalism on these trends, it is important to understand that culturalism manifested itself and influenced different factors in different ways. Therefore, some issues were greatly affected by culturalism, while others developed outside of the realm it affected.

My argument is primarily influenced by and structured around the studies of three different scholars. I developed my hypothesis based on the revisionist question, and the following three scholars, along with many others, directed my focus. Kenneth Pomeranz has conducted research and written extensively on the revisionist issue, focusing on what exactly caused, in his words, the Great Divergence. Pomeranz believes that coal and colonies were the primary causes of the Great Divergence, both lending favor to the West. While I do not believe that coal and colonies were the sole reasons behind the Great Divergence, I found his approach to studying the Great Divergence interesting. After further research, I decided that although his conclusions are valid, there was a much larger factor influencing this whole question of finding the source of the Great Divergence. James Townsend’s “Chinese Nationalism” provided the term around which my argument revolves. Townsend contends that the culturalism in China greatly affected the country’s course of action across the centuries. John Fairbanks, a renowned sinologist, further supported this theory, expounding on how this “culturalism” affected Chinese foreign policy throughout its history. My argument therefore has its foundation in the research and hypotheses of Townsend and Fairbanks, among others, and I apply this information in my attempt to understand and reevaluate Pomeranz’s Great Divergence. Although neither the study of culturalism, nor of the Great Divergence is new, by evaluating the two and seeing the relationship between them, I arrived at my hypothesis that culturalism was the most prevalent factor in the formation of Chinese foreign policy and trade that led to the eventual Great Divergence.
Background

As I’ve stated, China has a long imperial history, dating back to its unification in 221 B.C. During this imperial history, there is evidence of “patriotism, sense of racial distinctness and xenophobia, and commitments to imperial institutions and ruling dynasties." Confucian doctrine influenced the Emperors of the Han dynasty (202 B.C. – 220 A.D.) and continued to be a crucial part of society for two millennia. The dynasties utilized the Confucian teaching of the “primacy of social order, hierarchical status, and duty of obedience” in order to more effectively rule from the top down. The classical education under Confucian orthodoxy sought to indoctrinate China’s literate elites into a philosophical-religious ethnocentrism that Fairbanks declares to be much deeper than “nationalism.” Townsend would describe this as culturalism. It is clear that Confucian principles had a profound effect on the Chinese institutions and society, resulting in a national-culturalism that is roughly equivalent “to an amalgam of modern Europe’s notion of Christianity.” This adherence to Confucianism strengthened the tendencies of culturalism and had great influence over Chinese actions.

Economic Implications

Although I mention the isolation of China numerous times in this paper, it is important to understand that it is not such a simple matter to address. A complex history of dynasties and their respective opinions on foreign trade and policies make the topic of Chinese isolation particularly difficult to study. Even though the time focus on this paper is 1500-1800, the years before still have a great impact on the overall question of just how isolated China was? There is proof that the Chinese were trading directly with the Arabs, Persians, and Indians during the Song Dynasty (960-1271). This was an economically prosperous time, when the government withdrew some restrictions on international trade. Authors Swaine and Tellis contend that the Song dynasty’s sea trade was a result of being pushed out of North China by nomads and therefore losing land tax revenue. To make up for those losses, the Song dynasty turned to levying taxes on seaborne trade. The Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) also reopened China to foreign trade. During this time, the government provided merchants with ships and capital necessary to conduct trade, but would take 70 percent of profits, leaving the merchants only 30 percent. However, although China did conduct trade with more distant countries, the trading primarily involved Asian nations that fell under the “imperial tributary system,” a group of Asian countries that frequented trade with China.

5 Ibid., 98.
6 Fairbanks, “China’s Foreign Policy...”, 457.
7 Ibid., 460.
8 Ibid., 460.
12 Ibid., 255.
For 28 years at the beginning of the 15th Century, China ruled the seas. During this age of exploration, Chinese eunuch admiral Zheng He led 7 expeditions of naval envoys larger and more sophisticated than any ships to come for hundreds of years. During these journeys, the Chinese traveled as far as the east coast of Africa and an unprecedented amount of knowledge of medicine, cultures, and geography flowed into China. China had half of the world in its grip, and the other half easily obtainable if it had so desired. China had the potential to be the great colonizing power of the world, but after the last voyage the emperor forbade all overseas travel, destroyed the massive fleets, and jolted China into a period of relative isolation in comparison to Europe. Although the three decades of global exploration opened up China to the world temporarily, it could not contend with a tendency of isolation rooted in cultural supremacy that so often guided the dynasties of China. The Ming authorities (1368-1644) banned overseas trade soon afterwards, and this autarkic policy continued to be pushed for centuries. The Manchu (Qing) (1644-1911) authorities opened China up considerably more so than the Ming dynasty, but by no means to the extent of Western Europe. Levanthes contends that “at the heart of the matter is China’s view of itself and its position in the world...the opening and closing of doors. The sullen refuge in isolation.” In this context, Chinese isolation can be understood as a political manifestation of China’s “universal kingship”, a term used by Fairbanks to explain China’s extreme culturalism and self-prescribed superiority, a tool to push a sinocentric worldview.

Now aware of the cultural history and its implications on society, we can understand how this culturalism may have hindered China and had a decisive role in the Great Divergence. In The Great Divergence, Kenneth Pomeranz explores the period of 1500-1800, in an attempt to understand what led to the Great Divergence, regarding per capita sustained economic growth between the East and the West. Pomeranz primarily looks at England and the Yangze River Delta region in China. Both of these locations were the most developed and comparable to the East and the West. Pomeranz contends that Europe and China developed similarly during those three centuries in regards to quality of life, economic growth, functioning institutions, established manufacturing, proto-industrial production, and other factors that may have explained disparities between the two. By showing that all of these factors were comparable Pomeranz is able to narrow down the possible reasons for this divergence. Pomeranz proposes that coal and colonies were the force behind Europe’s triumph. While I do not disagree that these two things certainly helped Europe, I believe that there is certainly much more to the story. While the access to coal may indeed have been a very influential factor, Chinese culturalism does not really play a part in that. England simply had luck on their side. Coalmines were more easily accessible and a rainy climate demanded the development of an efficient and effective pump, thus propelling the improvement of steam technology. However, in Pomeranz’s argument about the effect of the colonies, culturalism certainly plays a role.

Before we explore how the colonies affected the East/West balance from 1500-1800, we must first look at why Europe had colonies and China did not. Although Europe certainly had the geographic advantage of being significantly closer to the Americas, we have already seen that if

---

China had so desired, they possessed the naval technology to have potentially reached the Americas nearly a century before the Europeans. But, as we know, China destroyed that fleet and did not explore the Americas. The decision to destroy the fleet and remain relatively isolated has roots in the culturalism that ruled China. Since the origins of China are so deeply rooted in a sense of cultural supremacy, China found no reason to go explore the world and deal with less cultured peoples. Fairbanks believes that “the striking fact is not that China’s universal kingship originally claimed to be superior, but that this claim could have been thoroughly institutionalized and preserved as the official myth of the states for more than two thousand years.”

So, while Europeans were exploring in the name of religion or their nation, China remained self-sufficient and land-based.

Before exploring the implications that these colonies had on Europe, an overview of Chinese trade during this period is necessary in order to compare the two. There is much debate on just how open or closed China was during the years leading up to the Nanking Treaty in 1842. The Nanking Treaty came at the end of the First Opium War between China and Britain. It resulted in the opening of more ports for trade, beyond Canton, and gave the West an economically privileged position with China. However, it is clear that China did not completely isolate itself from the world market up to this point. Sizable increases in the exports of porcelain, tea, and silk to foreign markets, including Europe, during this time clearly suggest that traders managed to get around the imperial trade restrictions. And, ironically, it was these exports that helped pay for the massive quantities of silver brought from mines in the Americas, thus empowering Europe even further.

Due to the anti-foreign trade laws, the majority of this trade occurred via smugglers. From the 16th Century until the mid 17th Century, smugglers conducted essentially all of China’s overseas trade. Furthermore, these smugglers functioned in a very complex system that seemed quite unenforceable by the Chinese authorities. Although much private trading and smuggling occurred during this period, it is also clear that the anti-trade laws did have some effect. This is evident through the economic boom that occurred in 1684 after the ban on coastal trade was lifted. Furthermore, the Nanking treaty in 1842 still marked a “breakthrough for the history of silk trade.” These two events indicate that China’s anti-trade laws did, to some extent, isolate China from the world economic market.

In his article “Is there an East Asia Development Path? Long-term Comparisons, Constraints, and Continuities,” Pomeranz simplifies the Great Divergence by saying that it was shaped by an “exceptional resource bonanza.” He then explains that while European growth was primarily resource-intensive based, the East Asian growth was based on different social ideas. During this time the world’s population grew very fast and Western Europe was able to combat the

---

16 Fairbanks, “China’s Foreign Policy…”, 456
18 O’Rourke, “After Columbus…”, 440.
20 Ibid., 270.
21 O’Rourke, “After Colombus…”, 441.
23 Ibid., 322.
looming Malthusian limits through a number of mechanisms. England, in particular, was able to combat this resource restraint through new technology, resources from the New World, favorable global conjectures, and increased coal production. The New World allowed a surge of imports of the four Malthusian necessities: food, fiber, building materials, and fuel. The colonies opened up a new set of plentiful resources and allowed Europe to import raw materials cheaply, in order to create and export manufactured goods at a great profit, the two sides working and feeding off of each other, leading to greater growth. The New World became a new periphery for Europe, but since the labor was slave based the profits and resource exploitation was even greater. China, lacking colonies of endless resources and slave-power, approached economic production a bit differently.

Import substitution occurs when a population decides to forego importing a good and instead manufacture it domestically. Pomeranz considers this a natural economic process that occurs in peripheries when people switch to new types of production and decide what goods to produce themselves. This can only occur in peripheries that, more or less, have free labor and a lack of economic restrictions. Therefore, since the labor in the New World was primarily slave-based, Europe did not employ import substitution and continued to use the raw goods from the periphery to manufacture goods in the core. Import substitution can lead to reduced raw material surpluses for export and reduced demand for imported manufacturers. This occurred in much of China in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, when import substitution became common, particularly in the manufacturing of textiles. Whereas slaves provided a constant stream of raw goods from the periphery to Europe, China’s peasants were considerably freer than their European counterparts, both the slaves in the Americas and the peasants at home, and therefore engaged in import substitution, leading to an internal cyclical trade cycle. By using their own resources, rather than exporting and importing, China stunted its per capita income growth and contributed to the plateau and decline of what had been, by far, the largest long-distance trade regime in the world.

What caused this move toward import substitution? Although Pomeranz believes that this is a naturally occurring in free peripheries, he acknowledges that the issue is more complex than that. He suggests that population growth and environmental strains may explain why so much of the population switched to manufacturing goods. However, there is certainly more to the story than that. Women in China often had their “womanliness” measured by embroidery skills, something that culturally had been present since late Imperial China. In China, especially compared to Europe during this time, cultural objections to women working outside the house were strong, and men were encouraged to have wives who focused on production based out of home. However, although women were encouraged to stay home, there was not a stigma on their

24 Ibid., 325.
25 Ibid., 331.
26 Pomeranz, The Great Divergence, 267.
27 Ibid., 243.
28 Ibid., 245.
29 Pomeranz, “Is There…”, 331.
30 Ibid., 331.
31 Pomeranz, The Great Divergence, 246.
32 Ibid., 97.
engagement in market-oriented production. In fact, a Chinese woman could make more money from selling her textiles than an unskilled male laborer. Jack Goldstone offers a theory about how the cultural tendency for women to stay home affected the economy. Goldstone contends that China did not develop the factories that Europe did, because of the “self-exploitation” of women. This made the building of factories less attractive than it would have been if there were not the competition from the homemade goods from the women. He believes the difference in Europe was that women could leave home to work in the factories and elsewhere. Although China was comparable to Europe in factors of available capital and technological inventiveness, Goldstone contends that this cultural norm prevented the buildings of factories.

Although there is certainly more to explaining the adoption of import substitution and economic divergence than the culture of women in the workplace, it is evident that it certainly had an effect. Also, we must not forget that during the time when China adopted import substitution, the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century (up to Nanking Treaty), China was ruled by the Qing dynasty that had laws in place banning private seaborne trade. Both of these factors played a significant role in creating economic divides between the West and China leading up to the great divergence. These factors are rooted in a strong cultural tradition that the Chinese were unwilling to let go of. By analyzing the economic history, it is extremely evident that this notion of culturalism greatly affected China’s economic development, especially in regards to trade and internal cultural norms about work. To further strengthen my argument about the profound effect of culturalism in China, I will examine the political implications it had.

Political Implications

The economic tendencies and trends in China clearly are a result of the broader workings of the government and institutions of China. Beyond the economy, Chinese culturalism played a pivotal role in the establishment of foreign policy and military action. The Confucian values that so often guided the emperor’s decisions were also fundamental in the creation of foreign policy beyond the economic realm.

Throughout the history of China, the protection and preservation of the heartland remained the central focal point in which foreign policy was constructed. Authors Swain and Tellis argue that the two primary tenets of Chinese foreign policy were the securing of the periphery and the consolidation of internal control, both a result of cultural factors. They contend that China was a “highly homogeneous culture and civilization incorporating a common set of political and social beliefs about the organizational and procedural requirements for stability, peace, and prosperity in an often chaos-prone environment.” These beliefs are centered on the notion of China as a “harmony-oriented Confucian-legalist order enforced by a single imperial bureaucracy.” 90% percent of Chinese are descendents of the Han and this highly homogeneous culture, through the humanistic and ethical doctrine of Confucianism, developed a society with a common set of social beliefs. These social beliefs are rooted in Confucian values and the belief in

34 Ibid., 100.
35 Ibid., 103.
36 Swain and Tellis, Interpreting China’s..., 40.
37 Ibid., 22.
universal kingship. The foreign policies that China implemented in the realm of external security all revolved around the defense of the Chinese “cultural, geographic, and sociopolitical heartland.”

To ensure the security of the heartland, control of the periphery was key. Beyond the strategic importance of the area, it was considered important to assert a “hierarchical, sinocentric, Confucian international order.” Swaine and Tellis believe that, throughout history, the attempts to consolidate the periphery by China served three purposes:

1. Eliminate threats to routes or Chinese frontiers
2. Intimidate or persuade neighboring tribes, kingdoms, or states along the periphery to accept China’s suzerainty and thereby acknowledge China’s sinocentric worldview.
3. To reinforce to the Chinese the authority of the regime and the leader.

All three of these purposes have a foundation in the culturalism rooted in Confucianism that played such a profound effect on the formation of foreign policy. The periphery, however, was not easy to control and China’s history tells endless accounts of wars and skirmishes with the marauding tribes and kingdoms on the edge of the heartland. This need to consolidate the periphery molded much of China’s foreign policy.

It is clear that foreign policy in China changed as time progressed. However, most dynasties sought some sort of control over the periphery. The amount of control depended on the current state of internal affairs and sense of unification among the Chinese. During the beginning stages of a new regime, all effort was focused at eliminating “remaining domestic resistance and reestablishing internal order and control.” It was only after domestic order had been achieved that the regime would attempt to consolidate the periphery to its historical maximum limits through direct control. Although this is not an unusual thing for new governments to do anywhere in the world, the reasoning behind it makes China unique. Other nations may do this for political and economic reasons; China did it to preserve a culture that, in their eyes, was far more important than dealing with the outside world. This highlights how much importance the dynasties placed on having a homogeneous society. Preserving Chinese culture internally had priority over protecting it from the outside. Considering the primary motivation for consolidating the periphery was to protect the Chinese culture, internal order and unity had to be present. Fairbanks also offers his insight about the major traditions of Chinese foreign policy, giving three major tenets around which policy was based. 1) Strategic primacy of Inner Asia; 2) Diseesteem of Sea Power; 3) the doctrine of Chinese superiority, Universal Kingship. Fairbanks’ insight mirrors that of Swaine and Tellis and further supports the argument that control of the periphery and protection of a supreme culture remained the top priority in Chinese foreign policy.
Since the motivation for having control in the periphery primarily centered around preservation and protection, the Chinese actions primarily were defensive in nature. These military actions against the periphery served to eliminate threats and reestablish regime authority and rarely did these actions go beyond the known periphery. Granted, like with the economy, exceptions did occur, the two biggest being actions taken during the Yuan and Qing dynasties. The defensive nature of these actions can be seen in the fact that the majority of military campaigns occurred during the first third of a regime’s power and rarely extended beyond the periphery. This is evidence that regimes placed high priority at first securing the heartland, through consolidating the periphery, but generally did not go beyond those defensive actions. Records show that the times when the action was more offensive were instances when the Chinese needed to regain lost territories to foreigners. So we now must ask why China, a colossal country that had perhaps the largest standing army in the world, primarily was defensive rather than offensive militarily.

Confucian advisors played a significant role in the shaping of foreign policies of Chinese dynasties. Confucian advisors and bureaucrats often resisted, for selfish and broader ethical reasons, the times in Chinese history when military actions went beyond securing the periphery and heartland. However, when a threat was perceived to the Confucian culture of China, it incited defensive reactions from the advisors. These advisors argued that involvement, diplomatically and economically, with foreign barbarians would “weaken the Confucian-legalist order, demoralize the population, create economic disruption and lawlessness, and thereby threaten domestic tranquility, harmony, and stability.” Essentially, Confucian advisors believed in strong border control and limited diplomatic and economic contact with foreigners, and often shaped their foreign policy after that. Although Confucian strategy was generally defensive, offensive measures were occasionally supported. In Confucianism, one is supposed to bring about change by virtue. The emperor was considered to possess virtue, and so the actions dictated by the emperor were inherently virtuous. Confucian advisors may have played the role of moral and ethical guidance, but they did not want to see their heartland be taken over by barbarians and understood that action, if not excessive or prolonged, had a place in foreign policy.

Conclusion

In his article “The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy,” Mark Mancall offers five assumptions that the Chinese had about the world order:

1) The traditional world is hierarchical, not egalitarian
2) China’s centrality in the world order was a function of her civilization and virtue, particularly the virtue of China’s ruler
3) World Hierarchy was universal. There were no other hierarchies and no other sources of power on the international scene
4) National power was the reflection of national virtue

43 Ibid., 37.
44 Ibid., 47.
45 Ibid., 50.
46 Ibid., 32.
47 Ibid., 58.
5) International society was the extension of internal society. Boundaries were cultural.\textsuperscript{48}

I believe that these five assumptions accurately summarize the foundation for the basic foreign economic and political policies adopted by imperial China.

At the center of all issues laid the idea that Chinese culture was supreme, and this extreme culturalism guided many of the actions taken by China over the centuries. The revisionist debate has presented a multitude of reasons and cases in order to explain the great divergence. While specific instances may give proof to specific events leading up to the great divergence, there needs to be further analysis of the effect that culture played in causing these events. I believe the causation for the events, trends, and reasons that lead to the Great Divergence lie in the culturalism that ruled China for two millennia.

The Level of Elite Cohesiveness in East Asia Modernization

XUESHAN YU

Introduction

1860 was a kink even Emperor Xianfeng, handy with all his Machiavellian tactics, couldn’t iron out. The Eight-Power Allied force was at gate, pointing their made-in-Europe canons towards the Qing spears, the grassroots Taiping Rebellion down south, and Russia, flared by its newly expansionary ambition, up in the northern borders. Yet, self-exiled from the Forbidden City (and symbolically the political center), Emperor Xianfeng comforted himself that he would at least outperform Prince Gong once again, after the succession fight decades before. By passing the sovereign power to Prince Gong and his faction, the Emperor passed them curses as well. Situations in due time left Prince Gong no other strategy but to surrender to the alleged enemies. This political landslide in China shocked the Tokugawa rulers in Japan, and they soon realized that the same ferments disintegrating China—domestic uprisings and colonial penetrations, would very likely one day inflict Japan. As a result, pro-west liberalism mushroomed across Satcho and Choshu ports while the Shogun clamped down to enhance domestic control—within years this antagonism would crystallize into a civil war and dismantle the Tokugawa reign. As if overnight these two Asian empires collapsed and it was up to the oligarchs in the Imperial Court (or roju, the shogunate cabinet before 1868) to rescue the empires. Later, as China and Japan modernized in the 1860s, it was also up to these oligarchs to initiate modernization.

Oligarchies in nature, Japan and China rely on the elite consensus in policy making, and my paper will compare and contrast how the level of elite cohesiveness decides the fate the Self-Strengthening Movements (1861-1894) in China and Meiji Restoration (1868-1894) in Japan before 1895. Japan triumphed China in the 1895 War. The most deadly weapons had not been gun powder, canons or fleets as the Chinese reform director, Li Hongzhang, once perceived after Japan's victory. Rather, under the Meiji leaders' collective efforts, a united elite class, with byproducts such as modern nationalism, coordinated social mobilization and governing coherency, was the secret recipe for success.

My paper will examine the level of elite cohesiveness during Japan's Meiji Restoration and China's Self-strengthening Movement before the first Sino-Japan War, and how it decides the final outcomes of these modernization efforts. The first section revisits some misconceptions contributing to the lags of such study in the China-Japan case. The second section delves into the elite structure, origins and powers in China and Japan, explaining how these patterns influence the level of elite cohesiveness. The third section assesses the impacts of elite fragmentation or unity on modernization efforts.
Revisiting Former Studies

Scholars sweat on supply-side analysis on China’s and Russia's modernizations, attributing the Sino-Nippon differences to reform measures, domestic institutions and even political cultures. In contrast, demand-side researches on interests groups or the policy-making process are minimal. This unequal treatment is understandable, since neither China nor Japan knew subject citizens or participatory constituencies before their first wave of modernization. Therefore, the demand side seems derive only from governing elites’ monotonous demands, rather than contending societal interests. In closer examination, however, different elite groups in 1860s China and Japan: the imperial, local and village elites shattered the monotony, leading to a fragmented governance of alliance-building and back-stabbing as all groups sought to self-serving. Consequently, stake players reached an institutional equilibrium in which they made policies on a consensus-base. Thus the demand-side analysis will help us to look into the policy making process ignored but puzzling the supply-side oriented scholars. Two other misunderstandings explain the dearth of researches. For one thing, the Europeans’ engagement in Southeast Asia as doorway to China and Japan had facilitated a Eurocentric approach towards Asia as a whole. Since the local population, disseminated across sedated agricultural plantations, rice paddies and mining lots, and alienated by struggles for maritime supremacy (mainly through piracy), were interests-driven profit seekers rather than hard-line nationalists, they didn’t rise to protest the colonial reign. Craving for power and wealth, the local elites soon fell to vassal administrators for the colonial masters. Achieving success in the South East Asia, colonialists carried the patterns of cooperating with the governing class to their quest for East Asia. Naturally, the interactions between the colonial powers and the governing elites thus became the most meaningful relations as seen by western scholars. However, by taking a revisionist approach, we find that nationalism already prevailed in East Asia, from the evidences of two domestic uprisings during the mid-19th century in China and Japan. Though with different focuses, they share a feature of “ideology fight” against feudal rulers for the countries' future: The Taiping Rebellion (1860-1864) and the Japanese anti-Bakufu (Toubakundo) campaigns (1865-1868).¹

Ethnic Hans initiated the Taiping Rebellion, a nationalist movement against the Qing rule, shouting "expel the barbarians and restore China." "Barbarian" not only expressed a condescending nationalist view on the ethnic Mans, ruling class of Qing, but also a discontent with Qing's signing of a waterfall of unequal treaties and the extra tax levied ensued to pay for the treaties' financial terms. Paradoxically, instead of toppling Man's reign, the Taiping rebellion soothed the rift between Man and Hans since the central government recruited Han officials from Hunan and Anhui provinces to organize the campaigns against the Taiping armies. These officials yielded enormous local autonomy by monopolizing budgetary and personnel issues. Eventually, they would reach the political apex in the late 20th century. Qing itself, though condemned by the Taiping alliances as a traitor, had higher aspirations than being a colonial courier: Qing was very upset to lose the hegemony status and become a subordinate of western powers, thus it had all incentives to restore domestic order and seek for development. Emperors in late imperial periods (Tongzhi, Guang Xu) initiated reforms adapting to western technologies while resisted political

and ideological penetrations. However, foreign powers, mainly Britain and France, opposed these reforms in fear that the strengthening of China would lessen the colonial economies' comparative advantages. Yet, internal chaos of China's political system played a more disruptive role, as reforms were halted by factional fights. Foreign powers might enjoy political windfalls from fragmented politics, but they never directly controlled Qing, nor had the Qing court downgraded itself to a colonial vassal.

Japan's Anti-Bakufu Campaigns, with its slogan “Revere the emperor and repulse the foreigners”, blazed nationalism in the same intensity. At first the daimyos directed forces against the immediate presence of colonial powers. Later, the Choshu- Satsuma factions, inspired by their prototype capitalist interests, came to realize that Tokugawa's feudal system, Sakoku, which failed to accommodate industrialization systematically, but not the colonial threats, were Japan's major hindrance towards independence and prosperity, and thus they turned against the Tokugawa rule. The “foreigners”, then the British, assisted the daimyos technically and financially in hope that once the Daimyos gain power positions, they would accept Britain into the Japanese markets. The British didn't get what they want, as the Daimyos, once took control of the government, quickly re-establishment of the authority of the Emperor and adopted the parliamentary system -these measures institutionally banished the ruling class, and thus curtailed foreign influences and prepared Japan for reforms. Japan's centrifugal power, the Choshu-Satsuma coalition, as Ward suggests, “behaved as if their main concerns, other than self-interest or local interest, were for the identity and inviolability of their country.”

Despite their nationalist efforts, China and Japan ended up several effective unequal treaties granting foreign powers tariff and extraterritorial privileges by the early 1860s, yet the specific terms in the treaties still need the local governing class to carry out. With such consideration, the colonial powers allied with the powerful in China and Japan to secure the privileges. Operating power politics instead of diplomatic relations revealed that the colonial priority focused on the security of economic extraction. The colonialists didn't have either the incentives or the interests to judge the domestic politics of their colonies. While nouveau riche class as vassals of colonial powers in both countries did exist, as Mai Ban (or deputy trader) in China and some merchant in opened-up ports in Japan, who profited from trading foreign goods, the cooperation of foreign powers and local ones happened at an individual level rather than organization ones in the mid-19th century. We must respect the countries' nationalism, which would either fuel development or halt it with regard to the level of elite cohesiveness.

**Being One of the Elites**

Esherick classifies the Tongzhi Chinese and Meiji Japanese elites into three categories: the imperial elites, the local elites and the village elites. The first two elites cultivate vertical networks to carry out government policies. The imperial elites dominate the central decision-making institutions, as court officials or supervisors sent to localities in China, and as members of the Imperial council, parliament or ministries in Japan. The local elites, versed with local practices and

---

resources, accommodate the central executives by carrying out bureaucratic functions, such as taxation. Village elites, mostly wealthy farmers and emerging merchant classes, are “non-governing” elites. Nevertheless, village elites in China network with local and imperial elites, or even enter into the Chinese meritocracy system through civil examinations. In Japan, Bakumatsu (late-Tokugawa 1853-1867) village elites sustain fief lords, Daimyos and Samurai, and continue to act as regional deputies of the central government later under the Prussian-styled prefect system in the Meiji period.

Elites in China and Japan gain their status through different paths. China’s meritocracy system introduces great social mobility: if a person passes the civil exams, he becomes a scholar official and enters the elite class. In fact, except for members from the royal family, one must gain this state-certified status to enter or remain in the elite class, regardless of wealth and power. Such a system of exogenous configuration of elite status inflicts the Chinese elites a sense of “insecurity”, as the state (usually represented by the emperor) can deny their status at will. This sense of insecurity propels the elites to seek for diversification. While land ownerships buy them entrance ticket to the elite class, land-holding of Chinese elites, much less in the British measurement, is not a major source of income. Elites divert to commercial activities for major income during Ming and Qing times. Military capacities also prove effective in acquiring elite status. However, although these resources confer real power, it does not guarantee one's elite status. To sustain the status, one must enter the civil examination and gain legitimacy from the Emperor, as any other ordinary person. This system manages to eradicate nepotism, promote equity and most importantly, enhance the Confucius rule. In spite of passing the criteria listed above, Chinese elites need to demonstrate their symbolic capital, a combination of morality standard, family tradition, local influences and others invisible capital to receive local recognition of their status. Many elites establish extensive horizontal and vertical networks, or guanxi, to extend their influences and outperform others in socioeconomic competitions.

Within the imperial elites in China, a small group has inherited titles: the Manchuria eight-banner aristocrats, descendents of the eight military factions of the Qing founder, Nurhaci. Often they serve as high officials in the court, and the head of each flagship forms the “Eight-Ministers”, a preponderant power in Qing politics. Such hereditary status reflects the ethnic policies of Qing, in which Han people can’t gain certain ministry or military positions.

Japanese again differed significantly here from China. We examine both the traditional samurai class and the ruling oligarchs here. The original Japanese elite-class, the samurai, derived their title from birth and maintained the status for a lifetime. However, the Confucius doctrine in the Japanese society emphasizes an idiom of Authoritarian Situation Ethic, as Fukuzawa Yukichi explained - the elite status (authoritarian) is justified by the fulfillment of obligations, and for the Samurai class, the obligation to fight. However, since 1800, wars seldom visited Japan, and thus robbed off samurai’s raison d’etre. Rutherford Alcock, an English minister in 1850s Edo, vividly

---

4 Ibid., 306.
5 Ibid., 307.
depicted the scenes in the guardhouses: "generally occupied by boys or superannuated old men, who spend their whole time squatting on their knees and heels and either dozing or smoking the pipe of apathetic idleness." Furthermore, the samurai class was effaced after the cancelation of samurai stipends and later in the 1873 conscription law, which required every male citizen to join the army for at least 3 years. Although small scales of upsurges did occur, the samurai class as a whole was “not future-oriented radicals but backward looking fundamentalists.” This does not mean the samurai class has no remnants or influences in the Meiji revolution. The Bushido, or the ethics of Samurai, emphasizes the self-scrutiny and righteous of behaviors, which serves as a criteria and cultural heritage contributed to the strong sense of public services in the Meiji bureaucracies. Some samurais manage to use the last amount of money issued by the Meiji government before cancelling their stipend, to start entrepreneurship; while others enter the bureaucracies for civil services. However, the samurai class is not major threat or component during the Meiji restoration. This old feudalist-style governorship ceases to create a “single centralized authority” envisioned by Kido.9

The elites who found the modern state of Japan, however, are another group of elites with enormous political powers –the old “aristocrats” ruling class. Thomas Smith describes this group of elites as “disgruntled members of the old ruling class alarmed at the discrepancy between the pretensions of the bakufu and the realities of its power.”10 They are mainly daimyos from wealthy provinces such as Satsuma and Choshu. In the first period of Meiji Japan (1868-1873), the triumvirate, Saigo Takamori, Okubo Toshimichi, and Kido Koin, joined under “a strong sense of unity, joint responsibility, and loyalty to the Throne”11 to form strong leadership for reforms. The Chosu-Satsuma coalition occupied the high arena of Japanese politics for the next forty years until the “Han clique” or Genro succeeded the triumvirate later and into the early 20th century, secured by marriage alliances.12

**Elite Cohesiveness**

The level of elite cohesiveness reflects both the political center's efforts to coordinate social capitals, and the elites' efforts to cooperate with one another. We first look at the centrifugal forces including the imperial power and centralization efforts and then move to intra-elite interactions. We will assess the level of elite cohesion and its impacts on the reform policies, implementation and outcomes. In conclusion, we re-examine the democratic elite theory, and show how the condition of Japan and China may attribute to and expand the theory.

**The Emperor**

In assessing the impact of the Emperor, we must respect both his formal and informal powers. In societies such as China and Japan, Confucius ethics of monarchical absolutism and Neo-
Shintoism concept of “God-emperor” had long ruled the ruling class. Formally, the emperor was regarded as the sole source of power and legitimacy, at least in symbolic meanings. Notably, the informal emperor power of China and Japan differed considerably. In China, Empress Ci Xi united with Prince Gong, the scapegoat we discussed at the beginning, to eradicate the powerful ministerial faction led by Su Shun in the 1861 coup d'état (Xin Qiu Coup d'état). Since then the Empress took imperial power, with the court disseminated into the Empress’ men and the Emperor’s men, each taking lead as time and events pushed onwards. Under such political turbulence, the governing theme turned to maintain the balance of power between factions even at the cost of national interests. Consequently, the most important figure in the political system, whether the Empress or the Emperor, had to align with factions in order to stabilize the regime. This alignment cultivated a set of political cults among court officials in the decades of Ci Xi’s Rule (1861-1908). The central arbitrator could no longer decide the political agenda all alone, but had to rely on consensus building. In Japan, however, while the Japanese emperor enjoyed no real political power, he was also free of Machiavelli politics. As Ward suggests, “the strongly oligarchic nature of Japanese power politics that served to make political authority and social position synonymous had much to do with perpetuating a condition in which a peacemaker possessed of only residual sovereignty continued to be useful.” This “residual sovereignty” of the Japanese Emperor rests mostly in legitimizing the victorious coalition. It is up to political factions themselves to maintain their status by alliance building, plotting and back-stabbing. Thus the Japanese Emperor acts as a moral judge over different issues, rather than a chief executive – this “mediator” role of the Meiji Emperor frees him from vested interests, and thus he can focus on judging the best policies for national interests. Although the emperor commands no coercive power, his symbolic power was highly revered and welcomed by the oligarchs in Japan, as Fukuzawa said:

Viewing the full sweep of his intellectual evolution, the emperor and religion were utilized only as temporary expedients, as crutches to maintain order in a competitive world and order itself was but a precondition for progress toward a rational civilization.

The Chinese emperor accommodates policies to aristocratic maneuvers. As a result, he needs to take the blame once domestic grievance aggregates. The Japanese emperor, in contrary, representing the people and justice in the political system, remains neutral in political fights. The emperor’s power is restrained in symbolic meanings, but this protects him from taking responsibilities once policies fail. This may explain why under the same Confucius ideology, Chinese imperial symbolism would induce hatred and upsurges such as the Taiping Rebellion and Nien campaigns (Shanxi Province) while Japanese imperial symbolism cultivated a strong nationalism and recognized as a “constructive and steadying force in the new era.” When analyzing the elite patterns in China and Japan, we must include the emperor as a main variable in elite cohesion in China, but exclude the emperor in Japan.

---

Centralization

Centralization impacts the elites’ behaviors in central decision making institutions. In China’s case, some argue that Taiping Rebellion is a devolution of central powers to localities, and brings to the local elites an uncontested dominion over social control. Two evidences support this argument. First, expelling the Qing’s low-level bureaucracies, Taiping maintained the local elites to perform basic bureaucratic functions, such as tax collections. Second, the local military units against the rebellion, lacking of government stipend, autonomously financed themselves and recruited personnel’s. A set of regional functioning “empires” with their own political system and social capitals popped up as a result. Local elites thus had the institutional support to gain independence or seize power from the Court, but they didn’t choose to do so. For one thing, the Taiping reign also incorporated non-elites into its Xiangguan (Village officers) system, which disrupted the former configuration of power, shattering old networks and posing great political risks due to inexperienced farmers’ rule. For another, local military units quickly dissolved soon after Qing conquered the Taiping Rebellion capitol, Nanjing.  

The most fundamental reason why Chinese local elites would not easily challenge central rule lies in how the elites gain their status. Different from feudal elites in most empires who derive their status from “unassailable claim over a basic social resources”, namely land, castle or titles in the case of Japan, Chinese elites depend on a set of more flexible yet less secure resources. For the Chinese, only passing the civil examination can officially grant them the elite status, or maintaining their heritage privileges. In other words, without internalizing the Confucius ideology, the elite candidates will not have the chance to rule. Just as Esherick concludes, “The outward pull of the examinations and the bureaucracy and the externally derived status from state-conferred office of degrees directed elite interests toward the center and caused the often-noted circulation between national and local elites” –local Chinese elites don’t stay in their regions but are pulled towards the central government. Besides a wholesale adoption of the Confucius ideology, Chinese elites also need to control other resources in order to meet the entry-level requirements and maintain daily expenses. Landownership has been an essential resource, yet from Ming dynasty on, commercial gains has played increasingly important roles. To decrease risks and increase gains, elites establish quasi joint-venture groups called the “kin organizations”, in which several families with the same surname integrate individual resources for socioeconomic competitions. The evolution of mercantile practices also prompted the local elites to establish horizontal networks with local elites, in which they could gather capital, human resources or information, as well as vertical networks with higher officials, even with some court officials, to pledge for rights for monopoly, cross-regional tariff reductions and other benefits. After all, the local elites cooperate with other partners, the clerical, military and bureaucratic elites in a patronage-client relationship for mutual gains, interests conflicts can be mediated within this network. Even if real split does occur, clients can find other patrons in order to achieve the same goal. Commonly, aware of their precarious status lack of “unassailable” resources, the elites try to

---

16 Zhonglin Peng, Qing Shi Tong Jian (Beijing, 2002).
17 Esherick and Rankin, Chinese Local Elites, 313.
19 Esherick and Rankin, Chinese Local Elites, 314.
accommodate to each other instead of breaking the ties. Since both disruption of the old network and construction of a new one incurs enormous costs. Through these networks, Chinese elites, “arguably the most unified elite in the world”, remains such at least in the hierarchy level.  

A counter-argument states that Qing tried to centralize after the Taiping Rebellion, but failed to do so. Weakened by foreign and domestic threats, the central government no longer had the capacity to ensure policy implementation in every inch of its vast territory. Key variables such as financing, recruitment, and taxation of the central government fell out of standard, which might contribute to such a conclusion. While a weak central government invites localities to seize power, the localities may show their loyalty instead of defecting. Indeed, while farmers’ rebellion rose in the late imperial years (statistic hugely skewed due to Taiping Rebellion), local elites remained pacified. This testifies that the vertical level of elite cohesion remained high. Such autonomy even assisted economic reforms in the Self-Strengthening Movement with the expertise of the local merchant class; more importantly, regional autonomy also raises the predictability of policies independent from the factional fights in the political center.

Unlike China, Japanese elites rely on land ownership. In the Tokugawa era, village heads transfer taxes (often in rice) to Daimyos, and Daimyos pay Samurais they retain. This causes elites to depend on non-elites for life subsistence. Such an interlocking structure helps to constrain Daimyos under the ankinkotai or alternate attendance system: the daimyos stay in Edo for half of the time, spending most revenues on transportation and luxuries and thus with no extra resources for rebellion. Except for the dependency, bureaucratic functions are usually carried out in consensus of local samurais and the village heads. Initially, Meiji Japan couldn’t conduct cohesive and efficient policies in fiefs due to this institutional weakness. Quickly, the Meiji reformers realized the disunity in the hierarchical network and carefully devised a counter-strategy: the prefect system. Kido Koin, one of the Triumvirate in Early Meiji restoration, urged for a Unitarian rule, “There must be one national polity and one sovereign authority...and must not in the slightest degree the yielded to subordinates.” The Meiji leaders in 1871 abolished the fiefs in order to curtail the “parochial political culture” and promoted the “subject political culture”, essential in a “modern state”. The abolishing efforts carefully balanced the interests of the local elites and the governing elites. Quietly, through compromise, the Japanese government implanted local bureaucracies during 1867-1871, by investing heavily in “social terms, in role-coordination structures and functions” well before the 1888 formal introduction of the Prussian

---

20 Ibid., 314.
23 Tsunoda et. al. Source of Japanese Tradition, 141.
model. By 1882, “a new system of taxation, law, law enforcement, education, transportation, communication and public health [was] introduced”, ready for implementation.25

While China might see Japan as a fragmented and weak state before 1871, in the following decade Japan had successfully centralized. It established the Prefect System in the local level to replace the old rule of village heads. The system carefully balanced the stake players, and introduced bureaucratic networks into the localities. China, with a cohesive hierarchy, did not enjoy actual unity of interests as Japan did. Although local elites did not and needed not stand against central ones, their local interests would reach the central policy-making institutions through this paternalistic network. However, as most of the provincial concerns remained regional, the impact of this vertical network was minimal.

Rule of the Game

The policy-making mechanisms of China and Japan deviate from each other. China lacks the institutionalization of power but forges policies mainly through aristocratic system. Usually several officials together bring a proposal to regular court meetings, other officials participate in the discussion, and the Emperor make the final decision. Direct emperor-code is another way to make policies, but often after consultation with officials. This process cultivates the motivation of forming strong factions in order to obtain more pro-voices in court discussion. The policies themselves carry strong vested interests, proposed in exchange of social networks. In Japan, however, policy makings flew the other way, from the low-ranking bureaucrats to central policy makers. Career bureaucrats have no vested interests in the political system and thus bring “a strong spirit of clannishness” to the oligarchy government.26 Usually, an official, normally from the “Dutch Scholars”, a group of scholars proficient with western technology, philosophy and politics by reading books brought in by the Dutch trades, from the low bureaucratic level proposes a policy, and the proposal goes through a chain of higher bureaucratic branches, finally to the oligarchy coalition. Officials can curtail or monitor the policies to avoid endangering their interests along the way, and thus lower officials always subordinate their interests below higher and general interests. This mechanism greatly reduces intra-elite conflicts since the oligarchs’ central role is to discuss and ratify the policies and can deny these policies anytime. This mechanism also reduces the incentives to form patron-client network with court officials, since they themselves cannot introduce policies.

While China enjoyed cohesive hierarchy as well as in the local submissiveness, it faced contending elite groups in the central government. The conservatives, led by Wo Ren, representing the interests of the conservative imperial wings overwhelmed the “Western affairs” faction first led by Prince Gong, and then by Li Hung Zhang in central and Zeng Guofan and others in regional levels. They argued against the Liberals that, as Wo Ren argued that the fundamental of a nation rests in courtesy but not tactics; in spirits but not techniques. Many officials and literati joined this group in proposals to the imperial court to protect their vested interests. Yet another faction blurred the situation. A group of low level bureaucracies from the

26 Tsunoda et. al. Source of Japanese Tradition, 140.
government school (Han Lin Yuan) and Anti-corruption officials (Du Cha Yuan), called Qing Liu party (clear flow clique), who did not have vested interests and was irritated by the social conditions in the late 19th century China, which bore enormous grievance. However, lacking the political resources and access to policy makings compared to the powerful court factions, they did not form a major faction at first. Later, when Empress Ci Xi, uninstalled the Su Shun clique, she turned to feel threatened by the prominent status of Prince Gong. Thus, she intentionally encouraged the rise of the Qing Liu party to contain the power of Yi Xin. She also used the Qing Liu party against regional powers led by Li Hongzhang and Zeng Guofan. The conservative faction led by Wo Ren strongly opposed institutional efforts towards infrastructure and education upgrades, since they regarded these as opposed to the fundamentalist Confucius ideas, in which the rules of forefathers should always be respected. The only leeway was in the military fields, and Li Hongzhang did establish several arsenals. However, the policies of self-strengthening movement, in the 60s military-oriented, 70s and 80s industrial-oriented first from state-entities to joint venture entities between states and the private sector, never escaped a fate of vested interests of generating profits rather than true entrepreneurship. Moreover, the political fluctuation in the central government disrupted the continuity of the policies, which was eventually put to death after the 1894 Sino-Japan War, as the whole fleet of North Sea Navy smashed by the Meiji navy.

Japan, in contrast, celebrated a united elite class. With a dissolved samurai class, and still fledgling merchant class, and local village heads under bureaucratic control, Japan did not have much trouble in maintaining the inter-group elite cohesiveness. Although the seven members of the genro were from different regions, they had strong sense of unity and a shared primary political agenda of gaining independence and later position among the comity of nations, thus they was not drawn into regional preferences, but strived to maintain the Sacho-balance in the cabinet as a whole.27 Although there were “shifts of alignment and misalignment” within the ruling elites, they cooperated to make the best policies and avoided continuous contentions.28 Historians applaud this cooperation as follows,

If Ito may be taken as the great symbol of cohesive unity, stability and continuity in Meiji Japan, Okuma represents constructive opposition, vigorous but gradual reform, and optimistic acceptance of the West29

With the emperor as the judge and a coordinated government, the Meiji rule displayed the capacity of “moderation” that China clearly lacked. The policy making process also contributed to such a moderation feature, since elites, stripped of patron-client bonds, had to compete for their prestige by conducting popular policies in light of Japan’s interests: strengthening and enriching the country.

Politically, Japanese elites were more flexible politically than their Chinese contemporaries, since they acquired status through birth, and thus didn’t need to internalize the Confucian ideas in political practices. This had also contributed to the celebrated cohesion in facing the Western

27 Ibid., 203.
world and initiating modernization measures, which might greatly challenge the supremacy of Confucian ideology. As a result, the Japanese applied a much profound reform from the educational areas, to military, to social life, and last, political reforms. Although the Meiji constitution, as Hall criticizes, "merely gave legal form to the effort of the oligarchy to suppress the movement for democratic rights," it did contain democratization elements such as separation of powers, parliamentary participatory system, respect for law and rule of law, property rights, and personal freedoms.\(^\text{30}\) Japan at least had created an institutional force for development, a much more powerful force than the factional forces of the Chinese liberals in a secular court practicing power politics.

**Predicting the Results**

When applying elite theories in the cases of China and Japan, we find both overlaps and discrepancies. Harold Crouch and James Morley, in their studies of Asian societies, conclude that “Where democratization has taken place, it has involved elites who have lost their cohesiveness, and hence, their managerial capacity, leaving them vulnerable to social forces grown at least momentarily participatory.”\(^\text{31}\) This applied perfectly in the Taiping Rebellion and Toubakundo, as in the first case local elites lost connectedness to central government and formed connections to the Taiping regime, though in a transitive manner, as they continued to rule after the Taiping’s defeat; and in the Japanese case, the disgruntled daimyos from Choshu and Satsuma fought against the Shogun and initiated the first wave of democratization in Japan.\(^\text{32}\) However, this theory fails to address one important endogenous factor: the time. The time is important in the Chinese case, since although the Chinese elites lacked cohesiveness within themselves, no other classes were strong enough to take the initiative to democratization: the farmer class remained disorganized, and the urban elites still slept in cradle. In the Japanese case, the elites, complaisant with the international environment and domestic problems, dedicated to democratization themselves. We must consider social conditions and interests as well as motivation of the ruling elites in deciding whether democratization will take place. Meanwhile, the democratic elite theory explains China's situation, where elite disunity and quiescent constituents contributed to unstable authoritarianism. But again, it fails to account for a society in transition between authoritarian and democracy, or the oligarchic nature of many semi- and pseudo- democracies as the feudal Japan.

We thus here add to the theory that, in an oligarchic regime with high elite cohesion, the motivation of the oligarchic coalition will decide the path of political evolution. As in the Japanese case, the Choshu-Satsuma elites, with real powers in hand, chose to trade their monopoly on respective fiefs in exchange for unification and democratization. The Japanese elites sacrificed personal interests for national ones, due to high pressure from both domestic nationalism and foreign threats. While the elites could, with their military and economic advantages, control Japan and turn it into a military state, they chose not to do so. Instead, they engaged in profound

---


reforms which would later introduce Japan as a member of the “comity of nations”. Their intentions to democratize decided what Japan became later.

In opposite, the theory will also predict that in an oligarchic regime with low elite cohesion, factional rivalry often leads to a political deadlock for policies introducing profound changes, as in China. Conflicts within the elite groups in reform eras results in a prisoner’s dilemma, as reforms always require eradicating some established interests, and each group struggles to cut off other’s interests instead of their own. Every group will focus on the relative gains instead of overall social benefits. Consequently, few policies are carried out with consistency and effectiveness.

Can a single elite coalition rule China? Is democratization in China feasible considering complex social interests and their need for stability? Does democracy in times of transition lack institutional strength in conducting policies? While we have assessed the level of cohesiveness in China and Japan, these questions still perplex us, and no natural experiments answer to them. However, while we sit back and criticize historical figures with hindsight, they have no choice but to act upon the happenings in the time given. Prince Gong would not know gaining Xian Feng's imperial will unlock a political landslide; nor would the shogun realize the loss of national power signals a serendipitous start for Japanese modernization.
Confucianism in Korea’s Economic Revolution

JOSH PARK

Introduction

South Korea’s GDP (PPP) per capita rose over 18,460% in almost 50 years. The Republic of Korea, or commonly known as South Korea, is one of the leading countries today economically. South Korea’s GDP is 15th in the world at $832,512 million.1 Considering that only 50 years ago, South Korea was one of the poorest nations in the world, this quick rise in its economy certainly seemed like a Cinderella story.

South Korea went through many hardships, yet miraculously developed at an incredible speed. Figure A below shows that South Korea’s economy grew rapidly and passed the average GDP per capita of the world. South Korea’s GDP (PPP) per capita (gross domestic product at purchasing power parity per capita) in 2009 at $17,078 (in current US) is much higher than it was in 1962 at $92 (in current US).2 One cannot ultimately say a country is ‘more successful’ than another country, because we do not know what the definition of being ‘successful’ is. However, there are some characteristics of a society that are more favorable than others. Such things could be GDP per capita, life expectancy, and infrastructure. South Korea submitted to Japan’s occupation from 1910 to 1945 and suffered greatly in its preservation of culture, its GDP per Korean, and its education system, which led to a lack of educated Koreans and in turn, Korean entrepreneurs. Civil war occurred from 1950 to 1953, during which much of South Korea’s infrastructure and buildings were destroyed, making rebuilding necessary to get back to where they were before. Many thought that South Korea could never get itself out of this economic and social mess in 60 years, let alone become a high-income economy, a full democracy, and a fierce competitor in the world market. However, in the 1970s, there must have been something to jumpstart South Korea’s economy.

The goal of this paper is to not only figure out how and why South Korea’s economy rose so greatly, but why South Korea had those factors or particularities that led it into the miracle of today. After researching the development of South Korea in the 1950s and the influence of Confucianism on Koreans, I believe that Confucianism played a heavy role in the successful economic and industrial growth of South Korea. Confucianism was a cornerstone founding the mediums of the chaebols and the ethos of Koreans.

Although Confucianism explains many of the reasons behind the reasons of the rise in Korea’s economy in the 1960’s, there are clashing principles between the growth of an economy and Confucianism. Weber notes that in a capitalistic society, there must be an individualistic

1 World Development Indicators database, World Bank, 27 September 2010.
2 World Development Indicators database, World Bank, 3 October 2010
desire to maximize profits and have competition. He says that Protestant ethics, the hard work of the individual and his or her pursuit of wealth, are what set the foundations for capitalism. By Weber’s logic, societies based on Confucian ethics could not have been successful, because Confucianism calls for abolishment of the individual and promotion of the wellbeing of the community. Because Korea, a capitalistic society, has become successful, Confucianism could not have been a factor, let alone a major one, in Korea’s economic rise.

Another scholar, Leonard Shihlien Hsu, suggests that Confucianism should have the capacity to breed advances in economic development, because Confucianism strives for the betterment of society. A Confucian society serves to distribute its national wealth justly and treat all individuals with equality, which supports the regulation of competition. Also, Confucianism promotes the growth of wealth in the society, leading to the development of the production of goods. Cogently, it then seems Confucianism could be the component behind South Korea’s economic rise.

Although these arguments may be sound, I believe that Confucianism played a role in South Korea’s economic and industrial rise. The economic fruits of Western countries’ capitalistic societies were attractive to South Koreans and so the choice to adopt capitalism seemed obvious. The cooperating, harmonious society, found in Confucianism, also made sense to emphasize.

---

Confucianism’s communal principles supported by Protestantism’s individual betterment bred the miraculous growth in South Korea.

**Confucianism in Korea**

Confucius was a philosopher and his collective teachings became what are known today as Confucianism. Confucianism focuses on two issues. One is the governing of the self, or ethics, and the second is the governing of others, or politics. The study of these two aspects of the philosophy naturally leads Confucianism to have features of both philosophical and realistic thinking.

The time period and origin of Confucianism in Korea is not clearly determined as it reached the land of Korea in various times, but it seeded early and persisted. The initial Confucian principles may have reached Korea through Chinese subjugation of northern Korea in the first three centuries A.D. In the beginning, Confucianism was very limited in Korea as the preferred, more dominant religion or teaching was Buddhism. In 788 A.D., a civil service examination was established as an imitation of the Chinese Tang Dynasty’s civil service examinations. The examination became a test on the Confucian classics, which furthered the expansion of Confucianism in Korea. In addition, the Korean scholars who spent time in Tang China studying Confucianism, helped Confucianism disseminate in Korea when they returned to Korea.

In Koryo, Confucianism persisted because Wang Kon, the founder of the Koryo Dynasty, immersed himself in Confucianism, declaring Confucianism to be the ideology of a centralized state. In 958, Koryo started its own civil service examination with the help of China that also focused on studying Confucianism. Confucianism was so eagerly accepted in the Koryo Dynasty because the founder, Wang Kon, wanted the Koryo Dynasty to emulate Tang China in almost every way possible. He, and the other early kings of Koryo, favored the cultural and institutional elements of the Tang Dynasty. Wang Kon proclaimed, “We in the East have long admired T’ang ways. In culture, ritual, and music we are entirely following its model.”

**Present and Past South Korea**

There are many things that we can compare in present and past South Korea. In addition to the comparison of South Korea’s present GDP per capita to that of its past, life expectancy and education are growing. South Korea has a life expectancy of 80 years in 2009 while in 1960, the life expectancy was 56 years. (See Figure B). If a country’s advancement is based on these factors, it seems that South Korea is more well off than it was in the 1960’s. But what pushed it to develop so quickly?

---


The Export-Oriented Growth

The beginning of economic expansion started in 1961 when Syngman Rhee was removed from the presidency through the ‘April 19 Student Revolution’ and President Park Chung-Hee took power. During the presidency of Syngman Rhee, not much attention was paid to the economy of South Korea and President Rhee focused more on the politics. Rhee, pushing South Korea’s economic agenda aside, promoted the idea of import substitution and acquiring considerable foreign assistance. Many businesses succeeded by using corruption within the government; favoritism played heavily into businesses receipt of government protection.

President Park enacted a new policy that made Korea into an export-oriented economy, a focus on increasing exports with minimal to no imports. In order to produce exports, President Park needed the help of big, successful Korean corporations. President Park made a deal with these businesses; if the businesses helped Korea through industrialization, the government would waive their punishment for corruption. The businesses accepted and President Park was now able to control many of these huge Korean conglomerates called chaebols. Because they were all working together under one leader, it allowed Korea to have rapid expansion of trade and industrial growth. In addition to controlling these large businesses, the government also developed a more suitable industrial infrastructure to promote export-orientation, for example, the Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO). The Korean government started POSCO in 1968 and it ambitiously,
and riskily became the largest steel industry at that time. Now it is the third largest steel producer in the world ranked by sales with sales of 31.1 million tones of steel in 2009.8

President Park’s philosophy of government proved controversial because he was so adamant about an export-oriented economy. He was quite the opposite of Syngman Rhee in that, while Syngman Rhee focused heavily on politics and lightly on economics, Park Chung-Hee focused mainly on economics and barely on politics. Park at one point made the controversial statement that “for such poor people like the Koreans, on the verge of near starvation, economics takes precedence over politics in their daily lives and enforcing democracy is meaningless.”9

From 1973 onward, the Korean government focused more on sector-oriented import substitution because it wanted to start utilizing the comparative advantages Korea had. Incentives and support were allocated to those businesses that seemed ‘strategic’ to Korea’s production of exportations. Such incentives were tax exemptions, custom rebates, access to foreign exchange, and other ways to allow the industries to compete internationally. Evolving from these incentives, the selecting and supporting of particular companies that were considered dependable and faithful induced the creation of these chaebols.

These next two sections will talk about two major reasons behind South Korea’s economic rise, the chaebols and the ethos of Koreans. Then I will further explain how Confucianism was the reason for the aforementioned two reasons.

The Work of Chaebols

Chaebols are humongous business groups that are owned and operated by family members that produce a diverse line of products for global consumption. These chaebols contributed greatly to the industrialization of South Korea as they created the exports that were necessary to have an export-oriented growth. They also created jobs in manufacturing. Because chaebols were so huge, they had many advantages over small firms in contributing to this export-oriented economic growth of South Korea.10

President Park demanded more and more exports and soon, the standard for success of a company in the eyes of the government were its export capabilities. As a result, firms kept trying to increase production and expand exports, but this resulted in companies being financed more through liabilities than equity. Due to this, larger firms were more capable in expanding their export capacity, as their liabilities-equity ratio would not be affected as much.

In addition, the government favored a small number of large firms to a large number of small firms, because the leadership and organization were more centralized and easier to control. This, in turn, gave large firms more capability to expand export capacities as the government allocated more bank credit to them. Larger firms were also more able to cut through red tape because of their large human resources in comparison to small firms.

---

8 World Steel Association (worldsteel), Worldsteel Member Companies 2009 Crude Steel Production Over 3 Million Tonnes
The chaebols did not push South Korea’s economy by itself; it was a polymerization of the chaebols and the personality of Koreans that propelled the production of exports, which subsequently drove the economy of South Korea.

The Educated and Strong-willed Personality

Although the formation of chaebols facilitated the industrialization of Korea, the chaebols would not have succeeded had it not been for South Korea’s immense work force. South Korea was different from other countries in that it had unusually high investment in human resources. The percentage of high school graduates advancing to colleges or university in Korea was the second highest in the world in 1990, after the United States.

Not only was education fundamental in the cause of Korea’s great human capital, but the idea that one could improve his or her family’s living standards spurred a huge percentage of the many agricultural workers of Korea to work in the chaebols. Although the money made at working in the factories was not that significantly higher than that in working on the farm, it was still seen as a more luxurious life. There was also much competition between the unskilled laborers to obtain blue-collar jobs within these companies.

The idea of education has become one of the most important driving factors in the economy of Korea. Parents are willing to sacrifice almost everything just so their child or children can receive the best education possible. This is also why being a professor is still seen as the noblest profession. Kim Myung Sook, a scholar of the Korea Development Institute estimated that total expenditures for education amounted to 13.3 percent of GNP in 1984, “larger than the Japanese figure of 5.7 percent in 1982 and the American figure of 6.7 percent in 1981.” The investments in education paid off as it produced a well-educated labor force that would supply the strength of the manufacturing chaebols in the 1960s.

Koreans were known for their “can-do” attitude. Korean workers were not just senselessly ambitious, but they ensured their goals came to fruition. The Korean work ethic was amazing in that they often prioritized work as one of their most important goal. The work ethic was described as persistent, self-sacrificing, faithful, and reliable. Personality or work ethic is not something that can be easily measured, recorded, and compared but in surveys asking Korean children what value their parents would like to see in them, achievement ranked number one, while in English and American children, it ranked sixth and eighth, respectively. In another study done by Kim Kyong-Dong, Korean workers were asked what they would do if they had enough money to live.

---

comfortably for the rest of their lives; 96% of the subjects replied that they would continue still to work hard.\textsuperscript{15}

The Korean worker’s week was strenuous compared to workers in other countries. The average hours per week, a male, Korean, industrial worker worked in 1975 and 1983 were 50.5 and 54.3, respectively.\textsuperscript{16} The estimated hours per year a Korean male worker worked were 2,833 hours, compared to 2,168 hours in Japan, and 1,898 hours in the United States.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, the average Korean took 4.5 vacation days per year while the Japanese counterpart took 9.6 days, and the U.S. counterpart took 19.5 days.\textsuperscript{18} The average Korean worker could be seen working easily more than 10-11 hours a day, six days a week, many companies requiring Sunday also.

The influence of Confucianism from China created one of the hardest working nations by the awesome work ethos of Koreans. Fueling the power behind the rise in Korea’s economy, the well-educated, optimistic labor force industrialized South Korea. But why did this idea of Confucianism resonate so well with Koreans and where were its origins?

\textbf{The Influence of Confucianism}

Confucianism had heavy influence in Korea and its code of ethics became the guide to the structure of Koreans in family, society and the work force, and the reason behind the wealth of human capital and the ethos of Koreans.

\textbf{The Structure of Chaebols}

The managerial structure of chaebols was unique in that it mirrored Koreans’ human relationships. The company was organized in the way that a Korean family would function internally and interact externally.\textsuperscript{19} The traditional Korean relationship was based upon Confucianism and neo-Confucianism. This code can be stated in five cardinal virtues:

1. There is a strong relationship between the father and son. The father is respected, loved, and absolutely obeyed by the son. The family is the most important identity of one’s self because it tells one where one is placed in the larger scope of society. The family cares after its own and stemming from this, Korean companies tend to be extremely nepotistic. Contrastingly, if the child disobeys, it is common for the father to punish the son physically.\textsuperscript{20}
2. The wife must not only give absolute obedience to the husband, but must place herself lower than him. Women are seen as just mothers and wives and must obey the male members of family and/or society. Women usually get paid less, hold lower positions, and


\textsuperscript{20} Steers, Sin, and Ungso, \textit{The Chaebol}, 13-14.
are treated less fairly than men. Similar to the child, many times, if there is an altercation between the wife and husband, the husband resorts to violence to resolve the problem.  

3. There is a strong sense of seniority in society. The young must show respect to the elders and the elders are to assume responsibility for the wellbeing of the young. This respect for elders is the root of “familism” that is the basis of all Korean relationships. In addition to the influence in the statuses of society, work, or family, the young must always show respectful gestures to the elderly. Some of the endless habits are that the young must bow to the elderly when greeting them, they must always give and receive using two hands while the elderly can use just one, they must always wait for the oldest person to eat first until they can eat, and they must always talk to the elderly using honorific language. They cannot even drink alcohol in front of the elderly and must turn away to drink unless the elder says that it is acceptable to drink in front of them.

4. There must be mutual trust between friends and acquaintances. The cohesiveness of this trust is essential in all Korean human relationships and very important in Korean culture. Korean workers always try and make friendships/relationships with other workers at all levels in all organizations. There is more emphasis on personal relationships than written contracts and business activity also reflects this emphasis.

5. Lastly, there is an absolute sense of loyalty between the servant and its master. This relationship parallels the relationship between the father and son. Like the same way, the employees of a company are faithful to their companies and the president/CEO.

The structure of employees within a chaebol consists of three categories: the core group, the middle group, and the marginal group. The core group consists of the employees that are extremely dedicated to the company and have usually worked for the company for an extensive period of time. These workers are valued highly by the company and are treated favorably. They are usually owners or executives. The second category is the regular workers. They are just the ordinary, normal employees who have been working at the company for some adequate time. These employees are usually managers and workers. While some regular workers advance to the core group, others may leave the company. The last group is the marginal employees. They are generally employed through favors made by existing employees. They do not have as much dedication, which results in a lack of passion and motivation.

To compare, the American company has a miniscule core group while it have a large regular and marginal employee group. The reason for this tiny core group is that the top executives of American companies do not consider many of their top managers and workers to be part of their corporate family. It is usually the few owners that are considered to be family and thus, there is not much bonding or commitment displayed between the companies and their workers.

The strong level of commitment and motivation in the chaebols made a much larger percentage of the company personally preserve, and develop the company. Because there were also

---

21 Ibid., 14.
22 Ibid., 14-15.
23 Ibid., 15.
24 Ibid., 15.
very few instances of employees leaving companies, the company felt fewer disruptions in their course of action; thus, it was more stable and efficient.

The Importance of Education in Confucianism

Chan, a scholar of Confucianism, said, “What heaven imparts to human is called human nature. To follow our nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called education.” Although education is not a direct principle of Confucianism, it is a byproduct of its principles and essentially tied in as a major principle. Branching from the first principle of Confucianism of familism, the needs of the family are greater than the needs of the family member and so each member must carry on his or her back the responsibilities to support the family. And as such, the way in which to progress and sustain the family is to earn necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. So the family member must earn money, and to earn money, he or she must be well educated. Each family member must be able to contribute to the family their potential gains.

Not only was education necessary in the familial society, but just as the community was seen as a family, education was important to the nation. The growth and strength of a nation depended upon the intellectual capacities of its people. Because of the Confucian idea that a nation must exceed itself and to want progress, people chose to educate themselves. Education was also seen as being part of a bigger idea of moral discipline; it improved the nation as it produced virtuous people that led to fewer crimes and more cooperation. Immoral governments would never be able to overcome moral ones and thus, education was a medium for people to be morally disciplined. In 1988, the average ten to fifteen year-old Korean spent more time doing homework per day than their Japanese and United States counterparts. Also, 78 percent of thirteen year-old Koreans had mastered intermediate mathematics compared to 40 percent in the United States.

Scholars Lim and Lay say, “Diligence is an intrinsic value in itself and since Confucius believed that relationships between society and individuals and between individuals and family were important, it is also a way of contributing back to society when one grows up and is able to work.” Rooting from the same Confucian principle of the son serving his father, diligence in work and education was expected. Because the families, companies, and communities strived to become better, the members worked hard to maximize their contributions to the group.

Furthermore, the individual putting forth his or her community before his or her self was a reason why the export-oriented policy worked so well. Although President Park enacted the policy, the Koreans ultimately decided to make it work. Because Koreans cared for their country, they were faithful and kept buying products from their own Korean companies even though the products may have been more expensive or of lesser quality.

---

**The Polymerization of the East and the West and Other Arguments**

In the 1960s, there was a surge of Westernization in South Korea through Christianity and there was a great exchange of ideas and beliefs. Christianity, Protestantism and Catholicism, came from Europe and it promoted the bases for capitalism. However, during this period of Westernization, many Koreans believed that the acceptance of Christianity overtook their national identity and that they needed to come back to the roots of Korean traditions. So the traditional Confucian ethics were combined with Western Christianity to form the new Confucian ethics.

Tu Wei-ming describes the new Confucian ethics as “an amalgam of family or collectively-oriented values of the East and the pragmatic, economic-goal oriented values of the West.” East Asian countries, such as Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore that have become influenced by the new Confucian ethics have shown prosperity. In traditional Confucianism, commerce, trade, and manufacturing were thought of as the lowest priority. So in the new Confucian ethics, these values were replaced by Protestant values.

**Conclusion**

After analyzing the factors behind the economic rise of South Korea, we can conclude that the traditional values of Confucianism were largely present through the Korean companies and in the personal characteristics of Koreans. Confucianism permeated throughout Korea and impacted the minds and the societal structure of Koreans. Bringing about a sense of loyalty and kinship, these relational characteristics created cohesiveness, catalyst, and a superhuman ambition for success. The methods of an export-oriented policy and the uniquely, structured chaebol created the surge in South Korea’s GDP through the massive production of exports.

There are arguments against the idea of Confucianism taking part in the economic rise of South Korea as evidenced by the ideas and works of Weber. Although Confucianism’s idea of focusing on the wellbeing of and the isolating of the country would conflict with the growth of an economy, the new Confucian ethics which fused the capitalistic system of Protestant ethics and the intense ambition of a nation’s success of Confucianism, became the cause behind the success of South Korea. Hopefully, the success that the combination of Protestantism and Confucianism brought to South Korea may stand as a precedent for great mixtures of ideologies to not only be accepted, but encouraged.

---