

COMPLETION REPORT

Networks of Faith and Profit: Buddhist Traders Between Japan and China, 838-1403

Yiwen Li
Assistant Professor
Department of Chinese and History
City University of Hong Kong

This research project "Network of Faith and Profit: Buddhist Traders between Japan and China, 838-1403" examines Sino-Japanese relations during the six centuries when their official diplomatic relations were suspended. This project has used a large variety of primary sources, including letters and poems written by monks and merchants, pilgrim monks' diaries, monastic records, and archaeological discoveries such as the Sinan shipwreck. The findings of this research show that during this period, although Japan stopped paying tribute to China, the commercial and religious exchanges between China and Japan prospered, and monks and merchants traveled frequently and formed a religio-commercial network. The religio-commercial network facilitated exchanges and exerted a profound impact on Sino-Japanese relations in the ensuing centuries. This research project prompts a reexamination of the previous understanding of the China-centered tributary system and calls for more attention to the significance of nonpolicy-makers in the history of international relations.

Specifically, this research project has achieved the objectives below:

1. To show that the prevailing framework of the tribute system cannot be applied to all forms of Chinese foreign relationships in history.
2. To provide a new way to understand Sino-Japanese relations—the religio-commercial networks. The networks were independent of diplomatic relationships and sustained the cultural and commercial exchanges in maritime East Asia for more than half a millennium.
3. To demonstrate that Buddhist monks and monasteries, contrary to what the Buddhist canon advised, did actively participate in commercial activities to make a profit.
4. To explore the relationship between religion and commerce in East Asia, and to join the conversation with scholars working on cross-cultural trade, especially the trade in the Mediterranean.

Thanks to the generous support from the Sumitomo Foundation, I was able to collect ample research data for this project and obtain necessary research assistance during the process. Although the unexpected global pandemic of Covid-19 prolonged the research duration and my travel plan to the sites related to Sino-Japanese trade in both China and Japan (such as Ningbo and Quanzhou in China, and Hakata and Kamakura in Japan) had been severely disturbed, I compensated the lack of access to field sites with using more online and purchased sources. By now, I have completed this research project and have published three English journal articles in leading academic journals, including *Religions*, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, and *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies*, and one Chinese book chapter in an edited volume published by Peking University Press.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

1. LI, Yiwen. "Useless Tribute, Desirable Exotics : Japanese Folding Fans in China, 1000–1500." Presented at International Conference "A Look at East Asian History through Transnational Intercourse and Networks." Nov.16, 2019. Seoul, Republic of Korea.
2. LI, Yiwen. "Interactions between Monks and Merchants in Sino-Japanese Exchanges, 840–900: A Study on *Fūsō Sengen Shū* and "Letters from the Tang People." Presented at "Missing Sources & Marginal Voices: Reconstructing Asian Historical Narratives," an International Conference Organized by University of Macau. December 7, 2021. Online.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

1. LI, Yiwen. "Integrating Faith and Profit: The Religio-Commercial Network Spanning China and Japan, 1100-1270." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 64.3 (2021), pp.191–216.
2. LI, Yiwen. "Useless Tribute, Desirable Exotics: Japanese Folding Fans in China, 1000–1500." *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 21.1 (2021), pp. 27–49.
3. LI, Yiwen. "Navigating Voyages in Real and Religious Life: The Big Dipper Belief and Shipbuilding in Premodern China." *Religions* 11.8 (2020): 398.
4. LI, Yiwen 李怡文. "Monk Merchant Collaboration and the Religio Commercial Network between China and Japan, 960 1270" (in Chinese) 十至十三世紀中日交流中的僧商合作與“宗教-商業”網絡. Book chapter in *Perspectives in the Song dynasty Studies* 宋史研究諸層面 (ed.) Deng Xiaonan and Fang Chengfeng (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2020), pp. 382–405.

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)