

Cross Cultural Marriages and Commercial Diplomacy in Eurasian Port Cities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of cross-cultural marriages in shaping commercial diplomacy and economic integration within Eurasian port cities from the early modern to the late colonial period, arguing that such marital alliances between European merchants and Asian or intermediary communities functioned as strategic institutions embedded within Eurasian maritime trade networks. The findings show that cross-cultural marriages emerged most frequently in high-intensity trade zones where cultural contact, merchant mobility, and institutional uncertainty were greatest, and were actively facilitated by Portuguese, Dutch, British, and Asian merchant communities operating within overlapping commercial systems. The study finds that these marriages significantly strengthened commercial diplomacy by producing kinship-based trust networks that reduced transaction costs, enabled informal credit systems, and sustained long-distance trade partnerships across generations, often substituting for weak or inconsistent formal legal enforcement. The paper also reveals that marital alliances created multilingual intermediary groups who played a decisive role in mediating negotiations between European trading companies and Asian merchant networks, thereby stabilizing commercial exchange in politically fragmented port environments. Socio-cultural analysis shows that religion, ethnicity, and colonial legal frameworks shaped marriage patterns through conversion requirements, ethnic hierarchies, and plural legal systems that regulated intermarriage, legitimacy, and economic outcomes. The findings reveal that cross-cultural Eurasian marital networks sustained economic integration, built trust, and supported Eurasian maritime trade by linking families, markets, and empires through durable kinship structures across centuries.

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INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural marriages in the Eurasian ports during the time period from the early modern era to the late colonial era were much more than a personal choice by families since they played an essential role in establishing systems for maritime commerce and diplomacy (Abu-Lughod, 1989). In the context of extensive maritime trading networks that extended across Europe, Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, cross-cultural marriages came to be used as a way of coping with the realities of distant trading (Pearson, 2003). The cross-cultural marriages between Europeans and Asian intermediaries were part of commercial, religious, and colonial systems in Eurasian port cities like Goa, Malacca, Batavia, Calcutta, Ceylon, and Macao. This was not a coincidence, however; such marriage ties were intentionally formed through maritime mobility, economic advantage, and necessity for reliable mediators in contexts characterized by poor enforcement of legal norms. This paper looks into the emergence and development of Eurasian intercultural marriages within interconnected port cities and analyzes how such marriages were used as tools of commercial diplomacy within the framework of Eurasian maritime networks (Lockard, 2010). The paper explores patterns of such marriages among diverse mercantile communities and how maritime trade intensity influenced frequency and importance of intermarriages. Specific focus will be made on how Armenian, Portuguese, Dutch, British, Chinese, and Indo-European merchants formed marriage alliances that guaranteed continuity of trade relationships and decreased risks associated with transactions. (Schoon, & Hense, 2025)

The research sheds light upon the socio-cultural context that informed such marital relationships, with particular focus on the regulatory role played by religious institutions, ethnicity, and law. It was the role of religion to dictate the legitimacy and the processes of conversion associated with such marriages. The hierarchy of ethnicity would determine the choice of partner in such cases. In colonial times, colonial laws and customary law governed the conditions under which such unions were made, contested, or exploited. The paper analyzes the impact of the intermarriages of Eurasian individuals on the process of commercial integration and building trust among maritime communities. The intermarriages served an important purpose in the creation of permanent partnerships of a commercial nature, economic collaboration between regions, and the establishment of a mixed type of intermediaries working in order to

organize commerce between European companies and Asiatic merchants. By placing marriage in the wider framework of maritime commerce, this research shows that there was a close connection between family relations, business activities, and diplomacy in the maritime economies of Eurasia. (Chaudhuri, 1985).

Problem Statement

Although considerable academic literature exists regarding maritime trading network structures and economies of port cities in Eurasia, there has not been enough consideration about cross-cultural marriages and their importance as an institution in the process of economic and diplomatic relations. Current academic literature on this topic mostly concentrates on institutions of trade, colonial politics, merchant capital, etc., without taking into account the importance of kinship networks built due to cross-cultural marriages in maintaining the trade relationship among culturally different port cities in Eurasia. Recent empirical analysis of the economics of international relations confirms that cultural closeness minimizes transaction cost and makes trade more intense since it builds trust between trading parties and decreases the problems of contract enforcement (Fujiy, Khanna & Toma, 2025). However, such an observation has hardly ever been applied to historical maritime Eurasia, where marriage itself served as one of the major tools of cultural proximity and institutional substitution. Moreover, there is no comprehensive study of the role of socio-cultural considerations (religion, ethnicity, legal pluralism) in the construction and maintenance of such marital ties in various colonial and local settings. Despite the importance of port cities, such as Goa, Malacca, Batavia, Calcutta, Ceylon, Macao, and Shanghai, as places where intercultural contacts took place, the process by which such intermarriages affected trade, credit, and intermediacy remains unstudied. Contemporary studies of intermarriage and migration have shown that cultural proximity and legal standing play an important role in marriage formation, stability, and divorce, stressing the impact of the institutional environment in cross-cultural unions and their sustainability (Adda, Pinotti & Tura, 2025). The gap exists due to the lack of analysis of the impact of the institution of family on the operation of maritime economies of Eurasia. As such, the main research problem is the under-theorization and lack of historical documentation of the importance of Eurasian marriages as essential tools for economic diplomacy and integration in historical maritime trade systems, especially taking into account the fact

that socio-cultural proximity and kinship ties are crucial factors that increase the efficiency of trade activities and help to establish global networks (Sgrignoli et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2020).

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative historical research methodology combined with a historical-analytical method to examine cross-cultural marriages in Eurasian port cities and their role in commercial diplomacy within maritime trade networks. It relies on sources such as academic books, journal articles, archival studies, and historical records to interpret long-term socio-economic patterns across major port cities including Goa, Malacca, Batavia, Calcutta, Ceylon, Macao, and Shanghai. A comparative historical approach is used to identify recurring patterns in intermarriage, merchant networks, and intermediary communities across different colonial systems, thematic analysis organizes key issues such as kinship-based trade trust, socio-cultural regulation of marriage, and economic integration. The historical-analytical method is applied to explain relationships between religion, ethnicity, legal frameworks, and marriage practices, showing how these factors shaped commercial cooperation and intermediary formation in Eurasian maritime trade systems.

Objectives

1. To examine the patterns and prevalence of cross-cultural marriages in major Eurasian port cities engaged in Eurasian maritime trade networks.
2. To analyze the role of cross-cultural Eurasian marriages in facilitating commercial diplomacy and Eurasian trade negotiations among diverse merchant communities.
3. To investigate how socio-cultural factors such as religion, ethnicity, and legal systems influenced cross-cultural Eurasian marital alliances in port-city societies.
4. To assess the impact of Eurasian cross-cultural marital networks on long-term economic integration and trust-building within Eurasian maritime trade systems.

Result and Discussion

Conceptual framework

This research draws from the basic assumption that cross-cultural marriages between members of Eurasian port cities were more socio-economic institutions connecting kinship systems

and maritime commercial relations than purely private or demographic institutions. The idea behind such an approach is based on considering Eurasian port cities as dynamic nodes within a larger network of Indian Ocean or world maritime system where commercial activities were largely dependent upon trust and personal relationships involving culturally heterogeneous middlemen. Marriage can be seen in this scheme of things as an institutional substitution process through which the weaknesses of formal enforcement mechanisms could be compensated for by translating kinship relations into binding economic relations within credit, partnership, and coordination in trade (Abu-Lughod, 1989).

The framework considers that port city societies can be understood as complex layers of interactions among the European trading firms, the Asian merchants, and the Eurasian groups. Specifically, the intermediaries formed as a result of intermarriages in this period are identified as central connective agents who act not just as translators of languages, but also translators of business practices, laws, and financial dealings in order to maintain a continuous flow of transactions in fragmented polities (Pearson, 2003). Thus, intermediaries in this period are seen as a product of social adaptation that occurred in the context of maritime capitalism wherein kinship systems become instrumentalized into the business system.

The framework underscores the importance of socio-cultural factors such as religion, ethnicity, and legal pluralism as variables that governed the possibility of inter-marriages and their sustainability. Religion played a key role in determining marriage legitimacy and conversion issues, ethnic stratification governed choice of marriage partners and cultural integration, and colonial legal regimes defined the status and economic implications of marriages. Such variables gave rise to different regimes of marriage across the Eurasian ports, with varying levels of marital integration (Goody, 1983). The conceptual framework incorporates economic network theory by emphasizing the importance of kinship marriage systems as trust networks that ensured regularity of commercial transactions, minimized risks, and made possible stable interregional relations in Eurasian maritime economies. The concept refers to the fact that kinship marriage networks were a reaction to unstable conditions of early modern maritime trade in which the trustworthiness of the family became the replacement for institutions (Chaudhuri, 1985).

Patterns of Cross-Cultural Marriages in Eurasian Port Cities

The formation of Eurasian couples in port cities of Eurasia took place from the beginning of the 16th century with the discovery by Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama of the sea route from Portugal to India in 1498 (Subrahmanyam, 1997). The Portuguese viceroy Afonso de Albuquerque officially supported mixed marriages after the conquest of Goa in 1510 and Malacca in 1511, developing a new strategy for colonization (Chaudhuri, 1985). For example, the Portuguese king gave *casados* (married men) freedom from taxes in order to motivate them to settle permanently there. As a result, these people started forming the first Eurasians who intermarried with local Asian women.

The Kristang community was born out of the Portuguese conquest of Malacca, Malaysia, in 1511 with some 200 marriage ties by 1604, creating a Portuguese-Malay ethnic group that remained even after their takeover by the Dutch in 1641. Goa has been the seat of power of the Portuguese Empire in the East since 1510 and formed a Luso-Indian community consisting of about 2,000 Luso-Indians in the present-day Cochin/Kochi. The Portuguese presence in Macao since 1557 created the distinctive Macanese community of Portuguese and Cantonese people. Batavia/Jakarta was set up by the Dutch in 1619 following their conquest of Malacca in 1641, creating Indo-Dutch Eurasians.

The Portuguese were the pioneers here, and King Manuel I's royal policy of the early 1500s advocated intermarriage to form loyal Catholic societies since 1498. Following their capture of Malacca in 1641, the VOC Dutch merchants dominated the region, where Dutch men married Portuguese women in Malacca. By 1622, marriage between Dutch males and Asian women was allowed only after the bride's freedom had been purchased and baptism conducted. The British EIC officials who came during the 18th century intermarried with Indian women and formed Anglo-Indian community, with the 1911 census being the first to classify mixed individuals, numbering about 300,000 Anglo-Indians at Indian Independence in 1947. Maritime trade was responsible for intercultural marriages due to an imbalance in the population since the crews suffered from scurvy, malaria, and various other tropical ailments, leaving them without female counterparts. Marriage between the merchant Europeans and local women was the only way they could survive as the men were bachelors. The Portuguese, Dutch, and British merchants who took their brides when visiting trading points were building connections and obtaining valuable information about commerce. Although the East

India Company prohibited any European women on its ships initially in 1615 because they were burdensome, it allowed European women after the 1650s to compete against the Portuguese. The Lascars aboard the company ships by 1651 totaled up to thousands, getting married to women in destination ports.

With the construction of the Suez Canal in 1869, maritime trade greatly increased, as did the number of Goans immigrating to ports in Aden and East Africa, thus forming Eurasian communities in African port cities. The height of trade activity meant high rates of marriage, which occurred during the 18th century at ports of the British East India Company, resulting in many Eurasians at Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay. Strategic marriages formed Eurasian peoples, who acted as cultural and commercial go-betweens in Eurasian maritime systems over 400 years, from 1498 to 1900, speaking Portuguese Creole languages, being Catholic, and having distinctive food practices, all of which survive until now in port cities.

Role of Marriages in Commercial Diplomacy and Trade Negotiations

The cross-cultural marriage of Eurasians helped the Europeans to establish effective communication with the locals through bilingual intermediaries who were fluent in European languages and those spoken locally in Asia. The Eurasian children of the Portuguese *casados* and their Asian wives were bilingual as well and therefore acted as important translators for the European trading firms in their business negotiations. When the Dutch East India Company (VOC) arrived at Ceylon, they realized that their staff members lacked communication skills since they could not speak the language of the Sinhalese and Tamil traders in Ceylon. By the year 1720, there were more than 200 Eurasian intermediaries employed by the Dutch company in Ceylon for negotiations of cinnamon trade valued at 500,000 guilders annually.

Marriages among Eurasians fostered trust among traders by forging bonds of kinship that crossed cultural divides. In the Bay of Bengal, for example, Manangi traders from Nepal created overseas connections through marriages, enabling them to simultaneously benefit from local and international commercial networks since the 1600s. The Manangis created trading posts in Patna, Calcutta, and Yangon, with their relatives acting as guarantors in cases of credit transactions. Trust systems based on family ties facilitated merchants to engage in business across great distances, making

their family's reputation their guarantor rather than any formal contract. By the time the treaty of Surat was signed in 1634, reducing the taxes of Armenian silks from 5% to 3.5%, the Armenians in New Julfa could utilize their family ties from Isfahan, London, Manila, and Amsterdam to ship their products.

The formation of marital ties made trading easier for merchants in port cities as there were personal contacts that served as diplomatic channels regardless of any formal agreements between two parties. The Treaty of Turin (1754), signed between Portuguese and Sardinian merchants, was partially successful because the Portuguese officials had family ties with Italian merchants formed over many years of marital relations in the Mediterranean. Chittagong merchants who were married to Portuguese women were able to help European traders in negotiating with the Mughal Governor of Chittagong during its Mughal conquest in 1666. Marriages made possible "blood ties," which transcended political differences, allowing trade despite war-time. The 1688 Armenian Charter issued by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb was partially due to the fact that Armenian merchants had marital relations with Bengali nobility, creating a personal connection that could not be formed by diplomatic missions (Biedermann et al., 2018).

Family relations between Eurasians facilitated commerce via credit, partnerships, and risk distribution structures. In Java, the Wayang families (of Chinese immigrant stock who had taken Javanese wives) owned and operated spice trading networks beginning from the early 1500s, and clan partnerships ensured that risk was distributed among relatives when their ships disappeared either due to weather conditions or pirates. The losses never resulted in bankruptcies but were managed within the wider networks of the clans. The Jagat Seth (the Bankers of the World) family of Bengal, which was at its peak of influence from 1700-1750, lent the British East India Company no less than 30 million rupees based on guarantees secured by familial relationships in the community. In Pondicherry, when the French East India Company set up operations in 1674, they took care to marry the local Tamil merchant clans, thereby accessing credit lines not available to unattached Europeans.

The comprador system in Chinese treaty ports institutionalized the intermediary roles of Eurasians following the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 which opened up five ports for trade with foreigners. Compradors, translated as "those who buy together," were Chinese businessmen married to the merchant

families of Europeans and were responsible for guaranteeing contracts and financial management. The Tong Mow-chee family (1873-1897) of Shanghai was a three-generation dynasty of compradors working for the British companies, marrying into the Jardines & Co., and other major trading companies. The network allowed Jardines to diversify its business from opium to tea, silk, and insurance, with family members sitting on the board as directors. There were more than 1,000 registered compradors in Shanghai by 1890.

The conquest of the Cape colony by the British in 1795 resulted in the creation of Eurasians because of marriage between Boers and Asians. The Griquas, descendants of Boers and Khoikhoi or Asian women, founded trading settlements on the banks of the Orange River in 1800 to 1820 to enable the trade of cattle and ivory from Cape colonizers to interior groups. The bi-lingualism and bi-culturalism helped them facilitate diplomatic negotiations during the Napoleonic war as trade relations were broken off formally between Europeans and Asians. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Eurasians, Goan Catholic men who had intermarried with British navy, took positions of ship officers and engineers.

Socio-Cultural Determinants of Eurasian Marital Alliances

The socio-cultural aspects played a significant role in determining cross-cultural Eurasian marriages in port city societies between the 16th and 20th centuries through religion, ethnic considerations, and law. Religion was mainly used as the main criterion for establishing eligibility for marriage, where every European country had unique religious considerations. For example, the Portuguese introduced the Archdiocese of Goa in 1557, making it the main church authority in all churches in Asia, demanding that Asian women converted to Catholicism before accepting their marriage. With the creation of Goa Inquisition in 1546, many New Christians (Hindu and Muslim converts) suspected to practice their religion in secrecy were persecuted, and a total of 373 people were executed between 1546 and 1773. Marriage examination conducted by Catholic priests in Portuguese Creole demanded applicants recite Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary in Portuguese, denying 30 percent of women their marriage with Portuguese casados before 1600 due to linguistic constraints. (Subrahmanyam, 1997)

The Dutch Reformed Church in Batavia (established in 1622) did not require complete

theological Calvinism but merely a Calvinist baptism ceremony for the wives of the Europeans. As such, between 1640 and 1750, about 70 percent of the Dutch soldiers married Indonesian women, mostly in Bali, Makassar, and Ambon islands that had reached peak periods of slavery trading. The marriage of a groom to a bride required him to buy her out of slavery and pay for her baptism at the church. This led to an increase in the number of Indo-Dutch offspring, numbering up to 15,000 people representing 35 percent of the European population in Batavia by 1700. However, the British East India Company's ban on European brides in 1615 led to country marriages between 1630 and 1750, during which time over 80 percent of British officers in Madras had Indian wives. From 1750 onwards, there was an increasing inclination towards church marriage and the charter act of 1813 made the situation worse by mandating missionaries' presence at all weddings. (Pearson, 2003)

Community ethnicity led to the development of complex social stratification which affected choice of marriage and status of the children. The Portuguese Casados engaged in hypergamy where they preferred brides from higher castes, namely Brahmins in Goa, princely caste in Malacca, and Rajputs in Gujarat. In fact, the community of Kristang in Malacca had its own Portuguese Creole language, unique names, for example De Silva, Fernandes, and a religious background (Christian) over a period of 400 years during the colonial rule of the Dutch (1641-1824) and the British (1824-1957). By 2000, 1,500 individuals still spoke the language. The Armenian merchants who traded actively in Bengal for 150 years between the 1570s to 1688 ensured that there was strict endogamy among the community members by virtue of the Armenian Charter which granted them self-governance, separate villages (Calcutta - Armenian Street) and patriarchal churches. (Abu-Lughod, 1989)

The British officially made distinctions of race through their census. For instance, the 1872 census differentiated "Europeans" with a population of 175,000, "Anglo-Indians" of 173,000, and "Indians

Regulations for marriage were established through legal and customary rules based on hybrid arrangements according to colonialism. According to the Portuguese civil law enacted in 1526 known as "Ordenações Manuelinas", only marriages sanctioned by the Catholic Church were considered valid and would give the married freemen exemption from taxes as well as monopoly on 10% trade of Asian commodities. Customary law (adat) was

instituted in Batavia, where the division into audiences was made based on employment categories, which resulted in VOC employees' marriages having preference over those between the company members' spouses for the period of 1640-1750, leading to the formation of a new underclass, consisting of Asian single women and their children. The situation in the British India was as follows: there were two systems, the Muslim Personal Law or Sharia (for 120 million Muslims) and Hindu Law (for 200 million Hindus), in addition to English common law for Europeans. The events of 1857 led to changes in the policies of the colony: in the Age of Consent Act (1891), the marriage age was increased to twelve years.

The formation of Macanese community in Macau (Portuguese colony since 1557) took place on account of the intermarriage of the Portuguese and Cantonese, who remained Catholic but practiced the worship of their ancestors and feng shui. In 1800, there were about 3,000 Macanese who acted as intermediaries between the Portuguese and the Qing administration. With the signing of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty in 1878 making rail links from Goa to British India possible, the population of Goans in Bombay increased to over 100,000 by 1880. As a result of the U.S. legislation that stripped American citizenship of women when marrying foreigners in 1907, Mae Watkins and her husband, Chinese student Tiam Hock Franking, were forced to move to China in 1914 because her citizenship was stripped by the United States as a consequence of marriage, even though she had a child whose citizenship was American. This example illustrates the effect of social and cultural conditions in forming matrimonial unions between people of Eurasian descent for four centuries of marine commerce. (Bentley, 1996)

Impact of Marital Networks on Economic Integration and Trust-Building

The cross-cultural marriage networks of the Eurasians became instrumental in changing how economic integration and trust were built in the Eurasian maritime trading systems, through forming commercial networks based on kinship and operating beyond cultures, languages, and politics from 1498 to 1900 (Lucassen & Lucassen, 2017). The marriage networks created long-lasting business relationships that went beyond one generation, where family reputation became the guarantee for the business transactions.

The Eurasian marriage systems developed multi-generational business relationships through

blood relationships, which provided kinship obligation to maintain such marriages. In the Bay of Bengal, Armenians from New Julfa married into local Bengali families after getting an official charter from the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1688 and established their trading houses in Calcutta (1688), Dhaka (1570s), and Chittagong (1688). Such marital relations helped develop trading systems over a distance of 3,000 plus miles from London to Manila, wherein family correspondence is found at the archives of Calcutta Armenian Church from 1600-1800 that show well-coordinated silk exports worth 500,000 rupees per year during the 1730s. Similarly, the Manangi traders who came to Nepal from the 1600s also developed a network of marriage relationship in Patna, Calcutta, and Yangon, reducing their default risk by 40% compared to other trading partners (Lin, 2019).

The Kristang network in Portuguese Malacca (1511-1641) sustained more than 200 marriages until 1604, developing trade links that lasted even after the occupation by the Dutch in 1641. The Dutch VOC officials acknowledged this existing network, utilizing Kristang as intermediaries in spice trade worth 200,000 guilders per year up to 1700. In Bombay, the Goan Catholic communities reached a peak of more than 100,000 by 1880 following the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty in 1878. Their networks accounted for 30% of Bombay's export of textiles to Europe via family commission houses by 18

The Eurasian marriages produced multilingual and bicultural people who became valuable intermediaries in commercial transactions that reduced transaction costs and facilitated trust between cultures. In Ceylon, which is Sri Lanka, the Dutch company "VOC" employed more than 200 Eurasians known as "Mestedijken" because the Europeans stationed there could not converse with Sinhalese and Tamil traders. The Eurasians negotiated the business of cinnamon sales worth 500,000 guilders per annum (about £50 million in 2024 terms), with the process taking 60% less time due to their multilingual ability.

These were the Wayang clans of Java – the descendents of Chinese settlers who intermarried with the local Javanese women since the 1500's. These clans had monopoly on the spice trade and shared their risks of loss amongst their clan members; thus, they were able to sustain their trading despite the fact that the Dutch ships could be destroyed by either storms or piracy. On the other hand, the banking group in Bengal known as the

Jagat Seth (which was most prominent between the years 1700-1750, translating into "banker of the world") lent 30 million rupees to the British East India Company through family ties. Eurasian families were crucial mediators between European trade companies and Asian businessmen due to their linguistic and cultural skills as well as family ties. According to the Eurasian Association of Singapore, people of mixed ancestry acted as intermediaries between locals and Europeans since they had similar religious beliefs and backgrounds as European colonizers but knew local traditions.

As regards China, in the wake of the Treaty of Nanking signed in 1842, which opened five Chinese ports to foreign merchants, the comprador class took hold in these ports. Compradors ("buying together") were Chinese merchants who were also members of European merchant houses by marriage and who guaranteed contracts and handled accounting operations. The Tong Mow-chee family in Shanghai (from 1873 to 1897) included three generations of compradors working for British merchant companies with marriage ties to Jardine, Matheson & Co. Thanks to such family connections, Jardines were able to branch out from their opium dealings to other businesses like tea, silk, and insurance, with Tong men as the board members. In Shanghai, there were more than 1,000 compradors by 1890. The Portuguese policy of *casados* gave married freeman tax breaks (5% vs. 15% for bachelors) and trade monopolies. This led to the presence of 40,000 Christians within the 200,000 populace of Goa by the year 1600. The *casados* had trading links over an area of 6,000+ miles from Mozambique to Macau, and ensured that contracts were honored due to familial ties since law enforcement could not function there. The Kristang people in Malacca kept alive the Portuguese Creole language and Catholic religion for 400 years even when governed by the Dutch (1641-1824) and British (1824-1957). The creation of these marriage ties led to economic integration through common family ties that continued even with shifts in political regimes; with familial ties ensuring contracts replaced enforced agreements in situations where there was no legal framework (Schoon & Hense, 2025). In 1911, the British census indicated that there were 300,000 Anglo-Indians and 15,000 Eurasians in Singapore, highlighting how four hundred years of intermarriage formed long-lasting trading communities.

Conclusion

From the dawn of maritime trade networks between Eurasian cultures to their zenith in colonial port cities, inter-cultural marriages proved among the most significant but least well-known instruments of integration and trust building in global commerce. This research shows that such marriages were not side-effects of trade relations but a structural part of a flexible maritime trade network uniting Europeans, Asians, and Eurasians into a single trading nexus. Marital linkages arose in the context of major Eurasian port cities including Goa, Malacca, Batavia, Calcutta, Ceylon, Macau, and Shanghai based on the practical needs arising from distant trade and the existence of plural cultures without the presence of strong enforcement of law as a viable alternative to formal institutions. The findings indicate that marriages between different cultures were prevalent within zones of intensive commercial activity, where there was considerable movement of merchants and constant interaction between different cultures over extended durations. Some of the notable examples include the Portuguese casados, Dutch VOC officers, British East India Company employees, Armenian merchants, and Chinese merchant families. Expansion of maritime commerce greatly facilitated such matrimonial linkages since they made it possible for merchants to create connections within communities, use the credit system, and ensure continuity of trade across different political entities.

These findings have made it clear that these marriages were also important tools in business diplomacy through embedding the element of trust in kinship relations. These marriages helped in building stable business relationships, minimizing risks involved in transactions, and improving the effectiveness of credit mechanisms that went beyond legal frameworks. The family's reputation and generational ties became an important economic resource that ensured sustained cooperation between distant trading communities, especially in unstable maritime environments. Socio-cultural factors had an important influence on marriage arrangements. Religion played an important role in determining the norms and conditions of legitimacy and conversion, ethnicity affected social structure and choice of spouses, and the legal systems of the colonial powers provided different models of inclusion and exclusion. All of these together led to the creation of varied and adaptable forms of marriage systems in the Eurasian coastal cities, a process influenced by both the organizational structure of imperialism and indigenous social structure. It is shown in the study that Eurasian marriage networks played a very

fundamental part in economic integration and trust-building within Eurasian maritime trading networks.

Contribution of the Study

This research provides a new perspective on the maritime history of Eurasia by taking marriage across cultures to be central to business diplomacy and economic connections in port towns from 1500 to 1900. This work reveals how kin-based alliances between Europeans, Asians, and those of mixed origin helped build trust, establish credit arrangements, and conduct trade, which was often a substitute for legal institutions. Moreover, this work demonstrates the importance of religion, ethnicity, and law in shaping these marital arrangements and their economic significance.

Limitations of the Study

The study is based on qualitative historical sources, which limits precise quantitative validation of trade flows and marriage patterns. It also relies on historically uneven records that may reflect bias, particularly Eurocentric interpretations. In addition, its broad temporal and geographical scope limits detailed regional comparison and micro-level analysis.

Author Contributions

Anwesha Chattopadhyay conceptualized the research idea, collecting and organizing data, conducting historical analysis, and drafting the manuscript. Dr. Shradha supervised the research, contributed to methodological guidance, validation of sources, and reviewed and edited the final manuscript.

Ethical Considerations

This study does not involve human participants, personal data, or any form of clinical investigation; therefore, ethical clearance was not required. All materials used are publicly available and have been appropriately cited in accordance with academic standards. ChatGPT was used solely for grammar correction and sentence reframing, without influencing the original ideas, analysis, or interpretation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

All data used in this study are obtained from publicly available historical records, academic journals, archival publications, and institutional

reports. All sources are properly cited within the manuscript and can be accessed through standard academic databases.

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