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Go-betweens and competitors. The Japanese residents in Southeast Asia at the crossroads between communities (17th century)

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Abstract: During the 17th century, the unprecedented opening of Japan to the outside world drew hundreds of Japanese to travel to and settle in Southeast Asia. These Japanese residents, some of whom continued to maintain a strong connection with Japan, acquired a privileged position in their host societies, as merchants, officials, or soldiers. This position enabled them to occupy the central function of go-betweens in the relations that the Southeast Asian states sought to establish with foreign merchants. This paper aims to demonstrate, through a careful analysis of sources and the use of modeling, that the Japanese in Southeast Asia crossed borders in multiple ways. Not only did they move outside the borders of Japan, but through their role as go-betweens they were also at the interface between social, ethno-linguistic, and religious groups. They used this favorable situation to facilitate communication as well as to erect barriers, according to their own interests. Although migrants imported practices from Japan when they settled there, this paper argues that in order to understand the solidity of their settlement and the success they and their children experienced they should be seen as frontier actors rather than Japanese migrants.

Keywords: cross-cultural relations; early modern Japan; early modern Southeast Asia; maritime circulations

At the turn of the 17th century, Japan experienced an unprecedented expansion of its foreign and diplomatic relations, not only with Europeans, but also with Southeast Asian countries.

This expansion had its origins in the navigations of the Sino-Japanese pirates, the famous *wakō*, who had been swarming the coasts of Korea and China since the

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14th–15th centuries.[1] From the middle of the 16th century, this endemic piracy, as well as the troubles caused by the Japanese in the context of the Chinese tributary system (including the Ningbo incident in 1523[2]), resulted in the Ming prohibition of Japanese travel to China.

Access to the Chinese market, especially silk, was necessary for Japanese merchants. That is what prompted them to travel to Southeast Asia, where they could meet with Chinese merchants while purchasing local products (ivory, deer skins, spices, sugar).

Japanese trade was then loosely regulated and largely dominated by merchant-pirates supported by the *daimyō* (feudal lords), who were looking for sources of funding for their war effort. If their relations with the Portuguese and the Jesuits are well documented,[3] this is not the case for their relations with Southeast Asia, about which almost no documents have been preserved.

From Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1592) and especially Tokugawa Ieyasu (1601) onwards, the Japanese state gradually took control of these foreign relations and tried to regulate them through the system of *shuinjō* 朱印状, i.e. travel licenses bearing a date, a destination and the red seal of the shogun. These licenses were supposed to allow the Southeast Asian authorities to distinguish pirates from legitimate merchants, although this distinction was still inoperative in the early 17th century. The *bakufu*'s aim was rather to decide which individuals had the right to engage in foreign trade.[4]

The period known as the *shuinsen* 朱印船 or red seal ships era (1601–1635) corresponds to the arrival in Southeast Asia, every year, of several ships from Japan, armed by Japanese merchants from Kyōto and Nagasaki, by *daimyō*, *bugyō*, or even Chinese and European merchants. This number has been estimated at a minimum of 356 ships over the entire period by the leading scholar on the subject, Iwao Seiichi.[5] It includes both licenses granted to ships that did not arrive at their destination, and ships for which it is not known whether they received a license or not. Some ships also traveled without *shuinjō*, but it is impossible to determine how many of them there were.

During that period, several thousand Japanese settled in Southeast Asia. They concentrated primarily in some of the main ports of the region, such as Manila, Ayutthaya (Siam), or Hội An (Đại Việt).[6] They held multiple functions and occupations

1 Peladan 2021; Shapinsky 2014; Tanaka 1986.
2 Shapinsky 2014: 215.
3 Tremml-Werner 2015; Vu Thanh 2016.
4 Bachelet 2022: 92–98.
5 Iwao 2013: 220.
6 Bachelet 2022 for a focus on Đại Việt and Hội An; Iwao 2017 [1940] for a general picture.

there – merchants, but also interpreters, officials, diplomats, soldiers or missionaries, often several at once.

In the 1630s, the maritime prohibition edicts (*kaikinrei* 海禁令 or *ikoku tokai kinshirei* 異国渡海禁止令) put an end to these regular direct contacts and migrations, the vast majority of the Japanese being now forbidden to leave the country or to return if they lived abroad. The Japanese in Southeast Asia, unable to return to Japan, nevertheless continued to exist as distinct communities until the end of the 17th century, when they eventually merged with the Chinese diaspora or local society.

Their good knowledge of the country and their privileged access to the local market made them crucial go-betweens for merchants coming from Japan, whether they were Japanese (before 1635), Chinese or European. It was with the latter that their role was most substantial, since apart from the missionaries and the conquered territories, the European implantation in Southeast Asia was often superficial.

Go-betweens and brokers have become key figures in the historiography of transnational relations and cross-cultural intercourse,[7] but they are yet to be fully incorporated into scholarship about Asia, especially before the 18th century, when primary material is scarce.[8] Interpreters, in particular, have been the subject of in-depth studies, whether or not on Asia;[9] this was also one of the main functions occupied by the Southeast Asian Japanese.

These go-betweens can be divided into several categories, which are not mutually exclusive. They may connect the group to which they belong with another group; they may belong to a third group that connects two different groups; they may escape classification into a specific and/or exclusive group. Japanese migrants and residents in Southeast Asia, like many other actors of global circulations in the early modern era, can correspond to these three profiles, and sometimes to all of them at the same time.

The notion of group used here is deliberately vague, so as to encompass ethnic, linguistic, social, cultural or religious groups. The sources at our disposal essentially describe groups defined according to ethno-linguistic criteria (Japanese, Portuguese etc.) or religious criteria (Christians), but they fail to account for the complexity of these group's organization by depicting them as homogeneous and clearly distinct blocks.

This paper focuses on the Japanese who, in the 17th century, crossed the Japanese borders and settled permanently in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, it aims to extend the analysis on border crossings by demonstrating how the Japanese and their children, through their activities as merchants, their shifting identities and

7 Jobs, Mackenthun 2013; Raj 2016; Schaffer et al. 2009.

8 Cushman 1981; Guerassimoff et al. 2020; Roberts 2009.

9 Harrison 2021; Kawashima 1989; Yao 2013.

their brokering functions, occupied a privileged position on the frontiers between distinct groups. These frontiers remained nevertheless fluctuating and delimited these groups only in a blurred manner. And it is precisely because the contours of these groups were blurred that they ended up intertwining.

In this configuration, Japanese residents were located in a contact zone. Their position allowed them to move easily from one group to another and turned them into active agents of the relationships and connections between these groups. They became, *in fine*, major participants in the expansion of Southeast Asian states' foreign relations and in foreign merchants' access to the local market.

The approach proposed here aims, in line with works belonging to the so-called "connected" or "global microhistory" (which point to more or less the same kind of methods) to "follow" [10] the Japanese actors in their migrations, transactions and relations with local authorities, foreign merchants and missionaries. It is indeed through a careful and attentive analysis of the primary sources that the complexity of the social interactions in which they were involved can be illustrated. These sources are relatively few in number, but diversified. They consist mainly of letters written by the Japanese in Southeast Asia (about twenty documents, written in Japanese or translated into Dutch right after their writing), annual letters written by the Jesuits and other missionary sources, and reports and diaries drawn up by Dutch merchants of the VOC.

The Japanese residents crossed borders in two ways; they traveled abroad and between communities. A first part will therefore focus on their migrations and a second on their migratory experience which includes, at least in part, a lifestyle based on the consumption of Japanese products. A third part will explore their activities as intermediaries between Japanese traders and local authorities. The fourth and fifth parts will deal with their position in-between groups and communities, regarding respectively to ethnolinguistic and religious boundaries.

1 Crossing Japan's borders: a shortened first wave of migrations

In the early Edo period, the Japanese migrated to Southeast Asia in previously unseen proportions. One of the commonly accepted definitions of a migrant implies a change of residence (or the intention to change residence) in the medium to long term; here, given the scarcity of documents written by the actors themselves, it is impossible to determine whether this intention may have existed. This analysis therefore includes,

10 Bertrand, Calafat 2018; Ghobrial 2019; Subrahmanyam 1997.

at least at the margin, individuals who came from Japan to trade, without necessarily acquiring a fixed residence there. Indeed, given that the conditions of navigation and trade at that time were determined by the monsoon, a trade trip to Southeast Asia necessarily involved several months spent there, and sometimes longer. Occurrences of ships remaining in port for a year due to damage or delay of some sort are common, and the merchants and sailors who traveled aboard them also had a migratory experience.

Several factors may have drawn the Japanese outside the country. The first was related to the endemic warfare that plagued Japan between the 15th and 16th centuries (the famous Warring States period or *Sengoku jidai* 戦国時代). Many samurai, vassals of defeated lords, found themselves without a master. Emigration then became an option to consider, since there is a strong demand in Asia for Japanese military expertise, in the handling of arquebuses in particular. The Dutch hired Japanese mercenaries,[11] as well as the King of Siam, who had his own personal guard.[12] The Japanese participated in the wars between Siam and Burma, as well as in the succession crises of Siam in the 1610s and late 1620s.[13] They were also employed by the Spaniards. In Manila, 800 Japanese participated in the massacre of 20,000 Chinese following the 1603 rebellion.[14]

Emigration also seems to have been related to the search for profit or the expansion of the activities of a family, a merchant house or a *daimyō*. It is relatively common to find Japanese in Southeast Asia bearing the names of large merchant families or *daimyō*. Arima Sugihiro 有馬杉廣, the first leader of the Japanese community in Siam before 1610, wore the name of one of the major *daimyō* recipients of *shuinjō*, Arima Harunobu 有馬晴信. In Hội An, the head of the community between 1635 and 1650 was a Hiranoya Rokubei 平野屋六兵衛, the name Hirano/Hiranoya being associated with a large merchant family of Ōsaka and Kyōto, the Sueyoshi 末吉, and with the *daikan* (local governor) Hirano Tōjirō 平野藤次郎. In some families, a younger brother settled abroad and maintained regular relations with his family in Japan, probably for the same reasons. Kadoya Shichirobei 角屋七郎兵衛, who settled in Hội An in 1631 and probably wrote until his death in 1672 to his brothers, was in that situation.[15]

The numbers of these migrants remained fairly small – up to 3,000 Japanese in the 1620s in Manila, perhaps 1,000 in Ayutthaya in Siam, 500–700 in Hội An in Đại Việt, 200–500 in Pinhalu-Phnom Penh in Cambodia. These ports were the only places

11 Clulow 2007: 16.
12 Nagazumi 2001: 114–116.
13 Baker, Phongphaichit 2017: 133–134.
14 Blair, Robertson 2004, vol. XIII.
15 Bachelet 2022: 326–334.

where they formed a community large enough to be called a Japanese city or district (*Nihonmachi* 日本町). They were also found in Batavia (about 100 people), Đông Kinh (present-day Hanoi), the Moluccas, or Burma, in lesser proportions. They nevertheless remained far fewer than the Chinese merchants who resided in these ports – 20,000 in Manila in the early 17th century.

The peculiarity of Japanese migration is that in the early 1630s, some of the migrants were left with no choice but to settle abroad and give up all hope of returning. The first edict prohibiting sea travel in 1633 only allowed Japanese who had been living abroad for less than five years to return. The second edict in 1635 forbade it to all Japanese returning "after having resided abroad",[16] which meant that the traders who just went to Southeast Asia for the trading season were allowed to return. Returning to the homeland was possible only for some of the migrants, and for a short period.

However, there are indications that between 1633 and 1635, the Japanese authorities may have been flexible. Indeed, the Japanese population of Manila, which had reached 3,000 in the 1620s, was estimated at only 800 in 1637. This drastic decrease (74 %) can only be explained by a massive return of Japanese from Manila to Japan, among whom it is unlikely that all had been in Manila for less than five years. However, as far as we know, there is no record of such an exodus, and if it had occurred, Spanish sources would probably have mentioned it.

The wake-up call of the 1633 edict could have been interpreted by the Japanese migrants as such, and many would have taken advantage of it to return. Can we consider, however, that the Japanese who did not return, such as Kadoya Shichirobei (who had left less than five years earlier!), had foreseen and accepted the fact of settling permanently or at least for the long term in the area? Nothing is less certain, especially since nothing indicates that the 1633 edict was conceived as a long-term measure. In Japan itself, merchants did not necessarily consider that this edict banning sea travel was destined to last. In 1650, Kansai merchants Suminokura Harunori 角倉玄紀, Sueyoshi Hachirōemon 末吉八郎右衛門, and Hirano Tōjirō petitioned the *bakufu* for permission to send ships back to Southeast Asia.[17] The Japanese authorities took some time before politely dismissing the request, which suggests that even the *bakufu* agreed to reconsider the matter.

In any case, some of these migrants retained, long after their departure, an attachment to Japan strong enough to wish they left a trace there. In a 1670 letter, Kadoya Shichirobei asked his brothers to adopt two children from the paternal and maternal branches of the family on his behalf and to buy them a house in the family's

16 Kikuchi 1931: 277.

17 Toby 1984: 10.

home area. Although he had already at least one son from his Vietnamese wife in Đại Việt, the Japanese merchant wanted to have a descendance in Japan.[18]

2 The Southeast Asian migrants: Japanese people outside Japan?

Whether or not these migrants chose to stay in Southeast Asia, some of them did make their home there. Most of them gathered in "Japanese quarters" that did not survive beyond the second or third generation. Indeed, it does not seem that the children of these migrants, whose mothers were generally not Japanese, sought to maintain a Japanese identity or consciousness, even though some of them were still called "Japanese" by outside observers, missionaries and European travelers.

Therefore, one cannot, as some have written,[19] call the Japanese communities a "diaspora", in the sense that they have neither the longevity nor the will to maintain a form of cohesion around values, customs or rituals that would be specific to them. In addition, being of Japanese descent seems to have been, in the long run, a minor claim among them. This can be explained by the policy put in place by the shogunate. As the majority of Japanese were forbidden to leave the country – and this ban was apparently respected, unlike in China – the Southeast Asian communities could not be strengthened by the arrival of new Japanese migrants, and it took only one or two generations for the feeling of belonging to a Japanese community to be diluted.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the idea of a Japanese identity was absent from the minds of some of these migrants. The very name *Nihonmachi* dates back to the 17th century. It was used by the famous British samurai William Adams to refer to the Japanese district of Hội An, under the form "Japanese mach" in 1617. This designation also appeared in the letters of Kadoya Shichirobei, who drew up a rough map of Hội An where he mentioned a *Nihonmachi* and a *Tōjinmachi* ("quarter of the Tang people" i.e., the Chinese). In addition, a companion of Kadoya's, Tanimura Shirobei 谷村四郎兵衛, stated in a 1676 letter to Shichirobei's older brother, Kadoya Shichirōjirō 角屋七郎次郎:

> I can imagine, of course, what your grief may have been after the death of Kurōbei-sama [another brother], and I understand this grief very well. Here, too, all the Japanese have died and there are only two of us left, but, as you can imagine, there is nothing we can do.[20]

18 Bachelet 2022.

19 Ribeiro 2001; Wray 2005.

20 爰元も日本仁皆々相果只二人に罷成り無爲方躰御推量可被成候. Matsumoto 1903: f.0351.

This text makes it clear that some members of the *Nihonmachi* of Hội An considered themselves "Japanese." The expression probably referred, in this case, to individuals who came from Japan – to the migrants then – which would explain why there would be only two left. It suggests that, for this presumably elderly man who came from Japan, the children of mixed parentage born in the *Nihonmachi* were not "Japanese".

The melancholy that emerges from this letter is reminiscent of other documents that testify to the emotions that the impossibility of returning to Japan and especially of seeing the family again could arouse. Cornelia van Nijenroode, a mestizo women with a Japanese mother and whose father was the head of the Dutch factory in Hirado between 1624 and 1632, alludes to it in her writings.[21] After her mother remarried to a Japanese man, she was transferred with her sister Esther to Batavia in 1636.[22] In 1671, she wrote a letter to her stepfather, Handa Goemon はん田五右衛門, in which she expressed her sadness and longing to see her mother, who had remained in Japan.

Other documents suggest that these migrants, unable to return to Japan, were keen to maintain a Japanese lifestyle, based on the consumption of Japanese products, although there is no evidence that they conceived this lifestyle as strictly and specifically "Japanese."

Kadoya Shichirobei repeatedly ordered a list of foodstuffs from his brothers in Japan, for his personal consumption, for his contacts in Japan, with whom he wished to maintain friendly ties, for the people who carried his goods and probably to send presents to his contacts in Đại Việt as well. At the end of 1671, he asked to be sent, among other things, two boxes of candied plums (*umeboshi*), two barrels of pickled radish (*daikon*), and 2.5 kg of dried mushrooms (*shiitake* and *matsutake*).[23] He obviously wanted to have foods specific to Japanese cuisine that he could not get in Đại Việt.

The distance and the impossibility of returning to the homeland did not prevent him from keeping strong links with Japan, which went beyond the maintenance of a way of life or his activity as a merchant. He asked for money to be paid to several temples in Nagasaki, as well as to the great sanctuary of Ise to which he offered 450 g of silver coins in thanks for a vow he had made to remain in good health. His desire to maintain a strong spiritual life, connected to Japan, is also manifested in the construction of a temple in Hội An bearing his family's original name (Matsumoto), for which he asked that a frame bearing that name and a bell be sent to him.

Kadoya Shichirobei also brought in Japanese clothing, but with the intention of giving it as a gift to the local authorities. It is not known whether the Japanese residents wore Japanese clothing, although the missionaries repeatedly say of some

21 Murakami 1939: 364–365.

22 Blussé 2002.

23 Horiuchi 1930, vol. 7: 306.

of them (Europeans or mestizos) that they dressed "Japanese-style" or "like Japanese," indicating that the residents had at least a specific style of dress.[24] There is a picture of a Japanese Christian from Batavia, drawn by Andries Beeckman in 1656,[25] in which the Japanese man is dressed in a lined kimono, with a belt from which a sword hangs. He is wearing a black hat, a distinctive sign of Europeans in Japanese iconography of the time. Because this image is unique, it is difficult to say that all Japanese people dressed this way – especially since there is no indication that the painter wanted to be true to his subject's actual appearance – but it may indicate, again, that the Japanese maintained a style of dress inspired by what they wore in Japan.

Therefore, some Japanese residents of Southeast Asia managed to maintain a strong connection to Japan to some extent, while living in a society whose customs they certainly adopted in part. It is likely that the temple of Kadoya Shichirobei, though called Matsumoto-dera, incorporated local elements. In 1640, Shichirobei and his Vietnamese wife, known by the Buddhist name of Diệu Thái 妙泰, made a donation to a cave temple in the Marble Mountains north of Hội An, indicating that the Japanese were active participants in local religious life.

It follows that although the settlements where these residents lived were called the "Japanese Quarter" from that time on, they were Japanese only insofar as, for a time, the heads of the families came from Japan. Their wives were Vietnamese, Thai or Cambodian, their children of mixed parentage, sometimes identified as Japanese, sometimes not. Until the end of the 17th century, the inhabitants of these *Nihonmachi* continued to be referred to by outside observers as "Japanese," even though there is almost no evidence that they used the Japanese language or claimed this heritage.

However, it seems that the children of Japanese migrants, once they were no longer associated with the *Nihonmachi*, were no longer considered, or at least designated, as "Japanese". This was the case of Alexo, a Christian martyr whose father, named Sebastião, was from Hakata and whose mother, Isabel, was Vietnamese. Probably born in the Hội An *Nihonmachi*, he left it at a young age when his father died, because his mother decided to return to live in his native region, the Thuận Hóa, about 100 km away. He therefore grew up and lived among the Christianity of that region, apparently without retaining any ties to the Japanese district. In the biographical record that the Jesuits devoted to him, they never referred to him as Japanese, although they did so with other individuals from the Japanese quarter.[26]

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24 Launay 2000, vol. 1: 46.

25 Wikimedia commons: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4a/Japanese_Christian_in_Jakarta_circa_1656_by_Andries_Beeckman.jpg

26 ARSI, Jap. Sin., vol. 70: 021.

The claim of a Japanese origin faded, among the descendants of the migrants, at the turn of the 18th century. Nevertheless, there was at least one counterexample. In 1778, Julien Faulet, a missionary of the Foreign Missions of Paris, wrote that he had "a village of Japanese that [he] held dear to his heart".[27] In Cambodia, this genealogical memory has obviously been maintained since, in 1852, some Christian Cambodians showed Father Bouillevaux some descendants of Japanese.[28]

Therefore, these examples invite us to think of Japanese residents of Southeast Asia not as migrants embodying a Japanese identity transplanted across the sea, but more as frontier actors, who not only stand at the junction between groups but also bridge these groups together.

3 The brokering activities of Southeast Asian Japanese (until 1635)

From the end of the 16th century until 1635, many Japanese traveled to Southeast Asia to trade. When arriving there, they needed the help of go-betweens, permanently settled, mastering the language and on good terms with the local authorities. These go-betweens enabled both merchants and the Japanese authorities to establish direct commercial and diplomatic relations with the Southeast Asian states.

In many cases, this intermediation was done by Japanese residents. The account of Edmund Sayers' trip to Hội An in 1617 provides a good example.[29] Sayers was traveling as a representative of the East India Company on William Adams' ship. Upon his arrival, he was greeted by the sons of the local Japanese community leader, named "Dacke-dono" in the British merchant's journal, and he stayed at their house. The so-called Dacke-dono was out, because he had gone to "Torroune" (*Toron* in Japanese, which referred to present-day Đà Nẵng) to welcome Barnardo, a Christian Japanese merchant from Nagasaki. The Japanese resident thus privileged his connection with the Japanese merchant, probably an older and closer connection, over that with the British newcomers. William Adams and Edmund Sayers nevertheless came from Hirado in Japan. They were identified as important partners, hence the good reception given to them by the sons, and then a few days later by Dacke-dono himself, who assured Edmund Sayers of his friendship and promised to help him.

27 Launay 2000: 68.
28 Mak Phoeun 1995: 133.
29 Purnell 1916: 102–111.

Nevertheless, in the days that followed, Barnardo, Dacke-dono and the local Vietnamese official eventually turned their back against the British. It was customary for merchants coming to this country, called Đàng Trong in Vietnamese, to go and pay homage to the local lord in order to retrieve a document signed with his seal, authorizing them to trade. The British wished to comply with the procedure. In 1614, the first British envoys to Hội An had never returned, one having been murdered and the other having disappeared at sea. The British therefore intended, in addition to asking to trade freely in the country, to seek redress from the local lord, Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên 阮福源. According to the British, the Vietnamese official was involved in the incident alongside another Japanese, *mangasawe* (Magozaemon?), who was deemed responsible for the murders. The official, probably fearing that the British would bring the matter to the Vietnamese lord, dissuaded them from going to the lord and assured them that he would obtain for them their safe-conduct.

The British found themselves ousted and stranded at Hội An, while the official, Dacke-dono, and Barnardo went to the capital to pay homage to the Vietnamese lord. The go-between, in this particular case, complied with the decision of the local authorities, no doubt for fear that the British, through their recriminations, would tarnish his image in front of the local authorities. At the same time, he supported and helped his Japanese partner, probably because the latter was an important merchant and he already knew him well, as well as because he was Japanese. Moreover, he continued to favor him thereafter, since he let Barnardo, upon his return to Hội An, decree that he had received from the Vietnamese lord the right to divide the Chinese silk cargoes among the various ships that came from Japan, much to Edmund Sayers' displeasure.

This pattern, one of Japanese trade relying on the intermediation of the Japanese residents, was probably the rule in all places where a *Nihonmachi* had been formed. Where the Japanese presence was less important, the situation could be different, because of the lack of Japanese presence on the spot. In 1606, the Japanese captain Suminokura Goemon 角倉五右衛門 had to rely on the intermediation of a Vietnamese merchant-literati, Hiển Sơn 縣山, who went to another region to get silk on his own account and bring it to the Japanese.[30]

Japanese residents also mediated in favor of, or at the initiative of, Southeast Asian authorities in their relations with Japan. The case of Yamada Nagamasa 山田長政, arguably the most famous Japanese in Southeast Asia, illustrates the privileged position acquired by these intermediaries. Arriving around 1610 in Ayutthaya in Siam, he became the head of the local Japanese community and then a high official under King Songtham. On the death of the latter (1628), he was swept up in the succession crisis which led to the arrival in power of Prasat Thong (r.1629–1655). He

30 *Suminokura Monjo*, quoted in Kawashima 1942: 220.

died in 1630, probably poisoned, when the new king had removed him by giving him the government of the city of Ligor.[31]

In 1621, Yamada Nagamasa sent two letters to the shogun's elder advisors (*rōjū*) Honda Masazumi 本多正純 and Doi Toshikatsu 土井利勝. He told them that at the request of King Songtham, two Thai ambassadors and a Japanese interpreter, Itō Kyūdayū 伊藤九大夫, have been sent to Japan. The three men were received by the shogun that same year, asking him that the friendly relations between the two countries continue and offering him gifts. They also received gifts and a letter. Yamada did the same in 1629, enclosing a letter with the gifts brought by three Thai ambassadors and another interpreter named Gozaemon 五左衛門.[32]

Similarly, in 1627, the Khmer authorities sent a man named Taketomi Nagaemon 武富長右衛門 to carry a letter to the *bugyō* of Nagasaki Hasegawa Gonroku 長谷川権六 and requested that the Japanese took a position of neutrality in the Cambodian conflict with Siam.[33] The intermediation activities of Japanese residents were thus not limited to fostering trade relations or relations with local merchant authorities, but also aimed to strengthen the diplomatic relations of their host country with their home country.

4 In-between groups and communities: the Japanese in Southeast Asia after 1635

There is little data on the go-betweens and the daily life of exchanges and transactions involving the Japanese in Southeast Asia for the period 1601–1635. Between the years 1630–1670, on the other hand, sources are more numerous thanks to the multiplication of European sources (Jesuits and Dutch in particular). It is also during this period that the few documents from the Japanese residents were written.

As the Japanese were unable to leave the country, the residents could no longer work directly on their behalf, and their intermediation function was to focus almost exclusively on Europeans and Chinese – in particular, not surprisingly, with those coming from Japan. They oscillated between partnership, competition and deception. In doing so, they successfully exploited their privileged position between local authorities and foreigners.

Among these profiles of go-between is that of a female interpreter, Ursula, active in Thăng Long or Đông Kinh (present-day Hanoi) in the 1630s–1640s. Her origin is, however, unclear. She is referred to as Japanese most of the time, sometimes as

31 Baker, Phongphaichit 2017: 123; Polenghi 2009: 43.

32 Iwamoto 2007; Nagazumi 1999.

33 Kitagawa, Okamoto 2015: 86–87.

Korean. The presence of a Korean woman in Southeast Asia is not impossible, although to our knowledge this is the only occurrence of this type. In the register (*ninbetsuchō* 人別帳) of the Hirado-machi 平戸町 district in Nagasaki, dated 1643, there is mention of several persons born in Korea or of Korean descent, who arrived in Nagasaki as a result of Hideyoshi's campaigns in the Imjin War (1592–1597). One of them is a certain Ikemoto Koshirō 池本小四郎, whose father had been born in Korea, had come to Nagasaki, and had traveled to Macao.[34] Ursula could have inherited a similar family history.

She appeared mainly in Dutch sources, particularly on the occasion of the first and second voyages of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to the Hanoi region.[35] In 1637, the Dutch decided to attempt to open trade relations with Đàng Ngoài (called Tonkin in European sources), the northern part of the Vietnamese kingdom which was then divided into two rival lordships. It was the representatives of the company, based in Hirado, Japan, who initiated the voyage.

After leaving Japan, the ship stopped at Hội An, where a Japanese named Strik was brought onboard. Once they arrived in the Red River Delta, further north, Strik allowed them to make contact with a man named Guan-dono, also Japanese, before the latter put them in touch with Ursula, who played the most important role. In this kind of cross-cultural interactions, the go-betweens are seldom alone to occupy this function. Rather, chains of intermediaries stretched across the communities, all the more numerous here that the groups that came into contact (the Dutch and the Vietnamese) had to go through a third group, the Japanese. The latter seemed to be part of a well-organized network, with one individual welcoming foreigners upon their arrival (perhaps at Phố Hiên, the river port that concentrated the region's commercial activities), and another handling relations with the central authorities in the capital. Therefore, the VOC had no Vietnamese interpreters but relied on the Japanese, both because its agents, in this case, came from Japan and because the Japanese were well established in Đại Việt.

These actors all played, at some point, the role of interpreter. The question of language is particularly important because the way in which cross-cultural contacts are usually reported tends sometimes, for reasons of simplification, to evacuate the difficulty of communication and the need, for the interlocutors, to have an interpreter. This is not to say that the sources fail to mention the presence of interpreters. This is the case with Ursula; it is also the case with a source that is as rare as it is valuable, the illustrated scroll of Chaya Matajirō Shinrokurō's 茶屋又次郎新六郎 journey to Hội An in the 1620s, in which an individual, clearly identified as an interpreter (*tsūkō* 通口), can be seen **[see image 1]**. According to Anzō Yūko, who

34 Hesselink 2009: 29.

35 *Dagregisters gehouden* … 1974, vol. 2: 192–293.

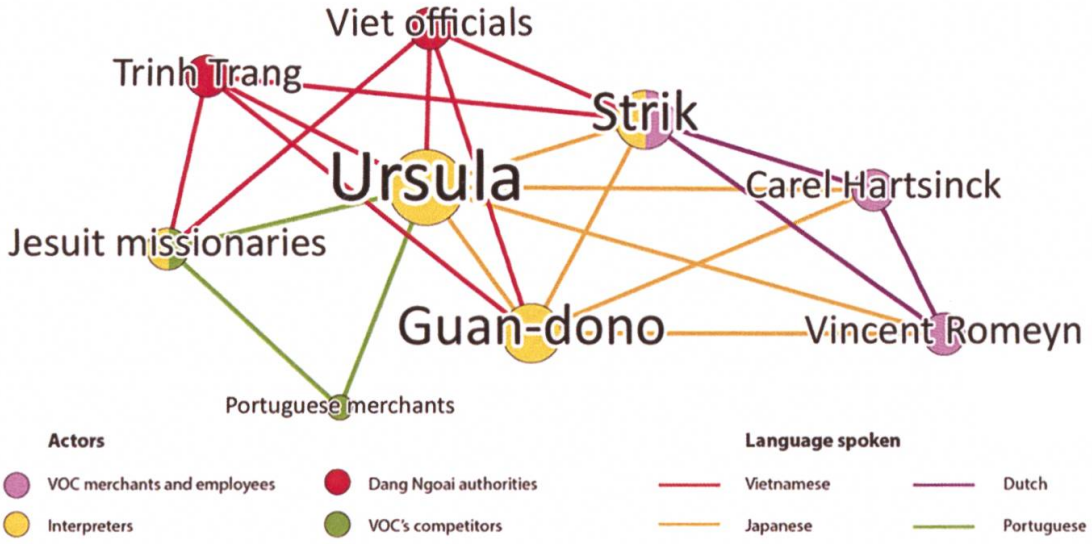

Figure 1: Communication during the first travel of the VOC to Đàng Ngoài (1637).

compared it with that of the Christians depicted on the famous Japanese screens (the *nanban byōbu*), the attire of this figure suggests that he was a Christian (*kirishitan*), perhaps belonging to the large Christian community of Đàng Trong.[36]

Figure 1 is a model that aims to visualize more effectively the relationships woven between the actors of this exchange. It retains as the only variable the question of the spoken language. By taking into account the question of communication, rather than the number of connections between the different actors, this type of modeling makes it possible to bypass the bias of the sources. Indeed, since the available sources are exclusively European, a representation based on European documents would give the impression that Europeans, by the number of connections they reported, played a central role. However, it was the go-betweens who were at the center of the exchange, which is well illustrated in the figure.

Ursula is positioned at the center and has the greatest number of connections, because she spoke the most languages and was in contact with the greatest variety of people. She spoke Japanese, Vietnamese and Portuguese, dealt with the Dutch, the missionaries, the Japanese residents and the local authorities. This may have been the case with Guan-dono as well, but the sources do not mention it. In any case, Ursula's importance is measured not only by her role as an interpreter, but by the role of leading diplomatic go-between that she played during (at least) the first two travels of the Dutch to Đông Kinh. Indeed, she was present at virtually every meeting between the VOC representatives and the local lord Trịnh Tráng 鄭棡, where she translated what the Dutch said – although it is not known whether they used the help

36 Kikuchi 2014: 37. The scroll is held at the Jōmyō temple, in Nagoya.

of another interpreter to switch to Japanese, of which they must have had at least some rudiments. She also transmitted messages to the Court outside of these meetings between the Dutch and the Trịnh lord. As part of her regular duties as interpreter, she and Guan-dono accompanied Captain Hartsinck to the Court in a procession in which the Dutch Governor-General's letter to the Vietnamese lord was carried under a parasol, following an etiquette common throughout the courts of Southeast Asia at the time.

Brokers such as Ursula or Guan-dono embodied the possibilities that were offered to Japanese residents, ensuring the bridging of the gap between communities. This did not prevent them from playing a double game. The Jesuit missionaries declared that Ursula, after having served Dutch interests, presented these same Dutchmen as a threat to the missionaries in front of the Vietnamese authorities.[37]

Finally, the Dutch left Đàng Ngoài with bitterness, having fallen victim, like the British at Hội An twenty years earlier, to collusion between local authorities and Japanese residents. Trịnh Tráng's son is said to have demanded that the Japanese deliver three boxes (3,000 taels) of silver to him. The Japanese managed to collect one, obtained a second from the officials, and asked the Dutch to provide the third, who agreed with difficulty to lend the money to the prince at a rate of 2 % to be returned on their next trip. Two days later, however, they learned that the Japanese had lent the money to the prince for their own account at a rate of 10 %! Despite their complaints, they were unable to get redress and concluded that they would have to bring other interpreters, from Đàng Trong or elsewhere, on their next trip. The role played by Ursula and Guan-dono in the affair is unclear because they no longer appear in the diary at this point, but at other times the Dutch complained about the duplicity of the Japanese. As agents of contact between distinct groups, the go-betweens played on their knowledge of the terrain to pursue their own interests.

The analysis of the Kadoya Shichirobei network presents other patterns of intermediation, but here too it demonstrates how chains of intermediaries, Japanese and Chinese in this case, maintained a strong connection between Japan and Southeast Asia. It also illustrates the agency of the children of these residents and their strategies for adapting to the conditions of trade dictated by the shogun's policy of prohibiting sea travel.

Figure 2 presents another model that summarizes the connections of Kadoya Shichirobei and his relatives to Japan and how objects and information flowed within it. This figure aims to emphasize the role played by the merchant who remained in Hội An, but also to show that, if we look at the network as a whole, it is

37 ARSI, Jap. Sin., vol. 88: 358.

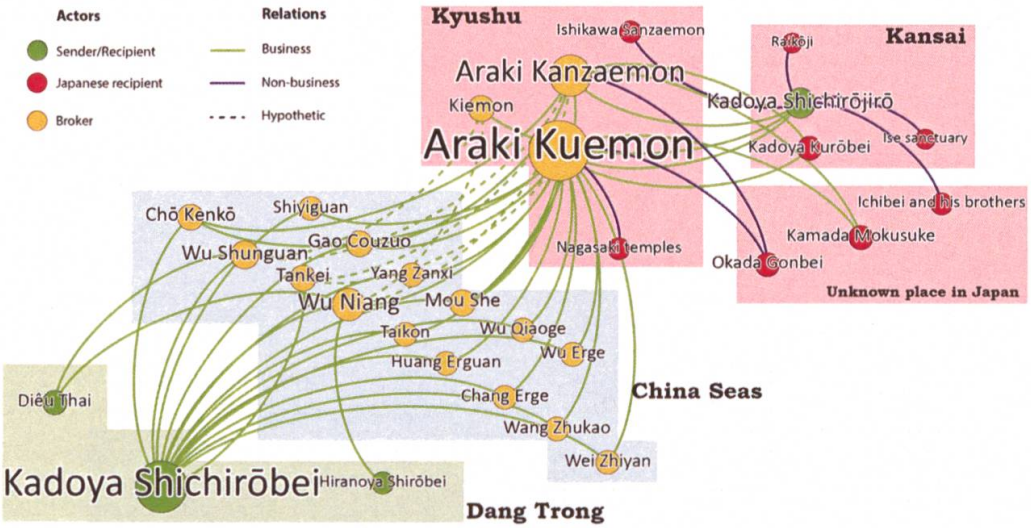

Figure 2: The network of Kadoya Shichirōbei and his relatives (1660s–1670s).

not so much him, but actors remaining in Japan, who stand out. Otherwise unknown, the Araki brothers 荒木 were Kadoya's brokers in Nagasaki. Kadoya had his goods and presents transported by a multitude of Chinese ships, to limit the risk of loss, and they were all centralized in the hands of these middlemen, who received some of them (what kept them loyal), but who were mostly responsible for distributing them among Kadoya's contacts in Japan – family, friends and religious institutions. This is an example of go-betweens located on the borders of Edo Japan, whose function is to act as a link between the Japanese and their relatives overseas, who are no longer allowed to return to Japan.

Kadoya Shichirobei himself was an important broker and frontier actor, if we center the scale of analysis on Đàng Trong. He mentioned in one of his letters presents sent by his brothers from Japan and intended for Lord Nguyễn Phúc Tần 阮福瀕. He took it upon himself to send these gifts to the local lord, but what is most interesting about this correspondence is that he included a few words in Vietnamese:

> I wish you a life of ten thousand years. I have learned that you have made one of my little brothers residing in Annam one of your subjects, which I am delighted about. I recommend him to your benevolence in all circumstances. I wish you a life of ten thousand years.
>
> I presented this letter introduction to the Đại công tý quan [the lord] with your presents in the year of the dog. If you address a letter like this again, write an introduction as shown here.[38]

38 翁門歳固蔑奄碎於垣安南宜浪缶作碎O翁明廩油門理時缶忌籠恩翁門歳/右書出仕之分戌年爰元大公子様其方兩人之進物に仕上げ申候自然重而御用等にて御状御上げ候はば口之書出仕右之ごとく可被成候 Horiuchi 1930, vol. 7: 308. The part between quotation marks was written in Vietnamese (nôm).

Kadoya Shichirobei advised his brothers, from now on, to add a sentence in Vietnamese to their letter of thanks. This example testifies to the good knowledge that these Japanese merchants settled abroad had of the local context and the solidity of their establishment.

This network also includes individuals whose most striking characteristic was not only their function as go-betweens, but also the impossibility of assigning them to a specific ethnic category. These were Wu Shunguan (ch.) or Go Junkan (jp.) 吳順官 and Chō Kenkō 長けんかう. Both had a very similar profile – they were individuals whose parents were likely to be from different ethnic origin. This is certain for Wu Shunguan, who was none other than the son of Kadoya Shichirobei and his Vietnamese wife Diệu Thái. He was mentioned in several letters as an individual who traveled annually, as a passenger and then as a captain, between Hội An and Nagasaki. Clearly, the prohibition against overseas Japanese returning to Japan did not apply to their children as long as they were not identified as Japanese, which was the case here since this merchant with a Japanese father and Vietnamese mother was referred to by a Chinese name. More specifically, it could be regarded as a Hokkien name (the main ethnolinguistic group from southern China to be found in Southeast Asia), since the vast majority of Hokkien merchant names ended in this guan 官 – in which case the pronunciation of his name would be closer to Ngô Sunkoan.

As for Chō Kenkō, he was the nephew of Kadoya Shichirobei and Diệu Thái. He was referred to by a Japanese name, or perhaps Sino-Japanese since the *chō* strongly resembles the surname Zhang 張, which is very common in Chinese. Another individual, Wu Niang/Gojō 五娘, was probably related to the family since he appeared very frequently alongside the previous two. The spelling of his name is reminiscent of the Japanese first name Gorō 五郎; this could be a variation or distortion.

In any case, these three individuals were among the many Chinese-named captains to whom Shichirobei and his relatives entrusted their goods and gifts, and who received gifts from them in return, as did the other captains. Only Diệu Thái's letters indicated that she had family ties to these individuals; Shichirobei does not mention this connection, perhaps so as not to draw attention to their Japanese parents. However, the authorities in Nagasaki were well aware of Kadoya Shichirobei and the fact that his son regularly traveled across the China seas. The fact that overseas Japanese were sending their children to Japan was not a matter of concern. It was, after all, not something that the edicts of the 1630s had contemplated or ruled on, leaving the Nagasaki authorities free to turn a blind eye to such cases and show flexibility.

This example is also indicative of the profile of a new generation of actors and intermediaries in the Japan-Southeast Asia trade, who came from a cosmopolitan background in which assignment to an ethnic category did not really make sense – or

at least in which such assignments were likely to change, shift and circulate. These individuals could play on this porosity to circumvent prohibitions, such as the prohibition against Japanese residents returning to Japan.

5 Ethnic, linguistic and religious borders: Japanese Christians in Southeast Asia

This paper ends with an analysis of additional profiles at the crossroads of multiple groups, which concern not only ethno-linguistic boundaries, but also religious boundaries – (half) Japanese missionaries and Christians.

Among them is Father Bartolomeu da Costa. He was one of the few Luso-Japanese Jesuits, born in Macao to a Portuguese father and a Japanese mother, and who played a major role in the Southeast Asian societies where there were still a Japanese community. Born in 1629, he entered the Company in 1653. He later took advantage of his status as a mestizo and missionary to acquire great influence in Nguyễn Đàng Trong. He became the official physician of the son of the Nguyễn lord, as well as the chaplain of the Court Church in the 1670s–1680s. He was in contact with the central power, in a country where persecutions against Christians returned cyclically. According to the French missionaries, he managed to escape persecution because he was of Japanese descent – or as they themselves write, because he was "disguised as a Japanese and had the language and face of a Japanese.[39]" In 1684, during his conflict with the MEP missionaries, he was excommunicated by them and expelled to Macau. However, the local authorities held him in such high esteem that in 1687, the lord of Đàng Trong Nguyễn Phúc Thái 阮福溙 sent two letters to Macau demanding his return, on pain of attacking all ships leaving or going to Macau![40]

His profile is also interesting because he encouraged religious practices at the frontier between Christianity and local cults. As was often the case with Jesuits, he showed a form of flexibility towards the preservation of local religious practices among his flock. For example, he allowed the Vietnamese ancestor altar (the *tran*) to be kept in the house of the Christians and he allowed the Christians to organize dances and secular festivals, which did not fail to shock the French missionaries of the Foreign Missions.

Furthermore, he launched a merciless struggle for hegemony against the French. He was supported in this perspective by a woman called "Japanese" in the

39 Launay 2000, vol. 1: 146.

40 Manguin 1972: 211–212.

sources, which probably means at that time that she had a Japanese father and a Vietnamese mother and that she lived in the *Nihonmachi*, called Izabel Martins. She was obviously a wealthy and important woman since she had a house that she managed to enlarge to house a substitute church in 1665, while the Jesuits had been expelled and their church destroyed.[41] She too crossed ethnolinguistic boundaries but also the barriers imposed on her gender, as she found herself preaching in place of Bartolomeu da Costa against the French missionaries, when the latter excommunicated the Jesuit priest. She then became known under the Vietnamese title of *thầy nữ*,[42] which means female "teacher" or "master," a vocabulary that made her an intellectual and religious authority figure. The French missionaries even claimed that she called herself "Saint Elizabeth"! In 1684, she violently attacked the French missionaries, publicly calling them brutes and ignorants, to the point that the matter was brought before the "captain of the Japanese," who we can only assume was also of mixed parentage at the time.[43]

Another Southeast Asian Japanese, named Wada Rizaemon 和田利左衛門, played on his multiple affiliations to achieve his ends. He was probably part of the wave of Japanese Christians who chose exile beginning in 1614, when the Tokugawa outlawed Christianity. We find him in Đông Kinh (Hanoi) from the 1630s onward, married to a certain Ursula who was probably not the same Ursula as the one presented above.[44] From then on, he too maintained close relations with the Dutch as a broker, with whom he exchanged letters.[45] He was also a high-ranking official, designated as a "mandarin" by the missionaries, which gives an enlightening idea of the position that the Japanese could expect thanks to their wealth, their commercial activities and their knowledge of the land.

This merchant-official was named differently depending on the individuals he was dealing with. Indeed, the Dutch were the only ones who call him by his Japanese name. The Jesuits, on the other hand, called him Paulo da Vada (an obvious deformation of Wada), wrongly Frenchified into "Paulo d'Abada" by the MEP missionaries. Unlike in Hội An, the missionaries hardly ever referred to him as "Japanese" – in their eyes, he was primarily a local Christian mandarin. Thus, he used his Christian name to do business with the Catholics and his Japanese name with the Dutch (presumably with the Chinese as well). Like Kadoya Shichirobei at Hội An, he probably also possessed a Vietnamese name and title.

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41 ARSI, Jap. Sin., vol. 68: 263–263v.

42 Cooke 2008: 395.

43 MEP, vol. 736: 107.

44 Nagazumi 1992.

45 *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India*… anno 1663: 77–78.

This adaptability, which was by no means exceptional, is again a testament to the way in which Japanese residents could easily accumulate identities, which intertwined rather than conflicted (Christianity and identification as Japanese not being incompatible), and positioned themselves in one or the other, sometimes in or between the two, according to their needs. The same is observed in Hội An, where Tanimura Shirobei, the companion of Kadoya Shichirobei discussed earlier, wrote to Japan twice to perpetuate his late friend's connection to his brothers. He also appeared in Jesuit documents. In a manuscript studied by Charles Boxer, a certain "Tanimura Xirobioei dono," along with other companions, was charged with testifying to the authenticity of the relics of a Japan martyr.[46] The Jesuit annual letters repeatedly mention one of the wealthiest members of the *Nihonmachi* Christians of Hội An as Francisco Shirobei, who may have been the same person.[47] In the letters to the Kadoya brothers, since he wrote to contacts based in Japan, where letters were read and shipments inspected to prevent the introduction of objects or information pertaining to Christianity, no reference is made to his Christian faith.

In general, Christianity may have constituted an identity referent that transcended ethno-linguistic boundaries. The aforementioned example of the relics of the Japanese martyr shows this well. In 1651, three Japanese Christians from Hội An, Thomé Conixi [Konishi], Yamada Toan, and Tanimura Shirobei, were given the responsibility of guarding a box containing the relics of Pedro de Zúñiga, who was burned alive in Japan in 1622. These relics had been kept by a Portuguese from Nagasaki, who was expelled to Macau in 1623 with his family. In 1647, his son Pedro Pinto de Figueiredo, in lack of money, decided to sell them to the Augustinians of Manila. Since Macau and Manila had had tense relations since the breakup of the Iberian Union (1640), he preferred to transport them to neutral ground and brought them to Hội An, where he entrusted them to Thomé Conixi, before returning to Macau where he died. It was then the Japanese Christians who took the initiative to contact the Augustinians in Manila and the friars asked that the authenticity of the relics be certified. The Jesuit Father Metello Saccano undertook the task and the three Japanese, along with eight Portuguese, a priest from Macao and three other Japanese, acted as witnesses. A Japanese captain named Jinbei was then in charge of transporting the relics to Manila.

This anecdote shows how misleading it would be to reduce Japanese residents of Southeast Asia to a community characterized solely by its relationship to Japan. Identification with the Catholic community could be just as important, especially for the children of migrants, most of whom had one non-Japanese parent. In 1689, during the conflict between the Jesuits and the MEP missionaries, a mixed group

46 Boxer 2002: 282.

47 ARSI, Jap. Sin., vol. 71: 430, vol. 73: 130v.

of Christians, composed of Japanese, Chinese and Portuguese, went to the French Father Labbé to defend the Portuguese fathers, arguing the principle of *padroado*, which originally gave primacy to the Jesuits.[48]

The boundaries between ethnic groups were characterized by a great permeability, which could be explained by the adherence to Christianity. However, this permeability also concerned the boundaries between religious groups, since it was sometimes difficult to distinguish a Christian Japanese from a non-Christian Japanese. The Jesuits indicated – and deplored – that they were sometimes housed together, and referred to some Japanese Christians as "lukewarm" in their faith. The friendship between Kadoya Shichirobei and Tanimura Shirobei indicates that while there may have been a distinction between religious groups, it did not imply a watertight separation between individuals.

6 Conclusions

The Japanese voyages of the early 17th century led to the crossing of multiple frontiers and boundaries by the Japanese, primarily maritime, sometimes overland. The Japanese who settled in Southeast Asia were migrants, kept regular and close ties with Japan, sometimes maintaining a form of Japanese lifestyle. By settling there, they gave rise to the emergence of a specific profile of individuals, the Japanese go-betweens or those of Japanese descent, whose role was decisive in the access of foreign merchants to Southeast Asian companies and authorities, as well as in the integration of these companies into international trade.

While they facilitated contacts by placing themselves in the contact zone between local authorities and merchants on the one hand, and foreigners on the other, Japanese residents were also able to obstruct these exchanges. Their privileged position on the frontier between groups allowed them to shape this frontier according to their needs and interests – at times an interface where goods, presents and ideas crossed, at other times a barrier against which the inexperience of Europeans ran up against and information was withheld. In doing so, they could play on their membership in different groups, competing or complementary, and the cosmopolitan nature of the port societies in which they resided sometimes made it difficult to attach them to a group or community with well-established contours.

Japanese residents, on the other hand, encountered few obstacles to their activities. The Japanese Christians of Hôi An, for example, were persecuted only late, in the 1660s, and without their lives being threatened. The authorities preferred to impose a heavy fine on them, taking advantage of the wealth they had accumulated.

48 Cooke 2008: 403.

The maritime prohibition edicts themselves, which logically worried Japanese residents in the years 1635–1636, did not ultimately lead to the decline of their activities (quickly redirected to Chinese ships) and cannot be considered as real obstacles to their economic success.

The only known counterexample concerns the Japanese community in Ayutthaya, Siam. In 1630, the new king Prasat Thong, after getting rid of Yamada Nagamasa and still fearing the military power that the Japanese represented, massacred part of the community. However, here again the barriers were quickly broken down since in 1632, Prasat Thong invited them to return and the *Nihonmachi* was reconstituted.

The brokering pattern was certainly not a Japanese specificity. The particularity of the Japanese residents was simply that they were amongst the most successful in playing this role during a particular period and in a specific geographical area – mostly Siam, Cambodia and Vietnam in the 17th century. Chinese, Malays, Persians, and even Europeans can be found in similar positions in these countries and other parts of Southeast Asia. Comparison with merchant communities in other parts of Eurasia, whether Sephardic Jews, Greeks or Armenians, reveals interesting parallels and differences. In both cases, these were merchant communities that reconstituted themselves abroad and retained practices from their countries of origin or specific to their group. However, during the 17th and especially the 18th centuries, European and Mediterranean states and Safavid Persia tended to define relatively clear boundaries between these groups, and the crossings, while frequent (for example, inter-community marriages), did not change the way in which the authorities tried to separate and distinguish between these communities. Members of these communities chose to maintain this separate status and the privileges it implied, and thus made these community boundaries their own. In the case of the Japanese residents – as with the Chinese merchants – the total lack of support from their country of origin, the favorable reception they received from the Southeast Asian authorities, and the overall disinterest of these societies in strict assignment to ethnic or religious categories, allowed these boundaries to remain blur and fluctuant well into the 19th century.

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