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In September 1604, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) dispatched a letter to Cochinchina, an emerging state in southern Vietnam. The document, dated the twenty-sixth day of the eighth month of Keichō 9, began with an enthusiastic affirmation of friendship between the Japanese shogun and his remote correspondent, Nguyễn Hoàng (1525–1613), then in the process of turning Cochinchina into an independent kingdom with a pronounced orientation toward the sea.[1] Through

* Many individuals helped in the preparation of this article. David Chandler and Stephen Turnbull read an early draft, and their feedback greatly sharpened the argument. Over the past year, my colleagues at Monash have read or listened to various versions of this paper, and I would like to thank all of them, particularly Bain Attwood, Ernest Koh, and Jane Drakard for their questions and comments. I am further indebted to Matt Romaniello and the two anonymous reviewers for their painstaking readings and thoughtful suggestions and to Atsushi Goto for his tireless assistance in fielding a seemingly endless sequence of translation-related queries.

[1] For the best survey of Cochinchina, see Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1998). Also see Keith Taylor, "Nguyen Hoang and the Beginning of Vietnam's Southward Expansion," in *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era, Trade, Power, and Belief*, ed. Anthony Reid (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

the exchange of letters like this one, two countries separated by great distances could, Ieyasu declared, become just "like neighbors."[2]

A close examination of extant documents dispatched from Japan in this period reveals that this letter, rather than being a one-off communiqué, was part of a much larger pattern of diplomatic correspondence. After he seized power in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu sent dozens of similar missives to rulers and officials scattered across Southeast Asia. Despite the number of these documents and the diversity of recipients, they have received little attention by scholars.[3] This situation stems in large part from the fact that the Tokugawa regime's pursuit of increasingly isolationist policies in the 1630s meant that formal relations between Japan and the Southeast Asian states in question were severed within a few decades after being opened. But even if these letters did not usher in long-term ties, they are nonetheless highly significant. Most obviously, their dispatch signaled a decisive break from past diplomatic patterns that centered on a handful of states in East Asia, foremost among them China, and this article argues first for the importance of these documents as a marker of a new stage of Japanese diplomacy.

In addition to revealing new possibilities for contact and communication, a study of these letters opens a window onto some of the problems created by the remarkable expansion of maritime trade routes in this period. Although the 1604 letter to Cochinchina opened with a set of appealing pleasantries, it quickly turned to the more serious issue at hand, which concerned the violent behavior of Tokugawa subjects in Nguyễn territory and particularly the booming port city of Hoi An. Dispatched in response to an ongoing sequence of incidents, the shogun's letters to Southeast Asia provide evidence of the frequent vio-

[2] Many of these letters discussed in this article are collected in a nineteenth-century diplomatic compilation prepared by Kondō Seisai (also known as Morishige, 1771–1829), who had served previously as the magistrate of Nagasaki. Finally completed in 1818, the compilation was presented to the Tokugawa regime in order to help it navigate an increasingly perilous international environment. Kondō Morishige, "Gaiban tsūsho," in *Kaitei shiseki shūran* (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1983–1984), 21:101. All of the translations are my own.

[3] One exception is Takeda Mariko's 2005 examination of Tokugawa borders, which includes a chapter devoted to these letters. Takeda argues that the Tokugawa regime pursued a policy of neutrality that was designed to eliminate any possibility of being drawn into a foreign conflict. As a result, she suggests that the letters sent to Southeast Asia fit within a wider program of systematic disengagement. Takeda Mariko, *Sakoku to kokkyō no seiritsu* (Tokyo: Doseisha, 2005), pp. 7–27. For a discussion of letters sent to Siam, see a now dated but still regularly quoted article by Ernest Satow, "Notes on the Intercourse between Japan and Siam in the Seventeenth Century," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 13 (1885): 139–210.

lence that accompanied the movement of large numbers of Japanese merchants into Southeast Asia in the early seventeenth century.

Although their violent propensities set the Japanese apart from rival Asian traders in this period, it brings them clearly into line with their European competitors who appeared in Southeast Asia at roughly the same time. In particular, Japanese merchants adopted the same kind of tactics, most notably a willingness to use force to carve out a space in which to operate, as the Dutch and the English who also shifted seamlessly between trade and violence. But if these letters show an unexpected connection between rival trade diasporas, they also reveal a vital difference.[4] In his letter to Cochinchina, the shogun renounced all legal claims over Japanese merchants while urging his correspondent to prosecute any offenders to the fullest extent of the law. "If there are merchants from my country who visit your country and commit crimes," Ieyasu explained, "then please punish them according to your laws."[5]

It was not an isolated instruction. In letter after letter sent to Southeast Asia, the shogun condemned the conduct of Tokugawa subjects, publicly renounced any claim to legal authority over their bodies, and insisted that all offenders should be dealt with according to local law. Concerned officials were, he stated again and again, fully entitled to order any punishment they deemed appropriate, including the execution of Tokugawa subjects. This emphatic severing of any connection with Japanese merchants operating abroad and the insistence that all offenders be punished within the framework of the host state's legal system has no obvious parallel in the history of European expansion into Asia, which was characterized by a persistent and jealous preservation of legal sovereignty. Instead, the documents sent to Southeast Asia reveal a very different relationship between the state and its subjects that accounts in part for the success that Europeans enjoyed in the region.

Diplomatic Networks

The starting point for any discussion of the shogun's letters is with the most obvious fact that they were even sent in the first place. While the

[4] I take the term "trade diaspora" from Philip Curtin's work. Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). He adopts a broad definition that enables the inclusion of traditional diasporas like the Armenians as well as a variety of other groups.

[5] Kondō, "Gaiban tsūsho," p. 101

Japanese archipelago had a long history of diplomatic correspondence in the premodern period, it had remained locked into well-established patterns for centuries. Prior to 1600, almost all Japanese diplomatic correspondence went to one of just three destinations: China, Korea, and the Ryukyu kingdom, a maritime polity located in modern day Okinawa. Of these, China was the most important. Indeed, much of the history of Japanese diplomacy before 1600 can be understood as a constant struggle by Japanese leaders to position themselves in relation to their far larger and more powerful neighbor. The result of this ongoing negotiation was an inconsistent diplomatic strategy that veered between neglect, guarded engagement, and an acceptance of China's place at the top of a hierarchical system of relations. In 607, for example, Prince Shōtoku, the regent to Empress Suiko, dispatched a letter to China that asserted equivalence between the two states and included the famous address from the "Son of Heaven in the place where the sun rises to the Son of Heaven in the place where the sun sets."[6] In the fifteenth century, by contrast, the ruling shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, adopted a very different strategy, describing himself in a letter sent to the Ming emperor as "Your subject Minamoto, King of Japan" and accepting investment as monarch.[7] The result was to pull Japan into the tributary order and in so doing secure access to Chinese trade.

As Japan descended into endemic warfare in the late fifteenth century, the pace of diplomatic correspondence first slowed and then, once the always-precarious Ashikaga shogunate finally collapsed, largely stopped. In the late sixteenth century, after Hideyoshi (1536–1598), the second of Japan's three great unifiers, seized control of the country, he took advantage of newly opened sea routes to launch a brief flurry of diplomatic activity that extended his reach beyond the boundaries of East Asia. His letters—dispatched to recipients including the Portuguese governor-general in India, colonial authorities in the Philippines, and an unnamed (and it transpired nonexistent) ruler in Taiwan—were, however, designed less to open diplomatic ties than to compel subordination by threatening military action if appropriate tribute was not paid.[8] Unsurprisingly, therefore, they did not develop

[6] Quoted in Charles Holcombe, *The Genesis of East Asia, 221 B.C.–A.D. 907* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 212.

[7] Quoted in John Whitney Hall and Takeshi Toyoda, eds., *Japan in the Muromachi Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 165.

[8] Yoshi S. Kuno, *Japanese Expansion on the Asiatic Continent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937), 1:308.

into an ongoing correspondence, and although Hideyoshi's tenure gave some hint of new possibilities for expanded contact, the transformation of Japanese diplomatic circuits only began after Tokugawa Ieyasu's rise to power in 1600.

The decade and a half after the decisive battle of Sekigahara saw a surge in letters that was unmatched in any previous period of Japanese history. Between 1601 and 1614, Tokugawa Ieyasu dispatched forty-eight diplomatic missives, while his senior advisors contributed a further twenty-eight for a total of seventy-six.[9] Some of these letters went to neighboring states such as China or Korea, but for the first time Japan broke decisively from the confines of the East Asian diplomatic trinity to make contact with a long list of distant states and colonies, including Patani, Cochinchina, Cambodia, Siam, the Dutch Republic, England, and the Philippines. Although the letters to Europe were the most striking in terms of total distance traveled, the bulk of diplomatic correspondence, forty-one of the forty-eight letters sent by the shogun, was directed toward Southeast Asia. The regularity of these letters is as significant as their overall numbers. Between 1601 and 1606, Ieyasu dispatched one letter each year to Nguyễn Hoàng in Cochinchina. Even more impressively, eleven missives were sent to Cambodia between 1603 and 1610, while eighteen letters were dispatched to the Philippines between 1601 and 1613.[10] Even Patani, a relatively minor state that made no great effort to correspond with Japan, received three messages from the shogun between 1599 and 1606.

In all of these cases, the flow of letters out of Japan was matched by an equal influx of correspondence into the archipelago. This created an ongoing dialogue with each document responding to the last and underpinned by an expectation of continued correspondence. In this way, new letters invariably began by referencing the previous document. The 1604 missive to Nguyễn Hoàng started by noting that "I have received and read the [previous] letter from you" while a 1605 letter to Cambodia opened with the statement: "I, Minamoto-no-Ieyasu of Japan, reply to you, the King of Cambodia . . . I have received your letter from a remote country and have read it repeatedly."[11]

This increase in diplomatic traffic with Southeast Asia was made possible by an upswing in maritime links between Japan and the region.

[9] Fujii Jōji, "Junana seiki no Nihon: Buke no kokka no keisei," in *Iwanami kōza Nihon tsūshi 12*, ed. Asao Naohiro et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994).
[10] Fujii, "Junana seiki no Nihon: Buke no kokka no keisei," p. 35.
[11] Kondō, "Gaiban tsūsho," pp. 101 and 175.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, Chinese maritime entrepreneurs such as Wang Zhi had pioneered new routes between Southeast Asia and Japan, but the volume of traffic remained relatively limited.[12] The catalyst for the subsequent expansion was the creation of a stable framework for international commerce within Japan. This appeared in the form of the *shuinjō*, or maritime pass, system, which required all outgoing merchant vessels to obtain special trading licenses authorizing the holder to undertake a single voyage from Japan to a stated destination.[13] As any merchant vessel carrying one of these documents was ensured a friendly welcome in ports across Southeast Asia, they became highly prized and drove a significant increase in long-distance commerce. After 1604, the first year for which records exist, a total of 356 licenses were issued to Japan-based merchants. The overwhelming majority of these, just less than three hundred, were intended for ships traveling to Southeast Asia with eighty-five licenses issued for Cochinchina, forty-four for Cambodia, fifty-two for the Philippines, and fifty-six for Siam during the lifespan of the system.[14] The result was to provide a ready vehicle for ongoing exchange.

Tokugawa Japan was not the only state to experience a diplomatic boom during the seventeenth century. Rather there was a more general surge in diplomatic correspondence across Asia during the early modern period, roughly defined as the years from 1500 to 1800. While there were numerous instances of long-distance diplomacy in earlier centuries, including an expansive phase of activity initiated by Zheng He's famous voyages (1405–1433), this period saw a marked upswing in the range of diplomatic interaction, the number of participants, and the volume of letters. After 1500, it became increasingly possible for rulers and officials to dispatch missives to their counterparts in distant regions and expect not simply a reply but an ongoing exchange.[15] The

[12] "Qinhuo Wang Zhi," in Zheng Ruozeng, *Chouhai tubian*, 9 (China, 1563). This source provides an account of Wang Zhi's role in opening up commercial ties between Japan and Southeast Asia. Although he started his career as a merchant, Wang Zhi later shifted to piracy and organized a series of destructive raids against the Chinese coast.

[13] The classic work on the *shuinsen* is Iwao Seiichi, *Shuinsen bōekishi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1985). For a more recent study see Nagazumi Yōko, *Shuinsen* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2001).

[14] For these figures, see Iwao, *Shuinsen bōekishi no kenkyū*. The figure for Cochinchina includes fourteen ships sent to Annan.

[15] As one representative example, the king of Siam was able to engage in regular correspondence with the Prince of Orange in the Dutch Republic during the first half of the seventeenth century. See Bhawan Ruangsilp, *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom, c. 1604–1765* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). In

result was to make global diplomatic engagements and connections routine in a way that had been unimaginable just a few decades earlier. Although they are often filled with insincere declarations and inflated claims, the importance of diplomatic letters should not be underestimated. In many cases, it was these documents that initiated the establishment of commercial ties, and it was their ongoing exchange that served to bind together a diverse array of rulers, states, and markets. Letters were, in Miles Ogborn's words, the "sinews of . . . long-distance connections," vital instruments that made this period of remarkable globalization possible.[16]

As they did in other parts of the world, diplomatic letters exchanged between Japan and Southeast Asia served multiple purposes. They provided, first of all, a means of initiating trade by establishing commerce as a mutually advantageous benefit that flowed naturally from a personal relationship between two sovereigns. In a letter to the king of Siam, Ieyasu noted: "if trade and merchant ships come between your honored country and my country every year, both our countries will be peaceful and our people will be prosperous."[17] A document sent in the same year by one of the shogun's senior subordinates assured his correspondent that any merchants and sailors that arrived in Japan from Siam would be well treated. For his part, the king of Siam wrote back to announce that "your honoured country's merchants vessels have continually visited us, and I have trusted them with even greater affection than if they had been my own subjects. I always impress upon the port officials that every facility must be afforded to them."[18] Diplomatic letters provided, moreover, a mechanism to manage a range of issues thrown up by the unprecedented scale of interaction. Of these, the most persistent and certainly the most striking concerned the actions of Tokugawa subjects in ports across Southeast Asia. The next section focuses on nine representative letters, three sent to Cambodia, three to Cochinchina, one to Patani, and two to the Philippines, all of which directly addressed this problem.

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recent years, a number of scholars have started to argue for the importance of diplomatic exchange as a key feature of the wider encounter between Europe and Asia in the early modern period. Richmond Barbour, "Power and Distant Display: Early English 'Ambassadors' in Moghul India," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 61, no. 3/4 (1998): 343–368. Robert Markley, "Riches, Power, Trade, and Religion: The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1720," *Renaissance Studies* 17 (2003): 433–455.

[16] Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 38.

[17] Kondō, *Gaiban tsūsho*, pp. 140–141.

[18] Quoted in Satow, "Notes on the Intercourse between Japan and Siam," p. 152.

"Riotous Behavior"

In 1605, Tokugawa Ieyasu dispatched two letters to the king of Cambodia. In the first, dated the nineteenth day of the ninth month, or 31 October, the shogun explained that "merchant vessels from my country visit your country yearly."[19] While such connections were desirable, these particular merchants were neither wise nor virtuous and, driven only by an overwhelming obsession with profits, they "engaged in riotous behavior." Such conduct was intolerable, and Japanese offenders should, the shogun urged, not escape punishment. Two months later, he followed up this document with a second letter. It began with the usual declaration of friendship and an affirmation of Ieyasu's "delight in receiving letters from remote countries."[20] Once again, however, the purpose of writing was to condemn the behavior of Tokugawa subjects, described here as "villains who tormented the people of your country [Cambodia]." The solution was the same as before: to hand over authority to local magistrates and allow them to punish Japanese merchants in any way they deemed appropriate. "As I have communicated a number of times already, if Japanese merchants commit crimes . . . you should follow the laws of your country and punish them appropriately if their crimes are serious." While these instructions suggest that the punishment should at least match the offense, it was clear that Ieyasu was prepared to leave the matter entirely to the discretion of the king of Cambodia and his subordinates, who were free to stipulate any penalty.

The shogun's comments were directed toward Japanese merchants who had traveled aboard *shuinjō* vessels to Southeast Asia and once there engaged in what was typically described as "riotous behavior." Although the size of these vessels varied considerably, the best estimate puts the average around three hundred tons, with the largest reaching eight hundred tons.[21] As a result, these ships were able to transport large numbers of affiliated merchants, who paid for space for themselves and their goods. The largest vessel to ply these routes, the eight-hundred-ton behemoth already referenced, carried just eighty crew members and 317 passengers, but this was an outsized exception, and

[19] Kondō, *Gaiban tsūsho*, p. 176.
[20] Ibid., p. 175.
[21] Iwao, *Shuinsen bōekishi*, p. 5.

most vessels probably had fewer than two hundred passengers.[22] Nonetheless if we multiply this figure by the almost three hundred ships that traveled to Southeast Asia during the lifespan of the system, the total moves quickly past fifty thousand.[23] While some of these merchants traveled temporarily to Southeast Asia, others elected to make their homes there on a more long-term basis. The result was the emergence of *nihonmachi* or Japanese settlements that sprung up in places like Dilao in the Philippines (a suburb of Manila which had an estimated population of 3000 Japanese residents), Siam (1500), Cochinchina (300), and Cambodia (350).[24]

Rather than simply sliding into existing patterns, Japanese merchants proved to be a highly disruptive addition to the commercial scene. A 1610 letter sent by Tokugawa Ieyasu to Cambodia outlined the nature of the problem:

> In the first place, merchants from my country [Japan] go to several places in your country [Cambodia] as well as Cochinchina and Champa. There they become cruel and ferocious. I have received information that these men cause terrible damage and there are no peaceful days in these areas . . . Furthermore, we have heard that they hide [in Southeast Asia] . . . and when the right circumstances present themselves they commit crimes and cause suffering to people in those areas. Their offenses are extremely serious. Please punish them immediately according to the laws of your country. It is not necessary to have any reservations in this regard.[25]

The shogun's closing comments were particularly telling; the king should not hesitate to apply Cambodian law to offenders even if its application led to the execution of Japanese merchants.

Documents dispatched to the Nguyễn lords of Cochinchina largely repeated the same instructions. While the 1604 letter discussed at the beginning of the article provided the terse instruction to punish Japanese merchants "according to your laws," a second missive sent a year

[22] Iwao estimates the average number of passengers and crew at 236. Iwao, *Shuinsen bōekishi*, p. 273.

[23] Ishizawa Yoshiaki has suggested that 71,200 men and women left aboard Japanese vessels and roughly another 30,000 on foreign shipping in this period. Yoshiaki Ishizawa, "Les quartiers japonais dans l'Asie du Sud-Est au XVIIème siècle," in *Guerre et Paix en Asie du Sud-Est*, ed. Nguyen The Anh and Alain Forest (Paris: Harmettan, 1998).

[24] For these figures and a detailed examination of the settlements, see Iwao Seiichi, *Zoku nanyō Nihon machi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987).

[25] Kondō, *Gaiban tsūsho*, p. 185.

later fleshed out this theme.[26] Driven by greed, "merchants from my country [Japan]" were, the shogun explained, prepared to travel great distances against "winds and weather," risking all in pursuit of profit. Once they arrived in places like Cochinchina, they acted without virtue, breaking laws and disrupting trade.[27] The condemnation of Japanese traders as individuals driven by an insatiable greed and lacking all morality was a standard feature of these documents. In a subsequent letter sent by one of the shogun's chief advisers, they were described as "neither wise nor skilled [people], whose only purpose is to greedily pursue profit. This is something that people without virtue do."[28]

Given these failings, the only way to deal with such people was swift and comprehensive punishment. A letter sent to Cochinchina in 1606 provided more detail as to what should be done: "If the merchants from Japan who go to your country do not obey [the rules of] your government, please inspect the severity of their crimes, and punish them heavily or slightly in accordance with their guilt."[29] Final judgment lay, therefore, with the local ruler, who was free to assess the offense and apply any punishment he considered appropriate. Another document dispatched to the same state used largely identical phrasing: "Please judge whether the deed is right or wrong, and decide whether the crime is slight or heavy, and punish [the culprit] immediately. As for our country, we think that there is no obstacle [when it comes to punishing the Japanese]."[30]

The ruler of Patani, a state on the Malay Peninsula, received similar letters. In a 1606 document, Ieyasu expressed his satisfaction that maritime "traffic between our two countries has increased recently," but as in other parts of the region "Japanese merchant ships [had] engaged in violent plunder and harmful disruptions."[31] The list of crimes was lengthy, including murder, arson, and disturbing the peace, and the response predictable: Patani should punish Japanese "villains" appropriately by applying the full measure of local law.

In addition to the missives sent to Asian rulers, a steady stream of letters flowed to the Philippines, which had become an important market for Japanese merchants and home to the most populous *nihonmachi* in the region. In 1602, Ieyasu explained that regular correspondence "causes us to feel that our two nations, though separated by great

[26] Ibid., p. 101.
[27] Ibid., p. 103.
[28] Ibid., pp. 116–117.
[29] Ibid., p. 109.
[30] Ibid., pp. 116–117.
[31] Ibid., p. 198.

waters, are but one happy family." He went on to renounce any legal claims over Japanese offenders by stipulating that Spanish authorities were perfectly entitled to "execute all Japanese who . . . violate your law."[32] Six years later, in 1608, the shogun dispatched another letter to the Philippines that repeated the same message. This time, however, he went one step further by including alongside the document a notice board *(seisatsu)* designed for public display in Manila and bearing on it an explicit warning to Japanese merchants: "As for the Japanese who go to Luzon [Manila] in recent years and commit crimes, they should be punished in accordance with the laws of Luzon. Japan has no reservations about this."[33] Once in the Philippines, the board was placed in a prominent position in the center of the city to warn potential troublemakers that they would be exposed to the full force of Spanish law.[34] A second notice board inscribed with a similar message was later sent to Cochinchina to be put on display there.[35]

In the majority of his letters, the shogun responded not to potential problems that might emerge sometime in the future but to incidents that had already happened. Quite clearly, therefore, these documents reveal something about the nature of the Japanese commercial advance into the region and the violence that seemed invariably to accompany it. Further confirmation of this point appears in the form of letters coming out of Southeast Asia from the rulers of Cochinchina and Cambodia. Although sometimes phrased in frustratingly tactful terms, they reveal just how often Japanese merchants clashed with local authorities and the dimensions of their rampages. The complaints are all the more striking because they came from rulers who were eager to court Tokugawa favor in order to expand commercial ties with a rich trading partner. The Nguyễn lords of Cochinchina provide a case in point for they were heavily dependent on foreign trade, seeing it as "key to their survival against the more powerful Trinh state, a source of revenues, weapons, and information."[36] As a result, they had little reason

[32] Zelia Nuttall, *The Earliest Historical Relations between Mexico and Japan: From Original Documents Preserved in Spain and Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1906), p. 4.

[33] Sūden Konchiin, *Ikoku nikki shō*, ed. Murakami Naojirō (Tokyo: Sankūsha, 1911), p. 11.

[34] Iwao Seiichi, *Early Japanese Settlers in the Philippines* (Tokyo: Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, 1943), p. 27.

[35] Kondō, *Gaiban tsūsho*, pp. 116–117.

[36] Craig Lockard, "'The Sea Common to All': Maritime Frontiers, Port Cities, and Chinese Traders in the Southeast Asian Age of Commerce, ca. 1400–1750," *Journal of World History* 21, no. 2 (2010): 219–247. Li Tana notes that while for some states "the question of overseas trade may have been a matter of determining whether they were rich or poor. For early Cochinchina, it was a question of life and death." Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, p. 60.

to exaggerate the scale of Japanese depredations and in many cases almost certainly underplayed what was actually happening.

A typical complaint penned in 1606 by Nguyễn Hoàng addressed the behavior of three Japanese vessels that had arrived in his territory the previous year.[37] According to the letter, he had welcomed the arrival of these merchants, extending them all possible courtesy. Rather than engaging in trade, however, they had run "rampant in my lands stealing goods and money belonging to Fujianese merchants and abusing neighboring residents and women." With no regard for law or the authority of local officials, they had done exactly as they wished and, after a failed attempt to reason with his unwelcome guests, Hoàng was left with no choice but to call in armed troops to restore order by force. At the heart of the complaint, as with most of the others that followed it, was a single charge: although Japanese merchants arrived seemingly intent on trade, they shifted swiftly and without warning or apparent provocation to violence.

In a subsequent letter, one of Hoàng's successors attempted to convey the same message while tiptoeing around the issue in order to avoid giving offense.[38] In "recent years," he explained, "ignorant men . . . have increased their selfish actions and prevented merchants from sailing [freely]." Not surprisingly, these "ignorant men" turned out to be Japanese merchants whose violent conduct had made it necessary to raise the issue directly with the Tokugawa regime. Although the writer did his best to leave the exact nature of the offense vague, other observers were far less diplomatic about the extent of these "selfish actions." Richard Cocks, an English merchant based in Japan, described the "burning [of] China junckes . . . whereof the King of Cochinchina advised themperour [shogun] of their vnrulynesse."[39] At the end of his letter and clearly eager to retain trading links with Japan, the lord of Cochinchina expressed a plaintive hope that "from now on, when the merchant ships of your country come to our country, they will behave faithfully and trade with our country in accordance with these sincere feelings."

The King of Cambodia also sent letters to the shogun complaining bitterly about the violent aftermath of the arrival of Japanese merchant

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[37] Kondō, *Gaiban tsūsho*, p. 107.

[38] Ibid., pp. 115–116.

[39] Richard Cocks, *Diary Kept by the Head of the English Factory in Japan: Diary of Richard Cocks, 1615–1622*, ed. University of Tokyo Historiographical Institute (Tokyo: University of Tokyo, 1978–1980), 2:85.

vessels. In a 1610 missive, he wrote that the "people of your country are cruel and ferocious. They come to engage in commerce but quickly act contrary to this purpose and rampage along the coast."[40] The result was to disrupt maritime traffic and undermine the prosperity of Cambodian ports. Incensed by such conduct and desperate for action, local traders had, the king explained, demanded that he deploy troops to restore order, end their suffering, and bring the offenders into line.

Each of these letters focused on the propensity shown by Japanese merchants to shift back and forth between peaceful commerce and violence. Arriving ostensibly to buy and sell goods, they opted instead to engage in "violent plunder and harmful disruptions."[41] In this way, Japanese traders appeared, both in these complaints as well as in the shogun's own letters, as unpredictable troublemakers who could not be trusted to follow regulations and who slipped too quickly into violence if their demands were not met. This tendency was neatly summarized by a Dutch observer who wrote that the Japanese "are dangerous to govern outside their land. If things do not go to their liking or when badly treated, they at once take a desperate attitude, which in their land would be prevented by rigorous justice or rather by tyranny. In this way they are lambs [in Japan] and like devils outside their land. This has been proved often in Patani, Siam and different places."[42] The ruler who welcomed Japanese merchants into his ports could thus never be certain if he was receiving peaceful merchants or dangerous pirates, legitimate traders or opportunistic marauders.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a full explanation for this predisposition toward violence, some contributing factors can be noted. First, Japanese mariners had a long history of mixing trade and maritime violence in an unstable but effective mix. The *Mingshi*, the official dynastic history of the Ming regime, which documents hundreds of pirate raids launched from Japan against the Chinese coast in the sixteenth century, included a description that mirrors some of the language used in the letters from Cambodia and Cochinchina: the Japanese "are cunning by nature. They often carried local products and weapons when they frequented our coast. When the occasion presented itself, they would display their weapons and

[40] Kondō, *Gaiban tsūsho*, p. 184.
[41] Ibid., p. 198.
[42] H. T. Colenbrander, ed., *Jan Pietersz: Coen, bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf in Indie* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1919–1923), 1:32.

plunder recklessly. When there was no opportunity, they would spread out their local products and claim to have come to present tribute."[43] Many of the Japanese merchants who arrived in Southeast Asia in the seventeenth century emerged from ports that had once hosted pirate fleets, and they seem to have slipped readily into the same patterns.

At the same time, violence should be seen as a tool, a useful instrument that provided a way for Japanese merchants to compete in a crowded commercial landscape and secure a guaranteed return on investment. As opposed to Chinese traders who had a long history in the region and well-established networks on which they could rely, the Japanese were relative newcomers more famous for their warlike qualities than any particular business acumen. Because of this, force represented a way to succeed when other avenues were closed or blocked. Thus while some violent outbursts, such as the assault on "neighboring residents and women" described in the letter from Cochinchina, seem to have occurred almost at random, in other cases they had a far more deliberate quality. It is, for example, difficult to interpret Japanese attacks on Fujianese merchants as anything other than an assault on a formidable competitor that was capable of obstructing any attempt to make inroads into these markets.

Violence and European Expansion

In the ease with which they moved from commerce to violence and back again, Japanese traders bear a striking resemblance to their European counterparts and especially Dutch and English merchants who appeared for the first time in Southeast Asia in the same period. As one example, the first Dutch expedition to Asia, which arrived in the port of Banten on Java in 1596, was initially welcomed by local officials eager to trade with these newcomers, but, prompted by a dispute over the delivery of goods, the encounter soon took a turn for the worse. Having fallen "into disgrace with the inhabitants," the leaders of the Dutch expedition decided to bombard the port in order to force the Bantenese to accept their terms. According to one Dutch observer, we "discredited ourselves even further when we captured and imprisoned some inhabitants and even arrogantly braved the town, blockading

[43] Quoted in Kwan-wai So, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China During the Sixteenth Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1975), p. 170.

the harbor and firing some ordnance, defying the town with as much spitefulness and rude behavior as we could muster."[44] In the process, the expedition established a pattern that was to be duplicated in subsequent voyages to Asia. When they encountered the Gordian knot of difficult conditions, overly effective competitors, and recalcitrant local officials, Dutch commanders readily unsheathed their swords to cut through these problems. Indeed, so frequently was violence employed that the Dutch East India Company's directors berated their subordinates for their attitude: "Too promptly one argues: we can not accept such conditions, ergo one may attack somebody without looking for any reason or justification. This is a stance we cannot vindicate to ourselves or to the world."[45]

English merchants arriving in the Indian Ocean in the early seventeenth century were also predisposed to make use of violence as a basic business tool. Indeed, some of their earliest ventures were little more than thinly disguised pirate expeditions designed to seize as much plunder as possible under the cover of legitimate trade. The voyage of the *Tiger*, an English vessel that departed Europe in 1604 under the control of Henry Michelbourne, provides one example of this. Arriving in the Indian Ocean with a broad mandate for trade in Asian waters, Michelbourne fell quickly into piracy and plunder, attacking passing maritime traffic at will and seizing goods indiscriminately. This is reflected in an account kept by one member of the expedition in which any mention of the sighting of a strange vessel is invariably followed with the comment that "wee fell in fight with her."[46] When they ventured on land, Michelbourne and his men discovered that they and their countrymen had gained a reputation as "theeves and disordinate livers, and such as did come for nothing but to deceive them, or use such violence as time would give us leave to execute."[47]

Another example comes from 1612 when the English East India Company assembled a small fleet of vessels with the intention of using force to pry open Indian ports to trade and secure a set of desired concessions. The commander of the fleet, Henry Middleton, expressed his plans in clear terms, writing "that they would not deale with us at their

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[44] Quoted in Martine van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies, 1595–1615* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 86.

[45] Quoted in Rene Barendse, *The Arabian Seas, 1640–1700* (Leiden: CNWS, 1998), p. 131.

[46] Albert Markham, ed., *The Voyages and Works of John Davis* (London, 1880), p. 172.

[47] Ibid., p. 174

owne doores wee having come so farre with commodities fitting their countrie . . . I thought wee should doe ourselves some right . . . to cause them to barter with us."[48] His fleet proceeded to plunder merchant ships traveling along the sea routes linking India with the Red Sea, netting fifteen prizes in just two weeks and only stopping when Middleton reported jubilantly that they had "nowe as many shippes as wee could well tell whatt to doe with all."[49] The regularity of such incidents reveals just how closely the first phase of European expansion into Asia was bound up with violence. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say, as Rene Barendse has argued, that the entire European presence in Asia was "built on a capacity to deploy armed force and on the contained use of force."[50]

While some scholars, especially those writing in relation to the Dutch and English East India companies, have emphasized the deliberate or rational deployment of force to achieve certain clearly defined aims, this approach does not provide an entirely accurate picture of conditions on the ground. Challenging this notion, Sanjay Subrahmanyam has argued instead for the presence of "constant but low-level violence" that he describes variously as "banal" or "ambient."[51] European groups like the Dutch and English used violence to achieve defined goals, but it could also erupt without warning or apparent reason. Such a description provides a far better fit with the available documentation, particularly on the Asian side, where Europeans are invariably presented as persistent troublemakers who can never be fully relied upon to pursue profit simply by negotiation and who veer instead to violence at unexpected times.[52] At the same time, Subrahmanyam's notion of ambient violence serves to capture the picture presented in the letters exchanged between Japan and Southeast Asia. When Japanese merchants appeared in ports across the region, they, just like their European counterparts, brought with them not only trading goods but

[48] Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or, Purchas His Pilgrimes: Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others* (Glasgow: J. MacLehose and Sons, 1905–1907), 1:272.

[49] John Jourdain, *Journal of John Jourdain, 1608–17: His Experiences in Arabia, India and the Malay Archipelago* (Cambridge: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1905), p. 210.

[50] Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pp. 493–494.

[51] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Ethnography, Violence, and the Dutch East India Company," in *Between the Middle Ages and Modernity*, ed. Charles Parker and Jerry Bentley (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).

[52] As one example, this is how the Dutch appear in Tokugawa sources where they are described as pirates or robbers. Sūden, *Ikoku nikki shō*, pp. 189–190.

"an ever present violence—whether acted out or potential."[53] But if they shared a similar reliance on force, there were also some vital differences that set the Japanese apart from the Dutch, the English, or for that matter any other European group in the region. The most important of these concerns the crucial issue of state support.

The State and the Merchant

The European enterprises that appeared in early modern Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were bound up with the state. In most cases, Europeans were in the region in large part because their home government had involved itself in overseas expansion, and they relied on its continued assistance to maintain a footing in Asia. For the Portuguese, who pioneered new sea routes between Europe and Asia, the state itself was the primary vehicle for expansion. As the Estado da India was a centrally controlled enterprise, every Portuguese subject who ventured east "did so in the service of the Crown," although most worked to enrich themselves on the side.[54] The English East India Company (EIC) and its Dutch counterpart, the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), which followed and eventually supplanted the Portuguese, were putatively independent organizations, but they also relied on a thick web of connections with their home governments. Indeed the very powers that these organizations depended upon to carve out a place in Asia had been gifted to them by the state.

At their moment of creation in 1600 and 1602 respectively, the English and Dutch companies were presented with a sweeping monopoly for all trade "East of the Cape of Good Hope but also in and beyond the straits of Magellan"[55] It was a significant prize, bringing with it access to all "Islands, Ports, Havens, Cities, Creeks, Towns and Places" in the richest market of the world and preventing, at least in theory, any domestic competitor from intruding.[56] In addition to

[53] Subrahmanyam, "Ethnography, Violence, and the Dutch East India Company," p. 135.

[54] C. R. Boxer, *Four Centuries of Portuguese Expansion, 1415–1825: A Succinct Survey* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1961), p. 18.

[55] For the complete charter see J. A. van der Chijs, *Geschiedenis der stichting van de Vereenigde O. I. Compagnie* (Leiden: P. Engels, 1857), pp. 98–115.

[56] John Shaw, *Charters Relating to the East India Company from 1600 to 1761* (Madras: Printed by R. Hill at the Government Press. 1887), p. 6.

this monopoly, the state granted both organizations a far-reaching set of powers. Article 35 of the VOC's charter gave the new enterprise sovereign powers of the kind more conventionally monopolized by national governments, including rights to conduct direct diplomacy with any ruler it might encounter, to maintain and deploy military forces, and to seize control of territory. The English company's first charter was less ambitious, but subsequent documents gave it the right to "make Peace or War with any Prince or People that are not Christians, in any Places of their Trade, as shall be most for the Advantage and Benefit of the said *Governor and Company*."[57] Even after they had established themselves in Asia, the companies continued to receive financial, legal, and political support from their respective governments. Thus, the States-General provided the VOC with a substantial subsidy, exemption from customs duties, and access to ships, ordinance, and munitions.[58]

In addition to providing material support, the state sprang enthusiastically to the defense of its subjects abroad. In this way, the initial rivalry between the Dutch and English companies for control over the trade in precious spices played out as much in Europe as a dispute between two governments as it did on the ground in Asia.[59] In 1612, for example, the English secretary of state instructed the king's ambassador in the Dutch Republic to press the EIC case because "his Majesty being sensible both as the Parent and Protector of his Subjects . . . doth require you to take notice of these Complaints."[60] A year later, the English government went one step further by convening the first of a sequence of colonial conferences to discuss the situation in Asia directly with Dutch representatives. The Dutch government responded by dispatching its own emissaries to the conference, including the redoubtable legal scholar Hugo Grotius, to argue the VOC case. That the interests of state and company overlapped was simply taken as a given in both countries, and it found clear reflection in the EIC's charter, which stated that the new organization was designed to promote the "Honour of our Nation, the Wealth of our People, the Increase of

[57] Ibid., p. 45. Italics in the original.

[58] Van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle*, p. 488

[59] For a summary of this conflict, see Vincent Loth, "Armed Incidents and Unpaid Bills: Anglo-Dutch Rivalry in the Banda Islands in the Seventeenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies* 29 (1995): 705–740.

[60] G. N. Clark, *Colonial Conferences between England and the Netherlands in 1613 and 1615* (Leiden: Brill, 1940), p. 47.

our Navigation, and the advancement of Lawful Traffick to the benefit of our Commonwealth."[61]

In contrast, the Tokugawa regime adopted a very different attitude toward its subjects abroad. As already discussed, the boom in trade between Japan and Southeast Asia that took place in the first half of the seventeenth century occurred largely within the confines of the *shuinjō* system. The maritime passes that formed the heart of this framework for trade were closely tied to the Tokugawa regime. Obtaining such a pass required the mediation of a high-ranking Tokugawa official, and the documents themselves bore the shogun's name.[62] In those few cases in which a ship carrying one of these documents was attacked, Japanese authorities tended to respond with disproportionate force. In 1610, for example, the regime authorized the destruction of the great Portuguese trading ship sailing between Macao and Nagasaki as retaliation for the violation of a *shuinjō* two years earlier.[63] The scale of the loss—the vessel carried within its hold the single most valuable cargo in East Asia—sent shock waves throughout the region, with the newly installed head of the VOC factory in Japan commenting that its "very costly cargo [was] burnt and sunk by the efforts of the Japanese, who by the emperor's order tried to seize the ship by force."[64]

The logic for such an outsized reaction is clear. The *shuinjō* and hence the ships that carried them were specially authorized by the shogun's administration, and they functioned as mobile outposts of its authority. As such, the state's prestige was directly invested in these documents, and any infringement was treated "as a direct challenge to its authority."[65] In those very rare instances in which a *shuinjō* was violated, the regime was prepared to act and act forcefully. Crucially, however, the policy stemmed not from any desire to protect Japanese merchants or mariners abroad—something that was entirely incidental to the desired outcome—but rather from an overriding apprehension about its own authority, embodied in this case in a single document. Beyond this concern with the *shuinjō*, the regime washed its hands of its subjects.

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[61] Shaw, *Charters Relating to the East India Company*, p. 2.

[62] Robert Innes, "The Door Ajar: Japan's Foreign Trade in the Seventeenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1980), p. 106.

[63] For the best account of this incident, see C. R. Boxer, ed., *Portuguese Merchants and Missionaries in Feudal Japan, 1543–1640* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986).

[64] Quoted in ibid., p. 87.

[65] Arano Yasunori, "The Formation of a Japanocentric World Order," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 2, no. 2 (2005): 185–216.

This lack of concern is clear from Tokugawa Ieyasu's letters in which he made no effort to defend the conduct of Japanese merchants abroad. Far from it, he condemned them for excessive greed and denounced their trading practices across the region. At the same time, the shogun repeatedly and emphatically renounced any link between his government and those Japanese merchants who chose to operate on distant commercial frontiers. It was up to local rulers and officials to investigate "the severity of their crimes, and punish them heavily or slightly in accordance with their guilt."[66] The larger message was unmistakable: Japanese merchants were on their own and could expect no aid or protection from the state. It was also consistent, repeated whenever there was an opportunity, and broadly disseminated, going out not simply to rulers and officials in Southeast Asia but also to Japanese merchants themselves who could see visible evidence of the regime's position on public notice boards displayed in the Philippines and Cochinchina.

Perhaps the best example of the divergent relationship between state and subject comes in the form of one of the most famous legal cases of this period, which involved both European merchants and Tokugawa subjects. To make it even more relevant, the dispute concerned the issue at the heart of the shogun's letters: jurisdiction over one's subjects in a distant land. The legal controversy in question was the Amboyna incident, an episode that took place on a tiny island in modern day Indonesia but came to poison relations between England and the Netherlands for decades. On 22 February 1623, a Japanese mercenary in the employ of the VOC was arrested for making persistent inquiries into the defenses and garrison of one of the Dutch company's castles on Amboyna.[67] After torture, he confessed his involvement in a conspiracy that had been orchestrated by a group of English merchants to seize control of the fortification. On 26 February, the local Dutch governor, Harman Van Speult, started torturing these merchants until he had extracted confessions from the majority of them. The ringleader of the plot was identified as Gabriel Towerson, chief agent of the English company in Amboyna, who confessed that he had plotted with the Japanese to make himself master of the castle. Armed with this evidence, Van Speult convened a council of local VOC employees, a group that later became known as the Amboyna judges, to pronounce

[66] Kondō, *Gaiban tsūsho*, p. 109.

[67] For an account of this incident and the Japanese role in it, see Adam Clulow, "Unjust, Cruel and Barbarous Proceedings: Japanese Mercenaries and the Amboyna Incident of 1623," *Itinerario* 31, no. 1 (2007): 15–34.

sentence on the supposed conspirators. The result was an emphatic guilty verdict, and on 9 March ten English merchants as well as a group of Japanese mercenaries were put to death.

When news of the Amboyna case reached London at the end of May 1624, it sparked outrage from the board of EIC governors, who protested that a Dutch court had no right to try English merchants. Condemning the "presumptuous proceedings," they moved quickly to gather all possible resources for a long fight.[68] The first and most crucial step was to seek support from the state and particularly from James I who was called upon to "vindicate the death of his subjects so cruelly and unjustly executed in the Indies."[69] On 11 July, the governors secured an audience with the king in his bedchamber, where they proceeded to deliver a petition and a blood-drenched account of events that emphasized the grave injustices done to the "King's subjects at Amboyna."[70] Filled with lurid details about the torture inflicted on Towerson and his subordinates, it secured the desired result with one observer reporting that the "king felt the matter very keenly."[71]

Swinging his weight behind the company, the king promised "a speedy reparation from the Dutch by the strength of his own arm."[72] The result was three clearly articulated demands that were subsequently conveyed to the States-General in The Hague: the Dutch must punish Van Speult and the remainder of the Amboyna judges, compensate the EIC for its losses, and make "reparations to his [the king's] subjects whose honour he considers seriously impugned." If this did not occur, the English monarch was prepared to take action by seizing Dutch ships in English ports or, more worryingly for Dutch authorities, by threatening "irreconcilable war."[73] While he waited for a response, James suggested that, in addition to these measures, he should officially join the company so that its ships could sail under the protection of his royal banner. In this way, the monarch promised to "assure his merchants of his powerful protection of them for the time to come."[74] Although the

[68] W. N. Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, East Indies, China and Japan, Volume 4: 1622–1624* (London: HMSO, 1878), §377. For ease of reference, this and the subsequent citations from this source refer to individual sections rather than page numbers.
[69] Ibid., §511.
[70] Ibid., §503.
[71] Karen Chancey, "The Amboyna Massacre in English Politics, 1624–1632," *Albion* 30, no. 4 (1998): 583–598.
[72] Sainsbury, *Calendar of State Papers, Volume 4: 1622–1624*, §503.
[73] Ibid., §513.
[74] Ibid., §511.

offer was eventually refused by EIC administrators, who preferred to keep the crown out of day-to-day operations, it provided yet another sign of a general willingness to support English merchants abroad.

On the continent, the States-General, the Dutch parliament, promptly took the same attitude and moved equally forcefully in defense of their countrymen. Although there were clear misgivings about the nature of the legal proceedings on Amboyna, the States-General initially refused to take any action, and its representatives asserted that Van Speult had behaved entirely appropriately. This continued for some months until 23 November 1624 when the Dutch government, alarmed by James's threat of reprisals against shipping, agreed to recall the Amboyna judges to Europe for questioning.[75] Having made a public response to English demands, it settled back into inactivity until September 1627, when a panel of seven judges was appointed to adjudicate the matter. From the beginning, however, it was clear that the new case would be nothing more than a show trial intended to placate English sentiment and that the States-General would never tolerate any infringement on its jurisdiction. The subsequent proceedings dragged on for years until political pressure had subsided enough to allow a verdict of not guilty, which was eventually delivered in January 1632.[76]

While the decision quashed any possibility for immediate action, successive English governments continued to cling to the grievance and apply pressure whenever possible. Finally, in August 1654, after decades of protest, Oliver Cromwell forced the VOC to pay general damages of £85,000 to the East India Company and £3,615 to the heirs of the men executed at Amboyna.[77] In contrast to the outrage generated in England, the execution of a group of Tokugawa subjects on what appeared to many observers to be trumped up charges excited no response in Japan. While the Japanese regime made no statement regarding this case, there can be little doubt as to its position. In letter after letter, the shogun had made it absolutely clear that local legal authorities had total jurisdiction over Tokugawa subjects abroad and were free to punish them in any way they deemed appropriate.

These divergent attitudes toward legal sovereignty bring us to the heart of a much larger question about the reasons for European suc-

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[75] W. Ph. Coolhaas, "Aanteekeningen en Opmerkingen over den zoogenaamdem Ambonschen Moord," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indie* 101 (1942): 49–93.

[76] Ibid.

[77] William Wilson Hunter, *History of British India* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1900), p. 427.

cess in Asia. Of late, traditional explanations that center on European cultural exceptionalism or the power of military technology have lost much of their persuasive value, and new arguments have moved increasingly to the fore.[78] One of the most convincing of these shifts the focus from material and cultural factors to the role of state support as an important enabling factor for European success. Tonio Andrade, who has emerged as one of the most effective proponents of this argument, suggests that "Europeans' success in creating overseas empires was based less on technology than on geopolitics, and particularly on one factor: state support."[79] In other words, it was the willingness of European governments to charter organizations like the East India companies, to provide resources, and to spring to the defense of its subjects that made the difference. The presence of the state gave a coherence to European expansion that Asian trade diasporas lacked and offered an unprecedented staying power. It was, in short, a vital edge that Europeans brought to Asia, and it helped them overwhelm their competitors.

In assembling evidence to show the relative absence of state support on the Asian side, the tendency has been to rely on stock, essentially formulaic, statements periodically made by the rulers of large territorial states with little interest in maritime commerce. Thus, the Mughal emperor's famous comment that "Merchants who travel by sea are like silly worms clinging to logs" is often recycled and presented as evidence of a general apathy.[80] It is in this regard that the shogun's letters to Southeast Asia become especially important. There is a clear difference between generic statements—largely devoid of political and temporal context—made by well-established regimes, and these documents in which a brand-new government with a largely favorable attitude toward commerce responded to a discrete and well-defined issue. The shogun's letters reveal a deliberate policy decision concern-

[78] In his superb new book, Tonio Andrade has made a convincing case that we should look again at European military technology. Tonio Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's First Great Victory over the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[79] Tonio Andrade, "Beyond Guns, Germs, and Steel: European Expansion and Maritime Asia, 1400–1750," *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010): 165–186. As Andrade makes clear, "the role of the state is a key, but not the only key." A similar argument about the importance of state support has also been made by Jack Wills. John E. Wills Jr., "Maritime Asia, 1500–1800: The Interactive Emergence of European Domination," *American Historical Review* 98 (February 1993): 83–105.

[80] As one example, see Michael Pearson, "Merchants and States," in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350–1750*, ed. James Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 41–116.

ing Japanese traders operating beyond the archipelago rather than a vague sentiment about the place of merchants in society. As such, they provide one of the clearest expressions available of the comparative advantage enjoyed by Europeans.

Japanese merchants in Southeast Asia were as active, as numerous, and certainly as ruthless as their European counterparts, but behind them stood a regime that had no interest in providing assistance to its subjects or in preserving legal sovereignty over their bodies. It is not only that Tokugawa Ieyasu's ready abandonment of legal rights has no obvious parallel in the history of European expansion into Asia but also that Dutch, English, and other European merchants could count on their home governments for continued and remarkably expansive support that could span, as was the case in the Amboyna incident, decades rather than years. While state support alone does not explain why Europeans were able to convert tentative footholds into an enduring place in Asia—indeed it is unlikely that this can be ascribed to any single casual factor—it merits a prominent place in the debate, and it is in this context that the shogun's letters to Southeast Asia should be seen as an especially important source.