

~~Unit Activities~~

~~Before You Begin 30 minutes~~

~~Use the information from the Introduction to Unit paragraph above to map the flow of silver in the sixteenth century.~~

~~Watch the Video, “Unit 15: Early Global Commodities” 30 minutes~~

Activity 1: Early Maritime Encounters in the Pacific Rim— 45 minutes

Create a script for an encounter in a Chinese teahouse in Manila involving a Chinese merchant, a Chinese storyteller, a Spanish sea captain, and a Japanese sailor. Use the following sources to write the script.

Spanish Priest Rodrigo de Loaisa witnessed the exploitation of the native peoples forced by the Spanish to work the mines in a version of the traditional mit'a system of tribute labor.

The Indians enter these infernal pits by some leather ropes like staircases. They spend all day Monday on this journey, taking some bags of roasted maize for their sustenance. Once inside, they spend the whole week in there without emerging, working with tallow candles. They are in great danger inside there, for one very small stone that falls injures or kills anyone it strikes. If 20 healthy Indians enter on Monday, half may emerge crippled on Saturday.

The annual Manila Galleon, which connected American mines with Asian markets for European profits, was so great that in some years the amount shipped across the Pacific to Manila was greater than the amount sent back across the Atlantic to Spain itself. This trade allowed Peru to hold off for decades the depression weighing down seventeenth-century Europe. China was the primary end market for the world's silver for several centuries. In 1569, a Dominican priest wrote, “He who would make good market in the country of China carrieth silver rather than goods.”

Portuguese Merchant Pedro de Baeza, 1609:

The most expensive that I have seen and bought gold in the city of Canton in China was seven pesos of silver for one of gold, and I never saw it go beyond this price, and here in Spain a peso of gold is commonly worth 12 of silver; therefore it is easy to see that bringing gold from China means a gain of more than seventy-five or eighty percent! (Charles R. Boxer, 1970, “Plata Es Sangre: Sidelights on the Drain of Spanish-American Silver in the Far East, 1550–1700,” *Philippine Studies* 18, no. 3 [1970]: 457–475.)

By the seventeenth century, the Chinese demand for silver was disturbing many Ming officials. At first, they had thought silver had little practical worth, so they briefly enacted a ban on foreign trade in 1626. But He Qiaoyuan, a native of the Fujian province, argued that silver brought real economic benefits to those merchants who traveled to trade with Europeans.

When our Chinese subjects journey to trade in the (Indian Ocean), the (foreigners) trade the goods we produce for the goods of others. But when engaging in trade in Luzon we have designs solely on silver coins A hundred jin of Huzhou silk yarn worth 100 taels can be sold at a price of 200 to 300 taels there. Moreover, porcelain from Jiangxi as well as sugar and fruit from my native Fujian, all are avidly desired by the foreigners. (Richard Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000–1700*, [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996]: 201.)