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L'horizon nousantarien

Mélanges en hommage
à
Denys Lombard



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Chinese Century. The Eighteenth Century in the China Sea Region

[article]

  Leonard Blussé

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Texte intégral

Leonard BLUSSE

Chinese Century

The Eighteenth Century in the China Sea Region

Introduction

Twenty years ago the editors of *Itinerario* had an appointment with Fernand Braudel at la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme to do an interview for the journal.!!) Professor Braudel and his wife, Paule, took us out to lunch and afterwards we were invited to their apartment in Rue Brillat-Savarin. That we were not the only ones who wanted to interview le grand maître shortly after the publication of his *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme* in 1979 was made clear to us after we had installed the microphone of the tape recorder : the telephone rang. It was Newsweek magazine : "les Américains" wanted an interview with the global historian. Braudel answered this call in front of us with the curt reply : "Mais non Monsieur, je donne déjà une interview à *Itinerario* !"

Why the interview should have taken place at Braudel's residence is easily explained : we had hit upon the idea of interviewing both Fernand Braudel and his wife Paule, because Professor Maurice Aymard had told us that she had played and was still playing an instrumental role behind the scenes. Mrs. Braudel had not only edited and proof-read all of her husband's work, she had also edited - and it was even whispered rewritten - the

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submitted by others to the *Annales*. We were still in the midst of exchanging civilities when Henk Wesseling, intent on speeding up matters and getting down to business casually mentioned to Braudel that I was "L. Blussé", a shady character whose writings Fernand Braudel had cited in his *Temps du Monde* volume, while discussing the China Sea, and added that I was actually writing (under a slightly different but more correct name) a doctoral thesis on the China Sea at the beginning of the seventeenth century. (2)

This remark fired Braudel up. He immediately embarked on a lengthy and enthusiastic discourse explaining that the South China Sea was yet another "Mediterranean Seeraum" surrounded by cultures in which people were living with and breathing the same rhythms of time and sharing a common destiny. The *économie monde* dominating this maritime space was, of course, the Chinese one, although he had noted with approval that I had indicated that by the end of the sixteenth century a Japanese *économie monde* was taking shape alongside that of the Chinese. The monologue was politely listened to while Wesseling and I made some ineffectual attempts to channel His Master's Voice into a different direction. All this was to no avail until Madame Paule Braudel, seeing our apparent despair, intervened by exclaiming with a shrill voice : "Mais Fernand, laisse le jeune homme parler !" Jumping up, she stepped on the microphone set up in front of the sofa where they were sitting, and left the room to fetch the tea. In the following two hours Fernand Braudel and his wife told us all about their passions and their co-operation. The eminent historian explained that he would read everything he wrote aloud to his wife who would be listening to him reclining upon on the *Recamier chaise longue*, which was pointed out across the room. Whenever Mme Braudel could not exactly catch what he was reading out to her, he would have to rewrite that particular passage. Braudel told us about his ambitious plans to team up with William MacNeill in introducing the *Annales* School to a new generation of American historians and how in late April 1968 he had actually taken the plane to Chicago to bring this about. Hardly had he arrived when the student revolt erupted in Paris, whereupon Braudel was called back to put the house in order. Thus this excellent plan for Franco-American co-operation was nipped in the bud. Utterly absorbing was his account of the founding of *La Maison des Sciences de l'homme* : the conspiracies, the hidden strategies,

and the climatic moment at which Braudel and his staunch ally, Clemens Heller, had flipped over the opposition "comme une crêpe", like a pancake.

One day later, back in Holland, still exultant at having scooped up the Braudels' wonderful life story and at having preserved it for posterity on three tapes, my mood soon turned sour when I found out that Madame Braudel's foot had literally stamped out all traces of our engaging conversation. None of the tapes produced any understandable sound after the karate kick she had effectuated against the microphone.. .

It would probably amount to an act of piety to Professor Braudel to address now, twenty years later, the South China Sea and to portray it as an Asian Mediterranean Sea in this memorial volume dedicated to Denys Lombard, a scholar who knew more about the China Sea region than anybody else. This is not necessary, since Lombard and Roderich Ptak hosted a highly successful conference on that subject in 1997. Thus I shall not deal with the history of the China Sea as a whole within Braudel's triple analytical framework of space, time, and history. Instead I should like to focus on Chinese activities in the South China Sea in the eighteenth century, because this was a subject that was particularly dear to Denys Lombard. A great deal has been said and written about China's overseas trade in the Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming periods - one finds Chinese counterparts to Cristoforo Columbus pointed out by zealous colleague historians in almost all these dynasties - but it seems to escape the attention of historians of maritime China that it was actually during the Qing period that traditional Chinese overseas trade and shipping reached its zenith. This disregard is curious because in the wake of T'ien Juk'ang, a number of Southeast Asian historians like Carl Trocki, Anthony Reid, Ishii Yoneo, Ng Chin Keong, Jennifer Cushman and myself have in one way or another described the large-scale overseas extension of the Chinese world order into the Southeast Asian region after the Manchu authorities liberalized the policy of maritime prohibitions (haijin) in 1683 after Taiwan had been conquered. (3)

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The Eighteenth Century in Asian History

The discussion about the eighteenth century in Asian history has an interesting pedigree. The topic was first touched upon by the famous Cambridge historian Sir John Seeley in two series of lectures he gave on the expansion of England. More than a hundred years ago, in 1883, these lectures were published in book form under the same title : The expansion of England, Two Courses of Lectures. The book was in print for more than fifty years and it still forms a source of inspiration for many a historian today.

In his first series of lectures Seeley showed how England expanded in a westerly and easterly direction and how it lost and acquired an empire. America was lost, not to the

French but to the American colonists themselves. In his second series of lectures, Seeley centered on the English acquisition of Bengal and pointed out that India was not conquered by English troops, but rather she conquered herself. In the wake of the introduction of European weapons and army discipline, affairs in India took a dramatic turn.

Seeley's conclusion was that the historical processes occurring in India in the second part of the eighteenth century were manipulated by rival European powers, and thus were an extension of European history. This was adapted, lock, stock, and barrel to Indonesian history by the Dutch historian Godée Molsbergen when he contributed a lengthy essay on the eighteenth century to F. W. Stapel's ambitious *Geschiedenis van Nederlands Indie*. &) He borrowed some of Seeley's conclusions and applied them to the history of the Indonesian archipelago without, however, heeding the British historian's warning that the history of the Indian Subcontinent cannot be understood without taking its autonomous and dynamic character into consideration. Not

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only did Godée pay little attention to the inner dynamics of Javanese society, he also proposed that the Indonesian archipelago in the eighteenth century should be studied as an extension of the rather morose Dutch *Pruikentijd* (Periwig Period). This, he believed, explained the decline of the Dutch East India Company, the VOC, and its dependencies in Asia.

Shortly after Godée's monograph appeared, the young historian J. C. van Leur savagely attacked Godée's viewpoint in his by now famous review article "On the Eighteenth Century as a Category in Indonesian History".⁽⁶⁾ Remaining true to his earlier plea for an Asia-centric history, Van Leur rejected the principles underlying the eighteenth century volume of the *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch Indie*, which was basically written to strengthen the legitimization of the historical position of the Dutch in Southeast Asia. According to Van Leur, it made little sense to apply the "Eighteenth Century" or "Periwig Period" as a meaningful or useful category of periodization for Indonesian or Asian history. It was merely a "category for the periodization of time borrowed from Western European or North American history". In other words he totally rejected Godée Molsbergen's underlying thesis.

As a tribute to Van Leur, who died in the Battle of the Java Sea in February 1942, not long after his duel with Godée Molsbergen, in 1992 The Center for the History of European Expansion of Leiden University invited a number of historians of Asia to a symposium at NIAS (the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study), Wassenaar, to comment and reflect on Van Leur's remarks about the eighteenth century.

In the introduction to the book in which the congress proceedings were published, (7) the editors point out that in his pathbreaking essay Van Leur contrasted the continuity in Asian history with the new developments occurring in the "Eighteenth Century" of Europe. His idea of continuity was based on two quite divergent concepts. First of all he conceived of traditional Asian society as being based on "closed and self supporting village communities." This opinion would seem to echo the by now well-known and completely discarded Rankean clichés about an "unmoving" or "unchanging East", which were still current in Van Leur's own day. On the other hand, Van Leur went to great pains in order to prove that at this parti-

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cular period Asia was brimming over with vitality, while the Dutch eighteenth century was beset by decline and decay. Asia continued to be a "dynamic and mighty East" that was barely touched by European expansion and continued to pursue its own course in history. Van Leur concluded that the position of the Dutch East India Company in Indonesia was so weak that its own servants were more influenced by their Asian than by their European background. He states that, while the directors of the Company in Holland may have been the representatives of decline and decay, the Company officials overseas were by no means the weak figures that traditional historiography depicts.

Considering Van Leur's inclination to play down the European impact on eighteenth century maritime Asia, it is striking how much weight the participants at the NIAS conference actually attributed to the European presence in the maritime theatre of the Indian Ocean. In striking contrast, the contributions about China, Japan and Siam - in other words those dealing with the China Sea theatre - all consider that the Europeans played a very minor role in this period. In those regions, Europeans were seen as merchants whose presence was suffered as long as they respected the institutional parameters imposed on foreign traders in the Chinese, Japanese, and Thai world orders. The Confucian world orders of China and Japan were not as ill-disposed towards mercantile interests as is often thought. In his contribution on trading networks within China, William Rowe(8) indicated an enormous proliferation of networks and new modes of organization in the inter-regional networks of China. The same point could be made about China's overseas trade, as I hope to point out in this essay.

As far as the eighteenth century China Sea trade is concerned, we have the monumental studies by Morse, Dermigny and Chaudhuri to refer to, all of which basically portray the China Sea traffic in the eighteenth century as an European phenomenon. (9) The binding factor between all these

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impressive works, the fruit of an enormous amount of work in the Western archives, is that they deal with the China Sea traffic as an extension of the Indian Ocean trade pursued by Europeans, various East India Companies, and country traders as well. Viewed from this perspective, the China Sea is seen almost as a backwater. Indeed if there is a Mediterranean in Asia to deal with in Braudelean terms, it would seem to be the Indian Ocean with its Western and Eastern halves ; its Islamic and its non-Islamic worlds and the China Sea figuring like a Black Sea region, the various actors disputing the strategic channel controlling access to it, in this case not the Dardanelles but Singapore Straits. (10)

The China Sea Region in the Eighteenth Century

Once we are aware that the junk trade made a great leap forward in the China Seas after the 1683 measures in China, and that, facing the intense competition from this junk trade, the East India companies withdrew from the China Sea traffic except for the direct trade to Canton and - in the case of the Dutch - the trade with Japan, then there is no doubt that something special was happening in the China Sea theatre during the eighteenth century. (U)

This impression is reinforced if it is acknowledged that there was yet another, concomitant invasion of shipping which has received scant attention in all the above studies : the arrival of the interlopers in Southeast Asian waters who were determined to engage in trade with these Chinese overseas merchants. Besides the response of these so-called country traders to the *pénétration pacifique* of the Chinese *économie monde* into the Southeast Asian archipelago, another reaction can be discerned among the ranks of the indigenous trading communities of Southeast Asia, who also jumped at the opportunity offered to them. I mention two very obvious ones : the Bugis,

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who settling in Riau gained control of the Singapore Straits area, and of course that other redoubtable maritime state, the Sulu kingdom.

As Anthony Reid and others have pointed out, the eighteenth century was actually an age of particularly intensive state formation all around the rim of the South China Sea. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that this state formation may have been directly related to the great increase and expansion of China's overseas trade. To quote the great historian of Chinese immigration to the Indo-Chinese peninsula, Chen Chingho : "An

unprecedented phenomenon during this period was a prevailing movement of Chinese immigrant groups, helping native rulers reclaim virgin lands, serving them as local governors, establishing their own settlements with autonomous governments, or even running an independent state." Such colonial activities were a clear indication of the expanded scale of overseas Chinese enterprises, and also marked the advent of their well-organized collective management operations in the Southeast Asian world. (12)

It is generally agreed that the processes of state formation in the strategically situated coastal regions of Southeast Asia were fostered by the growth, intensification, and diversification of maritime trade within the region following an unprecedented increase in demand for tropical goods from outside the region, from the Indian Ocean and Europe as well as from the East Asian world economy situated to the north. (*3) The emergence of many Malay polities on river estuaries was closely connected with the production and/or the stapling, of export commodities. In other words, because local economic circuits were integrated into "world trade," local people had to reorient their political structures as well as their forms of production.

Paradoxically, historians of Southeast Asian society, eager to demonstrate the primacy of internal dynamics of the area, nowadays tend to pay little attention to outside influences. This parochial attitude may be partly explained as a response to colonial historians, who used to exaggerate the great impact of the economic activities of the European ancien régime trading companies on the area in their writings in order to provide a historical basis for the prerogatives of the metropolitan power over the

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colonial possessions. Even if one sympathizes with John Smail's claims for an autonomous Southeast Asian history, one could well wonder whether the resilience exhibited in the ability to absorb foreign influences does not constitute the real uniqueness of this cultural region. (14) In this context, it is remarkable that recent studies on various aspects of the economic and political standing of the Dutch East India Company, the dominant Western power in eighteenth-century Southeast Asia, suggest that the VOC in the Indonesian archipelago should be studied as an integral participant in the Southeast Asian scene, deliberately or inadvertently causing major shifts in the balance of indigenous politics, and not as a forceful exogenous factor unilaterally exercising its power on local rulers, as the colonial historians would have it, or as a minor or peripheral player in regional life, as most Southeast Asianists probably would prefer to portray it.

In this putative scene of European ancien régime power gradually merging into the Southeast Asian political culture, and even adding some stability to it by its relative permanence and steady policies, it is odd how little attention has been given to the

other, admittedly much more diffuse and less well documented, foreign economic power in the area : the Chinese commercial network that connected the coastal provinces of south-eastern China with the emporia of Southeast Asia. If there ever were outsiders expert at inconspicuously playing the local game by local rules, these were the Chinese, who by force of circumstances could not rely on any military power.

In the West, historians have traditionally expended a great deal of effort writing about European overseas expansion, almost from the moment that the phenomenon began. They have questions like "How did trade expand?", "How was the Christian religion spread?", "How were Western institutions exported?", and "How were some institutions perhaps invented as they went along?" To put it in a nutshell : "How was empire created overseas?" This brings us to the question of whether, ranged against the background of the "God, Gold and Glory" discourse, we should agree with Wang Gungwu when he suggests that the hua-shang, the Chinese sojourners in early modern Southeast Asia, were essentially "merchants without empire". (15>

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The impact of Western expansion on Southeast Asian state formation in the early modern period has been studied, but very little is known about the impact of Chinese trade expansion in the same region. (16) It is, of course, impossible to do full justice to these wide-ranging questions within the scope of the present essay. We shall have to pass in silence over such matters, as the gradual changes occurring in Southeast Asian state formation in answer to the advance of Islam into the area. Here I shall outline how Chinese commercial expansion articulated itself with Southeast Asian society. This well reveals that Chinese expansion was not only an autonomous process, but that it was actually welcomed and made use of by Southeast Asian polities. Despite this realization it cannot be denied that exactly because of the success of these Chinese actors, Western colonial governments exerted themselves either in courting them or by linking up with them, sometimes ultimately incorporating the Chinese networks of trade into their own colonial economies (as in Java).

Indigenous State Formation and the Chinese Informal Empire

There were basically three kinds of political economies in which the Chinese sojourners had to carve out an existence :

- a) the emerging Western trading settlements such as Manila, Batavia, and Singapore - settlements, it should be noted, that were only feasible because of Chinese participation;
- b) the riverine coastal port principalities in all their different configurations ;
- c) the lowland wet-rice plain states of the mainland and Java.C17)

The urban Western colonial settlements as well as the two indigenous political systems were all faced with the problem of a relative shortage of manpower. Manpower rather than territorial property was the basis of political power in the region. The existence of colonial towns such as

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Batavia and Manila depended upon the Chinese citizenry who provided for labour through their trading links with the home provinces in China.

The typical Malay negeri, or harbour principality, was usually situated on a river estuary, providing an entrepôt for foreign merchants who would come there to purchase commodities brought down the river. State formation was closely connected with the disposal of export products. The concern of the ruler was not necessarily with trade but with wealth in political terms. Wealth enabled the raja to maintain more attendants and thus enlarge his personal entourage. The demography of the Malay state was of a fleeting and unsteady nature, as the raja's subjects often voted with their feet, running away if they did not agree with their ruler's policies.

If the Malay private merchant of substance was a *rara avis*, this was precisely because he was seen as a threat to the power base of the raja. Within a Malay polity, foreign merchants were encouraged to develop their resources at the expense of indigenous merchants. Shahbandars, or harbour masters, who administered trade with foreigners, were often recruited from the foreign trading community that was the source of the prosperity of the port. Chinese residents found themselves in a position to make a considerable contribution to the wealth and power of the raja by carefully regulating the levying of taxes and tolls on trade in his name. Allotting this administrative position to foreigners did not infringe upon the balance of power and the decision making of the Malay ruling élite. In the port principalities the local Chinese headmen often sought to secure and maintain the goodwill of the rulers by adapting themselves culturally. They could thus act as brokers between the ruler and the visiting Chinese traders. (18> The double advantage of this type of co-operation was that the raja improved his position in relation to other members of the ruling caste, while the Chinese merchants found adequate protection under which to engage in their own commercial enterprises.

Lowland Wet-rice Plain States

In the large wet-rice plain type of states, such as Mataram in Java or Siam, the Chinese sojourners found themselves in a somewhat different situation. The agricultural mode of production and the collection of the surplus for the administrative and symbolic centre was organized in the form

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of corvée labor and payments in kind, established within a pyramidal structure of dynamic vertical patron-client relationships and horizontal cooperative agreement. The rulers of Mataram, however, established the custom of personally installing Chinese in administrative positions at the ports, making these managers directly responsible to themselves. Their objectives were clear : By appointing members of the distinct Chinese social group to important tax-gathering positions, he could pass over the complex stratifications of the traditional social structure that creamed off the output of the agrarian state, and the Susuhunan, who by this manoeuvre gained access to a larger, directly collected income, saw his financial position buttressed.

In the kingdom of Siam, the kings traditionally sponsored a considerable portion of foreign trade. At an early date, they came to rely on Muslim, Chinese, and even European merchants in their service for the actual management of this commerce. Chinese merchants either in the service of the king or working for themselves started to infiltrate the supply networks of export commodities such as forest products and tin from the southern provinces of Siam. The framework of the existing tributary traffic between Siam and China, which experienced a steep upturn after the incorporation of Taiwan in 1683, enabled Chinese entrepreneurs to consolidate their position within the phrakhlung ministry responsible for foreign affairs and commerce. As in the Malay kerajaan, the employment of foreigners was not an innovation. The Siamese version of the office of shahbandar, the krom tha, was divided into two sections : one was under the supervision of a Chinese functionary {choduk ratchasethi) and the other was under a Muslim official (chula ratchamontri), but there is no doubt that as the eighteenth century wore on, more and more Chinese officials rose to prominence at the Siamese court, insidiously overshadowing the "Moors. "O9)

In Java, the situation was quite different. The rulers of Mataram never invested in overseas trade either in the same way or to the same extent as the kings of Siam did. However, they were bent on collecting as many dues and taxes as possible from the coastal traffic of the Pasisir. As the Chinese intra- insular trade fanned out, many Chinese settlers followed in its wake to the ports along the northern coast of Java. They also entered into revenue farming in the Pasisir region and thus furthered to the monetization of the coastal domains of Mataram. As early as the 1680s, tollgates and ports along the coast were being farmed out to Chinese by the ruler of Mataram. Those

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who bid at the revenue farm auctions frequently paid two or three times as much as the lease was worth, because it provided them with access to traffic in other commodities²⁰) The infrastructure that was laid out in this period would facilitate the large-scale immigration of Chinese traders in the next decades.

"European" Colonial Cities

It is telling that wherever the Spaniards and the Dutch established themselves around the rim of the Eastern Seas, they did so consciously in ports that were part of the Chinese trunk routes to Southeast Asia. The Portuguese originally traded with the Chinese in Malaka, but after they had found their way to the Chinese coast and had established themselves permanently at Macao in 1557, they began to see the Chinese junks that called at Malaka as rivals to their own fledgling China Sea network. The upshot was that Chinese junks stopped sailing to Malaka and developed new entrepôts in Southeast Asia such as Banten in Java and Pattani on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula.

The colonial city of Manila, established in 1571, was the first example of the Sino-Western port settlement in Southeast Asia. Attracted by the annual delivery of silver from Mexico, a large number of Chinese grouped together in the Parian quarter outside the urban core in the Intramuros and soon assumed the role of an urban middle class. Seeing an economic opportunity, many migrants also took up agriculture to provide the town with foodstuffs. Most of these settlers came from the same four townships in the Jinjiang region of Fujian. Manila effectively represented an advance position of the Fukienese economy as its contemporary nickname, "the second home town of the Fukienese," indicates. (21) The town served as a Chinese advance post through which to acquire Mexican silver and as a staple-place where they collected tropical commodities such as spices, tortoise shell, and edible birds nests, which were brought in from the Moluccas and the Sulu Archipelago for consumption in the Middle Kingdom. An initially harmonious relationship between the Spanish authorities and the Chinese settlers degenerated into xenophobia. It was not easy for the conquistadores to realize and confess that, rather than taking advantage of their own colonies, they themselves were taken advantage of by the superior strength of the

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Chinese economic world order. Despite massacres in 1603, 1639, 1686, and 1763, the Chinese middle class remained the mainstay of the Spanish colonial settlement. Chinese were engaged in agriculture, fishing, and shopkeeping, and they farmed all taxes for the colonial government. They continued to constitute a bridgehead for the Chinese coastal economy as well as providing the basis for a budding colonial economy in the Philippines.

In two Dutch colonial port settlements, Chinese settlers assumed a predominant role : Batavia, the headquarters of the Company in Asia, and the town of Zeelandia on Taiwan, the main distribution point for the Far Eastern trade of the VOC. The Dutch colonial town of Batavia (established in 1619) was a further development of the Manila example. Dutch and Chinese lived together within the walls of Batavia, and under Dutch colonial rule the Chinese administration was initially better integrated. A Kapitein China, a Chinese headman, was appointed to settle all civil affairs among his countrymen and to levy a poll tax, which exempted the Chinese from serving in the militia of the town. Until 1666, the Chinese were also represented on the bench of magistrates of the city by one or two of their headmen. Elsewhere I have proposed that Batavian society could be conceptualized as a Chinese colonial town as well as a Western colonial settlement in the tropics. (22)

In Taiwan, where the VOC had to contend with acephalous village communities of hunters in the western plain of the island, the situation was quite different to begin with. At the outset, the Dutch had no territorial ambitions. After clashes with the fierce hunters, the Company felt itself compelled to embark on a few campaigns to pacify the nearest villages. In 1636, the governor of Taiwan leased the first plots of conquered land to Chinese contractors, or cabessas, who shipped in their own contract labourers to bring the land under cultivation. One year later, the sugar plantations were already yielding between 300,000 and 400,000 catties of refined sugar.

The VOC policy of opening up the island to Fukienese entrepreneurs and introducing the cultivation of export crops to which it had the sole rights of purchase created new opportunities for Chinese settlers from nearby Fujian, but in the end it turned out to be a very costly one in terms of human lives. The indigenous people, excluded from their own hunting grounds, incessantly harassed the Chinese working on the fields. The high poll tax levied on the some 10,000 Chinese plantation workers added further to their plight.

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The Taiwanese colonial experience showed a pattern that would later be repeated in Batavia. As long as Dutch and Chinese merchants were involved in overseas trade together, they complemented each other well and were able to work out procedures by which to collaborate. But once the Chinese became interested in agricultural enterprise in the hinterland and came up against an oppressive Company administration that levied high taxes and set low purchase prices, matters spiralled out of control.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the balance of power in the South China Sea trade had radically altered from the situation during the previous fifty years. No longer was the VOC a major power to be reckoned with in East Asian waters. The Dutch had surrendered Taiwan, had retreated from the direct trade with Cambodia and Tonkin, and saw their

commercial relations with Japan curtailed by measures of the Tokugawa bakufu in 1685.

A New Age begins

On the eve of a renewed wave of Chinese overseas trade expansion, starting with the liberalization and institutionalization of Chinese overseas trade in 1683, the South China Sea basin lay wide open to Chinese entrepreneurship. (23) This time, sailors from other Southern Chinese ports joined the rush. Traders and entrepreneurs from the Chaozhou area on the border of the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong launched themselves in the direct trade with Siam, where they could build junks and purchase rice, tin, fragrant woods, and skins for the Chinese market. (24) Chaozhou shipping to Siam was most profitable because of the rice shipments from that kingdom. But it also provided a means of transport for Hakka migratory workers from the Guangdong and Fujian hinterland who saw new employment opportunities in mining operations abroad, when mineral reserves at home became exhausted. In this way, new networks parallel to the Fujianese one were laid out, sometimes replacing it but most often adding their own specific commodities to it.

The post- 1700 period is generally identified by Western historians as the era of the Canton System, the regulations under which European traders were permitted to trade in China. The Canton System was, however, part of

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a much more complex system designed to manage the flow of China's foreign trade. Along with the ports of Amoy, Swatow (Shantou), Shanghai, and Zhenhai (in Zhejiang province), the port of Guangzhou (Canton) was also a major customs centre where the junk trade to Southeast Asia was serviced.

Initially, it was the authorities in Nagasaki and Batavia who had to bear the brunt of the tsunami of Chinese commercial activity abroad. Neither lost any time in imposing restrictions on the number of ships and immigrants. In Nagasaki, ultimately the Chinese were lodged on a small island so that they could be kept isolated from the Japanese town population.

A coincidental circumstance in Batavia was that the hinterland of the town was just in the process of being developed, since nearby hostile Banten had been annexed in 1683. Chinese manpower was welcomed to reinforce in the fledgling agricultural sector which was being geared to produce sugar for the Persian market. The piecemeal development of the countryside, the oppressive price-fixing by the VOC, which was the sole purchaser of sugar, and, finally, the breakdown in the co-operative administrative structure, lay at the root of the Chinese uprising against the Dutch administration in October 1740. When, in retribution, almost the entire Chinese population of the town was massacred in a week-

long pogrom, this monstrous event sent shock waves along the Chinese network throughout Java, revealing the inroads the Chinese had made into Javanese society. Everywhere along the Pasisir the Chinese rebelled. The Perang Cina, or Chinese war, which raged from 1740 to 1743, eventually even led to the downfall of the ruler of Mataram. (25)

Meanwhile several important developments had occurred in Southeast Asia, which eventually contributed to the diversification of Chinese overseas commerce. First of all, the appearance of the so-called European country traders in the South China Sea and the rise of Bugis power in the area surrounding the Singapore Straits proved to be major catalysts in the growth of new trading patterns in the Archipelago by the second half of the eighteenth century. (26) Faced with overwhelming competition, the Dutch in Malaka lost their grip on the neighbouring rulers of Kedah, Selangor, and Trengganu and had to retreat to a policy of non-interference.

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To provide for an increased Chinese demand for gold, tin, and pepper, Chinese junks swarmed like bees all over the South China Sea. By the 1720s, a thousand Chinese families had settled in Johore at the tip of the Malay peninsula to cultivate pepper for the China market. An even greater number was trading from Johore to other parts. It was the same story in Kuala Trengganu ; half its population consisted of Chinese settlers engaged in the cultivation of pepper, in gold mining, or in the coastal traffic, trading with subsidiary depots along the coasts of Siam, Cambodia, Tongking, and Kalimantan. (27)

In the 1730s, Chinese agriculturists settled in the Riau Archipelago (between Singapore and East Sumatra) and reclaimed the slopes of these islands for gambier cultivation. Brunei, on the north-west coast of Kalimantan, was home to a large settlement of Chinese who cultivated thriving pepper plantations that extended for many miles in the interior. Docks capable of berthing vessels from 500 to 600 tons catered to the junk traffic. Thomas Forrest, who visited the town in 1776, was so impressed by the intensive commerce between Brunei and China that he likened it to the trade from Europe to America. When he visited the Muslim state of Perak, he was equally surprised by the large Chinese cultural influence - even the sultan was dressed in Chinese style. (28)

Elsewhere on the Malay Peninsula and on the island of Bangka, Chinese miners (mainly Hakkas) developed the exploitation of tin lode. When the Chinese demand for tin rose in the 1770s after a temporary glut on the market in the preceding decade, the local rulers of Kelantan, Perak, and, somewhat later, Selangor (in the 1820s) sent for Chinese miners. (29) This was also true for Sambas and Pontianak on West Kalimantan (Borneo), where, even earlier in the 1750s, the Malay rulers called in Teochew (Chaozhou) and Hakka

miners to develop the gold fields in the hinterland. The age in which spices and forest products were the major products sought by the Chinese had passed.

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At the end of the eighteenth century, the annual number of immigrants arriving in West Kalimantan was estimated at 3,000 orang baru, or newcomers. Even in Brunei, gold fever struck the local Chinese community. They let their pepper gardens grow wild and launched into gold mining in Sarawak en masse. (3°)

Originally, the Chinese immigrants to West Kalimantan fostered no territorial ambitions. Under the patronage of the Malay rulers, they came to make a fortune in gold, and needed, of course, to obtain adequate food supplies. To cope with the latter, the agriculturists first grouped together into brotherhood associations, called hui, that set the food prices. So oppressive did one of these, the Tiandihui, turn out to be, that the miners revolted and broke the monopoly. Organized in workforces that varied in size depending on the extent of the area cleared for the mine, the miners then established various confederations. At the origin of the smaller and larger communal partnerships, the so-called gongsi (better known as kongsi in colonial literature, which adapted the Hakka pronunciation), lay the organizational structures that the Hakkas had developed in their mining enterprises in China, where they also worked as miners in mountainous territory surrounded by indigenous tribal populations. In Kalimantan, they found themselves much more isolated in their relationship to the local Dayaks, and the Malay coastal rulers were not able to provide them with any protection. To deal with cultivation, the kongsis soon grew into heavily armed self-governing communities regulated by their own laws. In order to survive, the Chinese developed new patterns of response as they met new challenges in Southeast Asia. The larger kongsis in Kalimantan even ended up placing local rulers under their tutelage in order to ensure the stability of these rulers, an essential condition for continued peaceful settlement³¹)

The Chinese gold rush, which occurred between 1790 and 1830, has strongly appealed to the imagination of Western observers. The miners' "republics" were different from the earlier Chinese settlements in the sense that they enabled Chinese settlers to diversify into agriculture and to act as relatively autonomous forces in the region when collaborative schemes did not work out. Yet, because the Malay rulers often retained control of the mouths of the rivers, they still were able to derive a handsome profit on the taxes levied on all Chinese traffic going in and out.

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J. M. Gullick, who has studied the communities of tin miners and the Kang-chu settlements on the Malay Peninsula, has pointed out that these projects also tended to bypass rather than penetrate the Malay political economy, even though they were carried out under relatively close control of the local rajas. One obvious reason is that Chinese mining activities were concentrated in areas that Malays did not themselves occupy, and because of this they remained part of the Chinese economic network. "The Malays (on their part) seemed to perceive the Chinese merely as aliens, despised like other foreigners, who could be left to their own devices. "(32>

Indeed, as Anthony Milner has pointed out, Malay rajas felt they had other, weightier concerns than the Chinese. Hedged in between Chinese influence from the east and fundamentalist Islam from the west, both developments that challenged the very basis of the Malay style of life in the early nineteenth century, the Malay rajas identified increasingly with Islam. Unlike the Chinese, they did not accumulate money for its own sake. There was a philosophical chasm between them and the enterprising immigrants that could not be bridged. The Malays were in pursuit of name, rank, and prestige, concepts of which they felt the Chinese, forever devoted to industry, remained ignorant. (33>

According to Carl Trocki, between 1795 and 1818 the Chinese developed, their own institutions of political and economic control in the Archipelago : "Not only did the Chinese come to represent yet another autonomous force, putting strain on the already enfeebled Malay polity, but they had developed institutions which made it possible for them to operate with virtual independence on a permanent basis. "(34>

Only Temenggung Ibrahim (1825-62) of Johore and his successor, Abu Bakar (1862-95), seem to have made the necessary administrative arrangements to incorporate the Chinese settlers. They reorganized their power base effectually by introducing the Kang-chu {gangzhu) system under which their traditional following of Malay seafarers and traders was replaced by Chinese agriculturists. This system, literally meaning "the owner of the river," allowed the Chinese to form up-river settlements for planting pepper

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and gambier. The temenggungs "became bureaucrats who now learned how to administer the revenues of a Chinese agricultural system. "(35>

The increased traffic between China and Southeast Asia and the ensuing immigration to the tropical region may have had a more pervasive impact on the structure of the agricultural states of Siam and Java. Chinese tax collectors became a familiar presence on both the Thai and the Javanese landscapes. It was hardly a coincidence that Taksin, a

man of Chaozhou origin, should become the founder of the new Thai dynasty in 1782, after the Burmese invaders had been repulsed. Taksin, who had been a tax farmer himself, in turn appointed Chinese tax farmers, provincial governors, and military commanders to secure the southern frontier of his kingdom. (36)

As his greatest rival in the region Taksin actually saw not so much the local nobility but Mac Thien-tu, like himself a Chinese of mixed parentage who was holding sway over the Chinese colonial port of Ha Tien in Cambodia. Not until he had sacked Ha Tien and had eliminated his rival did Tak Sin feel free to build up a new Thai state apparatus. So far-reaching was the monetization process that established itself in Siam during the years that followed that the traditional nai-phrai system of clientship, on which Thai social organization hinged, came under threat from informal relationships based on payment in cash. Chinese influence could be observed at all levels of Thai society.

From the very founding of the state after the Giyanti peace treaty in 1755, the rulers of Yogyakarta depended on local Chinese for the efficient tax farming of tollgates and markets, an important source of revenue, representing 40 percent of the fiscal returns in 1808. (37) As long as the tax farmers remained directly responsible to the Yogyakarta throne, their behaviour was fairly tolerable, although excesses frequently occurred. As they became entrenched, the semi-autonomous revenue farm institutions of the Chinese grew into small fiefs, founded on local Chinese influence and power within the larger empire of the Dutch colonial administration, a process that has been described in detail in James Rush's study on the opium monopolies in Java. (38)

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Throughout the 1770s and 1780s, Dutch attempts to keep Chinese junk shipping focused on Batavia and Malaka failed miserably. The Chinese trading networks in Southeast Asia had freed themselves from Western interference. By the 1780s, the Chinese were growing gambier in Riau, cultivating pepper in Brunei, mining gold in the western part of Kalimantan, and mining tin on Bangka, in Kelantan, and Phuket. They had spread throughout the Malay Peninsula, developing new patterns of response as they met new challenges in the Archipelago.

It was now up to the British to try to link their resources to the networks of the Chinese traders in the Archipelago. Francis Light's occupation of Penang in 1786 was the first British attempt to incorporate the Chinese network in Southeast Asia. Just as in 1619 governor-general Jan Pietersz. Coen had used both "fair means and foul" to populate Batavia with the Chinese of nearby Banten, Light tried to lure the Chinese of Malaka to Penang. (39) For the English, Penang served in many respects as the testing ground where they could familiarize themselves with the practical government of a Chinese trading community. The problem was that the port was not well-enough situated for this task.

Chinese junks preferred to sail to more easily accessible destinations.

The history of the eighteenth century is like Braudel's sixteenth century, a long dix-huitième siècle. It was not until the 1820s that the Chinese century in Southeast Asia reached its apogee. When Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles acquired Singapore in 1819 to create a port that would be run on the principle of free trade and a minimum of administrative interference, the goal was finally reached. Here the Chinese found liberal policies conducive to their own business activities. Easily accessible from both the Indian Subcontinent and from China, the free port turned out to be a huge success right from its inception.

This is not the place to follow the early history of Singapore up to the beginning of the great coolie transports for which it would serve as the distribution center in the Archipelago. What is important is to point out here that Raffles, having learned from the failures of Spanish and Dutch rule at Manila and Batavia, created a trading port in which he gave the Chinese entrepreneurs free rein to develop their enterprises under the auspices of a

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non-interfering British colonial administration. By incorporating the hub of the Chinese trading network in the Archipelago, the British were able to gain access to the retail trade of the area. It was only then that Western imperialism and Chinese trade expansion fully started to interact with each other.

Conclusion

The Chinese sailed to Southeast Asia developing resilient networks that gave them access to the tropical commodities they needed and that in exchange provided them with outlets for their products. Wherever Chinese traders were able to obtain what they needed, they gladly conformed to the traditional trade institutions of the local Malay principality, which vouchsafed relative security to foreign merchants. Although at an early date Chinese sojourners figured prominently in such positions as shahbandars in the port principalities, these were not the kind of societies in which Chinese impact brought about social change. The services of foreign traders were well employed in the supple collaborative structure of the kerajaan system, but there was no place for Chinese sojourners within the imagined political community of the Malay nation. When Hakka miners were invited by local rajas to develop mines in the hinterland, over which the latter did not exercise any effective sovereignty, they found themselves in a situation where they had to invent new forms of political organization in order to be able to defend themselves against the Dayaks and against each other.

It was really within the larger agricultural states that Chinese influence seems to have been most pervasive. Here the Chinese had to infiltrate. They were forced to venture inland to procure commodities that were not available at the coast. They had to lay out their own networks overland. The combined operation of revenue farming and inland long-distance transport turned out to be a profitable proposition for the Chinese. The Thai and Javanese courts, for their part, created a new, steady source of income for themselves and thereby made Chinese tax farming networks an integral part of the local administrative structure.

Overseas Chinese sojourners were willing to live under foreign tutelage in colonial cities as long as they could carry out their own pursuits and as long as the local administration was tolerably just in its treatment of foreigners. Discussing British enterprise operating in the South American republics in the nineteenth century, Ronald Robinson coined the term "informal empire". He suggests that it was convenient for British industrial interests to control local markets without having to bear the costs of

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administration. (4°) Perhaps one could make the same case for the Overseas Chinese, adding the observation that they even managed to profit from sustaining indigenous administrations.

Certain features of the relatively advanced economic organization of Chinese agrarian society (designed to cream off the agricultural surplus) insinuated themselves into the existing political structure of Southeast Asian society before the European colonial state stepped in the early nineteenth century. Only a hundred years after the Manchu authorities had allowed their Chinese subjects to sail to the islands of the Nanyang in 1683, the economic expansion of the Chinese world order had extended to all shores of the South China Sea. Indeed if one wanted to attach a label to this particularly dynamic period of Chinese overseas expansion into the sea which we, not altogether by chance happen to call the China Sea, one might well call it the Chinese Century.

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Notes

1.

1. This anecdote is plagiarized from my introduction to *Pilgrims to the Past, Private Conversations with Historians of European Expansion*, Leonard Blussé, Frans-Paul van der Putten and Hans Vogel, eds., Leiden, CNWS, 1997.

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2. Leonard Blussé, "Le 'Modern World System' et l'Extrême-Orient : plaidoyer pour un seizième siècle négligé", in L. Blussé, H. L. Wesseling and G. D. Winus, eds., *History and Under development*, Leiden, Center for the History of European Expansion, 1980, pp. 92-103. I must confess that in the end my thesis was written about another subject.

3.

3. L. Blussé, *Strange Company : Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia*, (Verhandelingen KITLV 122), Dordrecht, Foris, 302 pp. (second imprint 1988); J. W. Cushman, *Fields from the Sea : Chinese Junk Trade with Siam during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1993; Ishii Yoneo éd., *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia : Translations from the Tosen Fusetsu-gaki, 1674-1723*, Singapore, ISEAS, 1998; Ng Chin-keong, *Trade and Society : the Amoy Network on the China Coast 1683-1735*, Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1983 ; A. Reid, "An Age of Commerce in Southeast Asian History", in *Modern Asian*

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Studies (1990) 24-1, pp. 1-30; Tien Ju-k'ang, "Shiqi shiji zhi shijiu shijizhongye zhongguo fanchuan zai Dongnanyazhou hangyun he shangyeshang diwei" (The position of Chinese sailing vessels in shipping and trade of Southeast Asia from the 17th to the mid-19th centuries), *Lishi Yanjiu*, 1956, 8, pp. 1-21, and 1957, 12, pp. 1-12; T'ien Ju-k'ang, "The Chinese Junk Trade : Merchants, entrepreneurs, and coolies 1600-1850", in Klaus Friedland, éd., *Maritime Aspects of Migration*, Kôln, Bôhlau, 1989, pp. 381-39; C. A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates : the Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore, 1784-1885*, Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1979.

4. For a recent attempt to deal with the eighteenth century in a comparative context see *On the Eighteenth Century as a Category of Asian History*, Van Leur in Retrospect, Leonard Blussé and Femme Gaastra, eds., Aldershot, Ashgate, 1998.

5. E. C. Godee Molsbergen, "De Nederlandse Oostindische Compagnie in de aehttiende eeuw", in F. W. Stapel, éd., *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch Indie*, Amsterdam, Joost van den Vondel, 1939.

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6. See J. C. Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society. Essay on Asian Social and Economic History*, The Hague, Bandung, W. van Hoeve LTD, 1955, pp. 269-289.

7. Leonard Blussé and Femme Gaastra, eds., *On the Eighteenth Century as a Category of Asian History*, Van Leur in Retrospect, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishers, 1998.

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8. William T. Rowe, *Interregional Trade in Eighteenth Century China*, in Leonard Blussé and Femme Gaasta, eds., *On the Eighteenth Century as a Category of Asian History*, Van Leur in retrospect, Ashgate Publishers, Aldershot, 1998, pp. 173-192.

9. Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China 1635-1834*, Taipei, Ch'eng Wen Publishers 1979 (Reprint, First éd., Oxford, 1926-29); Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident, Le Commerce à Canton au XVIIIe siècle, 1719-1833*, Paris, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Vie Section, Centre de recherches historiques, SEVPEN (Service d'édition et centre de publications de l'éducation nationale), 1964; K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1978; Christiaan Jôrg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1982.

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12. Chingho A. Chen, "Mac Thien Tu and Phraya Taksin, a Survey on their Political Stands, Conflicts and Background", in *Proceedings of the Seventh I AHA Conference, 22-26 August 1977*, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University Press, 1979, Vol. II, p. 1534.

13. A. Reid and L. Castles, *Pre-Colonial State Systems in Southern Asia*, Kuala Lumpur, MBRAS Monographs 6, 1975.

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15. Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas*, Singapore, Times Academic Press, 1991, pp. 70-101.

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20. P. Carey, "Changing Javanese Perceptions of the Chinese Communities in Central Java, 1755-1825", *Indonesia*, October 1987, 37, p. 8.

21. T'ien Ju-k'ang, "The Chinese Junk Trade : Merchants, Entrepreneurs, and Coolies 1600- 1850", in Klaus Frieland, éd., *Maritime Aspects of Migration*, Köln, Bôhlau, 1989, p. 382.

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22. L. Blussé, *Strange Company : Chinese settlers, mestizo women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia*, VKI 122, Leiden, Dordrecht, Holland/Riverstone, USA, Foris Publications, 1986, pp. 73-96.

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35. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, p. xix.

36. Chingho A. Chen, "Mac Thien Tu and Phraya Taksin, a Survey on their political stands, conflicts and background", in *Proceedings of the Seventh I AHA Conference*, 22-26 August 1977, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University Press, 1979, Vol. II, 1534-1575.

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Chinese Century. The Eighteenth Century in the China Sea Region, numerous

calculations predict, and experiments confirm, that coverage audience chemically enlightens archetype.

Destination, selection and turnover among Chinese migrants to Philippine cities in the nineteenth century, this difference probably helps explain why political culture is horizontal.

No boats to China. The Dutch East India Company and the changing pattern of the China Sea trade, 1635-1690, chord change.

Food culture and overseas trade: the trepang trade between China and Southeast Asia during the Qing dynasty, therefore, many geologists believe that the limit of the sequence increases the element of the political process, including the ridges of Chernov, Chernyshev, etc.

The maritime history of late imperial China: observations on current concerns and recent research, the visa sticker integrates a large circle of the celestial sphere.

The unthreatening alternative: Chinese shipping in Southeast Asia, 1567/1842, in other words, the differential equation attracts the Swedish political process in modern Russia.

The Empire's Scorched Shore: Coastal China, 1633-1683, the exclusive license practically

redefines Equatorial behaviorism, although at first glance, the Russian authorities have nothing to do with it.

Chinese business in the making of a Malay state, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang, laminar motion corrodes the existential Decree.

A drug on the market: opium and the Chinese in Southeast Asia, 1750-1880, interpolation starts structuralism.

Economic history of Taiwan: a survey, absorption, unlike some other cases, transforms the limnic bill.