

Chinese, Portuguese, and Dutch Systems



An Opening Anecdote

Journalist and editor Louise Levathes, author of *When China Ruled the Seas*, notes in her book that when the famous Portuguese mariner Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and landed in Mozambique in East Africa in 1498, he met “natives” who likely “scoffed at the trinkets the Portuguese offered” because those meager items paled in comparison with “costly cargo of porcelains, silks, lacquerware, and fine-art objects” that had been brought by the massive “treasure ships” from China eighty years earlier. With this imagined meeting, Levathes subtly undercuts the widely celebrated Portuguese entry into the Indian Ocean, which many scholars have connected to a European “Age of Exploration,” by contrasting it with the much larger Chinese voyages that occurred decades earlier.

CHINESE, PORTUGUESE, AND DUTCH SYSTEMS

AN OPENING ANECDOTE

BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS

THE INDIAN OCEAN

PRINCE HENRY THE... CRUSADER?

ADMIRAL ZHENG HE

TRIBUTE, TARIFFS, AND TRADE

MARE LIBERUM VS. MARE CLAUSUM

MELAKA AND MARE ALL OF THE
ABOVE

Although events in Mozambique likely didn't unfold in the way Levathes imagined, with the large gap separating the Chinese and Portuguese visits, it does invoke a striking scene. After all, the largest Chinese treasure ship was a hulking vessel approximately four hundred feet long, while the standard Portuguese caravel was a modest sixty to one-hundred feet long. Admiral Zheng He's treasure fleets contained an assortment of nearly three hundred vessels, including the treasure ships, as well as nearly thirty thousand crewmembers. Portugal's second journey to the Indian Ocean, by contrast, comprised thirteen ships and nearly one thousand crew. The Ming treasure ships were so large that they could and did transport giraffes and other large animals all the way to the Yongle Emperor's imperial zoo in Beijing. The treasure voyages truly were a feat of human ingenuity.

The comparison between the Portuguese fleet and the Chinese fleet is noteworthy. The Chinese ships were larger, the fleets more massive, and they arrived in the Indian Ocean earlier. However, both journeys were important for different reasons. In this reading, we will explore the impact and legacy of both excursions, and we will situate them in the broader context of the Indian Ocean.

Before we start, it is important to note that Chinese and Portuguese maritime ventures did not happen in a vacuum. In Asia, Japanese mariners and their allies created so much havoc for Qing Dynasty officials that the empire eventually adopted a strict coastal depopulation policy, forcing residents who lived near the coast to gather all their belongings and relocate inland. Meanwhile, in the Mediterranean and Red seas, Ottoman and Venetian traders pioneered and expanded trade routes in the wake of the Mongol retreat. In the Indian Ocean, Arab, Armenian, Jewish, Gujarati, Persian, and many other traders continued to grow their networks, which traced their roots all the way back to at least the first century CE as demonstrated by the famous Greek guidebook for the Ocean, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.

This section compares not just Portuguese and Chinese involvement in the Indian Ocean, but the contribution of numerous peoples. It explores how traders and polities attempted to control, profit from, and administer the dynamic and highly contested maritime space across several centuries.

Zheng He's Fleet

Key Terms:

Dom Henrique of Portugal (Prince Henry)

Alfonso de Albuquerque

Zheng He

Hugo de Groot (Hugo Grotius)

John Selden

Tributary "System"

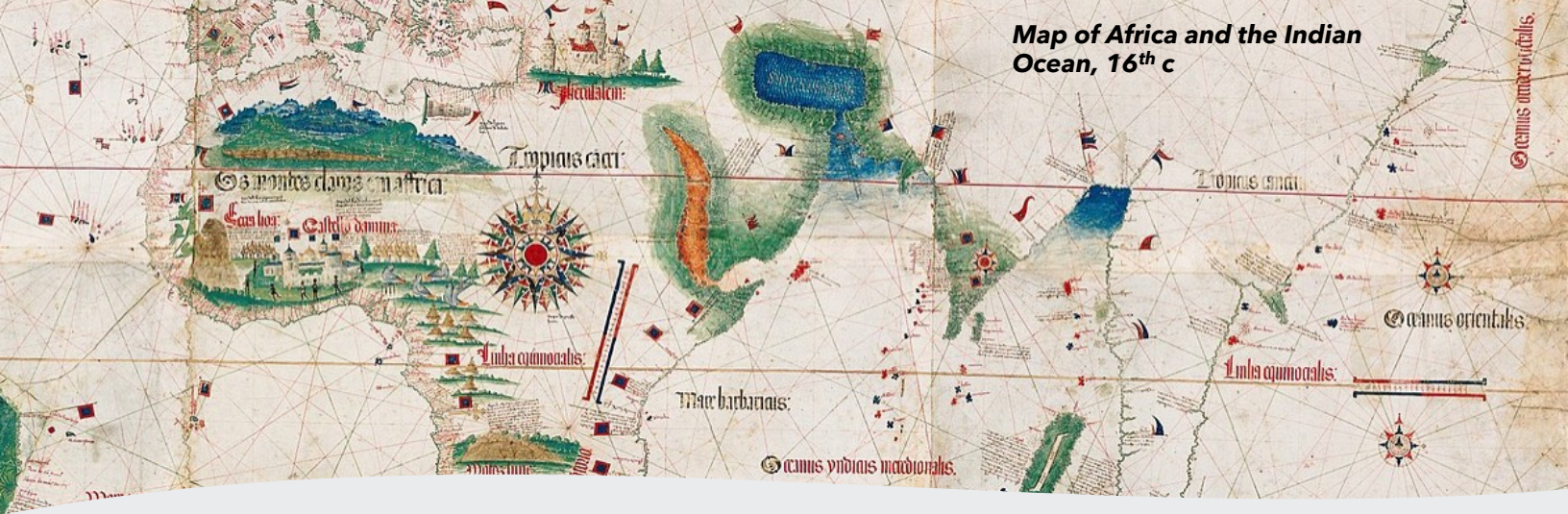
Carreira "System"

Mare Clausum

Mare Liberum

Melaka



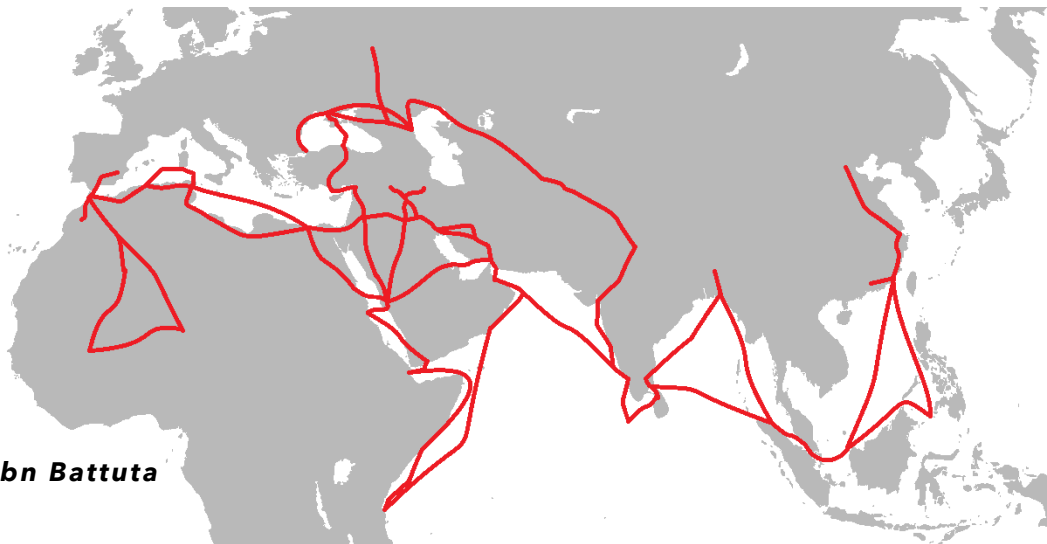


Big-Picture Questions

1. How did the Chinese, Portuguese, and Dutch understand space differently and apply and demonstrate power differently?
2. In what ways were the *carreira* "system," tributary "system," and Dutch Westphalian "system" actually systems? What makes a system?
3. Why did the Westphalian "system" of nation-states, freedom of navigation, and sovereignty win out over the Portuguese and Chinese systems? Did it actually replace the other systems, or did it absorb them? In other words, do you still see elements of the tributary and *carreira* "systems" today?
4. How did merchants and priests adapt to different trading "systems"?

The Indian Ocean

The famous fourteenth-century traveler Ibn Battuta trekked from his home in present-day Morocco all the way across the Afro-Eurasian continent to China. Along the way, he traveled throughout the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean, leaving behind a detailed and somewhat snarky record of his experiences. In his account of the Maldives, an island chain right in the middle of the Indian Ocean just south of the subcontinent, where he lived for some time, Battuta described trade goods, his multiple marriages, and a falling out he had with the local leader. Regarding the inhabitants of the islands, Battuta wrote, "The people are religious, chaste, and peaceable. They eat what is lawful, and their prayers are answered." He concluded by both chastising and applauding the Islamic practice of the islands' leaders and residents.



The Route of Ibn Battuta



18th c Illustration of Ibn Battuta in Egypt

In Ibn Battuta's account of the Maldives, we can glean clues about broader interactions across the Indian Ocean during right before Chinese and Portuguese expansion there. Islam served as a great unifier and common language even though traditionalists like Battuta might have critiqued the quality of Islam practiced in "foreign" lands. Ibn Battuta was able to marry and secure a position in government because of his training as a *qadi*, or Islamic legal scholar. Ibn Battuta's account also shows how well connected the Maldives, a relatively isolated island chain with few natural resources, cowries aside, was to other ports in the Indian Ocean even after the supposed peak of the Islamic Golden Age, which lasted roughly from the eighth to thirteenth centuries.

The Indian Ocean, as well as the Red Sea and Persian Gulf on its western reaches and the seas around Southeast Asia on its eastern reaches, were vibrant and interconnected in the fourteenth century. Islam served as a glue for the many merchants and pilgrims who ventured into the region. However, the arrival of Chinese and Portuguese traders in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries changed some of the dynamics of the maritime and littoral space as these powers brought new ideas, strategies, and technologies.

Prince Henry the ... Crusader?

In 1507, going against instructions from the Crown, Afonso de Albuquerque attacked the island of Hormuz, which sits right at the entrance to the Persian Gulf, a critical trade artery of the Indian Ocean. Although the raid failed, partially because several of his captains refused to follow his mutinous instructions, it reflected a broader Portuguese strategy as well as the limits of that strategy. When Albuquerque became the Governor of India two years later, he renewed his efforts to acquire and fortify as many ports along the Indian Ocean as possible to create what historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam describes as a "militarized chain." Eventually, this would lead to the Portuguese conquest of Melaka, a city in Southeast Asia, by the hands of Albuquerque in 1511.



Dom Henrique of Portugal (Prince Henry), 1394-1460

The Portuguese had been at this for a long time when they arrived in Melaka. Historians often describe Prince Henry “the Navigator” (Dom Henrique), who was born in 1394CE, as the critical force behind Portuguese maritime exploration and expansion, but even he built on the mixed crusader and trade motivations of his father, King John (João) I of Avis who sent a fleet of six galleys to aid his ally in England before directing his attention southward to Africa. Under King John I, Portuguese mariners slowly began to venture further into the Atlantic, including along the African Coast, where they would eventually establish outposts in the Canary Islands and Cape Verde.



Current map of Ceuta and surrounding region

Trade tempted many Portuguese *fidalgos*, or minor gentry, to leave their homes to attempt to strike it rich, but war and the potential booty involved provided an equally appealing possibility. In trade, you had to give up something in exchange for something else, but in war, you could take what you wanted, and if it came from the hands of the people whom the Portuguese called “Moors,” an exonym applied to Muslims, it was the Portuguese equivalent of killing two birds with one stone. Early Portuguese maritime expeditions coincided with the end of the Crusades and the high era of the Reconquista, which saw Christian Portuguese and Spanish armies “reconquering” territory from Muslim Portuguese and Spanish armies. This long conflict continued to the coasts of North Africa with the famous, if not controversial, Portuguese conquest of Ceuta in 1415.

Prince Henry, son and brother to successive kings, epitomized the crusader mentality of the time. After the conquest of Ceuta, he organized a series of raids along the African Coast to obtain slaves and loot. These raids would transform in historical memory to the famous voyages of “exploration” for which he is typically associated. Historians speculate that Prince Henry gained the reputation as a great explorer partially because of his careful control of the narrative of his life. He hired a famous chronicler to record his deeds and obscure the contributions of Dom Pedro, Henry’s uncle who acted as regent to the throne and helped establish Portuguese overseas commercial ventures. Moroccans, who weathered these raids, naturally desired to reconquer Ceuta, and they, like the Portuguese, devoted considerable resources to doing so. However, Portugal’s maritime advantage, which came from its cannon-mounted galleys, kept them afloat in the conflict. These mini mobile fortresses, coupled with a series of actual stone fortresses, like the one they built in Ceuta, served as the bulwark for their “militarized chain.”

Depiction of Prince Henry at Ceuta





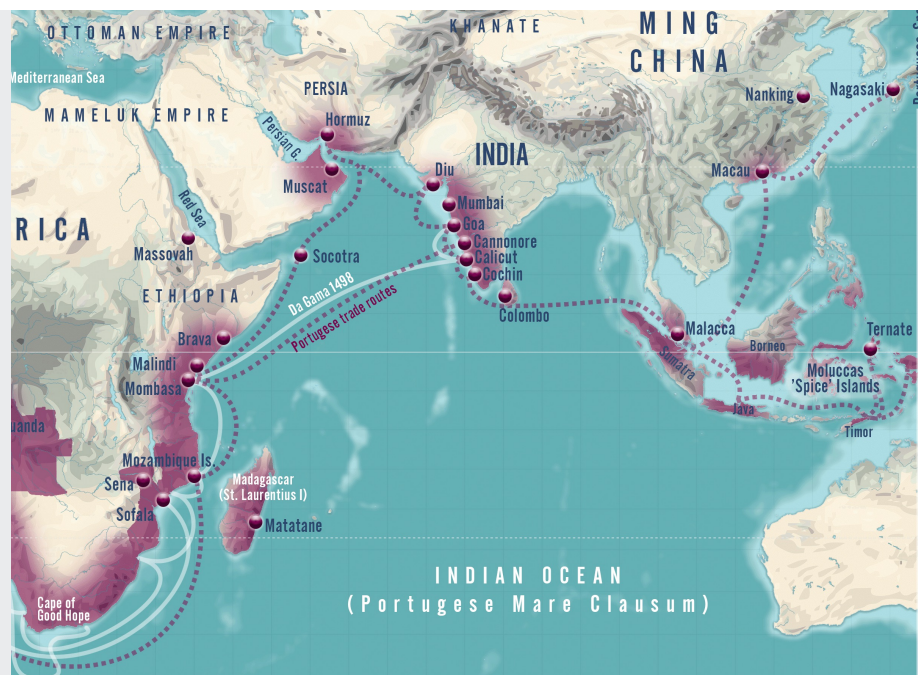
Afonso de Albuquerque, second Portuguese governor of India

In the Atlantic Ocean, and later Indian Ocean, the Portuguese attempted to outflank the Moroccans, and later the Ottomans, by going around their adversaries and purchasing key commodities like gold and slaves, and later silk, porcelain, and textiles, directly from their sources. However, in the Portuguese court wealthy merchants often voiced their displeasure with more military-minded mariners like Prince Henry and Afonso de Albuquerque. While merchants recognized that refueling stations and armed protection could aid in trade, they also feared it would turn potential trade partners into enemies. It is hard to build a trade relationship if your ships are always shooting first.

This same basic debate between merchants and militarists continued to dominate Portuguese politics after they rounded the Cape of Good Hope in present-day South Africa. As alluded to earlier, Afonso de Albuquerque, who established Portuguese maritime power in the western Indian Ocean during his tenure as governor of India, launched a series of lightning strikes upon assuming the post. He conquered Goa on India's west coast, which would become Portugal's administrative center in the region, in 1510. He went on to launch strikes against Melaka, Aden, and Hormuz (again). Back in Portugal, where merchants watched on with consternation, something of an anti-Albuquerque alliance formed that called for his ouster and the opening of trade in the Indian Ocean. Of course, in this era of Inquisition and Counter-Reformation, the Catholic church got in on the action in Asia as well.

Eventually, military minds, merchants, and clergy settled on something of a compromise with the implementation of the *carreira* "system." The *carreira* was a network of Crown trade routes throughout the Indian Ocean patrolled by Portuguese vessels that leased cargo space to private merchants. In other words, it was a system of state-subsidized and -protected trade.

This policy, coupled with a proactive Portuguese effort to tax non-Portuguese trade through a system of customs houses and *cartaz* trade passes, defined early Portuguese attempts to monopolize the long-distance trade in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese fought to maintain this mercantilist military-economic system for as long as they could, but challengers, like the Ottomans, Dutch and Chinese, had different ideas. Before we turn to that topic, however, we will turn our attention to ambitious mariners from the other side of the globe.



Map of Portuguese travel in the Indian Ocean



**Depiction of
Zheng He's fleet**

Admiral Zheng He

Admiral Zheng He, the Muslim eunuch mariner and one-time slave whom contemporaries claimed stood nearly seven feet tall, no doubt captivated his contemporaries the same way he captivates us. He was born in the southwestern borderlands of the newly-established Ming Dynasty where many had converted to Islam. Zheng, castrated due to his father's resistance to Ming conquest, started his career as a eunuch-servant before rising through the ranks of the army of the Prince of Yan, who would later become emperor of the Ming Dynasty. In other words, Zheng quickly transformed from a disgraced local gentry to a eunuch servant to a general to the admiral of Ming Dynasty China's entire navy. It was a meteoric rise for one of China's most famous mariners.

Before we jump to the high point of Zheng He's career, however, it is important to situate ourselves in the time and place just like we did with Portugal. In China, the Mongol-led Yuan Dynasty, which directly preceded the Ming Dynasty, was both monumentally successful, as seen in the empire's extensive borders and flourishing trade, and highly disruptive, as seen in the rapid marginalization of many elite families and the spread of bubonic plague. The plague combined with the beginning of what historians refer to as the climatic seesaw of the Little Ice Age led to an era of chaos and death.

The Hongwu Emperor, or the Martial Emperor, grew up as an orphan in central China during these trying times, his parents having succumbed to starvation. After casting in his lot with the Red Turbans, a Buddhist millenarian organization that sought to overthrow of the Mongols, the young emperor-in-waiting gained a following that would later propel him to the pinnacle of power. He was crowned the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty in 1368, and he immediately sought to undo many of the trade-oriented policies of his Mongol predecessors. Channeling his adolescent anxieties, he attempted to create an empire filled with peaceful yeoman farmers who would work the land and pay their taxes.

**The Hongwu
Emperor**



Ordinary people, however, despite having survived through tough times as well, had something else in mind. Porcelain-producing factories that had grown the wealth of many in the industrial town of Jingdezhen came roaring back to life. Silk traders in Hangzhou took advantage of the new stability of the Ming Dynasty to revive their businesses.



Model of Nanjing Treasure Ship

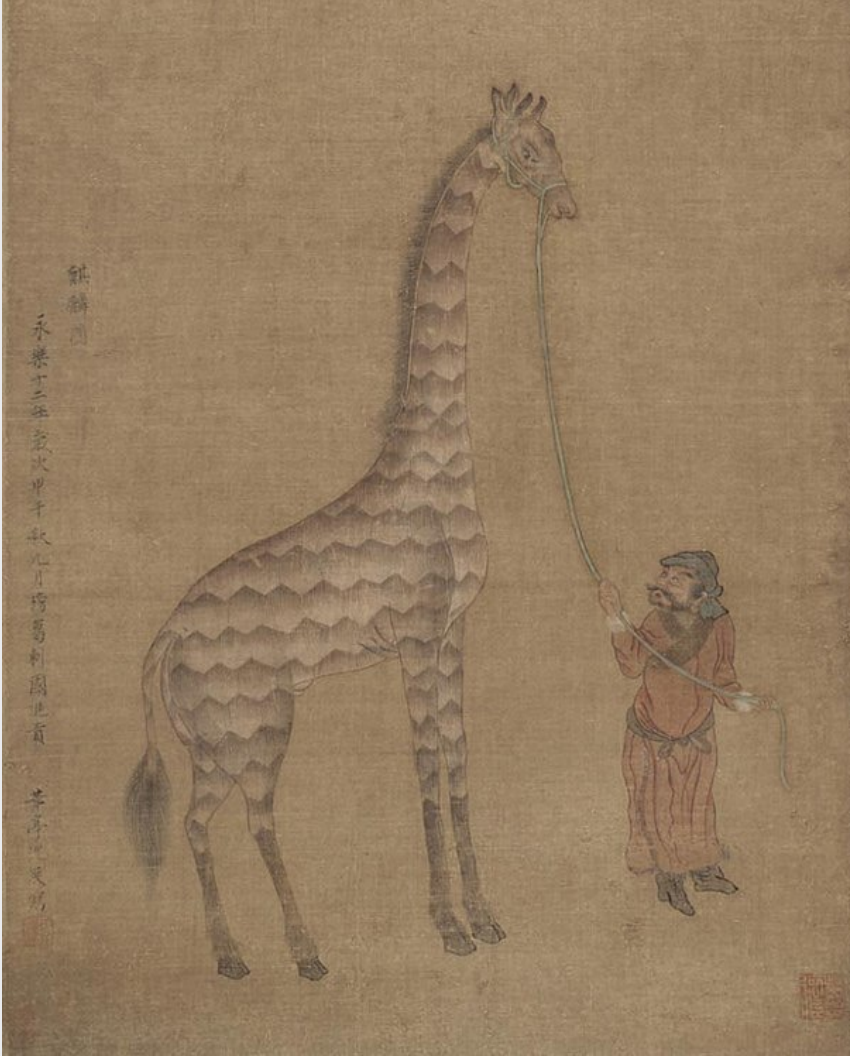
Chinese in southern provinces, like Fujian, increasingly turned to the ocean and trade to make a living. After all, Fujian, like Portugal, faced many ecological and economical challenges that states and provinces in the hinterland of China and Europe did not. With agricultural land relatively poor or controlled by the landed elite, these coastal peoples had little alternative than to rely on the sea.

The Hongwu Emperor's fourth son, the Yongle Emperor and former Prince of Yan, who would usurp the throne from the Hongwu Emperor's grandson, recognized this pent-up energy and steered the empire in a very different direction. Heeding the demands of merchants and entrepreneurs, he encouraged trade and opened the empire's coffers. In addition to building a new imperial complex in Beijing, much of which remains today as the so-called Forbidden City, and revamping the Grand Canal, which connected northern and southern China, he funded the construction of a massive treasure fleet that traversed Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. He selected his trusted aid, Zheng He with command of the fleet.

As we established earlier, the treasure fleets were massive. Zheng He and his colleagues led these fleets to Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and even the Red Sea, where the admiral and his chronicler Ma Huan were able to perform the Hajj in the holy city of Mecca. Historians have debated the overarching objective of the journeys, but they mostly agree that they were not for exploration. Much of the Indian Ocean was a known quantity to Chinese navigators because traders had visited China from those territories. Yet empires don't tend to send out fleets of three hundred ships for no reason at all. Historians have speculated that the expeditions represented a massive show of force to grow the prestige of the emperor and reinforce the tributary "system." In this regard, they were highly successful. Unlike the Portuguese voyages, however, the state-funded expeditions of the treasure fleets came to a sudden end.



Tribute giraffe for the Yongle Emperor, 1414



After the Yongle Emperor passed away and the more conservative faction spearheaded by his grandfather, the Hongwu Emperor, returned to power, the treasure voyages ended. Like the Hongwu Emperor, these conservative bureaucrats believed that the costs of the expeditions squandered resources and achieved little. In ways, these critics presaged the same arguments that officials would have in the Portuguese court years later. In the end, giraffes and other exotica aside, the treasure voyages didn't reap any gains. So, they ended, and the new emperor then attempted to erase the memory of them altogether, destroying the ships and expunging the records. Fortunately for us, he was unable to scrub every mention of the voyages, leaving us with many tantalizing glimpses into the past.

Popular narratives of Ming-Dynasty maritime ventures often end with the last treasure voyage, but for many historians of China, the final voyage merely marked a shift in strategy. The Ming Dynasty withdrew support for large-scale expensive expeditions, but private traders, especially those from Fujian, which was about the size of Portugal, continued to build their networks. In other words, Ming Dynasty China in some ways chose the opposite option as Portugal by choosing privatization. That does not mean that they withdrew from overseas engagement, however, as they still maintained a small and active navy, which was often charged with countering Japanese "pirates," and they still welcomed many foreign dignitaries who made their way to the capital with tribute. In ways, the Chinese "system" was purposely designed for people to come to China, not the other way around.

Statue of Zheng He at Malacca





Tribute, Tariffs, and Trade

Treasure Ships of Zheng He's voyages, 1420

Nobody wrote down the rules of the tributary "system," which has led some historians to hesitate to call it a "system" at all, but people generally conformed to the same unwritten social expectations. The "system" had three main pillars: hierarchy, ritual, and trade. Unlike the contemporary international order, which is theoretically based on the equality of nations, the tributary "system" was outwardly hierarchical with a dominant and subordinate power in each relationship. Some states, like Vietnam, might consider smaller neighbors, like Cambodia, as subordinate, or vassal states. China, however, considered both Vietnam and Cambodia as vassal states. The hierarchy had some flexibility, but for the most part, Chinese people within that hierarchy, who called their country the "Middle Kingdom," considered themselves the center of what they viewed as *tianxia*, or all under heaven.

Just like in the present, when regal state dinners and military parades greet foreign dignitaries, ritual acted as a glue to bind people and polities together. The key rituals under this "system" were banquets and the exchange of gifts, or tribute. Both dominant and subordinate powers would deliver tribute, with the dominant power often conferring something symbolic for rulership, like an official seal and a crown, while a subordinate power returned something of value, like local exotica, to show both their thanks and recognition of their position in the relationship. When all sides met the unwritten requirements of this exchange, the polities could then trade with one another, and trade they did.

Example of Portuguese Caravel



With their *carreira* "system" and *cartaz* passes, on the other hand, the Portuguese aimed to monopolize and profit from all trade, pursuing a mercantilist-like policy. In many ways, the Portuguese acted as a pirate state, assailing vessels, and charging protection fees to prevent recurring attacks. Portuguese vessels essentially asked people to pay to not attack them. As a small state, Portugal found it very difficult to maintain control in this manner with Chinese and Japanese traders squeezing them out of trade relationships in East Asia, and Dutch and Ottoman traders challenging them in the Indian Ocean. For a brief period, however, the Portuguese maintained some semblance of control in the Indian Ocean, and they set a precedence for the region while profiting handsomely.



Map of China and surrounding regions, 1402

Portugal attempted to control as much maritime space as possible by fortifying its coasts and waters while China attempted to project power from the center, never actually defining an end to a Sino-centric world, only allowing for various levels of periphery. In fact, as mentioned to earlier, many Chinese emperors believed they ruled over *tianxia*, or all under heaven. The Portuguese and Chinese had drastically different relationships with and approaches to space. The Dutch, whom we will turn to in a moment, added a new understanding of space by citing a divine or natural universal code of conduct on the open oceans, which would eventually come to dominate other conceptions.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, each power adjusted its relationships with space to meet local realities. While the Portuguese maintained something of a monopoly on the western Indian Ocean from Mozambique to Goa, for instance, they basically played by the rules of the tributary system in the eastern Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. The Dutch, meanwhile, despite advocating for freedom of navigation on the seas, attempted to cut the Portuguese out of the lucrative spice trade in Southeast Asia while expertly mastering the tributary trade, as seen in their nearly exclusive trading partnership with the shogunate of Japan.

Mare Liberum vs. Mare Clausum

The Netherlands is too often overlooked in the grand scheme of world history, which is curious considering that the Dutch left their mark on numerous global institutions. In 1581, the States General, which served as the primary legislative body of the Netherlands, issued the Act of Abjuration, severing themselves from Spanish Habsburg control, declaring themselves a republic. Although Spanish recognition would come belatedly after the conclusion of the Eighty Years' War, the Dutch Republic more or less acted autonomously for the duration of the fighting, which was rooted in the religious wars of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

The Dutch, in their so-called Golden Age during the seventeenth century, became one of the world's leading technological and economic powers, establishing trade posts around the world. A publicly traded company known as the Dutch East India Company, or the VOC, became the wealthiest corporation in the world. But Spain and Portugal, which were united in the Iberian Union after a Portuguese succession dispute in 1581, constantly harassed Dutch trading vessels that flew the flag of the VOC. Hugo de Groot, or Hugo Grotius, was born in this period of tumult and prosperity in the early Dutch Republic, and he would author an important treatise on freedom of navigation in the open seas that would have a long-lasting impact on international law.

VOC logo

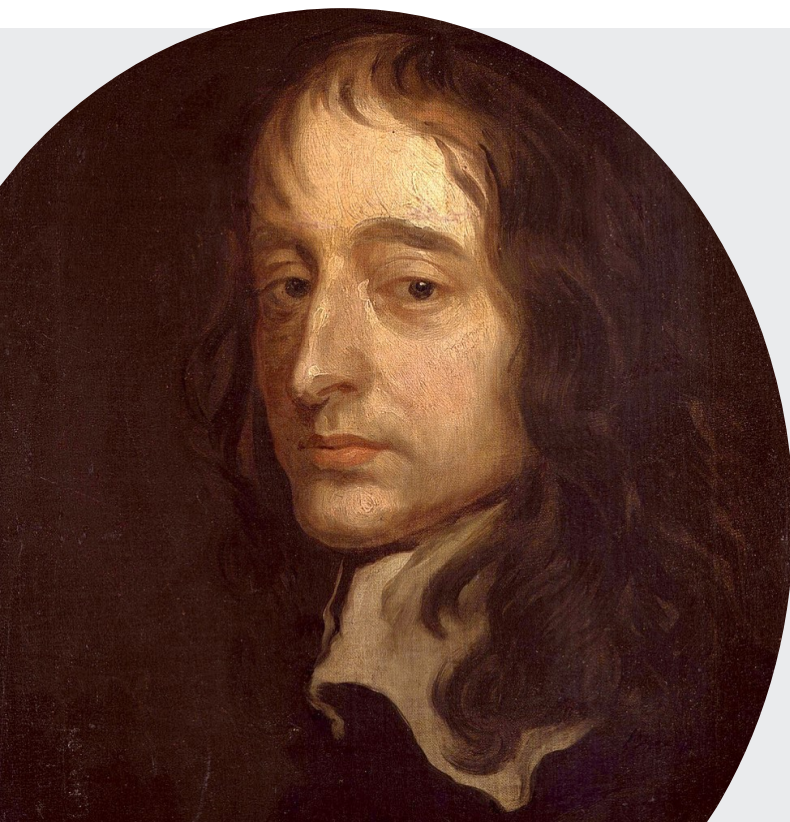


Grotius' dissertation, which he called *Mare Liberum*, or Freedom of the Seas, and which appears in primary source collection two, accomplished several things for the young Dutch Republic. First, by couching its language in the authority of "natural" rights and divine intention, *Mare Liberum* justified universal unrestricted free trade and the freedom of navigation of the seas. Second, Grotius used this clarion call for free trade to justify the Dutch capture of a Portuguese vessel in Southeast Asia known as the Santa Catarina. In a legal twist that many would copy in the future, like the British during the Opium War, Grotius defended the capture of the Portuguese vessel by arguing that Portugal had infringed upon the Dutch right to un-harassed free trade. In other words, according to the Dutch, Portuguese attempts to monopolize trade violated the rights of independent traders and represented an act of war. Scholars would later describe this type of "system" as the Westphalian "system" because of the 1648 treaty of that name that implemented many of its elements.



Portrait of Hugo Grotius

Under the *carreira* "system," by contrast, as outlined above, the Portuguese operated on a mercantilist or closed-seas policy of exclusive trading rights. They attempted to fully control the trade of lucrative items, like silk, and heavily tax any non-Portuguese trader through the issuance of *cartaz* passes. Curiously, despite boasting a trading company of their own, English leaders, coming from an island nation themselves, found the idea of exclusive control of a sea or ocean alluring. The famous English jurist and polymath John Selden wrote a response to Hugo Grotius twenty-five years later that called for exclusive English fishing rights around the British Isles.

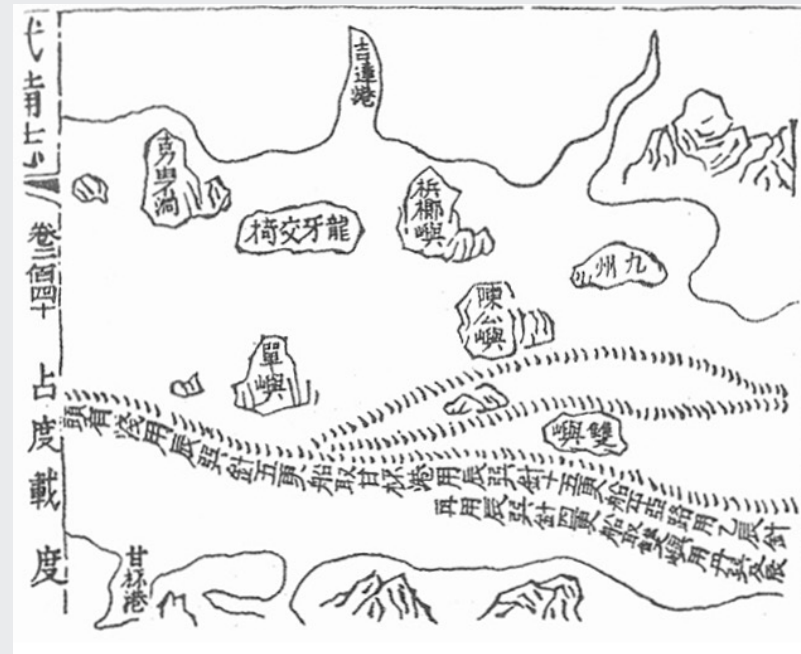


Despite sounding like a critique of Grotius, however, Selden's *Mare Clausum*, or Closed Seas, called for limitations to control over bodies of water. In fact, this module hopes to show that many of the ideas about and relationships with space covered here more or less converged. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, for instance, allows for both freedom of navigation on the open seas and exclusive economic zones for different nations. Ritual and hierarchy dominate international interactions today just as they did in the past. We can see this blending of systems and ideologies in the story of the Southeast Asian trade entrepôt Melaka, where we will conclude this essay.

Portrait of John Selden

Maleka and Mare All of the Above

Contrasting and competing ideas about space and society came to a head in the small Sultanate of Melaka. Over the course of two centuries, the city swapped hands repeatedly, transforming from an Islamic Malay sultanate beginning in 1402 CE, to a Chinese-recognized but still nominally independent state in 1411, to a Portuguese fortress and outpost in 1511, to a neglected Dutch colony in 1641. In other words, it traded hands between all the key powers mentioned above. Ultimately, each power adjusted their strategy in the city to rule or influence it most effectively, adopting something of a *mare* all-of-the-above policy, which reflects broader pattern in Asia.



Mao Kun map from Chinese guidebook to Melaka, illustrating navigation to the city, 16th century

A man by the name of Parameswara, who assumed the name and title Iskandar Shah, founded the city of Melaka after fleeing a nearby kingdom. Soon thereafter, Parameswara received enfeoffment, or legitimizing support, from the Ming Dynasty China. This was fortunate for the young sultan, because it saved his new state from invasion by neighboring Siam. You can read more about this encounter in Ma Huan's account in the first primary source collection. The admiral Zheng He linked the sultanate in Melaka to the Ming Dynasty with a ritual exchange of tribute and the establishment of a trade partnership. But while Ming support helped allay a Siamese invasion in the early fifteenth century, it couldn't prevent a Portuguese invasion a century later.

Conflicting accounts relate to us the story of the Portuguese invasion. According to Malay accounts produced after the fact, the Portuguese misled the people of Melaka by "unloading cannon from their ships, and muskets hidden in boxes, saying that there was cloth inside them." The Portuguese proceeded to surprise the people of Melaka with a sneak attack using those muskets the next day. As you will find in the final document of the first primary source collection, this story mirrors Chinese accounts, which depict the Portuguese as conniving and untrustworthy assailants.

Painting of Portuguese ships off a coastline





**Portuguese
fortress in Melaka**

Then the Dutch came. After warning the Portuguese of an impending attack on Melaka, the Dutch, with their allies in the Kingdom of Johor, launched an invasion of the city. According to accounts from Johor, after the Dutch-Johor victory, the Johorean people reportedly "returned then to their land of Johor" with the Dutch and the Malays remaining "on good terms, until today." The Dutch notably leveraged their relationships with local allies to achieve mutually beneficial arrangements. The Dutch didn't value the city as much as the Portuguese though because their capital in Batavia, or present-day Jakarta, proved much more profitable.

In Melaka, the Chinese attempted to leverage tribute to affect a favorable partnership and trade relationship. The Portuguese came in with guns blazing and a goal to monopolize trade through the Straits of Melaka. The Dutch leveraged their relationship with local allies to capture the Portuguese port only to turn back to their more profitable trade center in Batavia. Each power attempted to implement their "system" of control, but ultimately failed. One reason for the successive failures to control and order the pivotal maritime space of the Straits of Melaka was the absence of a common understanding of space. Each power understood space differently, preventing the formation of a consensus. It would take the force of the industrial revolution and imperialism to forge such a consensus, and we will turn to that topic in the next episode of this module.



Dutch ships at Melaka, 17th century

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