This book presents extensive new research findings on and new thinking about Southeast Asia in this interesting, richly diverse, but much understudied period. It examines the wide and well-developed trading networks, explores the different kinds of regimes and the nature of power and security, considers urban growth, international relations and the beginnings of European involvement with the region, and discusses religious factors, in particular the spread and impact of Christianity. One key theme of the book is the consideration of how well-developed Southeast Asia was before the onset of European involvement, and, how, during the peak of the commercial boom in the 1500s and 1600s, many polities in Southeast Asia were not far behind Europe in terms of socio-economic progress and attainments.

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To
Emeritus Professor Nicholas Tarling
Scholar par excellence,
inspiration and friend to up-and-coming scholars
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Foreword

It is a pleasure to welcome this collection of essays, for at least three reasons.

Firstly, the volume consolidates the recognition of Early Modernity as a meaningful way to define a global moment in which Southeast Asia played a particularly central role. The Early Modern period began with the “long sixteenth century” that unified the world, and petered out in the late seventeenth or eighteenth. There was no such category when those of my generation learned our history. The pattern of dividing European history into Medieval, Renaissance and Modern was assumed to be normative, and the majority of the world for which this made little sense nevertheless found itself categorized according to this established scheme. The importance of the long sixteenth century – roughly 1490–1630 – as the phase when the peoples of our planet were brought into constant contact and interaction with one another was recognized if at all by terms such as “Age of Discovery” or “Vasco da Gama Epoch”, which implied a European vantage point. Early Modern History brought a refreshing opportunity to perceive this period as a genuinely global phenomenon, when people, goods, ideas, crops, technologies, and diseases from opposite sides of the world collided and interacted, initially with eager curiosity, but ultimately with some much less agreeable results.

In the 1990s some Southeast Asian historians began to work with this paradigm, recognizing that it enabled history to be written in a more balanced way than the inherent dichotomy of Europe and Asia, active and passive, action and reaction, aggressors and victims. Moreover, it was a period when Southeast Asia played a central role in drawing the world together. It was Southeast Asian tropical spices that became the most desired trade commodity of the period, drawing traders from the West to the East, and incidentally encountering southern Africa and the Americas in their pursuit of the Asian spices. It was also in Southeast Asia that traders and missionaries from India and the Mediterranean encountered Chinese and Japanese, so that the cosmopolitan ports of the region became crucibles of discovery. The essays of Nicholas Tarling and Eric Wilson make this point in their distinct and interesting ways, and it is fitting that they begin the volume.

Secondly, the book is a showcase for a passing of the baton to a younger generation of historians of Southeast Asia. As the colonially-educated
generation passed from the scene, there had been a regrettable tendency for Southeast Asians to focus their attention on recent history where the language and conceptual demands were lowest, leaving the earlier history more than ever to foreigners. Here, however, Bhawan Ruangsilp from Thailand, Hoàng Anh Tuán from Viet Nam, and Sher Banu from Singapore all show a mastery of the difficult Dutch sources which provide an unrivalled data set for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Given added confidence by the training of the TANAP program in Leiden in reading these documents, they have been able to advance our knowledge of the nature of trade and statecraft throughout the region. Malaysian Danny Wong, meanwhile, is not afraid to move into difficult Vietnamese and Cham sources to expand our understanding of the last phase of the Cham polity.

Barbara and Leonard Andaya, Nicholas Tarling, and Dhiravat na Pombejra are distinguished representatives of an earlier generation that can be said to have pioneered the conceptualization of Early Modern History, at a time when it was far from established as either a phrase or a concept. Nicholas Tarling deserves special tribute for inspiring and funding a series of conferences designed explicitly to facilitate this transition to a new generation. This book is a fine example of how that process is working.

Finally, the papers show commendable innovation in exploring new frontiers many of which will give food for thought for all those that follow. In discussing Hugo Grotius, Eric Wilson shows the centrality of Southeast Asian experience in the creation of Early Modern ideas – indeed in laying some of the foundations of our nation-state system. Barbara Andaya shows similarly how the globalization of religion was an essential part of early modernity, with Catholic Christianity and Sunni Islam both being transformed by a global contest. Other frontiers are crossed here in economic history work, the environment (Dhiravat) and conceptualization. The baton of explicating Southeast Asia’s remarkable gender pattern, long carried by Barbara Andaya, has deftly been passed to Filomena Aguilar and Sher Banu, each exploring a critical dimension of Early Modern change from a gender perspective. Southeast Asia’s unusually long experience with a relatively balanced gender pattern should give confidence and inspiration to all of us as we live through an era of experimentation in that direction.

Anthony Reid
Australian National University
Preface

A journey of sorts describes this current undertaking of an edited volume that had a long gestation period. The seed of an idea was conceptualized back in 2011 over a course of two “serious” days of deliberations, arguments, and camaraderie, and a “joyful” day of outdoor excursion and appreciation of the Vietnamese environment, culture, history, and heritage, and also the warm hospitality. This Hanoi conference upon reflection was indeed a fruitful outing.

But it was a protracted journey with many delays from the last farewell to the concretization of a proposal for a volume. Alas, clear-cut plans were underway following months of uncertainties and the pendulum of optimism swung favourably in the shaping of the volume. Ambitious or plain greed, attempts were made to gather as many offspring as possible; finally fourteen survived through the journey.

The Nicholas Tarling Conference on Southeast Asian Studies was conceived in 2006 following the celebration of Emeritus Professor Nicholas Tarling’s 75th year in Auckland, New Zealand. The original idea found sustenance and finally realized in 2009 in Singapore when the inaugural conference was held “to advance the study of Southeast Asia primarily from an historical perspective”.

The conference theme then was Southeast Asia and the Cold War. The inaugural volume of the same name was published by Routledge in 2012 undertaken by Albert Lau (National University of Singapore) who had organized the Singapore conference. As agreed, the second outing was on the region’s mainland with Hanoi the choice and Hoàng Anh Tuấn (Vietnam National University) assuming the role of organizer.

The Second Nicholas Tarling Conference on Southeast Asian Studies, Hanoi, Vietnam, 3–4 November 2011 with the theme “Between Classical and Modern: Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Period, ca. late 14th to late 18th centuries” witnessed the participation of more than twenty scholars drawn from as far as Hawai‘i, Australia, New Zealand as well as within the region itself, namely Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Owing to the dire political situation then Thai colleagues had to abort their participation. Hosted by the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi this biennial conference brought together specialists to share the fruits of their respective research endeavours on this
period of the region’s historical development. Complementing territorial-based works were studies that transcend natural and manmade political divides to cover wide areas of the region. The intellectual discourse borne from the conference proceedings undoubtedly extended the boundaries of our appreciation and understanding of past developments that undoubtedly had a hand in shaping contemporary Southeast Asia.

Professor Tarling himself bore witness to the Hanoi get-together, and undoubtedly was delighted with this second outing. The working papers presented were diverse in content, challenging if not intriguing in some cases, but all tied-on the thread of the conference theme “Between Classical and Modern: Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Period, c. late 14th to late 18th centuries”. As expected Hoàng as conference organizer took on the role as editor of the second volume. But owing to various circumstances a joint effort of editing was undertaken by both Hoàng and Ooi Keat Gin.

Drawn from this aforesaid proceedings is this present edited volume comprising a collection of essays borne from the revised (and expanded) conference working papers that is intended to share, add, and contribute further to the greater understanding of Southeast Asia during this pivotal period of its history. The late fourteenth to late eighteenth centuries was the period prior to the onset of major and radical changes wrought by the increasing presence and direct and active participation of Western imperial and colonial powers from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

From the submitted revised working papers, there are fourteen works (hence fourteen chapters) organized along the lines of four themes: “diplomatic and inter-state relations” (Chapters 1 to 3); “interactions and transactions” (Chapters 4 to 9); “kingships and state systems” (Chapters 10 to 12); and, “indigenizing Christianity” (Chapters 13 and 14). The volume opens with an “Introduction” that basically provides an overall background of the scholarship on the early modern period of Southeast Asia. At the same time it contextualizes the corpus of works and draws out their significance and contributions to the volume as a whole.

The above-mentioned themes intend to offer a cross-section of significant and current issues that historians of Southeast Asia’s early modern period are deliberating, exploring, addressing, and evaluating. Moreover this present volume brings to readers works by specialists offering refreshing approaches, novel perspectives, challenging arguments to the ongoing discourse. Specific case studies are presented alongside works that take a wide spatial view transcending the entire region whilst others adopt a longue durée approach stretching over centuries. A balanced contribution between senior scholars and up-and-coming academics further add to the richness of the discourse as each generation may draw fresh insights in trying to understand the past. Most of the works presented drew materials from various archival collections detailed in the “Bibliography” to assist would-be researchers in their future assignments. Besides, as Emeritus Professor Anthony Reid in his Foreword alludes to the “passing of the baton” from one generation to another, both
the conference and this present volume succeeded in contributing to the sustainability to the study of the early modern period in Southeast Asia.

Ooi Keat Gin
Hoàng Anh Tuán

Note
Acknowledgement

“No man is an island”, likewise no enterprise was singularly executed and accomplished. Numerous persons were directly and indirectly involved in producing an edited volume, and the present outcome affirmed the norm. We, as joint editors, wish to extend our appreciation to all involved professionally as contributors and publisher. We expressed our gratitude to the Nicholas Tarling Foundation in partnership with the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi in organizing and hosting The Second Nicholas Tarling Conference on Southeast Asian Studies, 3–4 November 2011 from which the contents of this present volume is drawn. Hoàng Anh Tuấn donned many hats throughout this protracted undertaking, initially as conference host and organizer, then assuming as tour leader and guide during the one-day excursion for participants, and finally as co-editor of this volume. In all capacities, despite trying circumstances from within and without, Hoàng managed to excel and deliver what was expected of him in the various roles he was entrusted with.

All the contributors to this volume exhibited much patience especially during the early stages of this undertaking, and towards the closing several months demonstrated professionalism, diligence, cooperation, and again patience in adhering to technical requirements, inquiries, feedbacks, and deadlines. Gratefully we thanked Peter Sowden, the commissioning editor at Routledge, who took on this edited volume, and tolerated with aplomb the extended delays. Also to Routledge’s anonymous specialist reviewer whose comments, suggestions, and criticisms helped improved and reshaped the original proposal to the present form.

We wish to thank Emeritus Professor Anthony Reid for his Foreword that succinctly contextualizes the volume in the wider scholarship and historiography of the early modern period of Southeast Asia.

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An accolade of thanks to all individuals and institutions that in one way or another had contributed in realizing the completion of this edited volume.

Lastly, but undoubtedly not the least, both our families’ forbearance is a testament to the bonds of love that we share: Swee Im; Ling, Pham, and Tieuw.
Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASEAN  Association of South-East Asian Nations  
BEFEO  Le Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient (Bulletin of the French School of the Far East)  
BKI  Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia)  
EEIC  English East India Company  
IR  International Relations  
ISEAS  Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore  
JIA  Journal of Indian Archipelago / JIAEA Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia  
JMBRAS  Journal of the Malayan/Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society  
JSBRAS  Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society  
JSEAS  Journal of Southeast Asian Studies  
KIT  Royal Tropical Institute (Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen), Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
KITLV  Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies), Leiden, The Netherlands  
NIAS  Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark  
NTT  Nusa Tenggara Timur  
NUS  National University of Singapore, Singapore  
RAC-CSA  Royal Archives of Champa, Société Asiatique, Paris, France  
SEAP  Southeast Asia Program  
VOC  Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie ([Dutch] United East India Company)
Introduction

But whatever decision is made regarding terminology, scholarship on Southeast Asia is increasingly viewing a period that stretches from about the fifteenth to the early nineteenth century as rather different from those traditionally described as “classical” and “colonial/modern”. The term “early modern” [by] itself is at present a convenient tool for historical reference, and only time will tell whether it will find general acceptance.¹

By the dawn of the second decade of the twenty-first century, Southeast Asia as a region has undergone a relatively long phase of study in which both dimensions of place and time gained adequate scholarly consideration. For readers of Southeast Asian studies, the 1940s was a significant starting point. Since the publication of Georges Coedès’ *Histoire ancienne des états hindouisés d’Extrême-Orient*² in 1944, the history of a region which would later be terminologically coined as Southeast Asia gained increasing attention from various groups of scholars, especially historians.

In the early days of the voyage of this terminology, the geographical confines have been relatively changeable,³ whilst its time frame was also variable adequately.⁴ As a region, contemporary conceptualized Southeast Asia is a highly distinct place, totally different from the others, for instance, the Indian subcontinent and the “sinicized world” of Northeast Asia. And centuries before that, the people of Southeast Asia already identified its region clearly as “below the wind” in order to distinguish themselves from those coming from the other lands such as India and China.⁵ In this self-distinct region of Southeast Asia, well before the beginning of the Christian era, the indigenous people already developed a variety of socio-economic structures on the basis of adapting to the natural conditions. Southeast Asia, argued D.G.E. Hall in his monumental work, already “possessed a civilization of its own”⁶ before any encounter with Indian culture, enjoying its remarkable socio-economic development such as rice cultivation and animal domestication, irrigation, matriarchal order, religious diversity, and so forth. Thus, the arrival of Indian culture was merely a push, not a cause, to the steady advancement of Southeast Asian civilization during the following millennium. The millennia absorption of Indian culture and civilization enabled the spectacular rise of various indigenous states and
empires most notably Funan, Srivijaya, Angkor, Champa. Toward the northern part of the region, the Vietnamese kingdom of Đại Việt was a rare case in which, despite “rooted in Southeast Asia”, the process of nation-state development and acculturation was significantly influenced by the Chinese culture and civilization.

It is more problematic, however, when one turns to the issue of time frame. For long, the history of Southeast Asia was commonly viewed as a relatively even evolution from “pre- and pro-history” through the “early societies” characterized by the combination of indigenous characteristics and Indian influences, the “classical period” which witnessed significant socio-economic transition before enduring the “colonial age” from the latter half of the eighteenth century. Yet, the transition of the region from “classical” to “modern”, between c. mid fourteenth to late eighteenth centuries, requires in-depth elaboration, considering the profound internal development (consolidation of states and social systems, development of new trading networks, religious thought, etc.) as well as the global transformation (encounters, rivalries and conflicts with, besides the aged-old Indian and Chinese factors, Western powers, that is the European East India companies and Christian missionaries). This makes the period between c. 1350 and c. 1800 a distinct era, increasingly accepted today amongst scholars as the “early modern period” in Southeast Asian history.

Yet before introducing the issues from which this monograph is formed, it is of essentiality to recapitulate the academic assessment of “early modern” in Southeast Asian historiography during the past half century. Emerged in Europe during the 1940s, “early modern” was increasingly used to indicate a period of spectacular socio-economic transformation in Europe from c. 1500 to c. 1800. Besides the rapid expansion of long-distance trade after the great geographical discoveries by the Iberians, Europe also witnessed a series of internal changes, notably the emergence of absolutist powers and nation-states. During the 1970s, the concept of “early modern” was increasingly used by European historians, namely the English, German, and Dutch. Together with the popular use of “early modern”, the “modern period” was also re-set to begin after the French revolution or from the Industrial revolution in England.

Just as the situation in many other regions outside Europe, it took a while for the Southeast Asian scholarship to acknowledge and accept the concept of “early modern”. During the mid-1940s, Coedes has been highly aware of the fourteenth century as the “decline of the Indian kingdoms”, signaling the end of the so-called “Indian period” during the next century. This commencement date of the spectrum was rather unanimously supported by scholars in the following decades. Two decades after Coedes, in 1962, Harry J. Benda continued to put emphasis on the fourteenth century, regarding it as a “distinct, if only transitional, period” in Southeast Asian history. Another two decades later, participants of a four-day conference on early Southeast Asia at the Australian National University (ANU) agreed upon the fourteenth century as a cornerstone, marking the end of a lively period which they
considered had begun about five hundred years earlier, commencing a new historical phase during the fifteenth century. In short, the mid-fourteenth/early fifteenth century marked a significant transition in Southeast Asia when socio-economic transformations took place spurred by developments from within and pushes from without, viz. the expansion of trade networks based on Muslim mercantile patterns, and the initial phase of European penetration during the latter part of the century. During the heyday of commercial boom, c. 1500s and 1600s, many polities in Southeast Asia were far from behind Europe in terms of socio-economic progress and attainments, before descending from the late seventeenth century into the so-called “underdevelopment”.

At the other phase of the continuum, the mid-eighteenth century to early nineteenth century was often regarded as the appropriate turning point. In his immense work, D.G.E. Hall considered the period of European territorial expansion during the latter part of the eighteenth century as a significant turning point in the regional history. In the early 1970s, the mid-eighteenth century was unanimously agreed upon as the date of change to modern times in Southeast Asia, “when Europeans in the region first had the power and inclination to impose on others their technical skills and new world view”. It is obvious that, the four hundred-year period falling between the “Indian period” and the “modern era” was increasingly aware among the scholarly community as a distinctive phase, yet still generally classified as the “pre-colonial”. When The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia was published in 1992, the authors of “Part Two (From c. 1500 to c. 1800 CE)” regarded the period from the late fifteenth century to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as a distinct episode in the history of the region. During this period, alongside the age-old non-indigenous factors, that is the Indian and the Chinese was the formidable arrival of the Europeans. These new actors, without a doubt, contributed to the development of Southeast Asian states in one way or another, from socio-economic to political, cultural and religious changes.

It was not until the early 1990s that the periodization of Southeast Asian history attained a breathtaking progress. Developing from a conference sponsored by the Joint Committee on Southeast Asian Studies and the American Council of Learned Societies in 1989, an edited volume by Anthony Reid was published in 1993 titled Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief. The official use of the explicit term of “early modern” was of significance as it reflected “the growth since the 1970s in relevant local and regional studies that has expanded knowledge in historical developments”. Since then, the early modern period in Southeast Asian history became an exciting phase, though with controversies, thus required substantial revisionist research. In their textbook, Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya regard the period from 1400 to 1830 as the “early modern” period in the history of Southeast Asia with various sub-periodization such as “beginning of the early modern era” (1400–1511), acceleration of change (1511–1600), “expanding global links and their impact on Southeast Asia” (1600–1690s), “new boundaries and changing regimes” (1690s–1780s), and “the last phase” (1780s–1830s).
Currently in the mid-2010s, it is largely acknowledged that the early modern period was a watershed in human history. As for Southeast Asia, the region played a critical role in global trade between the fifteenth century and seventeenth century whereas the global commercial expansion during the long “sixteenth century” affected this region immediately and profoundly. In this process of global interactions, the European was often over-emphasized and centered at the heart of the play. It is, however, rightly argued that the evidences of development in Southeast Asia such as “the quickening of commerce, the monetization of transactions, the growth of cities, the accumulation of capital and the specialization of function which formed part of capitalist transition”, etc. have obviously begun in the region well before the European penetration into and influence upon the local societies in the early sixteenth century. A recent analysis of the “early modern” Southeast Asian states further admitted that the term helped distinguish the “foundational states” – typically prospered before significant European impact – and the colonial-era polities which were profoundly influenced by the European and American.

All in all, an understanding of the various aspects of Southeast Asia in the early modern period is a prerequisite to comprehending what the region had “lost” in the course of European intrusion and subsequent domination, local tradition overridden by Westernization and modernization, the twin juggernauts of “progress” and “development” portrayed as imperatives and “must-haves” for the peoples and the territories of the region. In re-discovering what had been “lost” and the circumstances therein will reinforce the unique characteristics of the region and the identity of the people. On the basis of the papers available for this edited volume, four main themes of early modern Southeast Asia will be focused here: diplomatic and inter-state relations; interactions and transactions; kingship and state systems; and indigenizing Christianity.

**Diplomatic and inter-state relations**

For decades, the discussion of diplomatic and inter-state relations in pre-modern Southeast Asia attracted a great deal of attention from historians. Any attempt to categorize Southeast Asia into either the Chinese hierarchical system or the Westphalian anarchy proved to be in vain as this complex and fluid region has never entirely fallen into one or the other pattern while the concept of Mandala model as proposed by Oliver Wolters was attractive and even somehow became orthodoxy in Southeast Asian studies. Given its geographical diversity, the political development and inter-state relations in early modern Southeast Asia were understandably diverse. The mainland world witnessed a remarkable tendency towards a greater centralization of authority which essentially laid the foundations for political unification in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Meanwhile, the island world, subjected to formidable obstacles of geography, continued to be fragmented both politically and culturally. In spite of this, the early modern period still saw a “slow movement
towards the larger political groupings which were to form the bases of later nation-states’. 23

The arrival of the Westerners from the late fifteenth century, nevertheless, contributed to the transformation of regional diplomacy and inter-state relationship. Western technological advances in weaponry, for instance, was a double-edged sword, while it helped increased the power of native rulers, it also contributed to the subsequent demise of numerous indigenous polities in the region, especially in insular Southeast Asia.

The ongoing discourse of early modern Southeast Asian diplomatic and inter-state relations is highlighted through examining a number of case studies. Nicholas Tarling utilizes the *long duree* perspective in exploring the state systems in Southeast Asia from early times to the contemporary nation-state (Chapter 1). Adopting a revisionist approach Eric Wilson discusses judicial issues in the Netherlands East Indies from the perspective of the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC, United [Dutch] United East India) between the sixteenth century and nineteenth century (Chapter 2). Utilizing Ayutthaya’s *Phrakhlang* Ministry (Ministry of External Relations and Maritime Trading Affairs) Bhawan Ruangsilp explores the manner and strategies employed by the Siamese in addressing diplomatic and inter-state relations during the early modern period (Chapter 3).

**Interactions and transactions**

Trade, maritime trade in particular, was highly developed in pre-modern Southeast Asia. This region itself was not only active in international trade with the existence of maritime power such as Srivijaya but also functioned as a rendezvous of different merchant groups from West Asia, South Asia, and East Asia. The development of cash crops in the early fifteenth century as well as the rising European demand for spices enabled the birth in the region of “Age of Commerce”, a phrase coined by Anthony Reid, to a large extent transformed this region into a sort of “Asian Mediterranean” a model forged by Fernand Braudel and the Braudelian school. 24 Reid postulates that the “age of commerce” in Southeast Asia probably reached its zenith between 1570 and 1630 when abundant flows of silver poured into the region in exchange for an assortment of spices. Consequently this commercial expansion significantly transformed Southeast Asia not only in the economic arena as an important cog in the wheel of global trade but also in the socio-cultural sphere. 25 Yet, refuting Anthony Reid’s Age of Commerce thesis, Victor Lieberman convincingly argues that with regard to “political strategy, chronology, and trajectory”, mainland Southeast Asia (in the millennium between c. 800 and 1830) shared more similarities with other parts of the “Eurasian protected zone”, such as Europe and Japan, than with the Southeast Asian archipelago. 26

Undeniably, however, that from the early seventeenth century with the arrival and subsequent domination of the Dutch and the English in the spice trade (not to mention the Portuguese stations in Malacca and Moluccas as well
as the Spanish control of Manila almost a century earlier), indigenous Southeast Asian trade gradually declined through the eighteenth century. Consequently weak states with less centralized politics and less prosperous populations faced the determined Western profit-fuelled juggernaut in the subsequent centuries with disastrous implications for the former.

Against this background of flourishing trade and commerce where there were extended and expanded interactions and transactions between the peoples of Southeast Asia and others beyond the region, six studies are presented. In opening this theme Leonard Y. Andaya demonstrates the interconnectedness of the “seas” that brings together the islands where he utilizes eastern Indonesia during the early modern period as an example of this vibrant phenomenon (Chapter 4). The push and pull factors from within and without the island of Borneo between the late fourteenth and late seventeenth centuries are analyzed by Ooi Keat Gin (Chapter 5). Vietnam’s role and dynamism during the early modern period is examined by Hoàng Anh Tuấn through the production and trading of export commodities (Chapter 6), and by Nguyễn Văn Kim of the port-polity of Vân Đồn that had participated in international trade for more than six centuries (Chapter 7). On the southern Malay Peninsula Peter Borschberg evaluates Batu Sawar in Johor as a commercial centre for regional trade in the seventeenth century (Chapter 8) while Nordin Hussin traces the early development (last quarter of the eighteenth century) of the port-polity of Penang off the Malay Peninsula’s northwest (Chapter 9).

**Kingship and state systems**

The trade which flowed strongly to Southeast Asia during the “Age of Commerce” brought by Muslim traders such as Arab, Persian and Indian merchants and thereafter Chinese traders followed by Europeans – Portuguese, Dutch and English – increased the region’s political, commercial and diplomatic contacts with Asia, Europe, Africa, and the New World. The burgeoning trade brought new kinds of luxuries and wealth as well as new varieties of ideas and faiths – new technologies in shipbuilding, gun-making, erection of forts, construction of palaces, and new perceptions of state and religious beliefs. Rulers of port-polities amassed wealth that was channeled to build armies, navies, and fortify their palaces thereby enabling them to gain the upper hand vis-à-vis their rivals, and increasingly dominated their hinterlands. Such developments were exemplified by the rise of powerful, absolutist rulers in the likes of Sultan Abulfatah Ageng of Banten, Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh, Sultan Agung of Java, and Sultan Babullah of Ternate.

The spread of Islam from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries was critical in creating the basis of kingship or queenship (in certain cases such as Aceh, Patani, Bone and Jambi) in the archipelagic Muslim port-polities and a new Islamic concept of the state that subsumed the hitherto local sacred sanctions. Islam became the basis of legitimacy for rulers and new bases of political organization and governance, delineating relations between the ruler, elites, and the
common people (*rakyat*, subjects). Muslim international trading networks were used to increase the power, wealth and prestige of these rulers. Besides governance and state affairs Islamic ideas also found local expression in literature, the arts, theology, architecture, and law. The cosmopolitan Muslim ports of Aceh, Demak, Banten, and Gowa became large populous port-cities and dynamic centres of opulent, creative urban culture. It was in these centres that foreign ideas, technologies, and fashions were imitated, adapted, or resisted. These ports basked in their heyday between 1500 and 1700; thereafter decline sets in due to instabilities from within and European competition from without.

The issues of kingship and state systems in early modern Southeast Asia has been under various discussions for decades. For long Anthony Reid’s “maritime economy” model has been influencing largely the regional scholarship on overall political transformation. Victor Lieberman, however, recently argues in his second volume of *Strange Parallels* that the early arrival of the Europeans, in the sixteenth century, had a long-term effect similar to the conquest of China, India and West Asia (Middle East) by Turkic and other Central Asian nomads; “white Inner Asians’ in [insular] Southeast Asia filled a role analogous to that of Manchus and Mughals in their respective spheres.”

Entering these controversial debates, Sher Banu A. L. Khan argues the case of an alternative model of kingship where female ascendancy triumphed in the seventeenth century in the Islamic sultanate of Aceh Dar al-Salam (Chapter 10). Dhiravat na Pomberja deftly ties the royal elephant hunt to “classical” statecraft, and draws political implications in the commercial transactions of elephants in seventeenth and eighteenth century Ayutthaya (Chapter 11). Danny Wong Tze Ken utilizes financial, commercial, and economic-related documents from the Panduranga Archives to reconstruct Viet-Cham relations in Binh-Thuan during the period from the late seventeenth to eighteenth century (Chapter 12). All three case studies demonstrated the particularity, diversity and tenacity of Southeast Asian kingship and state systems during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

**Indigenizing Christianity**

The picture of pre-modern Southeast Asian religions was a mosaic of local beliefs, and transplanted Buddhism and Hinduism. During the early modern period, Islam and Christianity added to this religious tapestry. While Buddhism continued to prevail in mainland Southeast Asia, Islam gradually entrenched itself in the Malay Peninsula whence it spread to Java and the other islands creating numerous Muslim polities across insular Southeast Asia. Through Spanish colonization, Christianity began to attract an increasing number of converts in the Philippines while their counterpart, the Portuguese, proselytized in communities and territories where they interacted commercially (the Moluccas) and colonized (Malacca, Timor). The process of Christianization in Southeast Asia was geared up during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Europeans attempted to combine clerical works with economic pursuits. Overall the
religious identities of Southeast Asia were largely formed by the experiences during the early modern period and continued to impact great influences in the later centuries.28

Barbara Watson Andaya tackles the challenges faced in the transplantation of Christianity in the early modern period in Southeast Asia and the unanticipated results and implications that arose (Chapter 13). Filomeno Aguilar intertwines the study of rice cultivation and its attendant spirituality with social relations (including gender relations), the intervention of Catholicism, and technological advances in the Philippines in the pre-colonial and Spanish colonial period (Chapter 14).

The avowed intention of the present volume is primarily to showcase some recent works on the four aforesaid themes. A balanced coverage of the Southeast Asian mainland and insular territories as well as region-wide treatment offer an overall treatment of this “early modern” period aimed at spurring further inquiry, exploration, and at the same time instigating debate, re-examination, reassessment, and/or simply re-looking at historical development. This is intended as a challenge to the increasing emergence of scholars from the region itself – born, schooled, and trained from within – to move forward the historical scholarship to another level leaving behind past baggage (Euro-centric, nationalist-oriented) to pioneer a breakthrough in achievement and excellence.

The aforesaid four themes and the chapters therein relating to the early modern era in Southeast Asia will further increase our current understanding of this historical phase as well as the period thereafter. Undoubtedly this present undertaking will challenge current viewpoints and perspectives and consequently spur extended discussions and debates. Only through open and continuous discourses could the boundaries of knowledge and understanding of the human journey be pushed forward, developed and expanded.

Notes

2 In 1968, the English translation by Sue Brown Cowing was published by East-West Center Press: Georges Coedès, The Indianized States of Southeast Asia, Honolulu, HI: Hawai‘i University Press, 1968.
3 It is necessary to note that in Coedès' early writings, the region of Southeast Asia included some parts of “India beyond the Ganges” but excluded the Philippines, Assam, and northern Vietnam. See Coedès, The Indianized States of Southeast Asia, “Introduction”, p. xv.
4 According to G. Coedès, “the ancient history of Farther India” ended by “the arrival of the European”, that is the seizure of Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511. Ibid., p. xvii.
5 Anthony Reid, Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000, pp. 4–6.
7 Trần Quốc Vượng, “Traditions, Acculturation, Renewal: The Evolutional Pattern of Vietnamese Culture”, in David G. Marr and A.C. Milner (eds), Southeast Asia in
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the 9th to the 14th Centuries, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1986, p. 277.


11 Held in May 1984, the conference attracted some forty experts, including historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, linguistics and epigraphers. See: David G. Marr and A.C. Milner (eds), Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1986.

12 A detailed discussion can be seen in two enormous volumes by Anthony Reid, Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450–1680, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988 and 1993.

13 Hall, A History of Southeast Asia, Part III (The Period of European Expansion), pp. 471–701.


15 An obvious example was the conference held at the Australian National University in 1973, which later formed the monograph edited by Anthony Reid and Lance Castles, Pre-colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia: The Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Bali-Lombok, South Celebes, Kuala Lumpur: Monograph of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, No. 6, 1975.


21 Anthony Reid, Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia, pp. 3, 7.


Part I

Diplomatic and inter-state relations

“Diplomacy is to do and say the nastiest things in the nicest way.”
Isaac Goldberg (1887–1938), American journalist
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1 Status and security in early Southeast Asian state systems

Nicholas Tarling

Introduction

Historians distrust other historians, as well as practitioners of other disciplines, when they divide up time and label their periodization. Do the dates really mark “turning points” or are they arbitrarily imposed upon a continuity? Can an era effectively be labelled as one of “violence” or an age one of “imperialism” without degrading a story that can meaningfully be told only in all its “detailed glory”? As Herbert Butterfield argued, the answer, of course, is one of convenience. It is impossible to compose a book without a theme or analyse a situation without an assumption.

Is international order in modern times rightly described, as by students of IR (International Relations), in terms of “anarchy”? Is to be contrasted to a preceding order based on hierarchy? And if there was such a shift, can it be marked off by dates, even if they are striking or symbolic?

Recognising the convenience of such a contrast, particularly for a work of what Butterfield called “abridgement”, the historian will also wonder if the orders, hierarchy and anarchy, are quite rather different in practice as they seem to be in definition, quite so sharply distinguishable. For they have to do with common problems that continue over many centuries, even though the nature of the states that make up the order may change, their capacities advance, their wealth increase, their population grow.

Both orders have, for one thing, to deal with the fundamental issue of interstate relationships, the disparity of power and its shifting distribution. The hierarchical system handles that by an explicit recognition of disparity that is also mutual: if the lesser know their place, they may be able to preserve or even enhance it. The characteristic relationship in such a system may be a lord–vassal or patron–client relationship, and/or the rendering and reception of tribute, always with the assumption that there is an element of obligation on the part of the superior as well as the inferior, that submission is counterparted by protection.

The equivalent in anarchy is far less specific, but it is surely there. States are theoretically equal in their sovereignty, but they are grossly unequal in power. The system works only because in practice the powerful moderate the exercise
of their power, and the weaker their aspirations to equality. A range of supplementary options may help: the making of alliances, the pursuit of a balance of power, the creation of regional organizations. Tensions come with change, often leading to conflict, even wars, big or small.

Both systems are closely related to matters of allegiance or control. In the ancient system the state did not have the power that the modern state has and seeks. It might be content with a diminished allegiance at least outside its core and with indefinite frontiers. It might control its people loosely, exercising symbolic rather than actual control, its officers exemplifying rather than enforcing appropriate behaviour. It might allow “foreigners” more or less to rule themselves, rather than attempting to assimilate them, or even use them as an instrument of control over others. The modern state looks for more: it seeks definite frontiers, within which citizens or subjects owe it services and taxes, and “minorities” have such rights as an entity ruled by or based on a “majority” sees fit to allow them.

In both systems what we may call “diplomacy” is at work. In our system we are aware of the functions of ambassadors, the use of “summits”, the manipulation of the media, the pursuit of intelligence: we know of the processes, even though we may know little of their content. There has been something of a tendency not to think of the ancient systems in a similar way, but rather to assume that they were a kind of semi-celestial clockwork. Yet surely they also were operated by men with schemes and ambitions, and their systems, symbolic though they might be, were also subject to manipulation. They not only worked: they might be worked. The Balinese king was not simply an icon, as H. Schulte Nordholt points out, but “a charismatic leader of flesh and blood who had to overcome constant threats to his position”. The idea that spectacle was not for the state but what the state was for would have seemed odd to Elizabeth I and Louis XIV, but odd, too, to the courtiers of Sultan Agung of Mataram, who, as Merle Ricklefs says, “thought that the state was for getting rich and powerful while avoiding enemy plots and treasons”.

Dealing with similar problems, the systems were in some ways similar, less distinctive than a schematic approach suggests, less cut-and-dried. Nor can the chronological divisions be so sharp as dates or labelling imply. Hierarchy did not prevail throughout the period of hierarchy, nor did it entirely disappear in the period of anarchy. Nor, on the other hand, did “anarchy” emerge full-blown as Minerva from the mind of Jupiter. In Europe itself, it came to prevail only over two centuries and more, and what is often called the Westphalia system was not simply established with the treaty of 1648 that labels it.

Beyond Europe, several further changes occurred before the Westphalia concept was established throughout the world. European powers established trading posts and built colonies and protectorates that both borrowed from and displaced the hierarchy of the past and projected some features of the European system and not others: few scholars have attempted to analyse that
peculiar, if not indeed paradoxical structure, the colonial state. Only with the decolonization that followed the end of the Second World War (1939–45) could it be said that “anarchy” extended across the world and the colonial phase itself be seen as one of transition, with Europeans operating two different systems. The states that emerged were so disparate in power, however, that their mutual accommodation at times prompted observers and prophets to recall the days, if not of empire, then indeed of hierarchy. But perhaps the “ASEAN way” is something different again.

Tackling these issues with a regional approach, and including Southeast Asia as a region, are welcome strategies, and, it may be shown, profitable ones. In the past, neither public nor scholarly debate was ready to identify it as a region, and even in recent works of generalization or popularization it tends to be by-passed. When it was distinguished in the past, it was often labelled in a misleading way: it was “Further India”, the Nanyang, the Nan-yo. Public events – the Second World War in particular – led to the wider adoption of a more neutral geographical labelling, and it was filled out by both political and academic activities. Histories of “Southeast Asia” appeared in the 1950s – magisterially led by D.G.E. Hall’s – and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – its leaders, conscious of the past as well as the present – was inaugurated in 1967. It was a diverse region, but that was not a reason for not seeing it as a region either for action or for study. Rather the reverse.

Students of the region, as well as statesmen, both sought commonalities, however, and it may be that it still retains, albeit in modified form, practices inherited from a past that temporally is after all not so distant, even if in the interim the region has been the scene of unprecedented change. One feature of the last 150–200 years is its shift from demographic immaturity: perhaps there were only 30 million people in Southeast Asia in 1830. Certainly in the more remote past what counted among the state-builders of Southeast Asia had been men rather than land, and the attitudes that established arguably help to account for the contemporary strength of patron–client relationships.

Whether the Southeast Asian past is peculiar in this may be doubted. What may be special about the Southeast Asian region – though still helpful in comparative studies – is its cultural diversity. It was penetrated by a range of peoples, but also subject to the influence of two great neighbours, India and China. What the process of that influence was has been disputed among historians. The generally accepted conclusion is that state-builders in the region borrowed from these cultures, in particular from India. At times, if not more generally, China, however, asserted its primal claim: exceptionally, in the Vietnamese case, in the form of political dominance, more usually in the form of a pattern of tributary relationships.

It is the product of this mix, neither hierarchy nor anarchy, with which Europeans came into contact from the early sixteenth century. To understand their approach and their impact requires a fuller analysis of it and of the states of which it was made up.
Herman Kulke suggests that there were three phases or levels in state formation in Southeast Asia: the local, the regional, and the "imperial". "Very generally speaking, the first step always had to be the successful establishment and consolidation of a solid local power within a limited territory." This he characterizes as "chieftaincy". Next might come the conquest of one or more neighbouring nuclear areas, incorporated not by annihilation nor by administrative unification, but by the establishment of more or less regular tributary patterns. These were the somewhat precarious "early kingdoms". From the early ninth century a small number of what Kulke calls "imperial" kingdoms emerged, beginning with Angkor, which unified two or even several core areas of former early kingdoms.4

That word "mandala" was deployed by Stanley Tambiah and in particular by Oliver Wolters, drawing from the Indian political literature and practice that influenced Southeast Asia. The former analysed Kautilya's Arthashastra, the only complete work of the brahmanic politico-economic literature to be preserved, made notorious for its alleged Machiavellianism by Max Weber.5 It deals inter alia with the maintenance of "state sovereignty" and the conduct of diplomacy, making alliances, making war, according to the mandala strategy, in which successive "circles of kings" formed enemies and allies in actuality or in potentia.

Tambiah also analysed the Buddhist texts. In them dharma, righteousness, is an absolute imperative. Its symbol in political life was the wheel, cakka, not the sceptre, danda. In his past lives the Buddha admitted that, as a wheel-turning raja, he used violence. "The Cakkavarti [sic] is depicted as a cosmo-crator whose conquest proceeded through the continents at each of the four cardinal points, and whose rule radiated out from a central position either identified or closely associated with the central cosmic mountain of the Indian traditions, Mount Meru." The cakkavatti grants their domains back to the conquered kings when they submit to the basic moral precepts of Buddhism: "in a sense the king must let the conquered rulers keep their thrones, since only as a king of kings is he a world monarch." The Emperor Asoka embraced the model, and he was in turn the model for many Southeast Asian Buddhist monarchs.6

Before he turns to them Tambiah describes the empire of their exemplar. Asoka's Mauryan state "was not so much a bureaucratized centralized imperial monarchy as a kind of galaxy-type structure with lesser political replicas revolving around the central entity and in perpetual motion of fission or incorporation. Indeed, it is clear that this is what the much-cited cakkavatti model represented: that a king as a wheel-rolling world ruler by definition required lesser kings under him who in turn encompassed still lesser rulers, that the raja of rajas was more a presiding apical ordinator than a totalitarian authority between whom and the people nothing intervened except his own agencies and agents of control." The model was "a closer representation of actual facts than has usually been imagined by virtue of misreading the rhetoric".7
It was the concept of mandala, Tambiah tells us that led him to invent the label “galactic polities”. In a common Indo-Tibetan tradition, mandala was composed of a core, manda, and an enclosing element, -la, and it was applied to designs, diagrams and cosmological schemes. Representing a cosmic harmony, it was a pattern for the state. “In the center was the king’s capital and the region of its direct control, which was surrounded by a circle of provinces ruled by princes or governors appointed by the king, and these again were surrounded by more or less independent ‘tributary’ polities.” The capital itself was a mandala, with the palace at the centre, surrounded by three circles of earthen ramparts, four gateways at the cardinal points. Each lesser unit replicates the larger, and is more or less autonomous, “held in orbit and within the sphere of influence of the center”. At the margin, however, are “similar competing central principalities and their satellites”. The system is “a hierarchy of central points continually subject to the dynamics of pulsation and changing spheres of influence”. Territorial jurisdiction was not characterized by fixed boundaries but by fluidity. Behind its cosmology and the “ritually inflated notions we see the dynamics of polities that were modulated by pulsating alliances, shifting territorial control, and frequent rebellions and succession disputes”.

The modern literature on these polities has tended not to adopt Tambiah’s celestial metaphor. Instead, it might be said, Oliver Wolters effectively presented them in terms of the mandala that had set him off in the first place, a word Kautilya had indeed used as a geopolitical concept, configuring friendly and enemy states.

The map of earlier Southeast Asia which evolved from the prehistoric networks of small settlements and reveals itself in historical records was a patchwork of often overlapping mandalas, or circles of kings. In each of these mandalas, one king, identified with divine and “universal” authority, claimed personal hegemony over the other rulers in his mandala who in theory were his obedient allies and vassals.

Wolters borrowed another metaphor from music. “Mandalas would expand and contract in concertina-like fashion. Each one contained several tributary rulers, some of whom would repudiate their vassal status when the opportunity arose and try to build up their own networks of vassals.”

Wolters draws attention to two of the political skills required. One was the gathering of “political intelligence”, finding out what was happening on the fringe of the mandala, so that threats might be anticipated. The other was diplomacy. An overlord had to be able to bring his rivals under his personal influence “and accommodate them within a network of loyalties to himself. … Administrative power as distinct from sacral authority depended on the management of personal relationships, exercised through the royal prerogative of investiture”, the same skill as attributed to earlier “men of prowess”. He had to attract loyal subordinates and preserve their loyalty. “[A]dministrative power as distinct from divine authority had … to be shared.”"
Whatever metaphor is adopted, historical example helps. In the Angkor court, as Ian Mabbett tells, there was a “web of obligation and influence. … Power was … something that arose from relationships and needed to be negotiated”.

“Bureaucratic apparatuses were mostly Indianized fiction”, writes Renée Hagesteijn: “a ruler was dependent on patron–client relations with ‘lesser’ political leaders.” At the centre the supraregional leader had direct relations with the headman. Regional leaders were clients, offered protection, honours and gifts. On the periphery control was “almost lacking”.

What was true of the mainland was true also of the archipelago, true of the thalassocracy that Georges Coedes uncovered in Srivijaya and Wolters so persistently expounded, true also of the land-based states of Java. There, the capital was “the magical centre of the realm”, as Soemarsaid Moertono put it, “but also, from the point of view of state politics, the central region was preponderantly important. … [T]he core region was relatively closely knit through the use of a remuneration system of appanages, while the outer regions were more loosely administered.” In the empire of Majapahit, as described in the Nāgarakertagāma, there were three regions: Java at the centre, the islands outside it and countries beyond, like Champa and Cambodia. Later Mataram was composed of the core, nagaragung, the outer provinces, mantjaneagara and pasisir, and the lands across the sea, tanah sabring. Territorial jurisdiction was “characterized by a fluidity or flexibility of boundary dependent on the diminishing or increasing power of the center”.

It was a form of inter-entity politics that welcomed, utilized and adapted the tradition and practice India had developed. India itself, however, was an exemplar, not an active part of the system. No Indian empire laid a larger claim over the Indianized states of Southeast Asia: the sub-continent was perhaps more than challenge enough. But, given their geographical position, it was not surprising to find that Southeast Asian states, largely Indianized though they were, might see their neighbour to the north, the Chinese empire, which had met the challenge of political unification, as the apex of a hierarchy that included them. It was a question of force, but also of accommodation and mutual advantage.

China developed a view of the “world” as it “knew” it. Outside countries, if in contact, were tributaries, and trade conducted in that context. What or who drew the “line” between China and the region and when? The creation of a Vietnamese state was crucial. That was in part the work of the Chinese themselves, but they lost control and accepted instead the formality of suzerainty. Conquered by the Han in the first century CE, the Red River area had become the site of a relatively stable polity, built up by Chinese frontier administrators and leading local clans, sensitive to dynastic interests but ready also to take advantage of dynastic weakness. As part of its frontier reorganization, the Tang dynasty set up the Protectorate of An-nam, Pacified South, in 679 CE. In its later years the Tang was able to drive back a ninth-century invasion from the kingdom of Nanzhao in Yunnan. That, as Keith Taylor puts it, “affirmed Vietnam’s long-standing ties to Chinese civilization”. Yet
the Tang were now too weak to dominate Vietnam, and the regime that emerged from the post-invasion reconstruction was “the first of a number of transitional regimes that finally led to the establishment of an independent Vietnamese monarchy”.\textsuperscript{16}

In the late thirteenth century the Tran dynasty succeeded in defeating to the north the armies of the Mongol (Yuan) dynasty, coupling their success with the payment of tribute, and also to the south the armies of Champa. Following the collapse of the Tran in the late fourteenth century, Ho Quy Ly, the chief minister, proclaimed himself ruler in 1400, only to provoke the intervention of the new Ming dynasty. Posing as restorers of the Tran, the Ming endeavoured in the event to restore the province of Giao. That endeavour was abandoned in the 1420s, in the face of Vietnamese resistance led by a wealthy landowner from Thanh Hoa, Le Loi.

Not altogether paradoxically, a state that drew at least some of its strength from its sinicization effectively resisted China, and sustained its independence. It was modified and made more or less acceptable to China by acknowledgement of its suzerainty. Had their neighbour deployed all its force, the Vietnamese realized, they could not have survived. But the Chinese understood that for whatever they coveted in Vietnam the Vietnamese would have exacted too high a price. “The Vietnamese people … clearly understood China’s awesome might. Realism dictated that they downgrade their victories and simultaneously whitewash Chinese retreats.”\textsuperscript{17}

The other “frontier” was established by the Mongol dynasty’s conquest of Yunnan. Its neighbours included the Burmese, the Tai of Sukhotai and Lan Na, and the Lao of Luang Prabang (Meoung Sua). “Under threat of military invasion, all were brought within the Chinese tributary system, thus initiating lasting diplomatic and political relations.”\textsuperscript{18} Kublai Khan sought tribute from Pagan in 1271, and when it was denied, sent a punitive force from Tali in 1277, and another in 1283. A new kingdom in Burma defeated the Mongol invasion of 1301 but offered tribute.\textsuperscript{19}

In the early fifteenth century, the new Ming dynasty not only tried to re-establish control over the Vietnamese kingdom: it also was responsible for the remarkable series of voyages mostly led by Zheng-he. Between 1405 and 1433, in some seven voyages, he visited Champa, Java, Sumatra, India and Sri Lanka, and even Arabia and East Africa, and called at Melaka several times. Nowhere in the Ming records is the purpose of the voyage stated, but the immediate effect was to bring large numbers of new countries into the tributary system. “Could it not be”, Wang Gungwu asks, “that the expeditions were the logical outcome of an effort to extend that system and make it truly the machinery of a world order?”\textsuperscript{20} The Yongle emperor’s personal aggrandizement may have played a part, Stuart-Fox suggests: he needed to “bolster his political legitimacy by ensuring that a steady stream of foreign ambassadors came to pay him homage in his new capital at Beijing”. Possibly, too, he needed to compensate for the closure of land routes by controlling maritime routes, so as to meet the demand for overseas products. But the Ming rulers
sought to put trade firmly into a tributary pattern, and Stuart-Fox agrees that
the main purpose of the voyages was “to enforce acceptance of the Chinese
world order”. “[R]itualized submission” would suffice. The scale of the fleets
was intended to bring that about without the actual use of force, “to coerce
through fear”, to “overawe”, and so create “a Pax Ming”.

Under Mongol and Ming both the spasmodic assertions of control and the
maintenance of tributary patterns of trade were designed to mark the influence
of China in Southeast Asia, to sustain order, and to check the over-mighty. A
tribute mission was, for a Southeast Asian state, a means of avoiding some-
thing worse – pre-empting a more forceful deployment of China’s power – but
it also had a more positive aspect. “The emperors thought that they were
manipulating their vassals by techniques of indirect control; the vassals were
manipulating the China trade … to amass wealth as a means of asserting their
authority”, as Wolters argues in the case of Srivijaya. The Ming emperors
took to limiting the number of missions, leaving the burgeoning trade of the
fifteenth century in the hands of smugglers.

The relationship could serve the purposes of Southeast Asian rulers in
other ways. “Vassalage” might assist one kingdom to maintain itself over against
another. It became part of the region’s inter-entity diplomacy. A fourteenth-
century king of Burma, Mingyi Swasawke, was recognized as “Governor of
Burma” by the Ming, and the two powers cooperated to some extent against
the Shans. The Thai state of Sukhotai sent missions to Beijing in the Mongol
period, and the Thais had the support of China as a splinter movement in the
Cambodian empire. Generally the Chinese sought fragmentation, as well as
submissiveness. Ayutthaya expanded when the Mongols were in decline, but it
sought to cultivate good relations with the Ming. So did the ruler of Melaka,
though the ruler of Brunei was the first southern ruler to journey personally
to Nanjing. The Ming government admonished Vietnam for invading the Lao
state of Lan Xang in 1479, but did not send in troops, as it requested. Instead
it sent envoys to both courts “to ‘instruct’ them how to maintain good relations
and to care for their people”.

The apical power, it would seem, exerted itself spasmodically and made no
attempts to Sinicize. Within the region a whole orchestra of concertinas
played. There was, it might almost be said, an anarchy of hierarchies. Like
other systems, they brought a measure of order. But they clearly required
diplomacy, the exercise of wit and intelligence, and the deployment of a range
of resources, ritual, intermarriage, patronage, as well as force.

Two systems overlapped. That was particularly obvious in the case of
Vietnam, more Sinicized than its regional neighbours. It accepted it was a tribu-
tary of China, and adopted a tribute system in respect of its neighbours, though it
was “a pale shadow” of it. “While the Vietnamese had copied the tributary
diplomacy framework of the Chinese in dealing with their neighbours, the
very states that they had demanded tribute from were used to operating in a
non-Sinicized diplomacy framework”.

Finding a framework for diplomatic relations which would accommodate the cultural differences between the
tensely balanced ‘Indianized’ world of Bangkok and the ‘sinicized’ world of Hué was never easy’, as Woodside remarks.29

It was into this Southeast Asia that the Europeans penetrated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries CE, adding elements of a third system at least in the archipelago. Again, it overlapped, rather than displaced. It was shaped by what they encountered there, as well by their own motives, preconceptions and rivalries.

Vasco da Gama opened the Cape route to India a few years after Columbus’ voyage, and in 1511 the Portuguese, already established in coastal India, captured Srivijaya’s successor as the major Southeast Asian entrepôt, Melaka. But the European state that came to dominate the Indonesian archipelago in the seventeenth century was the Dutch Republic, through the medium of the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, [Dutch] United East India Company), to which it granted sovereign powers. Its activities both gave rise to and were justified by a concept of international relations offered by a man whose opinion it commissioned, Hugo Grotius, who has long been feted as a legal scholar, but not always rightly interpreted. The Estates of Holland asked him to write a history of the Dutch revolt against Spain in 1601. In 1604 the Amsterdam directors of the Company asked him to write an apologia for their privateering campaign in the East Indies following the capture of a Portuguese merchantman, the Santa Catarina, in Singapore Straits in February 1603. As is the way with contractors, he told those who paid him what they wanted to hear. The twelfth chapter of the work was published in April 1609 as Mare Liberum. Grotius invoked natural law, that both justified free navigation and trade in monsoon Asia and permitted men to avenge the misdeeds of other men. Indeed he alleged the Dutch were liberating the natives from Portuguese tyranny.30

When it came to dealing with the English – then much weaker rivals of the Dutch – natural law was invoked to rather different purpose. The VOC proceeded by making “contracts” with the native princes, requiring the delivery of spices and other products. Pacta sunt servanda [agreements are observed], Grotius argued in his contribution to the Anglo-Dutch colonial conferences of 1613 and 1615: contracts are to be honoured, even though, as he knew, the native rulers who entered them had rarely done so of their free will. They had been relieved of Portuguese tyranny, but they were in no position to make contracts with the English.31 Grotius’ arguments undermined Iberian claims to the extra-European world, but were flexible enough to justify the Company’s attempt to monopolize the spice trade in the East Indies. In the longer term, however, his arguments were helpful to the English.

Grotius had found himself on the wrong side in the politics of the Republic: the Stadtholder of Holland, Maurice of Nassau, sided with the orthodox Calvinists against the [Armenian] Remonstrants, Oldenbarnevelt was executed, and his client, Grotius, banished for life. The enforced leisure produced his most famous work, De Jure Belli ac Pacis, published in Paris in 1625. That influenced John Locke, who wrote “Of Property” as the fifth chapter of
the *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina*. As M.J. van Ittersum suggests, “Grotius’ notion of divisible sovereignty, his theory of subjective rights and his account of the origins of private property were perfectly suited to justify the establishment of British colonies on the eastern seaboard of North America and the English East India Company’s (EEIC) dual role as trader and ruler in Bengal”.

By contrast, as van Ittersum adds, Grotius’s arguments were less attractive in those parts of Europe that were not engaged in colonial enterprises or were themselves battlegrounds for the most powerful rulers on the European continent. There a different concept was taking hold. Samuel Pufendorf, who held a new chair at Heidelberg, argued that Indians enjoyed absolute property rights, not to be taken away because they were perceived as lazy natives. Nor, on the other hand, were the Dutch, the Swedes, the French and the Danes justified in intervening in what became a thirty years’ war on the pretext of relieving the Holy Roman Empire from Habsburg “tyranny”. More significantly still, Pufendorf rejected the notion of divisible sovereignty, and interpreted the treaty of Westphalia that ended the war in 1648 as providing “an iron-clad guarantee for the freedom and independence” of the electoral princes, though in theory they still owed fealty to the Emperor.

What is often called the Westphalia system was consolidated, however, only as a result of the French revolutionary wars. The legal positivism of German counter-revolutionaries like A.H.L. Heeren, C.W. Koch and F. Schoell argued that the treaty of 1648 had inaugurated a European state system, regulated by treaties, and that Europe was “a constellation of mutually tolerant and fully sovereign entities which did not brook interference in their own domestic affairs”. Napoleon had destroyed the system, Heeren argued. Its object, argued Koch and Schoell, had been “to maintain public order, to protect the weak against the strong, to put obstacles in the way of the ambitious projects of conquerors, and to prevent dissensions that might lead to the calamities of war”.

Where did colonial and imperial territories find their place in such a system, which might be seen as a further pattern of international relations fitted on to Southeast Asia? That can only be understood in terms of a long process that displaced the three existing patterns, though utilising elements of them; improvised new versions of shared sovereignty like the protected state, the protectorate, the colonial protectorate and paradoxes like the “colonial state”, only finally to give way after the Japanese interregnum to an extension of what had come to be the Westphalia system to post-colonial states.

How had the region and its rulers reacted in what might be called the contractual phase, that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? It had little impact in mainland Southeast Asia, much more among the maritime states and their rulers. To some extent they sought to fit it into existing patterns, though the contracts sought to reduce their ability to turn to others, European or otherwise. Family links were, of course, ruled out, so that the exchange of gifts assumed additional importance in the conduct of diplomacy, more, as
Barbara Andaya points out, than the Dutch recognized. For the Dutch Company (VOC) and its English rival (EEIC) the prime purpose of treaties was to facilitate and control trade. For the rulers the most important clause was the initial statement of friendship. The contract had in a measure made the parties kin and established a framework for their relationship.

In the Maluku Spice Islands Tidor and Ternate became “children” of the “father” VOC. In 1704 the VOC was represented as “a large tree under which the Tidorese have for many years found security”. Indeed in some cases at least a treaty was seen as more than a statement of friendship: though the Dutch might be interested in securing a product, the ruler was seeking their protection. Such was the case on the Peninsula with Sultan Muzafar of Perak and the treaty with the VOC he made in 1746. As Governor Albinus of Melaka pointed out, “the king’s aims seem to be the obtaining of protection against the Bugis of Selangor by the building of a fort and a new alliance.” As Peter Borschberg has pointed out, the VOC “behaved increasingly like an Asian patron state that engaged its allies and treaty partners as dependents or client polities”. A semi-tributary relationship evolved. That was inherited by the Netherlands state after the abolition of the Company.

The great scholar of Indonesian legal history, G.J. Resink, published a number of essays that challenged the notion that the Dutch had ruled Indonesia for three hundred years by exposing the legal position between the Dutch and the native princes in many parts of the archipelago even in the nineteenth century. “[T]he far-flung archipelago”, he declared, “was divided by a cleavage in international law that was a great deal longer, and cut a great deal deeper, than the international boundaries with Britain on Borneo and with Portugal on Timor”. In 1854 the Minister of the Colonies had accepted that there were “independent Indies princes”, if “very few”, in the Netherlands Indies. In a law on import and export duties of 1873, the Crown and the States General distinguished between “Netherlands Indies possessions” and “native States of the Eastern Archipelago in amity with the Netherlands Government”. The Supreme Court at Batavia [Jakarta] distinguished in 1880 between the “Netherlands Indies state” and the “Netherlands Indies Archipelago”. As late as 1879, the Batavia Court of Justice saw a Controleur in Jambi as a political agent accredited to the Sultan.

The legal position did not, however, necessarily represent the actual position. The position of Indonesian rulers had continued to deteriorate, their sovereignty becoming ever less complete, even disappearing over time. The young Hendrik Colijn shaped the question sharply in 1911: “either these political contracts should be considered as agreements between equal parties, looked upon as treaties in the international-legal sense, or else we have to do with political manifestos in which the Netherlands Indies authorities declare that once certain conditions are met they are willing to refrain from intervention in the internal affairs of a given region.” At the outset of “our appearance in the Indies”, the former was their nature. There followed a period in which VOC and princes concluded contracts on the basis of equality, “and this is followed by an era
in which the contracts are characterized by the fact that the Company is manifestly the superior power and that it also exercises authority here and there, albeit on the basis of agreement”. The evolution proceeded through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “First the native states came in the position of vassal states with extensive powers on the part of the vassals and little influence on the part of the liege lords, and finally … we have arrived at the period in which these political agreements, even though the form does not still everywhere correspond to the actual situation, are really nothing but instruments of investiture”, and native “self-governors” became “organs of the State administration”.43

What is striking about the process is not that it took place but that it took place over a long period, and that what might be termed shared sovereignty took so long to erode. The reason is in part to be found in the policy of the British. The region had become interesting to them because of its position vis-à-vis the empire they had created in India – itself based on divided sovereignty, defended by Sir Henry Maine against the positivist John Austin44 – and the trade they built up with China. Even the provision of strategic support for those interests, however, should not damage their security in Europe, one aspect of which was the preservation of the Netherlands from any dominant continental power. Though they were aware of what Henry Dundas had termed “the radical and internal weakness of the sovereignty” the Dutch claimed,45 the British thus determined that the Dutch should preserve an empire in the archipelago, though not on the peninsula, and that they would contend only for a share in the commerce of the Indies, rather than set themselves up as political rivals, Britain engaging, as Lord Castlereagh put it, in “a fair and friendly competition, without the establishment of any other preponderating military of political authority … to counterbalance that, which the Dutch now and long have exercised”.46

The compromise was represented by the treaty of 1824. That included exchanges of territory in India and the Indies and the written expression of a line between Peninsula and Sumatra behind which the Dutch and the British would respectively not conclude treaties or make settlements. The British rights to trade in the archipelago were set out in respect both of Dutch possessions and of treaties and contracts which they made with native princes. It was part of the deal that the British would not challenge the Dutch on the basis of what now seemed the weakness of their position, legal as well as actual.

Predominant among the powers of the nineteenth century, Britain set the limits for other powers. The British and the Dutch, as George Canning put it, were “exclusive lords of the East”, though it was not desirable openly to proclaim the fact, lest that provoked a challenge.47 For the greater part of the century, indeed, the Dutch were able to take their time in extending their power in the archipelago. Only when Britain’s primacy declined, and other powers became more assertive, particularly after the Berlin conference of 1884–5, did it become more urgent to reduce the status and powers of the native rulers. The “contractual” pattern of relations thus lasted a long while.
Perak and Selangor fell on the non-Dutch side of the “line”. It was only fifty years later, however, that the British decisively intervened on the Peninsula, and then they did so by making treaties with the Malay rulers under which they agreed, rather on the pattern of Indian states, to accept British Residents, and to abide by their advice on all matters save Malay religion and custom. Arguably the British never possessed sovereignty in what was often called “British Malaya”, save in the colony of the Straits Settlements, Penang, Melaka and Singapore.

The policies of the British also affected the “hierarchical” pattern that shadowed Southeast Asia. Their attitude to China was again decisive. There indeed they sought change with the Macartney mission of 1792–4. But they had no wish to extend an empire to China. The EEIC was particularly anxious to avoid any break in the tea trade, then still its monopoly. These views were to persist even after the end of the monopoly, and indeed of the Company itself. China should not become another India, as The Times put it in 1875.48 Upholding China, on the other hand, would deter other powers and keep open its commerce.

The policy extended to its tributary relationships. That made the Company cautious in its dealings with Siam, which until the 1850s continued to send missions to China, while it continued itself to receive them on a rather different basis from some of the Malay states on the Peninsula. And while the French went to war when the Chinese responded to the Nguyen emperor’s appeal for help in combating them in Tonkin, though themselves taking up Vietnam’s claims over Laos, the British reached a deal after their annexation of Upper Burma: under an Anglo-Chinese convention of July 1886 it was agreed that Burma would continue to send a mission every ten years on the basis of equality.

The period in which the fourth pattern – that of the colonial state and protectorate – prevailed, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was relatively brief. Its prospects were never good. It was not merely that the guarantor of the system, Britain, was under threat from the outside. The state was something of a contradiction in itself, modern in some ways, but unable to utilize the talents of the people it ruled in a modern way. Nationalist movements were, moreover, rivals with the colonial powers for the task of modernization, anxious to fill the frontiers that the imperialists had seen fit to create – partly in order to avoid dispute among themselves – with subjects and citizens who could now be regarded as owing their loyalty to the state in a manner impractical under an alien regime, and to conduct their own relations with other states.

Shared sovereignty is nothing new in international law. But whether that means that new versions of it will be more acceptable in the contemporary world is doubtful. ASEAN is very clearly based on the acceptance of state sovereignty in the stricter interpretation of “Westphalia”. The fact that the states had only recently emerged from the colonial pattern and from the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere that displaced it in the Pacific War with yet another hierarchical pattern that its own ideologists had difficulty in defining49
did not make it easier to accept anything less. Nor did the Cold War attempts “puppetry” that succeeded those of the Japanese. To argue, as does Aihwa Ong, that “the recent pursuit of regionalism by Asian states is not based on cooperation between national entities but on ‘limited groupings of sites’ that transcend national borders”\textsuperscript{50} seems, in the ASEAN case, to be going too far. But the avoidance of dispute and the cooperation that ASEAN involves may indeed be regarded as yet a further pattern of inter-state relations in the region, testifying again to its readiness to borrow but also its capacity to adapt and even offer example. The “ASEAN way” insists on but also in practice qualifies the full exertion of sovereignty. It also limits the possibility that the great power to the north – China – as it “rises” will do more to assert an apical role.

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44 Keene, Beyond the Anarchical Society, pp. 107–8.
46 Castlereagh/Clancarty, 13.8.1819. FO 37/107, National Archives, Kew.
2 The “Alexandrowicz Thesis” revisited
Hugo Grotius, divisible sovereignty, and private avengers within the Indian Ocean World System

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For the Grotius scholar, the main significance of Charles Alexandrowicz’s seminal text lies with what has come to be known as the “Alexandrowicz thesis”: that the “primitive legal scholars” of early modern Europe, most notably Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), based their theories of public international law upon the indigenous legal texts and customs of the Indian Ocean region that remained largely unacknowledged by their European appropriators. Alexandrowicz states his thesis most clearly in Chapter IV of his text, “The Grotius-Freitas Controversy over the Indian Ocean.”

When Grotius studied the facts of the case of the Santa Catharina which led to the writing of the treatise De Jure Praedae, he acquired from the relevant documents and sources [i.e., the oral testimony of the VOC mariners as well as copies of Indian maritime and admiralty codes] first-hand knowledge of the problems of the East Indies and the habits and laws of its peoples and Rulers. Thus he must have been impressed by the fact that navigation east of the Red Sea to the confines of the Pacific had been free and that local State practice never treated the Indian Ocean as “mare clausum”, a concept which in the seventeenth century was followed by a number of European writers such as [John] Selden and [William] Welwood. It is therefore possible to assume that Grotius in formulating his doctrine of the freedom of the sea [“mare liberum”] found himself encouraged by what he learned from the study of Asian maritime custom. In fact it would be difficult to believe that he could have ignored the outstanding precedent for maritime freedom offered by the regime in the Indian Ocean in contrast to maritime practice in Europe. A brief analysis of the various passages of Grotius’s Mare Liberum may confirm the correctness of the above assumption.

While perhaps superficially plausible, Alexandrowicz’s account faces an insurmountable hurdle: there is no archival evidence that Grotius: (i) ever actually utilized Indian sources; or (ii) that Grotius ever possessed any substantive knowledge of the legal systems of South and Southeast Asia. Peter Borschberg is the most recent of a long line of scholars to make this clear:
“The epistolary testimonies illustrate the VOC’s hired author did not seize the initiative to conduct in-depth research in the company’s archival holdings, but instead relied on materials that were forwarded to him from its directors in Amsterdam and later also Middelburg.” After an exhaustive discussion of the archival issues, Borschberg is able to confidently conclude that “Grotius’s own boastful assertion to have written something on ‘the universal law of war and booty’ must be understood within its strictly Eurocentric context and nothing more.” Whatever Grotius did or did not know about the legal and political realities of “the East Indies”, academic consensus is that Alexandrowicz is wrong in his central assertion – the “strange parallels” that existed between both the form and the substance the law of the sea in western Europe and the eastern Indies were due more to the replication of the conditions of commercial and legal practice common to the two regional world systems rather than direct transmission.

It is not my intention here to directly challenge this consensus. What is intended is, however, to suggest an alternative way of interpreting the Alexandrowicz thesis, using it as a hermeneutic device for making sense of new, and rival, understandings of the nature of Grotius’s own work and of the political economy of both the Dutch State (the United Provinces) and the VOC. This chapter will draw on my previous work, which argues that Grotius’s primary authorial imperative was to render harmonious the requirements of the international public order (ius publicum Europaeum) constituted by the early (or “primitive”) capitalist world economy with the constitutional landscape of the Dutch Republic. It is argued that Grotius did possess an understanding of the legal landscape of the East Indies and that he replicated this knowledge within the greatest of his early or “juvenile” texts, De Indis. The crucial point is that the legal topography that Grotius reproduced was not that of the Indies itself but rather that of the VOC as it was structurally “embedded” within the world system of the Indian Ocean. What we are faced with, then, is not so much an example of transmission but rather of transposition, from the United Provinces to the East Indies and then back again, via the Grotian corpus. It is for this reason that here, as elsewhere, I always refer to De iure praedae as De Indis. Apart from the fact that Grotius always referred to his unpublished manuscript as “De rebus Indicis” (“On the Affairs of the Indies”) within his private correspondence, the alternative title – “Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty” – subliminally “de-politicizes” the text, re-presenting it as a formal legal treatise rather than – as I regard it – an extended meditation on republican political theory as the constitutional foundation of both the Dutch State and ius publicum Europaeum. The “problems of the East Indies and the habits and laws of its peoples and Rulers” that Grotius utilizes within his texts are not those of the Indian Ocean itself but rather of the private, or “corporate” sovereignty that the VOC established for itself within this regional world system.

Before I begin, though, a word of caution. In what follows, the reader should be prepared to encounter with full blown force the central
methodological problem of cross-comparative regional studies: a high degree of essentializing abstraction, not least in my super-imposition of an underlying continuity of authorial intention upon the early Grotian texts. I need, therefore, to reiterate that my purpose here is to undertake a critical legal reinterpretation of Alexandrowicz’s own text and not to provide a comprehensive reconceptualization of the (possible) realities of the Indian Ocean world system of the early seventeenth century, although I will certainly need to address the issue of historical sociology to some degree. As Alexandrowicz treats Grotius’s writings as a totality in absence of a chronology I will do the same, not because it is historically conclusive (it is not), but because it enables us to understand better the reasons why his writings followed the course of development that they actually did take as opposed to the manner that some contemporary historians wish that they took.16

**From transmission to transposition: Grotius, the VOC and the Indian Ocean world system**

Like all good historians, Alexandrowicz was really thinking about the present when writing about the past; his main objective was to critique and ultimately repudiate the “eurocentric” bias of contemporary interpretations of public international law.

The purpose of international law, whatever its effectiveness in the past or present, is not to impose a way of life peculiar to one part of mankind [sic] on countries following a different way of life. It fulfils its destiny by remaining a framework within which countries with heterogeneous ideologies or civilizations co-exist on a footing of equality.17

It is frequently underappreciated that Alexandrowicz composed his text during the 1960s, the high-water mark of the “wars of national liberation”, the most transformative of the anti-systemic movements within the Modern World-System at that time.18 Accordingly, the task of the historian of international law – “one fraught with considerable risk” – is to question “the traditional view that the law of nations grew up exclusively in the confines of Christian Europe”.19 Alexandrowicz’s anti-colonialist concern with rectifying the international political and legal asymmetries between the Developed and Developing Worlds is clearly evidenced by his extensive discussion of “The Goa Case”20 with which he opens his text. One of the pivotal rulings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), *Right of Passage* established the recognition of customary legal rights of former colonies as against the former colonial powers; in this case, India vis-à-vis Portugal, the first of the European states to “penetrate” the sixteenth-century Indian Ocean world system.

In the pleadings, Portugal, the applicant (or plaintiff) State argued that the treaty regime of the late eighteenth century guaranteed its right to transport
its troops through Indian national territory in order to quell an uprising within its territorial possessions around Goa.

In support of its claim, Portugal relies on the Treaty of Poona of 1779 and on *sanads* (decrees), issued by the Maratha ruler in 1783 and 1785, as having conferred sovereignty on Portugal over the enclaves [Dadra and Nagar-Aveli] with the right to passage to them.\(^{21}\) India objects on various grounds that what was alleged to be the Treaty of 1779 was not validly entered into and never became in law a treaty binding upon the Marathas.\(^{22}\)

There are two noteworthy points in the ICJ’s opinion. The first is that the law as operative between the two parties during the early modern period are still wholly recognizable (and, therefore, enforceable) today.

It is sufficient to state that the validity of a treaty concluded as long ago as the last quarter of the eighteenth century, in the conditions then prevailing in the Indian Peninsula, should not be judged upon the basis of practices and procedures which have since developed only gradually. The Marathas themselves regarded the Treaty of 1779 as valid and binding upon them, and gave effect to its provisions. The Treaty is frequently referred to as such in subsequent formal Maratha documents, including two *sanads* of 1783 and 1785, which purport to have been issued in pursuance of the Treaty. The Marathas did not at any time cast any doubt upon the validity or binding character of the Treaty.\(^{23}\)

As Alexandrowicz rightly observes, this ruling implicitly re-establishes the (presumed) legal equality that existed between the two parties at the time that the treaties originally entered into force, an assessment based directly upon the 18th law of nations which prioritized the effective exercise of sovereign prerogatives and the Ruler’s history of compliance with treaty obligations.\(^{24}\) The second point is that when interpreting the terms of the instruments, the ICJ adopts a highly restrictive approach: the Court cannot infer a transfer or ceding of sovereignty in the absence of an express intention to do so.

Article 17 of the Treaty is relied upon by Portugal as constituting a transfer of sovereignty.\(^{25}\) From an examination of the various texts of that article placed before it, the Court is unable to conclude that the language employed therein was intended to transfer sovereignty over the villages [of the enclaves] to the Portuguese. There are several instances on the [historical] record of treaties concluded by the Marathas which show that, where a transfer of sovereignty was intended, appropriate and adequate expressions like cession “in perpetuity” or “in perpetual sovereignty” were used … It therefore appears that the Treaty of 1779 and the *sanads* of 1783 and 1785 were intended by the Marathas to
effect in favour of the Portuguese only a grant of a *jagir* or *saranjam* [powers of taxation], and not to transfer sovereignty over the villages to them.\textsuperscript{26}

Alexandrowicz not unpersuasively interprets this to mean that the ICJ is affording at least implicit recognition of indigenous Asian systems of law as forming an integral part of contemporary customary international law as consistent with Article 38(1) (c) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice: “The Court, whose function it is to decide in accordance with international law such disputes as are submitted with it, shall apply … The general principles of law recognized by civilized nations …” For Alexandrowicz, it is “obvious that the transaction between a European and an Indian power as embodied in the treaty of 1779 has to be re-evaluated on the basis of the fundamental principles of the pre-nineteenth-century law of nations common to all sovereign entities irrespective of religion, civilisation or geographical location”;\textsuperscript{27} accordingly, it is in “this connection that the decision of the International Court of Justice in the Indo-Portuguese dispute provides a valuable starting point for the reconsideration of some of the problems of the history of the law of nations.”\textsuperscript{28} And by that he means something quite specific: to (re-)ground current judicial attitudes towards the Developing World within the historical terms of what is commonly known as “the Age of Partnership”,\textsuperscript{29} the era (approximately 1500–1700) when European powers in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia\textsuperscript{30} collectively treated indigenous rulers as co-equal sovereigns, both in terms of legal personality and diplomatic recognition. Alexandrowicz leaves us in no doubt that this is his main motive in composing his text. Therefore, his controversial “thesis” has to be understood strictly within the context of his wider engagement with the operation of international law between colonizer and colonized.

It may be asked why the period of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been chosen for discussion … European powers, in their contacts with East Indian Sovereigns, often discovered a similarity of ideas with them as far as principles of inter-State relations were concerned. Failing similarity, they tried to impose on them their own ideas and whenever they were not able or ready to do so, they accepted certain legal concepts from Eastern tradition.\textsuperscript{31}

In other words, the primitive legal scholars of Europe reasoned in approximately the same manner as did the ICJ when ruling in the *Rights of Passage* case. Alexandrowicz’s attitude towards Grotius now begins to make more sense: the Dutch jurist is the exemplar of the process of egalitarian engagement that materially operated during the Age of Partnership and that is being recovered *normatively* today. Grotius “eliminates the possibility of conceiving the East Indies as a legal vacuum as far as the law of nations is concerned”, emphasizing “the existence of organized political entities in the
East Indies which he considers independent and sovereign.” Grotius’s alleged reliance upon indigenous law when formulating his doctrine of “free seas” is not, therefore, merely an individual occurrence of judicial transmission; rather, it is one particular historically necessary manifestation of a wider spirit (Hegel’s Geist?) of cross-cultural engagement.

It is usually overlooked by historians of the law of nations that Mare Liberum is an important source for the appreciation of the dominion of the law of nations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For Grotius defended the rights of the Dutch and opposed the validity of Portuguese legal titles in the East Indies inter alia by putting emphasis on the status of the independent East Indian communities in the law of nations. This enables historians to gain more insight into the views of Grotius on the growth of the family of nations. It also throws light on the legal nature of Christian powers in Europe with the sovereign powers of Asia with whom they had to deal if the much desired trade with the East was to flourish. The second problem with which Grotius concerned himself was the freedom of the high seas. Again, historians have often overlooked one aspect of the problem which was significant to Grotius, that is the impact of the study of the actual regime of the Indian Ocean, which he carried out in the archives of the Dutch Company, on the formulation of the doctrine of mare liberum, at a time when the doctrine of mare clausum was more prevalent in European State practice than the ideal of the freedom of the high seas.

And this process of equitable exchange, both commercial and discursive, is governed strictly by the political realities of the Age of Partnership; “Whatever the vagaries of power politics, classification [of state sovereignty] itself could not be in a legal vacuum but was determined by the mutually accepted tests of sovereignty and principles of inter-State dealings.” In stark contrast to the inequitable – and, therefore, exploitative – conditions of the capitulatory regimes of the nineteenth century, treaty systems governing East and West prior to 1800 are characterized by their “pre-capitulation” instruments, which served as “the expression of international standards of equitable treatment of foreigners observed in the East Indies”; it was only in the nineteenth century that the capitularies’ “conversion into irrevocable instruments derogatory to the sovereignty of the granting Ruler resulted in the deformation of an ancient custom which had been a constructive factor in the development of international trade in the East.”

Although he does not use these terms, Alexandrowicz is effectively describing the Indian Ocean in terms of a regional, or sub-world system. Alexandrowicz’s own understanding of the East Indies as a system, or “community” of states is, in turn, a reflection of his own reading of Grotius, whom Alexandrowicz has appropriated as the primary international jurist of the Age of Partnership.
The joint reading of various passages found in *Mare Liberum* (as well as in *De Jure Praedae*) shows that Grotius acquired a fairly extensive knowledge of the East Indian region and its people. 39 He stresses their high cultural level, describing them as “intelligent and skilful” (“inge-nuosi et solertes” Chapter II 40) and he gives throughout his treatise expression to his appreciation of their civilization and traditions. In Chapter X 41 he recognizes their “right to trade with whomsoever they please” 42 and he opposes categorically the idea of a monopoly of one nation (the Portuguese) in the field of commerce, navigation and intercourse. He could not have stated his case [for the “free seas”] with convincing force without making the East Indian Sovereigns allies to his pleadings. 43

Given the relative paucity of primary sources, the substantive, or “positive”, maritime and commercial law, of the Indian Ocean during the Grotian era must be inferred by a process of logical inference, or deduction, from the externally observable, and quantifiable, modes of “state practice”. The historical evidence that is empirically recoverable would seem, on balance, to indicate the emergence of forms of State behaviour that de facto, if not de jure, are not inconsistent with the formally expressed legal doctrine of *mare liberum*.

From “The Age of Partnership” to peripheralization: the declaratory versus the constitutive theory

If I am correct in my assumption that the Indian Ocean formed a sub-world system within the early, or primitive, World-System of the seventeenth century, then I am permitted to postulate the operational, if not formally juridical, presence of the “Free Seas” as a deduction a priori: 44 if the Indian Ocean system complies with the criteria established by Immanuel Wallerstein, 45 and Giovanni Arrighi 46 – which, I would argue, that it does – then one would expect to find a spatial zone of (relatively) free trade (*liberum commercium*) juridically and politically governed by the principle of *res extra commercium*. Grotius does not need to access indigenous sources because his own theory of the free sea replicates the logic of the political economy of the early capitalist world system of Western Europe. Grotius is able to replicate within his own discursive framework a parallel system of *res nullius*, because both Europe and the Indies are regional world systems which are, out of necessity, governed by identical precepts of natural law which guarantees the political actor an inalienable legal personality. As Alexandrowicz correctly states, *ius naturale* possessed “certain functional qualities which remained part and parcel of its operation in practice throughout all the changing phases of the classic period”, most importantly its rejection of the doctrine of constitutivism “in so far as recognition of States and Sovereigns was concerned.” 47
Alexandrowicz’s strategic deployment of the term “constitutivism” is interesting, underscoring an underlying and commonly underappreciated continuity between early modern and contemporary forms of legal theory. Historically, there have been two dominant approaches to the formal establishment of the international legal personality of States. The first is the declaratory, or objective approach: the recognition by other States is not a pre-condition for legal personality is the express recognition by other States; rather, any State that can fulfil a universally agreed upon set of objective criteria (permanent population, recognizable borders, effective occupation and control over the territory, capacity to enter into treaty relations with States) automatically acquires personality through a unilateral declaration of national independence and statehood. The second is the constitutive or subjective approach: formal recognition by other States is the necessary pre-condition for legal personality, although, on the basis of the historical practice of States, recognition will not be provided unless the “constituted” State, on the preponderance of the evidence, meets all of the objective criteria of statehood.

As one would expect, the preference for one theory over the other at any particular historical moment is a juridical reflection of the wider issues of political power within the Modern World-System. This was established with brutal clarity in the first half of the nineteenth century with the publication of Henry Wheaton’s magisterial *Elements of International Law* (1848). Wheaton clearly asserts that any State, even the “developing” one, automatically enjoys a residual degree of “internal sovereignty” commensurate with the degree of effectiveness of its occupation and control over its core territory.

The internal sovereignty of a State does not, in any degree, depend upon its recognition by other States. A new State, springing into existence, does not require the recognition of other States to confirm its internal sovereignty. The existence of the State de facto is sufficient, in this respect, to establish its sovereignty *de jure*. It is a State because it exists.

The vital distinction, which embodies the essence of Wheaton’s colonialist approach, is the one that he draws between internal and external sovereignty; the latter, the hallmark of full sovereignty, is wholly dependent upon a positive act performed by the pre-established members of the international community: that is, the European States. If the “new” or self-declared State were to desire to join “that great society of nations, all the members of which recognize rights to which they are mutually entitled, and duties to which they may be called upon reciprocally to fulfill, such recognition becomes essentially necessary to the complete participation of the new State in all the advantages of this society.” The constitutive theory favours the Developed World by investing it with the collective ability to prevent the legal formation of new States through the withholding of express recognition, while the declaratory theory is more “friendly” to the Developing World by legally facilitating the process of de-colonization. Until very recently (the alleged wars of “self-determination” in
both Kosovo and Libya proving crucial) the preferred approach of the global community has been declaratory, reflecting the political imperatives and realities of the anti-colonialist agenda of the United Nations regime. Projecting contemporary biases backwards into the seventeenth century, Alexandrowicz implicitly frames Grotius as an early, and uncommonly enlightened, advocate of the objective doctrine.

How does Grotius approach the vital problem of opening the doors of the East Indies to European penetration? He eliminates the possibility of conceiving the East Indies as a legal vacuum as far as the law of nations is concerned. What he stresses most emphatically is the existence of organized political entities in the East Indies which he considers independent and sovereign.51

Expanding upon his own retrospective appropriation of Grotius as advocate of the anti-colonialist approach to international law, Alexandrowicz opines that the hegemony of constitutive theory may be questioned “in the light of treaty and diplomatic relations between European and East Indian powers during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”52 During the Age of Partnership, “Whatever the vagaries of power politics, classification [of State Sovereignty] itself could not be in a legal vacuum but was determined by the mutually accepted tests of sovereignty and principles of inter-State dealings.”53 Alexandrowicz then makes similar assumptions of transmission concerning what he identifies as the indigenous “pre-capitulation” treaty system of the “East Indies”.

One of the most remarkable features of East Indian tradition was the liberal attitude of the territorial Sovereign towards the establishment of foreign merchants who were allowed to govern themselves by their personal law and enjoyed considerable autonomy. Jurisdictional concessions granted to Europeans in pre-capitulation arrangements were gradually embodied in treaties.54

Strikingly, this point has been underscored by Borschberg himself; during the pivotal Anglo-Dutch conferences in London (1613) and in the Hague (1615), it was through the “upholding the unfettered sovereignty of the Asian rulers and by treating them as members of the greater family of monarchs [that] Grotius, and the VOC at large, established a moral and legal justification against a Spanish and Portuguese commercial monopoly and their efforts to politically dominate the region.”55

As I have argued elsewhere,56 De Indis is best read as the juro-political correlative to an early, or “primitive”, form of global governance. It is precisely this Modern World-System – a radically heterogeneous, and infinitely sub-divisible, inter-state system giving political expression to an integrated global capitalist economy – that provided the necessary historical context for the composition of a self-serving political instrument of the VOC. The Grotian text is governed by two signature rhetorical stratagems: (i) the attribution of an international normative/holistic order to international politics, derived
from the disparate variants of *ius naturale*, and (ii) the replication of the heterogeneous political logic of the Modern World-System and the capitalist world-economy as the juridical foundation of seventeenth-century international order, both public (*res publica*) and private (*lex mercatoria*). Simply put, *De Indis* (and *Mare Liberum*) “translate” the operational requirements of the world-economy into the terms of naturalist jurisprudence.\(^{57}\) *Pace* Borschberg, Alexandrowicz follows the same logic as I have adopted in *The Savage Republic*, which, in turn, follows the “tracings” originally etched by Grotius: the positive law of the East Indies that can be historically recovered appears to operate upon naturalist assumptions, which would be rendered *necessary* by the “systemic” properties of the regional polity of the Indian Ocean – a phenomenon that perfectly serves Alexandrowicz’s own pro-declaratory approach to contemporary international law.

**Divisible sovereignty and the United Provinces**

The importance of the parallel operation of a naturalist jurisprudence in both the western European and eastern Indian world systems is highlighted by the commonality of divisible sovereignty as the juridical-political foundation of constitutional order within both systems. A signature characteristic of *De Indis* is the recurrent juxtaposition of contending forms of sovereignty; the binary opposition between monistic and “divisible” sovereignty forms a cardinal antinomy of both *De Indis* in particular and of the Grotian corpus as a whole. Even though he is commonly identified with international law Grotius’s primary motivation in composing both *De Indis* and *Mare Liberum* was to formulate a constitutional model of political stability of the embryonic United Provinces.\(^{58}\) The hermeneutic key to the entirety of the Grotian “juvenilia” (c. 1600–1619) is to view these early works as experimental efforts in “constitutional modelling”. As Advocaat-Fiscal of Holland and as political confidant of the Grand Pensionary Johannes van Oldenbarnevelt (1547–1619), Grotius’s ruminations on primitive international legal scholarship were inevitably governed by domestic political and constitutional considerations; ordinarily, this meant legitimising the self-proclaimed national independence of the United Provinces while simultaneously formulating some variant of republican constitutionalism that would provide the longed for, but utterly elusive, form of political stability.\(^{59}\)

That the “United” Provinces were the political space of an irreducible, and potentially chaotic, pluralism is well attested by contemporary observers, such as the seventeenth-century English diplomat William Temple.

*[The Dutch Republic] cannot properly be styled a commonwealth, but is rather a Confederation of Seven Sovereign Provinces united together for their common and mutual defence, without any dependence one upon the other. But to discover the nature of their government from the first springs and motions, it must be taken yet into smaller pieces, by which it*
will appear that each of the Provinces is likewise composed of many little States or Cities, which have several marks of Sovereign Power within themselves, and are not subject to the Sovereignty of their Province.  

Insofar as its political mechanisms can be made out, the Dutch Republic appears to have been subordinate to a kind of “informal governance”, based upon the extra-constitutional convergences of the class (or “private”) interests of the pluralistic political and mercantile elites – who were, in most instances, identical with one another – centred upon the entrepôt, or “world-city” of Amsterdam, the headquarters of the VOC, an arrangement that superficially honoured provincial autonomy but that in practice “allowed Holland to mould the policies of the new state in accordance with its own wishes and needs”. J.L. Price has mischievously denoted this extra-constitutional linkage of informal (private) and formal (public) techniques of political control as “typically Dutch”. What I suggest in *The Savage Republic* is that it was precisely this two-fold dimension of the Dutch Republic within the capitalist world-economy – Amsterdam as simultaneously the premier world-city and the nexus of all of the vital economic and political interests of the urban patriciate – that not only maintained the “typically Dutch” practice of obviating formal constitutional principles, but also guaranteed that the Dutch state would be grounded upon an irreducible pluralism. One of the signature characteristics of Dutch republicanism was its adamant opposition to the divisibility of sovereignty; as the state belonged to the people (*res publica*) sovereignty was at one with the people and could not be divided or alienated. Hans W. Blom has remarked at great length on the “paradoxical move of Dutch republicans to opt for undivided sovereignty”. “Paradoxical” because, in certain respects, republicans should logically favour the divisibility of sovereignty, at least in so far as it could be rendered compatible with the practical realities of particularism; this was certainly the case during the early phase of the Dutch Revolt. During the later national context of the seventeenth century, however, divisibility of sovereignty had come to be with the *de jure* mixed constitution that equated with the de facto “rule” of the stadholder. By contrast, the monarchist Orangists were the champions of the mixed constitution, as it privileged the politically indeterminate stadholder; ergo, the Orange mixed constitution was implicitly premised upon both the divisibility and alienability of sovereignty.

The “paradox” of the Republic is replicated within the whole of the Grotian juvenilia, as the author continuously vacillates between divisible and indivisible notions of sovereignty. *De Indis* itself, however, composed during the peak of the early Republic, formally affirms both the pluralism and the divisibility of sovereignty. The legitimacy of political plurality within early modern constitutional theory was first advanced by Grotius’s contemporary (and possible unacknowledged source), Johannes Althusius (1557–1638), whose seminal text *Politica Methodice Digesta* (1603) expressly renders the “public domain” constitutionally subordinate – which is to say, ontologically
inferior to – “private” civil society; “The public association exists when many private associations are linked together, for the purpose of establishing an inclusive political order. It can be called a community, an associated body, or the pre-eminent political association.”67 As Edward Keene has convincingly demonstrated, in the seventeenth century it was the “more speculatively metaphysical system-builders” most in discursive thrall to delimitation, such as Jean Bodin (1530–96), who asserted the (abstract) indivisibility of sovereignty, while the “more pragmatic and constitutionally-minded experts on the law of nations”, such as Grotius, who “upheld the empirically verifiable doctrine that sovereignty was divisible.”68

Whatever the exact intellectual pedigree of Grotian constitutionalism, there is little doubt in my mind that the decisive factor propelling Grotius towards the anti-Bodean doctrine of divisible sovereignty was the material attributes of the Dutch political economy. The Dutch Revolt was a regionally based internal war with oligarchic republican libertas protected by a decentralized and cost-efficient military organization. The Grotian corpus naturally reflects both intra- and inter-state concerns with both anti-sectarianism and republican ideology. I believe that this is the juncture in which the historical instauration of the discursive heterology of the text and the historical conditions governing its production mirror each other most perfectly; Grotius-as-author was in the employ of the VOC at the moment in time he wrote the text. The Company, an intensely nationalistic and patriotic enterprise, was the apotheosis of the corporatist pluralism of the Dutch State and effectively “doubled” as an agent of the Republic. Simultaneously, its social composition of and political domination by the regenten meant that it served as an outlet, both political and economic, for the residual oligarchic tendencies of the Republic. At the time of Grotius’s authorship, the VOC had become the primary vehicle of the class interests of the regenten, acting as “the state within the state”. Prima facie, De Indis maintains an orthodox demarcation between the “public” and “private” domains by classifying the VOC – the private commercial body – as the juridico-political inferior of the Dutch national assembly, the Estates General that is the public political entity.

It is a generally accepted fact that the individuals who compose the east India Company are subject to the said Estates General. For all persons within the territory in question have pledged allegiance by oath to that assembly, or else tacitly give adequate assurance, by making themselves a part of the political community by the latter, of their intention to live in accordance with the customs of this community and to obey the magistrates recognized by it.69

As the Estates General is supreme, the State is at one and sovereignty (potestas) remains indivisible. However, what the text elides, at precisely this juncture, is the social context of its own production; because of the extremely oligarchic nature of the Dutch polity, the Estates General and the VOC constituted a unified de facto organizational entity. The political elite and the
Company were “one and the same, indistinguishable from each other and indeed often consisting of the same people. This was the reason for the apparent autonomy from metropolitan control that the VOC enjoyed; because the VOC was identical with the state, this was really no abdication by the state.” The differentiated discourse of De Indis, operating within the trace of the capitalist world-economy, renders the delimitation between the “private” and “public” domains inherently precarious.

This destabilizing “discursive oscillation” so characteristic of the young Grotius is clearly on display in one of the most important of the juvenile texts, the Commentarius in Theses XI (c. 1600) a wide-ranging defence of the “Dutch Revolt” as a Just War (bellum iustum). Prior to Grotius, orthodox theories of resistance, or lawful rebellion, were premised on two cardinal premises, “natural liberty” and the notion of the “inferior magistrate”. Under the first, “the people” (publicae) are the true bearers of that legal identity and personality which historically pre-dates any particular social formation; consequently, any subsequent act of lawful political incorporation rests upon the voluntary transfer of inalienable rights from the people to the polity. Under the second, the people possess an inalienable right to exercise lawful armed force against an otherwise legitimate public authority that has violated the conditions of the foundational act of conveyance through acts of tyranny. Broadly associated with the politically more moderate Protestant sect the Huguenots, the concept of the inferior magistrate was subjected to a more subversive doctrinal alteration by the more radically egalitarian Calvinists, who expressly inferred an inalienable right to take up arms on the basis of natural liberty alone.

Committed to a Venetian-style oligarchy, the Commentarius rejects radical Resistance Theory, postulating instead a via media derived from that multi-purpose free-floating Grotian signifier, divisible sovereignty, here formulated as “residual sovereignty”, one that is inherent within the secular political order, but also capable of indefinite sub-division. Art. 16 provides a generic definition of sovereignty; “That supreme right to govern the state which recognizes no supreme authority among humans, such that no person(s) may, through any right [ius] of his own, rescind what has been enacted thereby.” The text then moves to a more detailed empirical consideration of actus summae potestatis, those necessary “marks” or signs of sovereignty; intriguingly, “right” is clearly associated with “power”.

Those that no one may rescind by virtue of any higher right, for example, the supreme right to introduce legislation and to withdraw it, the right to pass judgement and to grant pardon, the right to appoint magistrates and to relieve them of their office, the right to impose taxes on the people, etc.

Accordingly:

If some marks [actus] rest with the prince, and others with the senate, or rather with the prince and the senate, one cannot claim that full
sovereignty is either with the prince or with the senate, but [only] with the prince and the senate [together]. The prince and the senate, however, are not one but several.\textsuperscript{78}

The \textit{Commentarius} then provides a “primitive” theory of constitutional checks and balances, which is inseparable from a residual sovereignty that is identified with \textit{libertas}.\textsuperscript{79} In other words, there is a conditional right of resistance, dependent in turn upon the facts of historical evidence and political identity. The \textit{Commentarius} asserts\textsuperscript{80} that there is persuasive historical evidence of a continuing presence of residual sovereignty within the Dutch “people” (that is, the “Batavians”), institutionally expressed through the \textit{Ordines}.\textsuperscript{81} As the Dutch Estates never expressly conveyed to “the prince” (namely, Spain) the power to tax, \textit{libertas} can be legally classified as a “legitimate spoil” of \textit{bellum iustum}, a lawful armed struggle between rival public authorities waged in pursuit of the enforcement of \textit{ius}. “Batavian private persons” (referring to the Dutch), in both their particular and universal aspects, are co-sovereigns with the Spanish Crown, and constitute their own form of legitimate – and self-legitimising – public authority, that greatest of all republican conceits; namely, that “all the marks of sovereignty that once rested with Philip were [subsequently] acquired by the States [of Holland]”.\textsuperscript{82} Divisible sovereignty and \textit{bellum iustum} receive even more radically republican expression in \textit{De Indis} which provides a crucial textual/discursive linkage between the Just War waged by the Dutch East India Company (the VOC) and the republican precepts of the lawful war of national liberation; “The power that has been bestowed upon a prince can be revoked, particularly when the prince exceeds the bounds defining his office, since in such circumstances he ceases \textit{ipso facto} to be regarded as a prince.”\textsuperscript{83}

Herein, residual sovereignty and republicanism are neatly fused with the self-grounding legitimacy of Dutch national independence: “Since the State has no superior, it is necessarily the judge even of its own cause. Thus the assertion made by Tacitus ... was true, namely that by a provision emanating from the Divine Will, the people were to brook no other judge than themselves.”\textsuperscript{84} The iterability, or radical reversibility, of the “mark” of sovereignty as itself constitutive of Sovereignty, unintentionally belies the wholly constructivist – and, therefore, contingent – nature of the alleged “sovereign”. The \textit{actus} is inherently ambiguous, not identical with either \textit{potestatis} or \textit{ius}, but an operationally “free-floating signifier” of the lurking “presence” of sovereignty;\textsuperscript{85} “the term \textit{actus} suggests not a diagnostic criterion which serves to indicate who possesses sovereign power, but the active exercise of some part of that power; the rendering function might be equally important.”\textsuperscript{86} The radically contextual nature of the \textit{actus} highlights the extreme iterability that governs the Grotian alterity between “public” and “private” actors. Within this discursive frame, both States and persons – which include corporations\textsuperscript{87} – are both fully able to respectively exercise the “sovereignty function” and, thereby, acquire the signature “mark”.

\textit{The “Alexandrowicz Thesis” revisited}
Divisible sovereignty and the East Indies

If I am correct in assuming that Grotius’s production of *De Indis* represents an act of transposition rather than process of transmission, then one would expect to see and/or find elements of divisible sovereignty operating in the Indian Ocean world system, either as formal constitutional doctrine or as an untheorized but empirically traceable form of State practice. Fortunately for my argument, that is exactly what we do find. In her recent work *Networks of Empire*, Kerry Ward has persuasively demonstrated that the VOC operated as a non-territorial network of control, operating across numerous, and intensely heterogeneous, zones of political and judicial identity; the Dutch East India Company “created networks across the Indian Ocean that brought partial territorial and legal sovereignties into a single imperial web. As an empire, the Company did not seek primarily to become a colonizer, and its territorial ambitions differed substantially among the various sites where it operated.” The VOC “was but one of the European merchant companies interjecting itself into a regional grid of ancient and vibrant cultural, religious and trading networks that had long eluded domination by any one merchant enterprise, polity or empire.” The basis of this divisible, or *partial sovereignty*, that the Company was able ensconce itself within and later successfully manipulate was a trans-territorial network, defined by Ward in extremely visceral terms: a “network is a structuring mechanism that is especially well suited for moving analytically among multiple layers of sovereignty and identifying important nodes of intersection among them.” In a more literal sense Ward’s notion of network is the historically actualized “path taken by a specific form of relational power in early modern empires”; it is in “tracing the density and reach of a particular network within a particular web, one becomes privy to the waxing and waning of specific vectors of imperial sovereignty as well as to the unique character of early modern empires and their interactions with indigenous polities”. Accordingly, the “empire” of the VOC:

manifested itself through cultural, legal, administrative, transportation, territorial, military and exchange networks that amalgamated spatially and over time into an imperial web whose sovereignty was effectively created and maintained but always partial and contingent … early modern empires were comprised of the material manifestations of lands and peoples conquered, and that these durable networks, with regional circuits and sub-circuits, and territorially and institutionally based nodes of regulatory power, operated not only on land and sea but discursively as well.

In other words, we have the “penetration” of a non-state entity into a pre-existent regional world-system whose operations are finessed to fit the contours of a radically pluralistic system of governance. A neater form of transposition
cannot be hoped for; whereas I have argued that Grotius's primitive legal scholarship was an external projection of Dutch constitutionalism into the early Modern World-System, Ward has convincingly shown that the juro-political landscape of the East Indies strictly complied with the precepts of divisible sovereignty. Even better for my claim is that Borschberg has argued in support of Ward; in Southeast Asia, “the package of implied rights [that is, Grotius’s ‘marks of sovereignty’] associated by the Europeans with sovereignty was understood to be divisible”. Using the Malay Peninsula, the site of the capture of the Santa Catarina, as his case study, Borschberg demonstrates the “division of power in Malay polities was far more subtle, fluid and complex than European observers were able – or willing to grasp”. Premised upon the tributary system – a highly patrimonial form of governance that embeds the circulation of political and social power within a highly fluid set of personal and kinship relations – Malay conceptions of sovereignty are marked by divisibility, reversibility and ambiguity; very much like Oldenbarneveldt’s quasi-privatized regime in the United Provinces. Senior nobles such as the bendahara (chief minister of state), laksamana (commander of naval forces) or temenggong (chief of security) were not European-style magistrates, but exercised their functions through an almost customary right of autonomy. The practical exercise of Malay sovereignty ultimately depended upon the successful cultivation of private loyalty; as “the histories show, however, loyalties often proved fluid and multifaceted, leading in practice to ‘overlapping’ or even intersecting rights of sovereignty.” Apart from its intrinsic interest, Borschberg’s treatment of the partial sovereignty of the Malay States is worth discussing because of what it reveals about certain assumptions about early modern European constitutional theory. Although Bodin’s theory of indivisible sovereignty certainly does not equate with the messy reality of early modern European constitutionalism, the hegemonic status that Bodean discourse enjoyed in the early seventeenth century as a formal theory of constitutionality may have played a role in shaping European perceptions of the nature of Southeast Asian government. Borschberg observes, for example that:

The European commentators of the early modern period generally observe that a Malay “kingdom” can comprise one or several negeri [“city” or “polity”], which in their understanding and their cultural-specific context is as much to say a given “kingdom” comprises one or several “settlements”, “cities” or perhaps loosely translated “civic polities”.

If Europeans could not publicly countenance the reality of partial sovereignty, they could not fully engage with the “truth” of Malay politics: “Knowingly – or inadvertently – they had ascribed to the rulers a set of rights they actually did not really possess within the context of their own politico-cultural traditions, practices and institutions”, resulting in the radical contingency of European treaty-making undertakings upon shifting Southeast Asian political realities that enjoyed no exact equivalence within the legal lexicon of Christendom.
Yet, as Borschberg’s own account shows, there is a strong possibility that Grotius obtained direct knowledge of the multi-centric “zones of sovereignty” of the Malays through his personal involvement in the treaty formation process between Johor and the VOC; “Grotius evidently had access to sets of treaties signed with Southeast Asian rulers. He gained access to definitive as well as draft treaties through his VOC contacts and in some instances may even have had a hand in drafting some of the treaties…thought to date from around 1606.”

In Appendix 14 of his text, Borschberg reproduces two treaties signed between Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge and ‘Ala’uddin Ri’ayat Shah III together with Raja Bongsu, the rulers of Johor, 17 May and 23 September 1606; both of these instruments clearly display the “marks” of a divisible sovereignty. The two indigenous rulers are “jointly titled ‘the Kings of Johor’” and both consecrate the pact as separate agents – “We, the Yang di Pertuan and Raja Seberang, the kings of Johor, swear herewith to sustain the above written agreement in all of its points and articles and not to undertake anything to infringe it, so help us God.” For his part, the VOC admiral holds, “I, Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge, in the name of the aforementioned High Mighty Gentlemen States General of the United Provinces, herewith swear to fulfil all the above written articles in all their parts and not to undertake anything to infringe them, so verily help me God.” Matelieff’s language is problematic here, for East Indian rulers were reluctant to “treat” with mercantile companies because of their perceived lack of sovereignty; the VOC was incorporated in 1602 so Admiral Matelieff was technically an agent for the private body of the “Gentlemen XVII”. As Alexandrowicz has pointed out:

[The] ceremonial observed at the courts of most East Indian Rulers implied a classification of foreign Sovereignties which resulted in granting preferential rank to European and major Asian powers such as Turkey, the Moghul Empire, Siam, Ceylon, Burma, Persia and the Marathas. Minor Rulers were treated as actual or potential vassals and their envoys were accorded a less favourable treatment, but vassals were not normally denied the right of legation and the diplomatic privileges of their envoys were generally respected. The leading powers in Asia favoured direct relations with European Sovereigns and tended at first to view the envoys of the East Indian Companies as representatives of a questionable rank. The Companies had to face the ensuing difficulties, and whenever it proved necessary the European Sovereign concerned had to send a Royal ambassador to secure negotiations on a footing of equality.

As a result, local rulers seemed to have been focused upon establishing “some direct or indirect contact with the ‘sovereign’ in the Netherlands who stood behind the Company.”

It is not surprising that Matelieff is adamant in his substituting the Estates-General for the VOC; virtually all of the early Company delegations to the courts of East India established their legal “credence” (credentials) by
referring to the Stadholder of the United Provinces, Prince Maurice of Orange, as “Ruler”, at times going so far as presenting the receiving monarch or dignitary (the “true” Sovereign or otherwise) with a portrait of the Prince. It also explains the deeper legal significance of the “Epistolary Memorial by Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge, addressed to Hugo Grotius, dated Rotterdam, 12 November 1608”, which details the negotiations with the King of Makassar and “the King of Holland’s (for that is the title the States General are given there) …”. From which Borschberg concludes:

But if Grotius would have only ventured to carefully scrutinise the two 1606 treaties signed by Admiral Matelieff and especially the oath taken by the Johor side, it is clear that Raja Bongsu and King ‘Ala’uddin, the “joint rulers of Johor”, in practice did not conform and are over-simplistic outlook of sovereignty [sic] being concentrated in the person of the monarch.

My question at this point becomes: How can we be so certain that Grotius did not carefully scrutinize the two treaties, especially as they temporally coincided with his completion of De Indis, a work that is premised upon the divisibility of sovereignty? If I am correct in arguing for the status of De Indis, along with the entirety of the juvenilia, as experiments with early republican theory, then it at least raises the possibility that Grotius either: (i) did in fact recognize the partial sovereignty of Johor for what it was on the basis of its “family resemblance” with his own writings; or (ii) in at least partial conformity with the Alexandrowicz thesis, used the example of Johor as one part of his constitutional theorizing. The essence of my revisionist reading of Alexandrowicz is not that Grotius directly (and simplistically) received transmitted knowledge from the East Indies, but rather that he subtly reconfigured one of his models of republican constitutional governance in accordance with the VOC’s transversal sovereignty within the Indian Ocean world system. And, as both Luck and History would have it, Borschberg makes plain that the archival materials do lend partial support to my highly selective reading of Alexandrowicz, when he nominates Matelieff as the primary source of Grotius’s knowledge of the East Indian economy; Grotius’s “working knowledge of commercial practices prevalent in the Southeast Asian theatre derived from the epistolary memorials of Matelieff” – the same VOC envoy who makes clear the divided sovereignty of the Malay rulers.

As Ward mischievously reminds us, “The Dutch East India Company looks a very different entity depending on which archival collection one is investigating.” As I have done in The Savage Republic, Ward clearly situates “the imperial locus” of Holland not within the “public” person of The United Provinces (the “state”) but within the parallel “private” agency of the VOC (the “corporation”). Ward offers even more tantalizing grounds of support when she includes jurisprudence as an integral part of network/empire; an empire “consists of multiple material networks including those of bureaucracy, correspondence, trade, transportation, and migration, as well as discursive networks
of law, administration, information, diplomacy and culture.” And, as she rightly goes on to observe, it is of the greatest importance that “primitive” International Law first emerged within the multi-traversed Dutch network/empire of the seventeenth century.

The relationship between the Dutch East India Company and indigenous states and polities was encoded into the legal network of empire, and the diplomatic memory of the Company was embodied in the written treaties and official reports of political negotiations and formal court politics in which Company officials participated, though not always on terms of their own making … Protocols of diplomacy reproduced elements of the court culture of indigenous Javanese polities in Batavia and became part of the exercise and display of political power.

Of great interest here is that no mention of either Grotius or Alexandrowicz appears in Ward’s text. What is so striking about their absence is that Ward, quite independently of them, has arrived at conclusions nearly identical to that of Alexandrowicz on Asian law as a source of modern international law and my own writings on Grotius; would not Grotius have been intimately familiar with the “imperial network” that Ward describes? And, if he was, would not the VOC archival material alone have been enough to provide him with the necessary material for his over-arching project of reconciling the governance of the early capitalist world-economy with the para-constitutional structures of the hegemonic Dutch State?

Conclusion: strange parallels

[A] transformation may take place, not merely in the case of individuals, as when Jephtes, Arsaces, and Viriathus instead of being leaders of brigands, became lawful chiefs, but also in the case of groups, so that those who have been robbers embracing another mode of life became a state.

Hugo Grotius

For Richard Tuck, De Indis is the locus of “the first modern political theory”. Grotius … made the claim that an individual in nature (that is, before transferring any rights to a civil society) was morally identical to a state, and that there were no powers possessed by a state which an individual could not possess in nature. The kind of state he had in mind, moreover, was one which was sovereign in a strong sense … supra republicam nihil est.

In C. XI of De Indis Grotius mentions a mysterious Portuguese renegade known only as “Rasalala”, a “Portuguese by origin, born in Areiro, but an
apostate from the Christian faith and by no means un-renowned as the leader of the pirates in those regions." Not satisfied with abjuring Christ, Rasalala had set himself at the head of a private army and seized political power in Sidajoe.

In compliance with a command received from the ... ruler of Tuban and from the Portuguese ... Rasalala, who had grown famous through his robberies, had gone to almost all of the Malaccas accompanied by soldiers from Tuban and by twenty Portuguese officers, with the purpose of driving the Dutch traders from the entire region ... Certainly that pirate sailed from those parts with approximately forty proas directly to Java where (so he had been given to understand) the Dutch vessels had come into port; for he was bound by an oath to capture or destroy any such vessel [that he could find]. With this end in view, he was soliciting aid in the name of the King of Tuban from the Regent of Bantam himself. From Java, Rasalala went on to Jacarta, with the intention of seizing such opportunities as might be propitious for the setting of his snares.

Rasalala, like other such pariah entrepreneurs, bears all of the hallmarks of liminality, a judicial nomad who, through his multiple crossings of borders of all kinds, serves as both the material and discursive embodiment of the overlapping and partial sovereignties of the East Indies. In a purely discursive sense, there is no vital difference between the Dutch and the Malays; to write about one is to speak of "the Other". Traditionally the monopolization of organized violence has served as the primary signifier of the "non-invertible" dichotomy between lawful and unlawful types of statist formation; "To say that a state is externally sovereign is in the context of international political theory another way of saying that it is a unity, whose indivisibility hinges on the presence of a monopoly of legitimate violence, and which ideally speaks with one voice to its neighbours." The problem concerning the mark(s) of sovereignty is that any agency capable of exerting effective control over organized violence is, by that fact alone, potentially eligible for legal personality. The "public" text of the Commentarius clearly recognizes this iterative nature of authority, identified with Sovereignty; "since he who holds a mark of Sovereignty has no overlord in respect of that mark, it follows that the right to pass judgement must necessarily be an adjunct of that mark of sovereignty." A strange parallel, indeed, with the VOC's "private" text, De Indis.

This is the crucial point. There is no question that, in terms of the manner in which it was originally formulated, the "Alexandrowicz thesis" is incorrect: there is simply insufficient archival evidence to support the contention that Grotius was familiar with Asian legal sources and commercial practices and employed them in his own writings. But the value that we assign Alexandrowicz's text is directly dependent on how we conceive of Grotius's authorial project. If we take the narrower view of Grotius as apologist of the VOC, then the patent falsehood of transmission theory looms large and the worth of An
Introduction to the History of the Law of Nations is diminished. But if, however, we take the wider view of Grotius as an experimental innovator in republican constitutional theory for both the United Provinces and ius publicum Europaeum, then the issue of direct transmission becomes much less significant. If Grotius-as-author is “inhabiting” the contours of the VOC as an embedded agent within the Indian Ocean world system, then his account of “the Affairs of the Indies” operates on a dual rhetorical plane: the discursive rendering of the VOC is simultaneously an account of both Holland and Johor. If both the Netherlands and the East Indies were founded upon the divisibility of sovereignty, and the VOC, a parallel “state within a state”, was a legal personality operating simultaneously within both territorial nexuses, then Grotius could not help but reproduce the most salient features of the political economy of the Southeast Asian state in his account of the Company as the avenging agent of the Dutch republic. It would seem, therefore, that any reading Alexandrowicz’s wonderfully suggestive text should be complemented by a close reading of the equally seminal work of Victor Lieberman; Grotius’s multi-faceted act of authorial transposition yields nothing but an open-ended set of “strange parallels”.

Notes

4 The seizure of the Portuguese carrack the Santa Catarina on 25 February 1603 in the Johor River estuary by the Dutch privateer Jacob van Heemskerck is widely assumed to have provided the motive for Grotius to have composed his two primary works on the law of the sea, De Indis (1604–6/9) and Mare Liberum (1612). See P. Borschberg, “The Santa Catarina incident of 1603: Dutch free-booting, the Portuguese Estado da India and intra-Asian trade at the dawn of the 17th century”, Review of Cultures, 11 (2004): 13–25.
5 Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty, the alternative, and more commonly used title of De Indis. See below.
6 Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, [Dutch] United East India Company).
8 P. Borschberg, Hugo Grotius, the Portuguese and Free Trade in the East Indies, Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2011, p. 143. See more generally ibid., Ch. 4, “How Grotius acquired a working knowledge of the East Indies”, pp. 106–46. In a similar vein, Martine van Ittersum, when commenting upon the empirical evidence of the Grotius papers held in the Dutch National Archive, declares that “you will soon realize that Dutch merchants and sailors were very ill-informed about indigenous customs/laws pertaining to fishing, maritime trade, maritime jurisdiction, etc … To conclude: the little information
which Grotius may have had about indigenous cultures and customs in Asia was always mediated by VOC sources, which were probably wrong about 90% of the time, at least in the years 1595–1620, which is exactly the time period that Grotius collected documents pertaining to Dutch expansion overseas.” Personal communication with the author.

9 Borschberg, *Hugo Grotius*, pp. 145–6. Emphasis added. An additional problem here is that the maritime law of the Indian Ocean appears to have been largely undeveloped, or “inchoate”, at this time. Borschberg, personal communication with the author.


11 Throughout this chapter I follow the methodology of world-systems analysis. Concerning terminology, it is important to note the distinction between a regional, or sub-world system, and The World-System, which is the outcome of political, legal and economic integration of all localized world systems that began in the 16th century under the aegis of European colonialism. It is common practice to denote the various regional systems in small case without hyphen, while capitalizing the hyphenated “globalist” World-System. I. Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.


14 Wilson, *Savage Republic*, p. 4.

15 Ibid., p. 5.

16 Personal correspondence with Borschberg and van Ittersum.


20 Right of Passage over Indian Territory case (Portugal–India), *ICJ Reports* (1960), p. 6.

21 This is made explicit by Portugal in its pleadings. Right of Passage, p. 11.

22 Right of Passage, p. 37.

23 Right of Passage, p. 37.


25 Right of Passage, p. 10.

26 Right of Passage, p. 37. Similarly, the finding by the ICJ of a limited right of Portuguese passage based upon a local custom operating between Lisbon and Delhi, is not tantamount to the acquisition of prescriptive jurisdiction. Right of Passage, pp. 37–8.


28 Ibid., pp. 10–11.

29 It is important to note the different temporal patterns governing the Southeast Asian “mainland” from the “archipelago”; in the latter, penetration and incorporation were almost simultaneous. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*.

30 In marked contrast to European behaviour in other parts of the “New World”, most notably in Central and South America.


32 Ibid., p. 45.

33 Ibid., p. 44.
Wilson, *Savage Republic*, pp. 395–400. Many other scholars have made similar arguments; Janet Abu-Lughod is typical in this regard. “Pathways and routes developed by the thirteenth century were later ‘conquered’ and adapted by a succession of European powers. Europe did not need to invent the system, since the basic groundwork was already in place by the thirteenth century when Europe was still only a peripheral and recent participant. In this sense, the rise of the West was facilitated by the pre-existing world economy that it restructured.” J.L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World-System A.D. 1250–1350*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 361.

Or, alternatively, the “age of penetration”.


“Nor truly are the Indians out of their wits and unsensible but ingenious and sharp-witted …”. Ibid., p. 15.

“That trading with the Indians is not proper to the Portugals by title of the Pope’s donation.” Ibid., p. 52.

“[S]eeing therefore [that] the Pope could take nothing away from [the Indians] which was theirs, he could not take away that right which they have of trading with whom they pleased.” Ibid.


Ibid., p. 45.

Ibid., p. 10.


Ibid., pp. 229–30.

Borschberg, *Hugo Grotius*, p. 68.

Wilson, *Savage Republic*.

Ibid.


64 Ibid., p. 255.


66 Wilson, Savage Republic, Ch. 5.


74 H. Grotius, Commentarius in Theses XI. An Early Treatise on Sovereignty, the Just War and the Legitimacy of the Dutch Revolt, edited with Introduction by Peter Borschberg, New York: Peter Lang, 1994, p. 229.


76 Ibid., p. 215.

77 Ibid., p. 225.

78 Ibid., p. 229.

79 Ibid., p. 249.

80 Ibid., p. 219 and pp. 281–3.

81 For Grotius, every society, “including States, is regarded as deriving its existence, in the last resort, from the Individual; and [no society] rises above the level of a

82 Grotius, *Commentarius*, p. 283.
83 Grotius, *De Indis*, p. 289.
84 Ibid., 24–5.

This marks an important difference of opinion between me and Ward. In *The Savage Republic*, I argue that the VOC, as a mercantile corporation, deliberately eschewed the Iberian model of territorialism, consistent with Holland’s position as hegemon within the early Capitalist World-Economy. Ward also highlights the differences between Portuguese and Dutch colonialism, but regularly denotes the VOC as an “empire”; her meaning seems to be that the Company was a form of “civil empire”, constituted by a plurality of political, legal and discursive structures but exercising a decisive degree of economic and political control across multiple spheres. See below.

90 Ward, *Networks of Empire*, p. 5.
91 Ibid., p. 6.
92 Following Ward, Borschberg holds that the juro-political basis of the VOC’s governance of the East Indies was its “creation and management of … multiple and intersecting fields of partial sovereignty”. Borschberg, Hugo Grotius, p. 153.
93 Ward, *Networks of Empire*, p. 41.
94 Ibid., p. 42.
95 Ibid., p. 6.
96 Wilson, “Making the world safe for Holland”.
97 Borschberg, Hugo Grotius, p. 156.
98 Ibid.
99 “The tributary system is the most visible and tangible manifestation of the hierarchy of rulers in East and Southeast Asia.” Ibid., p. 157.
100 “As is evidenced by considerations on overlapping sovereignty [cf. Ward] … relations between Asian rulers was not governed by equality of status, but by a relatively fluid hierarchy of authority and reputation … the hierarchy of Asian rulers was most significantly reflected in patterns of tribute and submission.” Ibid., p. 157.
101 Ibid., p. 156.
102 Ibid., p. 159. As Borschberg has pointed out elsewhere, part of the terminological problem here rests with Dutch authorities applying the vocabulary of western European feudalism to a non-European context. “Let’s take the [VOC] treaty with Sambas as an example. In 1609 the VOC signs a treaty with Sambas on Borneo, and the treaty is ostensibly concluded with the ‘king’. Now we know from Matlieff and others that Sambas is a personal ‘fiefdom’ (client polity) of Raja Bongsu of Johor. So to title the ruler of Sambas as a “king” is pushing it [sic], even more so since the ‘king’ signs himself with the Malay titles ‘Pangeran Adipati’. Pangeran is a prince of the royal blood; an Adipati is actually a ‘governor’, but in any case not a ‘sovereign king’. But the Dutch (deliberately?) project with the title ‘king’ a specific set (or sets) of rights and privileges on this ruler. They need him to be a sovereign so that they can sign an ‘international’ treaty with him.” Personal correspondence with the author. Of course,
under the declaratory theory, one of the cardinal signs of Sovereignty in international law is the capacity to negotiate and enter into treaties. When the Dutch, operating under the time worn adage that necessity is the mother of invention, chose to arbitrarily denote vassals as sovereigns, they were unconsciously creating the historical precedent needed to establish the plenary, or original, personality of Southeast Asian principalities – a point certainly not lost on Alexandrowicz.

103 Ibid.
104 Ibid., p. 344, fn. 71.
106 Ibid., p. 215.
107 Ibid., p. 221. Additional evidence indicating that the VOC understood perfectly well that it was dealing with a divisible political order is provided by Borschberg in Appendix 13, “Description by Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge of the four Johor Rulers: ’Ala’uddin Ri’ayat Shah III, Raja Bongsu, Raja Siak and Raja Laut, 1606”, pp. 211–15. Even the most cursory reading of this epistle makes it clear that the Malays were governed by overlapping and partial sovereignties.

108 Ibid., p. 221. Emphasis added.
110 Ibid., p. 32.
111 Ibid., pp. 33 and 209. In 1612, for example, a Dutch–Ceylon treaty was concluded in which “the President of the Dutch Company [sic] acted in the name of Prince Maurice and the States General. The States General (the real Sovereign) often appear as contracting party in transactions concluded at a later date [of Dutch penetration], reflecting the readiness of East Indian Rulers to fit the notion of a sovereign Republic into their processes of classification.” Ibid., pp. 33–4.

112 Borschberg, Hugo Grotius, p. 248.
114 Ibid., p. 47.
115 Ibid., Appendix 15, pp. 223–57.
116 Borschberg’s account also partially reaffirms my belief in the centrality of the Grotius–Oldenbarnevelt connection; the epistolary memorials “may have served as a blueprint for the early VOC, and judging by the surviving correspondences between the two men, Matelieff appears to have used Grotius to receive an entrée to, and gain the attention of, senior statesman Johan van Oldenbarnevelt”. Ibid., p. 47.

117 Ward, Networks of Empire, p. 28.
118 Ibid., p. 10.
119 Ibid., p. 23.
120 Alexandrowicz does not appear in either the Bibliography or the Index. Grotius’s Mare Liberum is listed in the Bibliography, but it is not discussed in the main body of the work.

123 The Batavians.
124 Tuck, The Rights of War and Peace, p. 82.
125 Tentatively identified as the Rajah of Lalang; Grotius, De Indis, p. 189. De Indis consists of three separate segments: (i) the Historica/C. XI, which treats the history of the Luso-Dutch inter-state rivalry in the East Indies; (ii) the Dogmatical C. I, III–X, and XII–XV, which legitimizes maritime prize-taking in terms of
Just War, and (iii) the *Prolegomena* C. II, which functions as a separate “gloss” on the *Dogmatica*. For discussion, see Wilson, “On heterogeneity and the naming of *De Indis* of Hugo Grotius”, pp. 72–115.

126 Grotius, *De Indis*, p. 189.
127 Ibid., p. 192.
3 The Phrakhlang Ministry of Ayutthaya
Siamese instrument to cope with the early modern world

*Bhawan Ruangsilp*

**Ayutthaya and early modernity**

The Siamese Kingdom of Ayutthaya rose to prominence in Southeast Asia from the middle of the fourteenth century and was ultimately destroyed in 1767. The rise of Ayutthaya has been ascribed to different forces, especially the internal needs for re-settlement and its strategic location along the China–Southeast Asia trade routes. Likewise, its fall has been explained in different ways: a fatal consequence of an ideological war centred on the Indian-influenced idea of universal kingship and of economic and commercial rivalry between Siam and Burma. These interpretations which explain the developments of Ayutthaya as a result of either internal or external forces suggest a common notion of historians that during its four-century existence this early modern Southeast Asian polity was continuously expanding itself to take advantage of and to defend itself from the initial stage of globalization.

Ayutthaya was a Janus polity which sought the traditional and the novel and looked both to the hinterlands and to the seas. In earlier studies, the Siamese Kingdom has been explained as a territorial power based on agriculture and military strength. Its success was based on its ability in effective control and use of manpower – which presented an intrinsic problem for traditional states on mainland Southeast Asia – for military and economic purposes. In a more recent study, more emphasis was laid on Ayutthaya as one of the most frequented maritime ports in Southeast Asia with strong state interest in foreign trade. Ayutthaya was a “port-polity” which had a double function of political and economic centre.

In the “Age of Commerce” (1450–1680) in Anthony Reid’s conception, Southeast Asian peoples were connected with each other and cultivated contacts with extra-regional agents by maritime intercourse more than ever before. The activities by sea, essentially stimulated by commercial purposes, linked Ayutthaya with a world wider than land-based connections alone could offer. Chris Baker argues that Ayutthaya rose to prominence on mainland Southeast Asia through maritime interactions from its inception.

Here we shall consider maritime connectedness as an agency of “early modernity” in Southeast Asia. The increase of maritime interactions, which
was a global phenomenon, led to intensified exploitation of human, material and intellectual exchanges which contributed to both ephemeral and structural changes in the region. To explain Ayutthaya from a “seas perspective” as Leonard Andaya puts it in this volume (see Chapter 4), or in the context of “Asian maritime worlds” as Haneda Masashi coins elsewhere, should increase our understanding of its development in connection with early modernity, not only as a transition period but also as a transition process between the classical era and the westernized, colonial modern period.

This chapter will argue that between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, in coping with the novelty which maritime connectedness brought with it, the Kingdom of Ayutthaya responded with the invention of a bureaucratic tool, the Phrakhlang Ministry, to deal with the expansion of regional and global trade and migrations as well as the increasing complexity of inter-state relations.

The Phrakhlang Ministry: innovation of opportunity and necessity

Throughout the four centuries of its existence, the Kingdom of Ayutthaya experienced the expansion, and occasionally contraction, of trade and foreign relations as well as the incessant increase of permanent and temporary immigration from different origins driven by economic and political motivations. As the world became intertwined through seas and oceans resulting in the intensification of contacts, Ayutthaya needed a structure to manage or prevent an anarchy of maritime interaction.

Ayutthaya developed its interests in the outside world for two main reasons. On the one hand, it was the desire of the ruling elite of the kingdom to connect with the outside world. Secondly, its location allowed it to capitalize gains, materially and intellectually, from the maritime intercourse within and from outside the region.

Traditionally, Southeast Asia, located between the two major civilizations, India and China, was important as a gateway from the west to the Middle Kingdom. The maritime trade of Siam covered large areas from Arabia to Japan, further to Europe by European merchants. The kingdom possessed two major ports: Ayutthaya (and Bangkok) on the Gulf of Siam, with its trade network consisting of the Malay and Indonesian archipelago and the South China Sea, and Tenasserim (through Mergui) with its commercial connections in the Bay of Bengal.

The ruling elite of Ayutthaya were especially interested and involved in acquiring commercial profits. Together with the taxes collected in cash and kind and tributes received from the vassal states, foreign trade was the most essential source of the king’s revenue. David K. Wyatt explained the relationship between economic development and politics in Ayutthaya that “the more the king gained wealth through trade, the better able he was to overawe or overcome both domestic and neighbouring rivals and join their territory to his, thereby further improving his ability to trade.”
argues that domestic commercial growth (besides demographic growth) champions the role of local agency in the commercial expansion of Ayutthaya and Southeast Asia: “control of commerce as a source of wealth and a pre-requisite to power”.  

Export goods were its natural resources, especially forest and marine products, and minerals; foodstuffs and agricultural products, especially rice, and handicrafts. Furthermore, the Siamese ruling class was addicted to consumption of foreign goods, which also served as status symbol setting the political elite apart from the rest of the society. Imported products included luxury goods, curiosities, precious metal and Indian textiles. These large trade networks and varieties of products required an elaborate instruction to manage.

As a result of these interests, part of the economic practices of Ayutthaya was based on state-organized trade. Despite his position as the lord of all lives and lands in the kingdom, in practice the king of Ayutthaya had direct control only over the capital city and adjacent cities. His geographically limited administrative power was, however, complemented by his monopoly of foreign trade.  

In principle, the Siamese bureaucracy, including its persons in charge, was assigned for effective control and exploitation of the labour under supervision, provided by the phrai (freemen), the basic source of labour, for military and other purposes, like public works. The distinction of responsibilities of the administrative personnel was introduced in the Hierarchy Laws of King Trailok dating from 1466. According to these legal texts, the Siamese bureaucracy was divided into two grand divisions, with the military under the minister of the Kalahom and the civilian under the minister of the Mahatthai. Each division consisted of several departments, sections, subsections, etc., each with specified functional duties. In the civilian division, there were four ministries which were in charge of the capital, the palace, the agriculture, and the treasury.

The minister of treasury was known officially as Kosathibodi meaning the great treasurer, or more casually as Phrakhlang. His ministry, the Phrakhlang Sinkha institution, was designed to meet the economic, administrative and social necessities of the Kingdom. The “Ministry of External Relations and Maritime Trading Affairs”, as defined by Kennon Breazeale, was established as a major bureaucratic apparatus as part of Ayutthaya’s attempts to cope with the evolving and changing local and global circumstances. Separate sections were created to be responsible for foreign trade, foreign affairs, and the regulation of immigrant trading communities. As the greatest merchant of Ayutthaya, the king was keen to acquire strong control over trade in his port; therefore, the Phrakhlang Ministry answered directly to the king.

Particularly by means of royal monopolies and discriminatory trade, the institution was designed primarily to control economic activities, especially the buying and selling of import and export produce from and to both local and foreign traders. The ministry was divided into four parts: (1) the Department of General Administration, Appeals, and Records; (2) the
Department of Royal Warehouses; (3) the Department of Eastern Maritime Affairs and Crown Junks (*Krom Tha Sai*); and (4) the Department of Western Maritime Affairs (*Krom Tha Khwa*).\(^{18}\)

The head of the *Krom Tha Sai* – a Chinese resident of Ayutthaya – was responsible for trade in the South and East China Seas (shipping to and from ports in Southern China, Nagasaki, the Ryukyu Islands, and Vietnam) and had jurisdiction over all Chinese and Japanese in the Thai kingdom.\(^{19}\) Usually with a Muslim from South Asia as its head, the *Krom Tha Khwa* was responsible for maritime relations with South Asia; the shipping to Ayutthaya by Muslim traders from the Malay Peninsula\(^{20}\); and, geographically overlapping with the Eastern Department, the Southeast Asian Archipelago.\(^{21}\) The Departments of Eastern and Western Maritime Affairs were thus the clearest indicators of a Siamese administrative response to the growing maritime interaction and the elite’s desire for added revenue from foreign trade and increased access to foreign luxuries.

Towards the end of the Ayutthaya period, a decrease in the royal trade monopoly and an increase in private trade especially by officials – who increasingly hired Chinese to sail their junks to China – can be observed. Unlike King Prasatthong (r. 1629–1656) – who controlled his officials with a firm hand – and King Narai (r. 1656–1688) – who more willingly granted commercial freedom to foreigners in his service than to local officials, the eighteenth-century rulers were forced by their need for support from their officials to share trading profits with them.\(^{22}\) In the reign of King Borommakot (r. 1733–1758), it was reported that instead of paying some taxes to the court, the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, [Dutch] United East India Company) was obliged to give the officials of the treasury department a sum of twenty catties of silver per year for their services.\(^{23}\) The *Phrakhlang* Ministry had thus become an institution with negotiation power vis-à-vis both the monarch and the foreigners.

Besides the principal function of organizing foreign trade, the *Phrakhlang* minister and his officials, including harbour-masters and interpreters, were the first official contacts between the Siamese authorities and trading nations. They were the designated intermediaries and interpreters for the foreign communities in Ayutthaya. It was a responsibility of the *Phrakhlang* Ministry to control foreign trading communities in Ayutthaya, which was a multi-ethnic society. Its foreign population consisted of traders, war captives, political and religious refugees, mercenaries and experts in other fields, and missionaries. This situation raises the question of how the indigenous administration maintained peace and order.

The answer lays in the practicality of the Ayutthaya ruling elite which allowed a compromise between their own cultural and legal traditions with those of other ethnic groups. The Siamese court exercised legal plurality; that is, they gave limited administrative and judicial autonomy to some ethnic groups. Foreigners were permitted to take care of their own affairs within the communities, unless something violated the rules of Siam at the cost of the
common good. The plurality of the legal system existed in many places in Asia by the approval of the indigenous rulers as a response to the cosmopolitan environment of that time.24

Globalizing Ayutthaya: outlook, tasks and staffs

By the fourteenth century, Ayutthaya had long adopted Buddhism with some degree of Brahman and Hindu influences as the foundation of its culture and worldview. The novelty which the seas connection brought to Ayutthaya did not have a formative effect in reshaping its civilization. However, these external forces led to reactions: resistance or adaptation, exclusion or inclusion. The Phrakhlang Ministry was one of the sites to observe Siam’s reactions to their expanding world, for the institution was at the forefront of the interaction.

As an important commercial centre on the Southeast Asian mainland, Ayutthaya had long been engaged with the maritime trade and migration of the East and in the process of the early stage of globalization became an integral part of the global exchange. In the time when trade and diplomacy were the two sides of the same coin, Ayutthaya’s model for conducting external relations was influenced and shaped by the Chinese tributary system. The only way to be allowed the most desired access to the China market for Ayutthaya and other Southeast Asian polities was to accept the role of tribute sender, a vassal. Without doubt, China was in the highest position in Siam’s diplomatic hierarchy.

Tributary relation was replicated in Southeast Asia, including by Ayutthaya. The court of Ayutthaya itself maintained a hierarchical order of the polities with which it had contact, and would treat a visiting embassy according to the status of the ruler who sent it. But often this was the polite exchange of gifts as a formality accompanying mutually beneficial trade. The journey to submit tribute gave the vassal an opportunity to trade at a larger port, that of the suzerain, in return for a symbolic acceptance of his primacy. The lord–vassal relations of the tributary system, China-centric and Southeast Asian, functioned as an exclusive trade agreement. Outside the tributary relations, the king of Ayutthaya accepted diplomatic exchanges with equal counterparts, most importantly the rulers of Burma, some South Asian states and European states. This was how Siam organized its inter-state relations with the world.

Globalization has served as a concept to explain the development of the modern world, according to which almost every part of the world became interconnected through economic interdependence and consumerism crossing any national and cultural divide. Geoffrey C. Gunn applied this concept to explain world history from 1500 to 1800: that the world had experienced the “first globalization” which covered the Eurasian exchange, especially intellectually and culturally.25

It can also be said that the success of the European overseas exploration from the fifteenth century contributed greatly to the increase of global connectivity. As a rule, maritime activities brought along new people, material,
ideas and practices. What concerns us here is that the presence of the Europeans had a significant effect on, among other things, economic practices and the conduct of diplomatic or inter-state relations in Asia. The westerners introduced their ways of commercial practice, which included operation of monopoly and exclusive rights in highly demanded goods. Considered new to the Asians were also the exemption of European subjects from indigenous judicial system – a precursor of extraterritorial rights – and the enforcement of control over the previously unclaimed Asian waters, such as by the Portuguese *cartaz* system which compelled non-Portuguese ships to pay duties for the right of passage in Portugal’s areas of operation in the Indian Ocean. Apart from different diplomatic protocol, the Europeans also introduced the conclusion of treaties with attempted long-term binding effects according to the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* (“agreements must be kept”), which requires that obligations be respected for the efficacy of the whole system, laying foundation for future international law.

Admittedly, the Siamese court, like other ruling elite groups in Asia, accepted treaties as a means to conduct diplomatic and trading relations. Some of these foreign, western practices induced resistance from the Siamese side. When in the 1660s King Narai wanted to finance his wars in the north, his *Phrakhlang* minister instituted a number of changes in the ways Siam’s international trade was conducted. In 1662, the court imposed a royal monopoly on all trade, which meant that goods destined for export had first to be sold to the crown, although they had granted the Dutch exclusive right on exporting hides.26

The tasks of the *Phrakhlang* Ministry started from the moment the foreigners arrived in the Chao Phraya River. Especially foreign merchants knew well enough that their people and goods had to be inspected at two tollhouses along the river on their way to and fro the capital city. If they came, and left, as representatives of an authority, they had to present themselves officially to the Ministry. If foreigners meant or were forced to settle in Ayutthaya, they were to be assigned by the royal court a head of community, who often shared their origin and who was to be subjected to the supervision of the *Phrakhlang* minister. The historical and archaeological references to foreign settlements in Ayutthaya are the best evidence for its cosmopolitanism.

There are indications that the Ministry worked systematically to a certain degree. The *Phrakhlang* Ministry apparently had an archive. For example, they allegedly consulted the record of receiving a Dutch embassy in the 1650s and they disputed the Dutch version of the treaty of 1664 with their own.27 In the presence of and contact with foreigners from many different origins, foreign experts were needed for translation and interpreter services to be done by the officials of the *Phrakhlang* Ministry to overcome both linguistic and cultural barriers. The Siamese court officially communicated with the Europeans mainly in Malay and Portuguese, the languages which served as the *lingua franca* of the day in Southeast Asia. For example, the Dutch state letters to the Siamese authorities were to be translated from Dutch to Portuguese to Malay and at last to Thai. The translation ceremony was held in a temple, a
sacred place worthy of the importance of the sender and recipient of the letters. It is to be noted that the Dutch *stadholder* from far away was “localized”, presented in a more familiar version to the Siamese as the “King of Holland”.28 The whole process of the translation of the state letters exchanged between the king of Ayutthaya and the other rulers offered a picture of Siam’s participation in world affairs and the involvement of the people of different origins who contributed with their linguistic skills.

The Siamese were not equipped for long-distance travel and navigation. Social structure and values prevented them from this kind of activity. The most important labour force, the *phrai*, was bound by service to the ruling elite which took up half of their time each year; while the majority of them were also engaged in agricultural production. These tasks were, therefore, fulfilled by foreign labour and experts. Chinese crewmen were used to sail Siamese junks or to bring products of Siam to foreign destinations.

For these reasons, the *Phrakhlang* Ministry had to consist of foreign officials or to hire foreign temporary employees. Given its need for commercial and other expertise, the Ayutthayan bureaucracy was inevitably open to foreigners.

In their attempts to strengthen their position vis-à-vis those whose power was based on control over labour, the Siamese rulers built up a new kind of wealth through control over commodities and trade. As Wyatt remarked, here the kings “embarked upon a novel policy” of hiring foreigners to conduct their foreign trade and it was “[t]hese men [who] hastened Siam’s involvement in the wider world.”29

**Localizing the world: foreign experts and expertise**

By the fourteenth century, dynamic migrations of peoples had significantly contributed to the early stage of the state-building process in Southeast Asia. In the following century, partly as a result of the beginning of European overseas expansion, the region came to experience a drastic increase of migrations of the global populations. As international migrations intensified, Ayutthaya correspondingly became increasingly “cosmopolitan”, “multi-ethnic” or “international”. However, it should also be noted that some migrations were forced, such as war captives.

The royal Thai chronicles from the Ayutthaya period as well as foreign contemporary sources give evidence of the diversity of ethnic groups who came to temporarily frequent or permanently settle in the kingdom. It can be argued that Ayutthaya was cosmopolitan by opportunity as much as by necessity. The rulers and elite had options, as well as opportunities offered especially by geographical and commercial factors. The royal court of Ayutthaya, which was aware of its own inadequacies in some required skills and knowledge, hoped to rely on the expertise of the foreigners. These were among other things, military and commercial skills. They reflected the needs of this port polity.
Foreigners were lured by the tolerant policy of the ruling elite and the attitude of their like-minded population in regard of different religions and cultures. Abundance, mild-climate environment and prosperous economy proved to be the strengths of Ayutthaya for settlers. At court, foreign experts – militia, artisans, physicians and traders – lived on rewards and the mercy of the rulers. With their expertise, the “outsiders” could transform themselves into “insiders”. The royal court often integrated foreign experts into the bureaucratic structure, granting them Thai ranks and titles. In Ayutthaya, social mobility was possible by merit, including for foreigners. One of the most remarkable examples was Constantine Phaulkon, a sailor of Cephalonian origin who became the most trusted servant of King Narai in the 1680s as a result of his commercial skills and experience, linguistic capacity and cross-cultural understanding.

Together with the military departments, the Phrakhlang Ministry was one of the most important employers of foreign experts. It recruited people with navigation and commercial skills as well as those to serve as linguistic and cultural intermediaries for the Siamese court. The foreign origins of the Ministry officials were manifested especially in the sub-divisions, Krom Tha Sai (Department of Eastern Maritime Affairs and Crown Junks) and Krom Tha Khwa (Department of Western Maritime Affairs).30

As Wyatt concluded, the strength of foreigners in the royal service, like in the Phrakhlang Ministry, lay in their resources in commodities and international trade vis-à-vis the traditional elite’s control of labour. It was possible for them to rise to high official positions and to found “dynasties of royal officers who monopolized certain state offices and played prominent political roles.”31

The involvement of Western Asians in the development of the Phrakhlang Ministry went back at least as far as the first years of the seventeenth century. Two prominent Muslim traders from the Persian Gulf indeed helped re-organize the ministry in the 1610s.32 The two brothers, originally from the Persian Gulf, played an important role in the Ministry after their arrival in Ayutthaya in 1602 and taking Siamese wives as a means to be socially integrated. The elder, Sheik Ahmad, became the head of the Krom Tha Khwa, the department which dealt with Muslim traders from the Archipelago, India and the Near East. King Songtham appointed him as Phrakhlang and later the head of the Mahaththai, which was one of the highest positions in the kingdom. Sheik Ahmad was succeeded by his son and then his grandson in the office. His younger brother, Muhammad Said, became founder of another powerful official family. His son Aqa Muhammad Astarabadi was influential in the early years of King Narai’s reign.33 In 1685 family control of the Phrakhlang Ministry was interrupted, when King Narai appointed Constantine Phaulkon to the office (Phaulkon was de facto Phrakhlang but never actually held the position formally). Phaulkon’s rise to power weakened the position of the Muslim trading communities who had long had influence in the Ministry. He gave proof that these traders, presumably the Persians, Malays and Indians,
had falsified financial accounts. He also accused them of trying to promote the conversion of the kingdom to Islam. Phaulkon himself was to take part in the French attempt to promote the conversion of the king to Christianity. In this case, it did not end well for both the accused and the accuser because their plan of conversion upset Siam’s Buddhist elite. Contacts and influences through the Phrakhlang Ministry’s work could lead not only to power but also to complications and conflicts.

Chinese men had been serving in the Siamese administration for a long time; they conducted trade on behalf of the Siamese government as officials in the service of the state. But it was for the first time in the 1720s that a Chinese achieved the prominent position of Phrakhlang. King Thaisa appointed a Chinese Phrakhlang, who had been prominent at court since his father’s reign. He played a very important role in integrating the local Chinese community into the economic and social life of Ayutthaya. In the reign of King Thaisa, much of the Siamese trade with China and Japan that earlier had been in the hands of the Dutch now fell into the hands of private Chinese traders. During the service of the Chinese Phrakhlang, the Ministry virtually was dominated by Chinese at all levels. The trade between Siam and China began to boom when in 1727 the Chinese government almost completely opened South China ports to shipments of Siamese rice. All those involved with this trade prospered, including the Siamese court and the Phrakhlang.

At the death of King Thaisa in January 1733, a succession conflict profoundly affected the politics and economy of the kingdom. Many of the leading officials, among them the Chinese Phrakhlang, who supported the king’s sons, were purged by the king’s brother who won the contest. The new King Borommakot rewarded his major aide, Khun Chamnan Channarong by raising him to the highest rank and title of Chaophraya Channanborirak and giving him the Phrakhlang office. The rise of Chamnan confirmed the rise to power of another of the important official families of Siam. The new Phrakhlang was the descendant of a line of Indian Brahmans who had come to Siam in the reign of King Prasatthong and served in ceremonial capacities at court in the seventeenth century. The title of his father’s brother Chaophraya Mahasombat suggests that he may have served as Phrakhlang, too. On the death of Chamnan in 1753 the office was given to an official of Chinese descent, Chaophraya Phrakhlang (Chim) who was married to Chamnan’s daughter.

Towards the end of the Ayutthaya period, the Chinese group represented by Chim and the Persian family continued to dominate the Ministry. They had an important base in overseas trading activities, which generated wealth, thereby countering the control of labour in all power struggles.

**Conclusion**

In the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries, the significant growth of maritime interactions, which included material and intellectual exchange and sea-borne migrations, compelled the Kingdom of Ayutthaya to react to its own
advantage. In order to cope with the new circumstances, the Siamese court offered foreign traders and experts and their people possibilities to make a living, religious tolerance and some degree of self-governing in exchange for their skills and technology, most importantly linguistic, commercial and military.

One of these reactions, which directly concerned foreign trade and inter-state relations, was the Phrakhlang Ministry, a bureaucratic innovation resulting from the opportunities and necessities that Siam was facing. The Ayutthaya period departed from its Tai state predecessors because it was organized in a new, more elaborate way. The creation of the Phrakhlang Ministry reflects a certain degree of division of labour in Siamese bureaucracy and state organization in trade.

However, the challenges brought by maritime intercourse were not enough to enforce an overhaul of Ayutthaya’s politics and administration, of which the purposes were, at least theoretically, to serve the monarch. The king of Ayutthaya maintained his position through his ability to exercise control and patronage, and to create awe-inspiring splendour. These abilities were significantly derived from the wealth from trade and benefit of foreign contacts; to achieve both of these was the responsibility of the Phrakhlang Ministry. Despite the immense importance of his function, the Phrakhlang minister was, like all other bureaucratic positions, subjected to the “personal rule” of the Siamese king, who relied less on any institutional backup such as the bureaucracy or the rules of succession, and more on his personal accomplishment in exercising his power.38 Therefore, in reality, at the ruler’s wishes, “military” functions could be undertaken by Phrakhlang ministers, whose tasks were supposed to be commercial, diplomatic and “civilian”.

The Phrakhlang Ministry was institutionalized to serve the purpose of existence of Ayutthaya as one of the most prosperous international port cities of early modern Southeast Asia. The emergence of the bureaucratic unit was in response to the needs to gain access to and control over goods and peoples. It lost its usefulness when Western influence forced Siam to modernize around the middle of the nineteenth century. Then, similarly to what happened to some other indigenous traditions, the Phrakhlang Ministry, with its emphasis on trade monopolies and crown shipping, was to be overridden by Westernization of economic practices on behalf of the “free trade” doctrine.

Notes
2 This is argued in Chris Baker, “Ayutthaya rising: from land or sea?”, JSEAS, 34, 1 (February 2003): 41–62.
3 This argument is presented in Sunait Chutintaranond, “‘Cakravartin’: the ideology of traditional warfare in Siam and Burma, 1548–1605”, Diss., Cornell University, 1990.


See Chris Baker, “Ayutthaya rising”.


For a survey of the trade of Siam with Asian partners, see Kennon Breazeale, “Thai maritime trade and the ministry responsible”, in Kennon Breazeale (ed.), *From Japan to Arabia: Ayutthaya’s Maritime Relations with Asia*, Bangkok: The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 1999, pp. 1–54, especially pp. 23–45.


Breazeale, “Thai maritime trade and the ministry responsible”, pp. 23–45.


Manop, *khunnang Ayutthaya*, p. 137.


See Breazeale, “Thai maritime trade and the ministry responsible”, pp. 23–45.


For a detailed study of the Krom Tha Khwa, see Julispong Chularatan, *botbat lae nathi khong krom tha khwa nai samai Ayutthaya thueng samai ratanakosin, 2153–2435* [The Krom Tha Khwa: Roles and Functions during the Ayutthaya and Ratanakosin Periods, 1610–1892]. 2nd edn. Bangkok: Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 2007. The emphasis of the book is, however, laid on the later Bangkok period.

A part of the Three Seals Laws (Kot Mai Tra Sam Duang) – the Law of Civil Hierarchy (probably of 1466) – outlines the basic organization of the Phrakhlang Sinka. For a survey of this ministry see Breazeale, “Thai maritime trade and the ministry responsible”, pp. 5–15.

Saichon Wannarat has suggested that the eighteenth-century ruling class became more bourgeois, materialistic, consumerist, imbued with empirical views and a mercantilist mind, as a result of its increasing participation in trade. Saichon Wannarat, “setthakit lae sangkom thai nai samai plai ayutthaya [Thai Economy and Society in the Late Ayutthaya Period]”, *Warasam Thammasat* [Journal of Thammasat University], 11, 3 (September 1982): 6–27.

From my previous study, the Dutch sources show a clear picture of how the Siamese court treated foreign residents and exercised legal plurality in the case of the Dutch community in Siam. See Bhawan, *Dutch East India Company Merchants*, pp. 41–9.


27 Bhawan, *Dutch East India Company Merchants*, pp. 41–9.

28 Bhawan, *Dutch East India Company Merchants*, p. 31.

29 Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, p. 94.

30 Breazeale, “Thai maritime trade and the ministry responsible”, p. 5.


32 Breazeale, “Thai maritime trade and the ministry responsible”, p. 9.

33 Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, p. 95.


36 Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, pp. 109–10; see also Dhiravat, “Princes, pretenders and the Chinese Phrakhlang”, pp. 115–20. The Chinese also became quickly rooted in the provincial bureaucracy in such places as Ligor.


Part II

Interactions and transactions

“No transaction happens unless it is voluntary. It only happens if both of you think you win.”

John Frank Stossel (1947–), American television personality
In recent years there has been great interest shown in adopting a seas perspective to the study of history. The literature has become increasingly sophisticated and has expanded our understanding of the various ways in which the seas can and should be studied. But the focus has been almost exclusively on the major (in terms of size and economic importance) bodies of water, such as the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. Yet there are other ways of conceptualizing the sea by focusing on connectivities – the interaction of communities through exchange of goods and ideas – which in turn fosters a sense of community and often creates what one scholar has termed a “family resemblance”. These “seas” are not those that modern geographers have arbitrarily determined as “distinct bodies of water partially separated from other waters by intervening lands”, but functioning units linked together by stretches of seas and lands. In the past the seas in the Asian region were conceptualized in different ways. Providing a name to a particular sea was based on more than merely a physical geographic unit, in fact it defined a space consisting of both land and water that comprised a meaningful economic and cultural entity. Using this definition avoids the tendency to conceptualize studies around physical bodies of water termed “seas” or “oceans”, and encourages instead a focus on linkages among littoral communities that form meaningful unities. In this chapter the focus is on eastern Indonesia by way of illustrating the function of “seas” in creating workable networks that incorporated the myriad islands with their distinctive cultures and languages.

Adopting the seas as a historical perspective

There has been a growing interest in the seas as a historical perspective, and two of the most useful works on the subject have been Philip Steinberg’s *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (2001), and Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell’s *The Corrupting Sea* (2000). Horden and Purcell have even introduced the idea of a “virtual sea”, referring to “spaces of danger and variable communications – mountain ranges, forests, or arid wildernesses such as the Sahara”. The relationship between human communities and ecology,
including the degree of connectedness of those who share this common environment, is not unlike that within an actual sea. What is exciting about this idea is the possibility of reconfiguring regions in a new way that offers alternative ways of studying the past. Students should be encouraged to identify and study areas of interaction in the past as well as the present that contest national and area studies boundaries. The recent interest in “Zomia”, a term newly created to refer to a little studied world of the mountainous regions that span Central Asia, South Asia, China, and Southeast Asia, is one such example. But interactions between human communities in a more limited environment also occur, such as in the eastern Indonesian seas at the eastern extremity of the Indian Ocean.

In writing about the Mediterranean, Hordern and Purcell have made a useful distinction between a study IN the ocean and OF the ocean. The former has resulted in studies of people and places that are located IN a particular body of water, such as the Mediterranean, without necessarily having much to do with other communities and sites sharing the same sea. In such studies it is not the sea that is a prominent feature, but the adjoining land. A study OF the ocean, on the other hand, emphasizes the sea as a region of “complex interaction of human and physical factors, not simply a material backdrop of a set of immutable constraints”. Equally important is the fact that such human and physical factors are dynamic forces that are contingent on the shifts in tastes and attitudes toward commodities, volatile weather patterns, forced or voluntary population mobility, and other global and local factors. Finally, a “sea” is only a “sea” if it has a sense of place, the acknowledgement that there is a unity based on tangible as well as intangible elements. It is identified by interactions among communities in the form of material and spiritual exchange within a dynamic human and environmental landscape.

The dynamism is especially evident in eastern Indonesia, where the variant needs of littoral communities created “overlapping seas” based on different objectives. Eastern Indonesia includes thousands of high islands and coral reefs that stretch from east Sumbawa to the Birdshead Peninsula in New Guinea (Map 4.1). Indigenous to this area are the spices and aromatic woods that were greatly valued in the ancient and early modern world and proved to be a major impetus to international trade. By the early eighteenth century, these seas were also the major providers of the holothurian tripang (trepang) (bêche-de-mer or sea slugs), a new Chinese delicacy, and of slaves to satisfy the increasing need for labour in the European cities in Southeast Asia and in the new pepper gardens planted by local rulers in response to international demand. Eastern Indonesia was geographically distant from the world centres, but it was never isolated. Its local trade systems were linked to regional and international networks that extended to all parts of the globe. In this chapter, cognizance is taken of Jerry Bentley’s sensible advice that one should seek connections “without losing sight either of local experiences or of the global interactions that sometimes conditioned the experiences of the regions themselves”.

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Map 4.1 Island world of Southeast Asia
Connectivities that form part of a “sea” of communities, however, go beyond the purely commercial; they also include, in Hordern and Purcell’s words, “a complex interaction of human and physical factors”. Through such interactions a common political and cultural idiom is developed and a strong “family resemblance” formed that come to define that sea. Two such “seas” have been identified that functioned in eastern Indonesia in the early modern period. The first was based in a local area of Nusa Tenggara Timur (Eastern Lesser Sunda Islands), and the other on the entire eastern Indonesian region with emanating from the port of Makassar.

The Topasses Sea

The Topasses Sea is located within the present-day Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). It is an extensive area of numerous high islands and coral atolls inhabited by people of widely variant cultures, who speak mutually unintelligible Austronesian or Papuan-type languages. Yet beneath this bewildering diversity of seascapes and societies are communities that actively seek connections with the outside world to survive in a very hostile environment. As a result of low rainfall, high wind speeds, and intense solar radiation, NTT is the driest part of Indonesia. The rain-bearing northwest monsoon winds drop most of their moisture over western Indonesia before reaching NTT, and the dry season is extreme because of the dry southeast winds and the low topography of many of the islands. It is the strength and duration of these dry trade winds that have had a severe impact on life in the region. For many communities in NTT, therefore, it is essential to maintain networks of relationships with the outside world to meet both material and spiritual needs.

A major component of this Topasses Sea is the Lamaholot cultural area, which includes the eastern part of the island of Flores, the neighbouring islands of Adonara, Solor, Lembata (except for Kedang in the east), and the scattered enclaves on the coasts of Pantar and Alor. One of the striking features of Lamaholot society is the presence of a dualism between the Damon and the Paji. Although evidence of the existence of this dualism was first noted in the sixteenth century, the earliest detailed discussion of it is by a nineteenth-century Dominican, P.P. Arndt. The local characterization of this dualism is expressed succinctly as “Damon lewo pulo, Paji watang léma” (“The Damon have ten districts and the Paji have five coastal areas”). The expression captures the distinction between these two groups. The Damon were associated with the interior and agriculture, while the Paji were linked to the coast and trade. By the seventeenth century as a result of contact with the Portuguese, the Damon also became identified with Christianity, while the Paji became associated with Islam, though both groups had followers who continued to adhere to traditional indigenous beliefs. This formal and precise distinction, however, obscures the complexity of the division. There were enclaves of one group situated in the midst of another, and despite the enmity between the two characterized by skirmishes and headhunting they often interacted.
Map 4.2 Eastern Indonesia
peacefully, particularly in the marketplace. According to reports between
the sixteenth and late nineteenth centuries, the principal leader of the Damon
was Raja Larantuka, while the Paji were led by Raja Adonara and in later
years also by the Raja Solor. At one stage Raja Larantuka succeeded in
conquering western and central Adonara, thereby introducing the Damon
into a formerly totally Paji region. The Paji were apparently once dominant
in the Lamaholot but the Damon eventually became a larger and more
powerful group.

The Damon–Paji dualism was reinforced by the intrusion of the so-called
“black Portuguese” or Topasses, who represented a variety of different groups
that were characterized by their identification with the Portuguese language,
Catholicism, and dress associated with the Portuguese. The facility in the
language, depth of knowledge of the religion, and understanding of what
constituted “European” dress mattered far less than the fierce attachment to
these elements as a meaningful source of their identity. The origins of the
black Portuguese in Asia would have begun in the Portuguese enclave of Goa
in India, the main centre of the Portuguese Asian empire or Estado da India.
They had been the brainchild of Affonso de Albuquerque, who hoped that
the offspring of unions between the Portuguese and women from good local
Indian families would in time produce a loyal corps of subjects to staff the

Map 4.3 Timor
Online at: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East_Timor_map_mhn.jpg (accessed
15 December 2004).
empire. The reality proved far less sanguine, as the “good” Indian families rejected the lower status Portuguese men.\textsuperscript{14}

Consequent of the strength of the Damon–Paji dualism in the Lamaholot area, the Topasses inevitably had to choose sides, and so they became associated with the Damon. The Topasses knew that they could rely on their native Damon allies because of the intense rivalry between the Damon and the Paji communities. The Topasses were therefore able to maintain their strongholds at Larantuka because they were shielded by the local Damon communities. The latter, on the other hand, could rely on the Topasses for help against their enemies, which did occur in the history of the region. Within this protective environment, the Topasses were able to develop into a formidable entity in the Solor archipelago. The emergence of a rivalry between the two leading Topasses families, the Hornays and the da Costas, would have been regarded by the indigenous inhabitants as “natural” because the Lamaholot and many other eastern Indonesian societies share the belief that the world consists of dualisms in which the opposing halves are antagonistic yet complementary.

The Hornay family had become one of the most important traders in \textit{cassia lignea} (a type of cinnamon) in Flores and in sandalwood in north Timor in the vicinity of Mena. Jan Hornay’s son, Gonsalvo de Hornay, had even established his own kingdom and was regarded as one of the most powerful individuals in Timor. Gonsalvo’s sons, Antonio and Francisco, later also became important rajas in Timor.\textsuperscript{15} Antonio served the Portuguese captain in Larantuka, Simão Luís, who was a protégé of the great Portuguese entrepreneur, Francisco Vieiera de Figueredo. At Luis’s death in 1664, Antonio was proposed as the new Captain-Major (Capitão Mor), which was strongly opposed by another Topas leader, Mateus da Costa, who had distinguished himself in battles against the Dutch on Timor. This was the beginning of the struggle between the Hornay and the da Costa families for dominance in the Solor archipelago, but particularly in Timor.\textsuperscript{16}

Having experienced the benefits of becoming “indigenized” in the Lamaholot area, the Topasses also sought to become part of the indigenous communities in Timor. There would have been a smooth transition from the Lamaholot areas to Timor. The exchange of products and food between the Lamaholot and the Timorese over the centuries contributed to the existence of tales that reflect their relationship. The ancestors of the rajas of Sikka in eastern Flores, for example, are said to have run aground and settled on the island. Associated with this voyage were also the settlements of Konga to the south of Larantuka and of Oecussi in northern Timor.\textsuperscript{17} The Topasses’ links with these Damon settlements would have thus facilitated their acceptance in Oecussi in Timor. But an equally noteworthy aspect of the tale is its inclusion of the two powerful families of the Topasses: the Hornays and the da Costas. In this same ancestral story of more recent vintage, there are two quarrelling sons of the ruler of the well-known Malay kingdom of Melaka. One decides to leave with his nephew, and they eventually land in Flores and establish the settlement of Sikka across from the island of Ende. The son is called Costa and his nephew, Hornay.
Costa goes to Timor, marries the daughter of Raja Ambeno, and then succeeds his father-in-law. He then names Hornay to succeed him. Although this particular version of the tale was collected in more recent times, it continues to emphasize the rivalry of the Hornays and the da Costas, as well as the close relationship between Flores and Timor.

In Timor as in the Lamaholot, there was a dual process at work: the Topasses became “indigenized” because of the local communities’ willingness to “localize” them within their cultural world. The leaders of the Topasses community continued the practice begun in the Lamaholot of intermarriage with the royal houses of the many kingdoms on the island. One auspicious marriage was that between Antonio Hornay and the daughter of the ruler of the kingdom of Ambeno. The offspring of this marriage contributed to the influence of the Topasses within the Ambeno kingdom. But so dominant were the Topasses in Timor in terms of both economic and military power that the Hornays and the da Costas were able to form their own kingdoms. By becoming rajas and intermarrying with other royal households, the two powerful Topasses families became an integral part of the political, economic, and cultural landscape of Timor. While in the Lamaholot area the Topasses became part of the Damon–Paji dualism, in Timor they were viewed by many local kingdoms as worthy successors to the prestigious overlords associated with the Sonba’i and Wehale kingdoms.

In 1522 Antonio Pigafetta, the Italian doctor on board Magellan’s fleet, noted that in the southern part of Timor were four brothers who were kings of the island. Of these four, two were particularly important in the history of Timor. One ruled in “Oibich”, possibly Waiwiku, a major centre of the South Belu kingdom of Wehale. The second was ruler at “Lichsana”, perhaps Insana, with its principal port at Mena. Insana may have represented the whole of the Atoni-speaking area and hence would have been equivalent to the Sonba’i realm. Almost a century later in 1613 the ruler of Mena was regarded by the Dutch as the most important of the many kings of Timor. Intriguing is the statement that Mena maintained relations with the Muslims in Adonara. These Muslims in Adonara belonged to the Paji within the Lamaholot cultural area. In this period, therefore, Sonba’i via the ruler at the port of Mena would have been linked to the Muslim Paji under the rulers of Adonara and Solor and hence the natural enemies of the Damon and their Portuguese allies.

By the latter part of the seventeenth century many of the Topasses were born in the Solor archipelago or in Timor, and were truly “mestiço” or mixed in blood, attitudes, and loyalties. Topasses communities were found in different areas in the eastern part of Timor, and some came to play important roles as bodyguards to local rulers. By 1729 the Dutch estimated that there were approximately 40,000 Topasses scattered through the whole Solor archipelago and Timor. This was a considerable force when compared to the gradually diminishing numbers of both white Portuguese and Dutch in these islands. Moreover, they were ably led by the Hornays and the da Costas, who
eventually agreed to alternate leadership between the two families. Acting as indigenous rulers, they had contracted marriages with the many royal families on Timor and hence become part of the local cultural and political landscape. When the people of South Belu finally agreed to a peace with the white Portuguese in 1728 after a long period of hostilities, their one demand was that they be placed under “their lawful lord”, Francisco Hornay. With well-respected rulers, a formidable fighting force, and strong cultural links to the area, the Topasses gained acceptance as one of the many independent, indigenous kingdoms that dotted the landscape in Timor and the other islands of the Solor archipelago.

The Topasses Sea was created in the sixteenth and continued to function well into the eighteenth century. What characterized this Sea was the important role played by the Topasses, whose successful indigenization and localization had promoted and strengthened the connectivity of the littoral settlements in the Lamaholot cultural areas in the Solor archipelago and eastern Flores, as well as the indigenous communities in Timor. The successful functioning of this sea owed much to the complementarity of activities of its participants. For example, the Timorese generally were averse to sea-going activities, but they lived on an island that provided the much-desired commodity, sandalwood. The Solorese, on the other hand, lived on far smaller islands and were noted seafarers. It was therefore the Solorese who were the major shippers and carriers of goods in this sea, while the Timorese were the principal providers of sandalwood. Solor also became a major entrepôt in the Topasses Sea, where ships from all over the archipelago converged bringing rice, cloth, iron, porcelain – and for bride price requirements for certain communities, elephant tusks and bronze drums in exchange for sandalwood. From here the Solorese ships serviced the other settlements within the Topasses Sea, and returned with various goods for export outside the NTT but particularly the prized cargoes of sandalwood from Timor.

In time the economic network created a familiarity among its members that helped to sustain this connectivity. This can be seen in the origin tales of the Topasses, which clearly state how one part of the sea was related to the other. Despite the many languages and cultures that were found in these islands, the Topasses helped to create a commonality that was reinforced over time through established practice that became tradition.

The Sea of Makassar

A second example of the creation of a sea in eastern Indonesia is the Sea of Makassar. For a century from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, the Makassarese kingdom of Gowa in South Sulawesi was the dominant power in the whole of eastern Indonesia. From its thriving entrepôt at Makassar, ships from numerous nations brought goods from all parts of the world in exchange for the unique spices and commodities from eastern Indonesia. Gowa’s spectacular rise owes much to the Malay refugees who fled Melaka after its conquest by the Portuguese in 1511. Some went to Siang in present-day
Pangkajene on the west coast of South Sulawesi because it was one of the ports frequented by Malay traders during the heyday of the Melaka kingdom in the fifteenth century. In 1544 the Portuguese Antonio Paiva noted the bustling atmosphere at Siang, where the bulk of the merchants were Malays from Ujung Tanah (Johor), Patani, and Pahang. But the Christianization of the ruler of Siang by the Portuguese at that time may have spurred the Malay Muslim merchants to shift their trade to the port at Makassar, which was under the control of the newly formed union of the Makassarese kingdoms of Gowa and Tallo, which soon came to be known simply as Gowa.

Until the beginning of the seventeenth century, much of the carrying trade conducted from the port of Makassar to eastern Indonesia was in the hands of Malays and non-Sulawesi, though Makassarese undoubtedly served on these ships. A Dutch report of 1603 describes an annual visit of Portuguese from Melaka to Makassar to load cloves, nutmeg, and mace, which they purchased with Indian cloth. These spices were being brought from the spice islands in northern Maluku to Makassar principally by Malays, Javanese, and Bandanese. Malays resident in the city maintained links with their compatriots in other communities throughout the region and entered into cooperative ventures with the Portuguese in the trade between Melaka and Makassar. The Javanese had been active spice traders since Majapahit times (late thirteenth–early sixteenth centuries), but most likely even earlier. The Bandanese were the principal local carriers of spices, shipping cloves brought from the islands to the north along with their own nutmeg and mace. They continued to play a major role in the spice-carrying trade before the Dutch massacre of the islanders in 1621, in which only 1000 of the original 15,000 Bandanese succeeded in escaping to the neighboring islands of Kai, Aru, and East Seram. In 1624 the ruler of Gowa invited the Bandanese refugees in East Seram to settle in Makassar. With their long experience as carriers of spices from Maluku to Melaka and their continuing links with other refugee Bandanese communities in the eastern islands, the refugee Bandanese community in Makassar became instrumental in the expansion of Makassarese trade to the east.

Building on the expertise, experiences, and networks of the resident Malays and Bandanese, the Makassarese became leading traders to eastern Indonesia. By the first quarter of the seventeenth century the Makassarese were trading in their own vessels and on their own account. In the late 1620s the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, [Dutch] United East India Company) Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen lamented the fact that Makassarese competition had resulted in weaker Dutch trade in the Solor archipelago and Timor. Another worrying development for the Dutch was the fact that the Makassarese were using the islands of East Seram, the Aru-Kai archipelagoes, and Tanimbar as bases to obtain spices from Maluku. Another route taken by the Makassarese to the spice islands to avoid VOC patrols went northward around the northern coast of Sulawesi to Halmahera, then down the east coast of Halmahera to the settlement of Maba, then around the south coast of Halmahera, up through the Patinti Straits and then northward
to Tidore.\textsuperscript{30} Tidore was the main collecting point for spices and many other desired eastern Indonesian goods brought by its dependencies in southeast Halmahera, the Raja Ampat islands, and the Bird's Head Peninsula. Some Makassarese traders also went with their small boats directly to places in northern Halmahera and the Sula Islands for spices, slaves, massoi bark, and other items.\textsuperscript{31}

After the VOC established a post in Ternate in 1607, the Makassarese avoided Ternate and instead went directly to one of the major spice-producing areas in the Hoalmoal peninsula in west Seram. The settlements transported their cloves across the mountains to Lesidi and Erang, where they were bought by the Makassarese in exchange for rice and slaves.\textsuperscript{32} Many of these small communities found it more profitable and often easier to sell their products to the numerous Makassarese traders sailing on their small boats through these islands than to go through middlemen or bring their products to a specific collecting centre. Dutch reports estimated that some 150 to 200 boats from Makassar traded annually to Maluku and Nusa Tenggara.\textsuperscript{33} The size and light draught of the Makassarese boats enabled them to seek safety or escape detection by VOC ships in creeks or small passageways between the islands. The Makassarese were therefore able to fill their limited cargo space with desired products from the east with only occasional interference from the Dutch.\textsuperscript{34}

With the conquest of Gowa by the VOC in 1669, the kingdom’s former direct trade relationships with mainland Southeast Asia, the southern Philippines, Manila, and Macao were severely curtailed by the Dutch, and any trade to the western archipelago had to be channeled through Batavia. Despite or because of these restrictions, Makassarese trade to some regions was strengthened, such as to the eastern coasts of Borneo and to Nusa Tenggara. Although the Dutch required that all Makassar-based trade ships obtain passes, there was no way that the Dutch could prevent ships with Dutch passes from going to other ports on the way to their stated destination.\textsuperscript{35} Some of the trade that used to go directly to Makassar now went to East Seram, with the Makassarese traders an important part of this shift.\textsuperscript{36} Increasingly, the Makassarese concentrated their resources on the trade to the “southern hemisphere”, that is the southeastern peninsula of Sulawesi, the area of the Flores Sea, and Nusa Tenggara. In the 1720s this southern hemisphere constituted just 17 per cent of the volume of traffic in Makassar, but by the 1780s it had grown to some 58 per cent.\textsuperscript{37}

In the trade to the southern hemisphere, the Makassarese went directly to the sites of production in hopes of obtaining better prices or more favourable exchange of goods. The principal products sought were sandalwood, slaves, tortoiseshells and, in the second half of the eighteenth century, \textit{tripang}. In exchange the Makassarese brought rice, cloth, and iron. Rice was greatly desired by the ruling classes in Maluku and in NTT as a prestige food compared to the more common staple of sago. With increasing demand for rice as a trade item and to feed the burgeoning population in Makassar, Gowa was
unable to supply sufficient quantities even with the increased acreage brought under cultivation. Already by the early seventeenth century, the shortage of rice was a concern of Gowa’s rulers. To meet this demand, Gowa conquered the major rice baskets of eastern Indonesia: Bima (1616) and Sumbawa (1618) on the island of Sumbawa, and Manado (1636) and Gorontalo (1638) in northern Sulawesi.

Iron was another precious commodity brought by the Makassarese throughout eastern Indonesia. One source of supply came from mines around Lake Matano in Luwu in South Sulawesi. Its special mix of iron and nickel had been particularly favoured by Javanese kris-makers since the time of Majapahit. But the knives, swords, and iron implements from Tobunku were more highly regarded in the eastern Indonesian areas, especially among the Papuan islanders and those in the interior of the islands of Halmahera and Seram. The iron ore was readily accessible in Tobunku, and so the inhabitants simply waited for boats to arrive before digging up the ore to make whatever iron implement needed. Control over Luwu and Tobunku therefore became a strategic part of Gowa-Tallo’s plan to dominate the spice trade.

Cloth was the third major trade item brought by Makassarese traders and was by far the most desired product among eastern Indonesian communities. The Makassarese obtained Indian and Chinese cloth from traders from Siam, Patani, Johor, Melaka, Jambi, Aceh, Banten, Batavia, and Bali, but their major suppliers of Indian cloth were the Europeans. Already by 1603 the Dutch noted that the Portuguese themselves were going to Makassar to purchase spices brought there by Malays, Javanese, and perhaps also the Bandanese, but only cloth was accepted as payment. The Portuguese also became active in the Indian and Chinese cloth trade in Makassar once they moved there in 1641 after being ousted from Melaka by the Dutch. The English established a trading post in Makassar in 1613, the Danes in 1618, and the French in 1622 – all of whom supplied Makassar with a large variety of Indian cloths. In addition, the Makassarese brought certain locally produced cloth from Bima, Salayar, and Buton, which had a strong market in the spice-producing islands of northern Maluku. Cloth was such a highly valued item in the trade with eastern Indonesian communities that many would not part with their goods until they were compensated with cloth. Even after the Dutch conquest of Gowa in 1669, Makassarese traders were able to obtain cloth from VOC stores or from other traders.

The rice, iron, and cloth brought by the Makassarese traders to eastern Indonesia were not necessarily consumed by these people but often formed useful trade items to exchange for other goods within the area. In this way the Makassarese regional network directly contributed to the formation of local networks. The Makassarese themselves were not simply providing these goods to a central redistribution centre but became involved as part of local networks. To obtain sandalwood, slaves, tortoiseshell, and tripang, the Makassarese were forced to participate in a local peddling trade of buying and selling of a variety of goods from one island to another. They very likely performed this
function much like the Butunese today, who anchor offshore, line their goods on the beach and conduct a market with the local people for a short time before moving on to another island and community. As a result of these long and intricate economic links, stories of Makassarese settlers and armies from both Gowa and Tallo abound in the traditions of littoral communities in the Sea of Makassar.

Among the goods that the Makassarese obtained in NTT was sandalwood, particularly the most highly desired white sandalwood (*Santalum album* L.), which was prized in India and China to treat fevers, and in the oil form in China as an aphrodisiac. The Javanese used sandalwood as part of their *jamu*, herbal medicine, or as a paste to enhance beauty. The island of Sumba was known as “Sandalwood Island”, but already in the sixteenth century little if any sandalwood was found there. The major source of white sandalwood was in Timor, and so it became a natural target for an emergent Gowa seeking to develop Makassar into a major international entrepôt. In January 1541 a large Makassarese fleet of between 90 and 150 boats carrying 5000 to 7000 men attacked and conquered Larantuka – the main settlement of the Topasses, the major traders of sandalwood – at the eastern end of Flores, and then proceeded on to Timor. Here the fleet split in two, with one going to the south coast to Batomian, and the other to the northeast coast at Manatutu, Ade, and Hon to extend control over the sandalwood-producing areas. The south coast of Timor was where much of the sandalwood was harvested and brought around the east end of Timor to Larantuka. Although the settlements of Manatutu, Ade, and Hon were not sandalwood-producing areas, they were strategically placed to patrol the movement of ships coming around east Timor. From Larantuka the sandalwood was then transported by Makassar-based traders to Makassar, the main redistribution point, where it was then taken by Indian and Chinese traders to the markets in Persia and China.

Another local NTT product that was an important part of the Sea of Makassar was tortoiseshell. Java and China were the largest markets for the tortoiseshell from the Hawksbill turtle (*E. imbricata Agassiz*). It was collected mainly from the eastern Indonesian islands and brought to Makassar as the main redistribution centre. The earliest reference to its presence in China comes from an attempt by a Chinese emperor in the first century CE to use it as currency; whereas the Javanese from early on used the tortoiseshell for combs, which women wore in their hair. Yet eastern Indonesia was apparently not the supplier of tortoiseshell to China until much later during the Song and Yüan period (tenth–fourteenth centuries). Tortoiseshell had a ready market in the western archipelago at Batavia, Banten, Melaka, and Aceh.

The search for the sea turtle, especially for the most desired and hence most valuable Hawksbill, required an intimate knowledge of the turtle’s habitat and habits. Chief collectors were the Sama Bajau, a sea people whose activities extended from the southern Philippines and Borneo to eastern Indonesia. The
principal collecting centres were in the southern Philippines, northern Sulawesi, eastern Borneo and in Alor and Tanimbar in NTT. The northern Sulawesi twin kingdom of Gorontalo-Limbotto was the collecting point of tortoiseshell brought by the Sama Bajau from the Togia Islands in Tomini Gulf, while Tobunku was another collecting point for tortoiseshell brought from Banggai and the Togia Islands.

Local traders became intermediaries in purchasing tortoiseshell from the Sama Bajau collectors and then trading it to the Makassarese. The trade in tortoiseshell was not a straightforward exchange because in some islands the sea turtle had special cultural significance. In the Tanimbar islands, for example, it was believed that the spirits of the ancestors resided in the sea turtle, and in Wetar the sea turtle was part of the totem of the group and hence regarded with great reverence. Yet this did not prevent trade in this commodity, principally because it became a major source of revenue for those islands, especially in the Southwestern and Southeastern Islands of NTT, whose spice trees had been destroyed in the latter half of the seventeenth century by the VOC as part of its effort to limit production of cloves to Ambon and nutmeg and mace to Banda.

One of the most valuable aspects of the trade in tortoiseshell was the reaffirmation each season of the trade relationship between the Makassarese traders and the collectors in many small islands in eastern Indonesia. By creating a reliable market for tortoiseshell, the Makassarese were able to distribute cloth, earthen- and ironware, and other goods to local communities, who resold some of these valued items in the local network to spice-producing communities. These spices were then delivered to the Makassarese in payment for the imported items. It was thus possible for the Makassarese traders to obtain small but sufficient quantities of spices from a variety of sources to fill their small boats. The spices and tortoiseshell were then brought back to Makassar, where they were purchased by the Chinese and Javanese for their home markets. In this way even some of the small barren islands were able to survive and even prosper by being part of the local trade networks that were linked to the regional and international networks operating from the port of Makassar.

A third example of a local product that contributed to the creation of the Sea of Makassar was tripang or edible holothuria (also known as bêche-de-mer, sea cucumber, and the more descriptive, sea slug). Its fame rests on the fact that it was considered an exotic delicacy in China that promised health-giving results and, because of its phallic shape, believed to enhance sexual prowess. The earliest Chinese reference to this sea creature is in the sixteenth century, where it is mentioned as a medicine. By late Ming, however, tripang is described along with bird nests and shark fin as delicacies, and in the eighteenth century it was a required dish in any respectable feast menu.

In the eighteenth century eastern Indonesia became a major source of tripang, which was exchanged in the port of Makassar for Chinese goods brought by Chinese traders from Amoy and Canton. Heather Sutherland has
even asserted that the tripang trade in the eighteenth century was “central to the commercial integration of the South China Sea”.

The tripang was harvested by the local people and by the Sama Bajau sea people in the eastern Indonesian islands from Butun in the west to the Southeastern Islands in NTT. From an island near Makassar, the Sama Bajau would bring their boats to join the Makassarese fleets in the search for tripang. Other Sama Bajau from different islands also participated in this trade, with each group forming its own fleet of boats. Tripang obtained from the Sama Bajau was then sold by local traders to the Malays, Makassarese, or Bugis, most of whom were based in Makassar. In Makassar by the 1780s the Chinese traders from Amoy purchased 85 per cent of the entire supply for shipment back to China.

The Bugis and Makassarese also became known as major tripang collectors in their own right, with one of the major sources of tripang being in present-day Arnhem Land in northern Australia. Matthew Flinders, who was in Kupang in Timor in 1803, was told that the Makassarese used to gather tripang in the islands off Java and in the coral banks off the island of Roti. But about twenty years before, one of the Makassarese boats was blown to the coast of New Holland (northern Australia). They found so much tripang there that since that time the Makassarese sent regular fleets to that area, which they called Maregeq. The earliest that the Makassarese would have been involved in the collecting of tripang from Australia in the Gulf of Carpentaria would have been in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

The presence of tripang at many of these eastern Indonesian islands provided an unexpected source of revenue for many small communities in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This development is captured in the records from the port of Makassar, which registered a rise in demand for external goods from islands that sold tripang. The intimate knowledge and skills of the mobile populations of the Sama Bajau and local collectors, the gathering and processing capabilities of regional Makassarese and Bugis traders, and the financing, grading, and pricing of the tripang by the Chinese were all combined to make tripang a profitable commodity at all levels of production and sale.

While there were other trade items – particularly slaves – that were part of the economic network within the Sea of Makassar, the examples of the trade goods mentioned above are sufficient to suggest the manner in which a sea became constituted. It began in the Sea of Makassar with the necessity of many societies in eastern Indonesia to establish trade relationships with foreign merchants to obtain cloth, iron, and food (mainly rice). But these many littoral communities in the seas of NTT, for example, had other social and ritual requirements that had to be met from their immediate neighbours or from regional centres. The important requirement of elephant tusks and bronze drums as bride price for some of the societies was met in the Sea of Makassar. The trade in human beings is not included as part of the development of the Sea because, while proving lucrative for certain segments of each society, it also served to create suspicion and fear among the participants, not the trust
necessary for a sea to function as a “family”. With regard to sandalwood, tortoiseshell, and tripang, the interdependence of the Makassarese, the Sama Bajau, and the local communities encouraged closer interaction and exchange not only of valued goods but also of ideas and traditions. Evidence of this can be found in the traditions that societies of NTT have of the communities with which they have interacted for centuries.

Conclusion

In this chapter it has been argued that applying a seas perspective would provide an alternate way of configuring the past. Influenced by ideas advanced by Hordern and Purcell in their innovative study of the Mediterranean, I have attempted to write a history of the ocean by focusing on two “seas” in eastern Indonesia: the Sea of Topasses and the Sea of Makassar. Both seas were based on a dominant ethnic community that played the major economic role in initially linking the participating communities. In the former it was the Topasses, along with Catholicism and sandalwood, that formed the principal bases for the sea. While some of the societies on the island of Timor did not convert to Catholicism they were linked by the shared belief in the Timorese idea of le’iu, spiritual prowess, that the Topasses were believed to possess in abundance. There was, therefore, a sharing of spiritual objects and the performance of rituals that spanned both Catholicism and native beliefs. Undoubtedly sandalwood provided the economic incentive that initially motivated communities to become attached to the sea. The Sea of Makassar was centred on the port of Makassar and was sustained by the continuing presence of numerous Makassarese traders on their “coast-creepers”. These small boats became involved in a peddling trade of various local commodities and served to link the many scattered and distant littoral communities to products and ideas arriving via Makassar. For these communities, “Makassarese” became synonymous with the outside world and the source of desired goods and new ideas.

What defined both the Sea of Topasses and the Sea of Makassar was a “sense of place”. 58

Neither was a purely trade network; each was a functioning entity where the exchange of goods, ideas, and people helped create a sense of place, of a shared community. The difficult environmental conditions of NTT were mitigated by the formation of seas, which helped to link the many scattered and far-flung islands. The emergence of a sea was in response to the needs of the participating communities to gain security, livelihood, and access to goods and ideas from the outside world – benefits usually provided by large centralizing polities. An important component in this re-conceptualization of geographic space is the eventual emergence of a notion of belonging to one “family”, which carried connotations of respect, priority, and loyalty in every aspect of their relationship. In time the familiarity within a sea facilitated not only the exchange of goods and ideas but also of political leaders and of women, thus
reinforcing the unity of the sea. In seeking to reconfigure land and sea spaces into conceptual unities called “seas”, it is hoped to encourage others to think of “connectivities” as a way of reshaping the boundaries of our research and perhaps create new ways of understanding the past.

Notes
4 See Bibliography for reference details of these two books.
7 Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, p. 9.
8 In a recent study I have attempted to demonstrate the existence of a “Sea of Malayu” in the early history of Southeast Asia. Leonard Y. Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007, pp. 18–48.
10 Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, p. 9.
18 Ibid., pp. 65–6.

Generale Missiven, Vol. VIII, 8 Dec. 1728, 199.


Heather Sutherland and David S. Brée, “Quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of Indonesian trade: the case of Makassar”, in T. Ibrahim Alfian et al. (eds), Dari Babad dan Hikayat sampai Sejarah Kritis: Kumpulan Karangan dipersembahkan kepada Prof. Dr. Sartono Kartodirjo [From the Chronicle and The Saga to Critical History: A Collection of Essays dedicated to Prof. Dr Sartono Kartodirjo], Jogjakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1987, p. 400.


Ibid., pp. 86–7.


Knaap and Sutherland, Monsoon Traders, pp. 21–2.


Knaap and Sutherland, Monsoon Traders, pp. 72–3.


Andaya, World of Maluku, p. 87.


Meilink-Roelofsz, Asian Trade, p. 163.


44 Roever, Jacht op Sandelhout, pp. 233–5.


48 Andaya, “Local trade networks”, p. 74; Andaya, World of Maluku, p. 87.


50 Riedel, Sluik en Kroesharige, p. 466.


54 Knaap and Sutherland, Monsoon Traders, pp. 101–2.


57 Andaya, “Elephant tusks and bronze drums”.

58 Hordern and Purcell, Corrupting Sea, pp. 403–4.
5 Borneo in the early modern period
c. late fourteenth to c. late eighteenth centuries

Ooi Keat Gin

The island of Borneo, situated in the midst of Southeast Asia, experienced influences from its neighbouring lands as well as directly and indirectly from the Chinese mainland and Indian sub-continent. Geography played an important role in ensuring that particular parts of the island received impact from a particular area, viz. the northwest sector drawn to the Strait of Malacca to India and the west, and China to the east whereas the south, southwest, and southeast portions oriented towards Java. This twin directional pull could be discerned from about the thirteenth century and increasingly pronounced through to the eighteenth century. Involvements of Portugal and Spain, the Iberian powers, in Borneo in the sixteenth century, and more pertinently, of Britain and the Netherlands from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries accentuated these differentiated influences, notably the island’s northwestern and northern portion towards the Anglo-China trade, and the southern, southwestern and southeastern parts turning to Batavia and the Dutch East Indies. The direction and influence to which Borneo was drawn during the early modern period, between the late fourteenth and the late eighteenth centuries, the pre-colonial period will be examined. Focus will be on the political entities of Brunei, Bandjarmasin, Kutai and also Pontianak relating to their genesis, developments, and responses to influences from without offering an insightful understanding of Borneo prior to the full imposition of Western trade and commerce, imperialist incursions, and subsequently colonialism and domination.

Borneo prior to the early modern period

Activities and remains of human beings (Homo sapiens) dating to some 35,000 BCE were discovered in Niah in northeast Sarawak. They were believed to be Australoids, akin to contemporary Australian Aborigines and Papuans. About 4000 BCE owing to climactic changes, Austronesian people with Mongoloid features migrated southwards on outrigger canoes with a primitive sail from South China and Taiwan to insular Southeast Asia. They reached Borneo sometime between 3000 and 2000 BCE settling along the coastal fringes. The Dong-son culture of northern Vietnam ushered in the
Metal Age for the archipelago sometime between 400 and 200 BCE. Metalurgical technologies related to the Dong-son culture reached Borneo in the beginning of the Common Era (CE).

It is difficult to determine exactly when iron became known and used in Borneo, though iron-working sites have been discovered in the Sarawak river delta area, downstream of Kuching, dating from about 1,000 [CE]. Some authorities claim that skills in the working of iron may have emerged somewhere between about the fifth to the tenth centuries [CE] on the island.¹

Archaeological artifacts and written sources point to the fact that the inhabitants of Borneo had since early times established relations with people from without. By 1000 CE Borneo, and insular Southeast Asia, possessed maritime trade relations with South and West Asia as well as East Asia. Borneo’s gold fields undoubtedly attracted Indian merchants and Brahman priests. By 400 CE it was likely that Indianized kingdoms such as Kutai on Borneo’s east coast and Brunei on the northwest were in existence. Archaeological finds demonstrate the existence of Indianized polities, for instance Brahmin sacrificial posts (c. fourth century CE), gold ornaments and the Hindu deity Ganesa of stone from Limbang (sixth or seventh century CE), and a stone Buddha figure from Santubong, southwest Sarawak (eighth or ninth century CE).² Between the fourth and eighth centuries CE a Hinduized kingdom known as Muara Kaman on the Mahakam River was believed to be in existence, the precursor to Kutai.³ Another Indianized polity, Negaradipa, established before the mid-fourteenth century in the hinterland area of contemporary Bandjarmasin was believed to be the latter’s predecessor.⁴

Kota Batu or Stone Fort, situated two and a half kilometres eastwards of Brunei’s contemporary capital city of Bandar Seri Begawan, is considered as its predecessor. Chinese coins and pottery dating from the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) to the eighteenth century demonstrate the continuous occupancy, therefore the site’s importance vis-à-vis other sites south of Brunei Bay in present-day Sarawak.⁵ By the first millennium CE there appeared a trading centre, Santubong on the Sarawak River delta where there was an iron-smelting industry that supplied the coastal regions including Brunei and the interior.⁶ Drawing from the portrayal of men with blowpipes depicted on the galleries of Borobodur, the ninth-century Buddhist temple monument of central Java, it is highly plausible that Java–Borneo contacts were established by then.⁷

During the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE), Borneo was known as Tanjungpura (Tanjung Pulo), after a trading town on the island’s southeast coast.⁸ Then in 1292 the imperialistic Hindu kingdom of Majapahit on Java seized Tanjungpura. At the same time a Mongol expedition was sent against Java. Consequently it prompted the establishment of Kutai Kertanegara on the east coast founded by Javanese fleeing from the Mongol assault.
But the most intense [Java–Borneo] relations were established during the golden age of the East Javanese kingdom of Majapahit in the fourteenth and fifteen centuries. At that time the eastern, western and southern parts of Borneo came under the suzerainty of Majapahit. The “Majapahit kris”, a distinctive, beautifully made dagger, was a symbol of allegiance to the kingdom; examples of these are still found in various places in interior Borneo, and have become sacred ritual objects there.  

Throughout its primacy Majapahit was the major power and influence over Borneo’s coastal settlements, notably Sukadana on the west, Berau, on the northeast, and Bandjarmasin, on the south. Even Brunei, on the northwest, acknowledged this Javanese overlord. The *Nagarakretagama* penned in Kawi script by Prapanca in 1365 referred to “Buruneng”, possibly Brunei, evidence of the latter’s existence in the mid-fourteenth century and of vassal status to Majapahit. It was apparent in the *Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei* of the sovereign–vassal relations between Majapahit and Brunei.  

In commencing the reign as the king of Berunai, Awang Alak Betatar was an atheist; and at that time was colonised by Betara Majapahit and Pateh Gajah Mada, and presented a drum of drink from young betel nut as a tribute to Majapahit annually. When Majapahit collapsed, he no longer presented the tribute as Berunai became sovereign and ruled the domain.  

Meanwhile a Chinese colony was founded (c. 1375) on the Kinabatangan River in northern Borneo to service the junk trade of luxury goods with the mainland. Also, there was a Chinese mercantile community resident in the Brunei Bay area by the sixteenth century CE.  

As can be seen in this pre-early modern period the twin directional pull was apparent: Borneo’s northwestern and northern region drawn to mainland China whereas the western, southern, eastern and northeastern parts to Java. The Javanese Majapahit sway and influence was much more potent than that of Imperial China.  

**The early phase of the “early modern period”, c. late fourteenth to c. late sixteenth centuries**

Borneo during the “early modern period” experienced various influences from abroad, notably the spread of Islam, the showcasing of Chinese hegemony, and increasing participation in international trade and commerce. Islam from the Arabian Peninsula through Indian merchants reached northern Sumatra in the early thirteenth century. Through traders, missionaries, and mystics (Sufis) Islam gradually spread across archipelagic Southeast Asia. Besides monotheistic Islam’s simplistic appeal, many of the ruling elite embraced the faith for economic and political mileage. The Javanese ruler of Kutai
Kertanegara embraced the Islamic faith in the closing years of the fourteenth century.

The last quarter of the fourteenth century marked the end of the once powerful and influential Hindu Majapahit.

The demise of Majapahit was probably gradual and nondramatic. It is very likely that with the flourishing of trade cities on the northern coast of Java (pasisir), and especially the rise of Demak as a strong Islamic sultanate, Majapahit lost its control of the sea trade routes, then became disintegrated and subsequently exited the historical stage.14

Sino-Brunei relations begun very early, questionably as early as during the Liang dynasty (c. 502–66 CE) where the ruler of Brunei was known as Raja Pin-ka (Vingka) or Kaundinya, a Hindu or Buddhist monarch.15 A late fourteenth-century connection appeared more plausible. According to Ming records, about the year 1370 during the reign of Hung Wu (1368–98), a Chinese delegation to Java led by Chang Ching Tze and Sin Tze sojourned at Brunei. It reported that the ruler of Brunei then was “Mahamosha”, a Chinese rendition of Sultan Muhammad Shah (born Awang Alak Betatar, 1368–1402).16 Following the account in the Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei, a daughter of Sultan Muhammad Shah – Puteri Ratna Dewi – was married to a Chinese official Ong Sum Peng.

At that time, Awang Khalak Betatar became sultan, and assumed the name Sultan Muhammad. Henceforth, the sultan had a daughter who was very beautiful indeed. Soon after, Ong Sum Peng asked for the princess’s hand in marriage. Thus, Sultan Muhammad accepted Ong Sum Peng’s proposal, and they were married in a traditional royal ceremony.17

The Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei had Ong Sum Peng as Sultan Ahmad (1408–25), successor to his father-in-law, Sultan Muhammad Shah.18 But another Brunei source, the Batu Tarsilah at Makam Diraja, Bandar Seri Begawan written by Khatib Haji Abdul Latif in 1221 Hijrah (1807 CE) cited “Sultan Ahmad” as the brother of Sultan Muhammad Shah.19

The first three decades of the fifteenth century saw Ming China (1368–1644) demonstrating its maritime might through visits of its fleet of “treasure ships” across the South China Sea, through the Straits of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and reaching Africa’s eastern shores under the stewardship of the Muslim eunuch Zheng He. It is unclear if the fleet ever called on Brunei, but this politically astute Brunei ruler, Sultan Ahmad, proceeded with a tribute mission to the Ming court.

Brunei’s ruler distinguished himself in the eyes of the Yongle emperor not by his political importance but by his “loyalty” as the first southern king to present tribute in person, in 1408. He was splendidly received in the
capital, and still more splendidly buried at Chinese expense when he died on the way home from his mission. His infant son was sent home with a substantial Chinese retinue, including a commissioner who reportedly governed Brunei during his minority. That this Chinese intervention was a factor in Brunei’s rise was acknowledged in later Brunei legends about a founding king who went to China and married a Chinese princess.\textsuperscript{20}

The Ming fleet called on Malacca, on the west-central coast of the Malay Peninsula; this emerging Malay seaport also acknowledged China’s suzerainty. By the mid-century Malay Muslim Melaka had replaced Hindu Majapahit as the preeminent power in the archipelago. Melaka eclipsed Santubong.

The fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511 “sent thousands of Muslim traders across the archipelago, disrupted the traditional inter-regional trading pattern and caused great concern amongst the mercantile Muslim rulers of the small coastal independent principalities that had flourished along the coasts of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Java”.\textsuperscript{21} Brunei apparently benefited from this “exodus” of Muslim merchants where many flocked to its port to carry out trade. The precise date of Brunei’s conversion to Islam is unclear; a Portuguese source of January 1514 told of a trading visit of three junks from Brunei where “The King is a pagan, but the merchants are Moors [Muslims]”.\textsuperscript{22} The following year, Tomé Pires, Supervisor of the Spice Trade in Malacca (1512–15), in his description of Brunei commented that, “Borneo is made up of many islands [ports\textsuperscript{23}], large and small. They are almost all inhabited by heathen, only the chief one [Brunei] is inhabited by Moors [Muslims]; it is not very long since the King became a Moor”.\textsuperscript{24}

By the second decade of the sixteenth century although Brunei’s ruler was “a Moro [Muslim] … forty years old and corpulent”, there were interesting observations made by Antonio Pigafetta, the scribe on Magellan’s expedition.\textsuperscript{25}

In that same port [\textit{sic.} anchorage within Brunei Bay] is another city inhabited by heathens, which is larger than that of the Moros [Muslims], and built like the latter in salt water. On that account the two peoples have daily contacts together in the same harbour. The heathen king is as powerful as the Moro king, but not as haughty, and could be converted easily to the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{26}

Such a possibility of a pagan ruler and a Muslim ruler, in other words, the coexistence of two “Bruneis”; however the aforesaid Muslim “exodus” could mean the eventual eclipsing of the pagan half.\textsuperscript{27} But more revealing was their encounter with the Brunei fleet wherein the Spaniards captured the “son of the king of the island of Lozon [Luzon]”. This royal captive

… was captain-general of the king of Burney [Brunei], and came with these junks from a large city named Laoe, which is located at the end of that island (Borneo) toward Java Major. He had destroyed and sacked
that city because it refused to obey the king (of Brunei), but [obeyed] the king of Java Major instead. 28

From the aforesaid, it was evident that Brunei’s power and influence reached as far north as Luzon in the Philippines and southwards to southern Borneo. Laoe was said to be “a city in the Kuala Kapuas area”, quite likely referring to Lawe or Tanjungpura, northwest of present-day Bandjarmasin. 29

Meanwhile Bandjarmasin, which had Hindu-Buddhist roots and close affinity with Majapahit, by the early sixteenth century came under the influence of the Javanese Muslim sultanate of Demak, undoubtedly the greatest Islamic kingdom of Java of the sixteenth century that held power over all the northern Javanese port cities. About 1530 Bandjarmasin’s ruler Pangeran Samudra embraced Islam and adopted the reign title Sultan Surian Allah (or Suriansjah). 30 Other Muslim political entities emerged particularly on Borneo’s west coast – Sambas, Landak, Sukadana, Ketapang, and Kotawaringin – owing to their proximity and hence influence from Java and Johor. 31 For instance, Sambas had ties with Johor while Sukadana was linked with Surabaya in East Java. These far-flung linkages were however tenuous, or at best, nominal. In 1590, for example, the north Javanese Muslim polity of Japara seized control of Sambas severing the latter’s ties with Johor.

The Portuguese capture of Melaka was a boon to both Brunei and Bandjarmasin. An influx of Chinese merchants into Bandjarmasin following Melaka’s fall boosted the trade in luxuries including camphor, diamonds and other precious stones, and bezoar stones in exchange for porcelains (china-ware). In the mid-sixteenth century in order to better facilitate trade, the sultanate’s capital shifted from the interior southwards to the Barito delta locating itself on contemporary Bandjarmasin. 32

Borneo’s port-cities whether Brunei or Bandjarmasin of the sixteenth century and later were famously renowned for exotic trade goods, many categorized as luxuries, others rather mundane, and also of slaves.

Into these ports flowed the produce of the interior – the camphor, aromatic woods, hornbill, rhinoceros horn and bezoar stones beloved of Chinese apothecaries, rattans, gold, colourful birds’ feathers, birds’ nests, gum, and wax – and of the sea – pearls, mother-of-pearl, bêche-de-mer, cowrie shells, and turtle shell. There was also the trade in slaves, taken in raids, sold, or exchanged; a trade long established and sanctioned by custom and tradition … Into these ports, to exchange for these [aforesaid] products, came ironware, brassware, and silverware, the textiles of India, the silks, brocades, and ceramics of China; even glass beads and other objects from the Mediterranean. 33

Notwithstanding the visits by Portuguese and Spanish galleons, European direct involvement had yet to materialize in the greater part of this early phase. The last quarter of the sixteenth century, however, ushered greater
interactions between the Bornean port-cities and the Spaniards that had entrenched themselves in the Philippine archipelago capturing Cebu in 1565 and Manila in 1571. Owing to the Spaniard’s proselytizing zeal in attempting to Christianize the entire archipelago, Manila accused Brunei of Muslim missionary activities in the Philippines. The Spaniard Governor Doctor Francisco de Sande of the Philippines in a letter of 13 April 1578 to Brunei’s Sultan Saiful Rijal (1535–81) made the following allegation and issued a command.

... it has been rumoured that you have tried and are trying to do us harm, and to make war upon us; that you have tried to induce and have solicited the natives of Lucon [Luzon] and other districts to rebel and revolt against us; that you have sent spies to Cebu and other districts; that you have left your residence for this purpose of warring against us with a fleet of ships. ... that you shall send no preachers of the sect of Mahoma [d] to any part of these islands, nor to the heathen among the Tingues [hill-people], nor into other parts of your own island.34

Brunei ignored both the allegations and command. In retaliation in the same month the Spaniards assaulted Brunei in 1578 and occupied the port-city. They subsequently withdrew.35 In March 1579 the Spaniards returned intending to secure some trade concessions but were rebuffed by Brunei. No untoward action was taken and the Spaniards again withdrew without achieving their primary objective, namely making Brunei their vassal and cessation of Islamic missionary activities in the southern Philippines.36 Brunei, on the other hand, lost control and influence over Sulu.

The Iberian powers failed to secure any foothold on Borneo and it was left to other Europeans, notably the Dutch and the British to attempt the subjugation and domination over the island in the following centuries. By the close of the sixteenth century, Borneo remained in large part a terra incognita to Westerners.

The later phase, c. seventeenth to c. late eighteenth centuries

The beginning of the seventeenth century saw the reassertion of Brunei hegemony over Sambas and Sulu that had fallen to Japara and the Spaniards respectively. Under the reign of Sultan Muhammad Hassan (1601–1617), Sulu returned to Brunei’s fold. In 1609 several Brunei pengiran (noblemen) from Mukah to Sambas revolted against the Brunei court and sought allegiance with Johor in its conflict with Aceh. Muhammad Hassan prudently allied with Aceh’s strongman Sultan Iskandar Muda “Mahkota Alam” (1607–1636) in the Aceh–Johor conflict that saw Johor’s defeat in 1615. Brunei restored its control over the northwest coast but failed to regain Sambas.37 The Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei with much hyperbole compared Sultan Muhammad Hassan with Sultan Iskandar Muda.
This is the custom from the time of Mahrum di Tanjung, titled as Paduka Seri Sultan Hasan, whose kingdom was vast and ruled strictly … was the incomparable Brunei Sultan, but was the equal of Sultan [Iskandar Muda] Mahkota Alam in Aceh; a king who had no equal, of king or man, and was a king of royal customs and his kingdom in Berunai did as he please.\textsuperscript{38}

Notwithstanding the blood ties (political marriages) between Brunei and Johor, the former as mentioned, allied with Aceh to defeat Johor.\textsuperscript{39}

Internal strife and civil war in Brunei between 1661 and 1673 resulted in Sulu not only gaining its independence but also obtaining considerable territory from its Brunei overlord. Owing to the supposed assistance of Sulu one of the claimants to the Brunei throne was killed; the triumphant claimant became Sultan Muhyiddin (1673–1690). The upshot was, however, in return for their assistance Sulu was given the territories north of Brunei Bay; more importantly Sulu became “an independent power with its ruler no longer an adipati [viceroy] of Brunei but claiming the title of Sultan of Sulu”.\textsuperscript{40} The loss of Sulu also meant Brunei losing the support of the Bajau Laut (Samal Laut), well-known for their skills in collecting sea produce in particular the much priced trepang (tripang) or hêche-de-mer in the Chinese market.\textsuperscript{41} A consolation was that during Muhyiddin’s reign, Brunei managed to subdue Sambas and much of Borneo’s southwest coast.\textsuperscript{42}

Established in 1602 in Amsterdam, the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC [Dutch] United East India Company) begun to explore favourable possibilities in securing the trade with Borneo’s various port-cities. Failure, however, befell VOC factories established on Borneo’s west coast, viz. Sambas, Sukadana, and Bandjarmasin. In 1603 a Dutch factor was stationed in Bandjarmasin for the lucrative pepper trade. Owing to rivalry or jealousy a Dutch ship suffered the slaughter of its entire crew in 1607. The Dutch returned in 1612 to avenge this outrage by sacking Bandjarmasin forcing the royal court to flee to Martapura.\textsuperscript{43} Meanwhile in 1610 the VOC factory at Sambas was attacked killing all Dutch personnel. Again the VOC’s settlement in Sukadana was destroyed in 1622 during the Sukadana–Mataram conflict.\textsuperscript{44}

It was another two decades later that Dutch–Bandjarmasin relations were revived; a treaty was signed in 1635 whereby pepper was delivered to the VOC at a fixed price, the modus operandi of Dutch trading practices throughout archipelagic Southeast Asia. But such an arrangement proved untenable. Shortly thereafter in 1638 another Dutch vessel was assaulted and again the entire crew were slaughtered at Kota Waringin. Two and half decades later the VOC attempted another monopoly arrangement with Bandjarmasin; again the forced deliveries failed, and the Dutch reluctantly withdrew altogether in 1669.\textsuperscript{45} One of the major obstacles of Dutch failure owed to Chinese competition; the latter often offered better prices to the Sultan of Bandjarmasin for his pepper hence enticing the latter to break his contract with the Dutch. Overall “if any lesson could be drawn from Dutch experiences in Borneo
during the seventeenth century, it was nothing less than the presence of permanent military garrisons would ensure the fulfilment of contracts signed by the local princes.46

Trade developed between the coastal port-cities and interior kingdoms. The latter emerged along rivers owing to the common practice of tribute and/or toll collection. While numerous polities were established along the coasts, smaller polities situated on strategic stretches of the meandering rivers were established. For instance, on the west coast in the seventeenth century along the Kapuas River several polities emerged such as Sekadau, Sintang, Silat, Suhaid, Selimbau, Jongkong, and Buntut for control of the trading traffic.47 The downstream coastal Malay Muslim traders brought both goods and Islam to upriver polities and the hinterland.

If the dating on a grave of a Chinese miner at Montrado in west Borneo is taken as evidence of the presence of gold-mining activities, then the 1740s would be taken as possible beginnings of this activity by immigrant Chinese.48 The Chinese were initially invited by Malay chiefs and rulers of West Borneo to undertake gold-mining in their territories after having witnessed the prosperity accrued by the Bangka sultan from Chinese tin-mining activities. An initial trickle of not more than 20 immigrant Chinese, became a swell of 3000 per annum during the 1760s.49 Subsequently Chinese gold-mining communities were established in the areas that collectively became known as the “Chinese districts” comprising Singkawang, Pemangkat, Bengkajang, Sambas, Mempawah, Pontianak, and Landak.50 Despite leaving the Chinese to themselves, having no intention of governing them, Malay rulers imposed strict conditions for granting mining rights, viz. the miners were barred from agricultural activities and involvement in wholesale trade, full reliance of supplies and provisions including foodstuff from the Malay ruler, and the delivery of a substantial annual tribute.51 This original arrangement of economic control over the Chinese miners by Malay rulers was only sustainable when the number of Chinese was small. But it gradually became untenable “when the mining population expanded to tens of thousands in the 1770s … It was clearly no longer possible for the Sultan to continue the monopoly of provisions. … [hence the Sultan] ceased to be the partner or ‘employer’ of the Chinese miners.”52

Therefore from the beginnings of a small partnership (Shan-sha or Parit) based on the principle of kongsi (lit. sharing), the organization of the mining community evolved into hui (lit. union), a form of brotherhood that subsequently became a term interchangeable with kongsi.53 By the last quarter of the eighteenth century kongsi numbered between 24 and 12. The kongsi were self-governing, self-sufficient, and independent socio-political entities, an imperium in imperio. The kongsi kowtowed to no one but their democratically elected headman; decisions on policies were submitted to a vote by all members (miners). During the early nineteenth century several kongsi joined together to form federations, the “big three” then were Fosjoen Kongsi of Montrado, its breakaway the Samtioakioe Kongsi, and Lanfang Kongsi of
Mandor. Quarrels and armed clashes between the kongsi were rife in the nineteenth century over mining areas and/or of the all-important water supplies.

The English East India Company (EEIC) established in 1600 by royal charter sought to partake a portion of the spice trade of the East Indies. It faced stiff competition and opposition from its counterpart the VOC, which practiced monopolistic and exclusive trade. Consequently the EEIC did not make much headway partly from VOC competition and partly on the “incompetence of its local representatives”.

However, during the course of the eighteenth century when the EEIC’s interest in the spice trade declined and shifted focus to the China tea trade, Borneo was viewed increasingly as a possible entrepôt between the Chinese mainland and the Straits of Malacca. Consequently a factory in the Sulu Archipelago was deemed prudent following explorations of the area by Alexander Dalrymple who served in the EEIC’s Madras office. A trading settlement:

… would not only serve as a convenient “counter” for the distribution of British and Indian goods to the Malayan islands, but also, by attracting to itself the southward-bound Chinese junk trade, would British woollens before the merchants of northern China, of whom few had ever been in touch with British manufactures of any kind because of the strict monopoly enforced by the Hongs at Canton.

Following approval of his plans in Madras, Dalrymple headed towards the Sulu Archipelago where in mid-1760 he secured a treaty with the Sultan of Sulu including approval of an EEIC factory in the area. Balambangan, an island situated off the tip of northern Borneo, was deemed a suitable site; accordingly in early 1763 a factory was established. Thereafter Dalrymple succeeded in gaining a cession to the EEIC by the Sulu ruler of the entire territory of northeastern Borneo and part of the island of Palawan. The treaty of June 1764 confirmed this concession. A decade later the Balambangan factory was attacked by Sulu marauders. At this juncture, in 1775, Brunei offered either a settlement on Labuan or on the mainland in return for protection against third parties notably Sulu. Owing to the Balambangan venture that had incurred substantial financial losses, apparently by the late 1770s the EEIC withdrew altogether from the region.

The Dutch, having learnt of the failure of native princes in the “fulfilment of contracts”, demanded that a trade contract incorporated the granting of permission for a fort to dissuade recalcitrant action. Hence in 1747 when a pepper contract was negotiated with the ruler of Bandjarmasin, a fort was erected at Tabanio. Gradually this tactic proved sustainable. Another viable tactic that contributed to increasing Dutch influence was direct military intervention on the side of one native claimant against another. Having won the throne he was obligated to reward the Dutch by way of concessions. In
this manner in 1787 the VOC literally became “sovereign lord, owner, and possessor of the whole kingdom of Bandjarmasin”. 63

Dutch intervention in native affairs brought about the creation of the sultanate of Pontianak on the west coast of Borneo. In 1772 Syarif Abdurrahman, who originated from the Hadraumaut, established a settlement called Pontianak at the mouth of the Landak River. 64 The Raja of Landak regarded this as an intrusion into his territory and took his grievance to the Sultan of Bantam, who theoretically possessed sovereign rights over that portion of Borneo. The Dutch seized this opportunity to persuade the Sultan of Bantam to surrender his dormant sovereignty of his Bornean possession to the VOC. In turn the VOC granted Abdurrahman the sovereign rights and declared him as the Sultan of Pontianak. In return a Dutch factory was established. VOC-Pontianak alliance was thus established and all challenges were met with force; for instance Sukadana in 1786, and Mempawah in 1787. 65

By the late 1780s the VOC had succeeded in establishing its influence and power over much of western and southern Borneo. But within a decade the Dutch withdrew from Borneo. Owing to a plethora of insurmountable problems including mismanagement leading almost to financial collapse and aggravated by the “open seas” policy dictated by the Treaty of Paris (1784) 66 that allowed all ships of all nations to trade throughout the East Indies, hitherto the VOC’s preserve, all the efforts of establishing viable footholds on Borneo had to be abandoned. 67

Concluding remarks

Throughout the early modern period Borneo enjoyed some degree of prosperity from exposure and participation in international commerce, some semblance of tributary relations with China, receptive of socio-cultural influences significantly Islam, interaction with Europeans, and witnessed the emergence of Chinese colonization on its west coast. The gradual demise of Hindu Majapahit and the spread of Islam were advantageous to Borneo’s port-cities in terms of further strengthening their trading links to the Straits of Malacca and the Indian Ocean. The showcasing of Ming China’s maritime might was another favourable phenomenon in encouraging greater commercial intercourse between Borneo and the Chinese mainland. Although Borneo benefited commercially from the primacy of Malay Muslim Melaka, it was the port-city’s capture by the Portuguese that greatly boosted Brunei, Borneo’s foremost port-city and Muslim kingdom. Brunei’s power and influence were felt as far as Luzon and southern Borneo. Bandjarmasin also reaped dividends from the influx of Chinese traders following Melaka’s fall to an Iberian power. The Spaniards, another Iberian power from their bases (Manila and Cebu) in the Philippines sought in vain to impose their will on Brunei. The Protestant powers of the Netherlands and Britain through their respective mercantile consortiums, VOC and EEIC, also sought to secure advantageous trading concessions from Bornean kingdoms. But like their Iberian counterparts, the Dutch and British also subsequently withdrew.
There was continuity as well as change in Borneo’s economic systems particularly of the coastal principalities. While trade between the coast and the upstream regions remained intact, the coastal kingdoms such as Brunei and Bandjarmasin were throughout the “early modern period” increasingly drawn into the international trading network. Islam, similar to its predecessor Hinduism that was brought in, impacted on the socio-political organizations and socio-cultural traditions of Bornean kingdoms. The former replaced the latter as the dominant influence, “sultan” replaced “raja” but much of the court traditions and practices continued to have Hindunized remnants. The influence of Islam and previously Hinduism were limited to the coastal port-cities and kingdoms while the interior regions continued with native animistic practices outside the pale of world religions.

In large measure during the early modern period Borneo managed to fend off domination from without. The major native kingdoms maintained their independence.

At the close of the eighteenth century, Borneo despite being continuously wooed by numerous suitors to a great extent remained un-betrothed to none. The Chinese gold-mining communities on the west coast undoubtedly represented a form of foreign colonization transformed the demographic as well as physical landscape. Islam remained entrenched in the coastal and riverine Malay principalities. The changed geopolitical situation in the nineteenth century witnessed Western imperialist incursions, colonialism, and prolonged domination into the second half of the twentieth century.

**Notes**

16 Ibid., p. 24.
18 Ibid., pp. 53–4.
23 In referring to ports as “islands”, Pires adopted the language of old Arab scribes, namely ports are in fact islands of economic activities surrounded by “seas” of water, and “seas” of land.
26 Ibid., p. 11.
29 Ibid., p. 13. According to Brown, who referred to Broek, “Laoe appears to have been located south of the present-day state of Sarawak”. Brown, *Brunei*, p. 141;


33 Brown, *Brunei*, p. 45.


35 Water-borne illness such as dysentery or cholera might be the reason for the withdrawal back to Manila; poisoned water supply was another possibility. Saunders, *A History of Brunei*, pp. 55–7.


39 See ibid., pp. 66–7.

40 Saunders, *A History of Brunei*, p. 64.

41 See Brown, *Brunei*, p. 144.

42 See Saunders, *A History of Brunei*, p. 64.


44 Ibid., p. 5.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.


49 Ibid., pp. 55–6.


52 Ibid., pp. 59–60.


60 Ibid., p. 10.
63 Ibid., p. 6.
66 This treaty concluded the Anglo-Dutch War of 1780–4.
Another past
Early modern Vietnamese commodity expansion in global perspective

Hoàng Anh Tuán

Prologue

Among a myriad of “historiographical gaps” which seriously challenged the so-called “new historiography”¹ in Vietnam, the question of the “unprecedented” commodity economy expansion during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries remained unanswered. Over the past half a century, Vietnamese historians mentioned this economic phenomenon as fact.² None could, however, explain in detail why this phenomenon could have taken place, how far the country’s commodity expansion had developed, and, as a matter of fact, how deep this transformation had actually influenced overall socio-economic development in early modern³ Vietnam.

During the past decades, the common view has been that the “self development” of the country’s export commodities such as silks and, to a lesser extent, ceramics, lacquers, and so forth attracted foreign merchants from different corners of the world to come to trade in Vietnam. This “internal” viewpoint undoubtedly helps explain a number of “internal factors” such as the privatization of land, the demographic boom, etc. Yet, it inevitably downplays the impact of such “external causes” as the dynamism of itinerant merchants, regional and global trading networks upon the socio-economic expansion of the country during these transitional centuries.⁴ This “revisionist” article, taking on this still-controversial theme, argues that the commodity economy expansion in seventeenth-century Vietnam could have taken place only on the basis of the transformation of regional and global trade during the early modern era.⁵

A historical paradox …

By the early sixteenth century, the Vietnamese kingdom of Đại Việt (Great Việt) fell into political disorder. In 1527, Mạc Đăng Dung, a high-ranking courtier, dethroned the Lê dynasty to claim himself emperor, founding the Mạc dynasty. Civil war quickly broke out between the newly-established Mạc and the deposed Lê, who fled south to establish a base for the long-term rivalry against the Mạc usurper. Shortly after the conclusion of the Lê–Mạc war (1533–1592), in 1627, another conflict broke out between the Trịnh family,
who, under the banner of supporting the Lê dynasty, actually controlled the court, and the Nguyễn family in present-day central Vietnam. The Trịnh–Nguyễn civil war lasted until 1672 when both sides decided to come to a ceasefire in order to end the protracted and costly rivalry.  

On paper, the consecutive conflicts from the early sixteenth to late seventeenth centuries must have largely destroyed the country’s economy. Paradoxically, the country’s commodity economy spectacularly expanded during this warring period, especially from the late sixteenth century, with the rapid development of the silk and ceramic industries. For the most part of the second half of the twentieth century, Vietnamese historians regarded this economic phenomenon as “self-development” while overlooking the context of regional and global trade in which these key products were consumed which, in return, stimulated the local large-scale production for export.

In so far as silk is concerned, it had been woven by the Vietnamese people as a household handicraft for over a millennium before the arrival of European merchants in Vietnam in the late sixteenth century. The fluvial fields of the Red River deltaic triangle were ideal for mulberry growth and the four-season climate offered Vietnamese farmers two major crops, in the spring and autumn respectively. Legend has it that, under the Chinese Tang’s colonization of Vietnam during the seventh century, a number of silk villages in present-day northern Vietnam were producing high-quality raw silk and silk piece-goods which drew attention from both Chinese rulers and foreign merchants trading to the areas along the Gulf of Tonkin.

After the Vietnamese eventually dethroned the Chinese millennial colonization of Vietnam (179 BCE–938 CE) and regained national independence, under the Lý (1010–1225) and Trần (1226–1400) dynasties, the silk industry began to take off alongside the expansion of the country’s economy. According to local gazetteers, most of the villages in the Red River delta afforded to produce various sorts of raw silk and silk textiles. Silk was not only a household product but also manufactured in state workshops. The royal courts paid especially close attention to silk manufacture. For instance, in the spring of 1013, the Lý Court issued a regulation on the taxation of mulberry fields.  

Regulations on silk production and trade were often reissued and revised during subsequent dynasties.

The quality of Vietnamese silk also improved considerably thanks to frequent technological improvements. According to Vietnamese annals, by the mid-1200s, fully aware of the high quality of Vietnamese silks, Emperor Thái Tông of the Lý dynasty decided henceforth to dress the court in local silks instead of those of Chinese manufacture.  

It was its high quality which made Vietnamese silk an integral part of the tributary cargo the Vietnamese court dispatched to China during the medieval period. Silk was also regarded as the special present which the Vietnamese emperors often used to award people on special occasions. In 1447, for instance, Emperor Thánh Tông of the Early Lê dynasty (1428–1527) awarded “the chief and the deputies [of the Chăm delegation] each a silk cloth and three pieces of silk, the interpreter and the
accompanying members each two pieces of silk, the other nineteen servants each a piece of silk”. Although featuring prominently among the tributary items sent to China, Vietnamese silk was also exported to various regional markets aboard foreign ships. According to Vietnamese records, silk was found among the cargos shipped away by Southeast Asian merchants (Siamese, Javanese, etc.). Patchy information on silk production and the shortage of source materials on silk exports hinders us from delineating a complete picture over the production and trade of this Vietnamese fabric. Yet, it is popularly assumed that, under the Chinese Ming’s Haijin (“Ocean Forbidden”, 1371–1567), Vietnamese silk, together with ceramics, was alternatively exported to regional and international markets on a relatively large scale.

The earliest Western documentation on Vietnamese silk production was perhaps the description by the early sixteenth-century Portuguese traveller Tomé Pires. In his famous Suma Oriental, Pires noted that the Vietnamese Kingdom of Cochin China (synonymous at the time with Đại Việt) produced, amongst other valuable items, “bigger and wider and finer taffeta of all kinds than there is anywhere else here and in our [countries]. They have the best raw silks in colours, which are in great abundance here, and all that they have in this way is fine and perfect, without the falseness that things from other places have”. During the next century, Western merchants and travellers kept emphasizing the importance of Vietnamese yarn in the country’s overall economy. By the 1620s, Vietnamese silk had become so popular on the regional market that the French priest Alexandre de Rhodes, who first arrived in northern Vietnam in 1627, noted that this product, together with aloeswood, was among the most important of the merchandise which lured Chinese and Japanese merchants to trade with Tonkin. “There is an abundance of silk in Tonkin,” wrote Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in the 1670s, “The natives, both the rich and the poor, all wear silk.” Samuel Baron, who was born and raised in Tonkin, documented in 1683 that “the chief riches, and indeed the only staple commodity, is silk, raw and wrought: of the raw the Portuguese and Castilians in former days, the Hollanders lately, and at present the Chinese, export good quantity to Japan, etc.: of their wrought silks the English and the Dutch expand the most”.

Ming China’s maritime embargo might have stimulated the sixteenth-century expansion of Vietnamese export products such as silk and ceramics. At the same time the consecutive political rivalries that encouraged political powers to utilize foreign trade in order to seek both finance and advanced weapons also stimulated Vietnamese silk production. During its rule, for instance, the Mạc dynasty (1523–1592) maintained an open-minded attitude toward foreign trade and even promulgated some liberal policies to stimulate the expansion of this economic branch, which was often regarded as countering the Confucianist thought of “valuing agriculture over trade”. After having defeated their Mạc rivals and gained complete power in the northern Vietnamese kingdom of Tonkin in 1592, the Lê-Trịnh rulers continued to nourish this liberal attitude
throughout the greater part of the 1600s in search of financial and military support from Western trading enterprises in order to gain an edge in the protracted rivalry with their southern counterpart, the Nguyễn of Cochinchina.

In the early seventeenth century silk, as a traditional household handicraft, was produced in virtually every Vietnamese village. There were, however, several manufacturing centres where silk textiles were produced in great quantities. Most of these places were located either within the capital Thăng Long (present-day Hanoi) itself or in the surrounding prefectures namely in present-day provinces of Hà Tày, Sơn Tấy, Bắc Ninh, Hải Dương, and Sơn Nam, where orchards of mulberry trees were watered and fertilized by the Red River. Besides silk textiles made by the peasantry, a considerable quantity of silk was manufactured by state-owned factories, whose products were confined not only to court dresses and gifts in the tributary trade but were also delivered to foreign merchants from whom in return the royal families received silver, copper, and curiosities.¹⁶

The process of silk production relied on two major crops per year. The “summer” crop harvested between April and May was the largest crop. In the 1630s, the Dutch (represented by the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie [VOC, (Dutch) United East India Company]) estimated that the summer crop yielded around 1,500–1,600 piculs (around 90 tons) of raw silk and roughly 5,000–6,000 (large-size) silk piece-goods, whereas, the “winter” crop harvested between October and November provided around half of the amount yielded by the summer harvest. Consequently, foreign merchants involved in the Tonkin–Japan silk trade often arrived in Tonkin before the summer to buy silk and departed for Japan before the southern monsoon ended in July or August. Shortly after the summer harvest, a silk auction was organized by the court in the capital Thăng Long. The delivery price varied according to the privileges which foreign merchants enjoyed but was always higher than on the free market. Afterwards local weavers and brokers sold and delivered their products to the foreigners according to what they had purchased. The winter yarn was either kept for Japan-bound shipments in the summer or shipped to Europe. From the second half of the seventeenth century, the Dutch mainly exported Vietnamese winter silks to the Netherlands. These winter cargoes were first shipped to Batavia in the spring and trans-shipped in vessels leaving for Europe. The English, who failed to re-open their trade with Japan in 1673, also exported Vietnamese silk to London during the last quarter of the seventeenth century.¹⁷

Despite the large amounts produced annually, the quality of Vietnamese export silk was generally lower than that of its Chinese and Bengal counterparts, which were also exported regularly to Japan in the seventeenth century. The reason for this lower output lay in the characteristics of the local mulberries, the silkworms, and the tropical climate of Tonkin. Mulberry trees planted in northern Vietnam, according to an eighteenth-century European traveller, were “small shrubs, which are every year cut down to the ground in the winter and the plant of which must be renewed from time to time, if they would
obtain fine silk, … the old plants, as well as the large trees, give but indifferent silk”.

The silkworm was another decisive factor. The silkworm bred in Tonkin adapted well to the tropical climate and even spun cocoons during the hot summer, but the bulk of these were yellow, hence, the yarn was yellow (bogy according to Dutch records), which was neither esteemed nor marketable on the Japanese market. The Vietnamese therefore tried to import Chinese silkworms which spun white yarn. Unused to the tropical climate, the imported silkworms were only able to spin cocoons in the cool weather of autumn and spring. By this time most of the mulberry trees had been chopped down. The amount of this sort of silk was therefore small, contributing to the fact that the winter silk crop was quantitatively inconsiderable.

Despite the humble amount of winter silk, there were often not enough buyers because foreign merchants were well aware of the very fact that, lamented an English merchant in Tonkin in the early 1670s, the Japanese “make a great difference between the new silk and the old”. The “new silk” here referred partly to the summer product to distinguish it from the “old” which was harvested during the winter. During the early 1660s, when Vietnamese silk was losing the Japanese market to Bengali product, silks were often so abundant in the winter sales that the prices dropped rapidly. A high-ranking local mandarin of Tonkin therefore requested Batavia to send ships to Tonkin during the New Year season to buy all winter silks which were sold at relatively low prices.

All in all, Vietnamese silk production expanded rapidly during the most part of the seventeenth century despite the political and territorial schism. This, then, stimulated the “unprecedented” boom of the country’s foreign trade during the greater part of the seventeenth century.

Globalizing Vietnamese silk products

Chinese demise, Vietnamese rise

As stated in the previous part, Vietnamese silk had been exported randomly during medieval times. Yet, the first sign of Vietnamese silk as a global export product only emerged at the dawn of the seventeenth century when Chinese and Japanese shuin-sen (Red-Seal) merchants began to export this valuable product to Japan. Backed by the rich source of silver and the Shogunate’s encouragement for foreign trade, Japanese shuin-sen ships together with Chinese vessels regularly visited Vietnamese ports searching for both Chinese and Vietnamese silk and the other local products. Alexandre de Rhodes observed during his first visit to northern Vietnam in 1627 that silk was among the most important merchandise which lured Japanese and Chinese merchants to Tonkin. By 1624, the Dutch factors in Hirado (Japan) realized that Vietnamese silk was included in the silk cargo Chinese merchants carried to Japan. As the Japanese consumers became used to the Vietnamese product, the volume
of Vietnamese silk exported to Japan by the Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese increased from the early 1630s. In 1634, for instance, the Dutch factors at the Hirado office recorded that, out of 2,550 piculs of silk the Chinese junks brought to Japan that year, Vietnamese silk comprised a substantial part.22

It was during the early 1630s that the export of Vietnamese silk gained momentum thanks to the Japanese court’s new policy over the import of Chinese silk. With the Japanese government’s issuance of the itowappu system,23 which was expressly devised to gain a tighter grip on the sale of Chinese yarn in Japan seriously to reduce the annual Portuguese profits, the Lusitanian merchants resolved to cut down the import volume of Chinese silk.24 In 1634, the Portuguese brought a mere two hundred piculs of Chinese silk to Japan, but simultaneously increased their annual import of Chinese piece-goods and Vietnamese raw silk which were exempted from the itowappu restrictions. This explains the steep increase in the import volume of Vietnamese silk by the Portuguese. In 1636, for instance, three Portuguese vessels arrived in northern Vietnam from Macao and bought 965 piculs in total of Vietnamese raw silk for Japan. It was at a cost as one galiota was shipwrecked off Hainan Island.25 In 1635, when the Japanese government abolished the shuin-sen system and banned its subjects from trading abroad, the Portuguese hoped to replace the Japanese trading network in northern Vietnam. This strategy, however, was doomed to be short-lived as the Portuguese were expelled from Japan in 1639.26

The rapid transformation of the silk trade in East Asia, especially the Japanese Bakufu’s promulgation of the sakoku (popularly known as the seclusion policy) which forbade Japanese merchants from trading abroad was closely monitored by the Dutch. In 1636, Nicolaas Couckebacker, the director of the Hirado factory, joyfully informed his superiors in Batavia of the declaration of the Japanese seclusion policy and the subsequent possibility to expand the Company trade to several places with which Japanese merchants formerly had regularly traded.27 Among the countries targeted was Tonkin which enjoyed a good reputation as a silk-producer and silk-exporter of the East. In the same year, Couckebacker, compiled a promising report on the current production and trade of Vietnamese silk.28 Considering the current transformation in the East Asian trade, the High Government in Batavia confidently reported its planned strategy to take over the Japanese trading network at several places in the Indo-Chinese Peninsula to the Gentlemen XVII.29 In 1637, the Dutch commenced their official trade and diplomatic relations with the northern Vietnamese kingdom of Tonkin. The flow of Vietnamese silk to the regional and international markets peaked with the Dutch trade and lasted for around two quarters before losing the favourite Japanese market to their Bengali counterpart. Yet, Japan was far from being the only market for Vietnamese silk products, though certainly the most prominent one. There were also other “back doors” through which Vietnamese silk was exported, viz. Manila and Europe.
Almost a century before Vietnamese silk joined the “silk-for-silver” race, Chinese silk had been exported to the Japanese market by the Portuguese and, to a lesser extent, the Chinese and the Japanese through such Southeast Asian intermediary ports as Manila, Patani, Hội An etc. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, the Portuguese Macao–Japan silk trade declined rapidly as their privileged position in Japan eroded vis-à-vis Dutch penetration into East Asian waters posed a serious threat to the Portuguese trading position. From the early 1630s, VOC attempts to expand its East Asian trade coincidentally concurred with several political and commercial transformations in Japan which contributed enormously to the enlargement of its trading network. A few years after the abolition of the shuin-sen network in 1635, the Japanese government deported the Portuguese from Nagasaki, triggering remarkable changes within the East Asian maritime trade network. This paved the way for the Dutch to assume the “Vietnamese silk-for-Japanese silver” trade from the Portuguese in 1637. In this year, the Dutch sent their first ship to northern Vietnam; Dutch–Vietnamese trade and diplomacy began and, despite vicissitudes, lasted until 1700.

Recent research on the Dutch Tonkin trade shows that the procurement of local silk products for Japan was the raison d’être for the VOC in Tonkin. This trade can be divided into three major phases.

The experiment (1637–40)

Between 1637 and 1640, the experimental phase failed to produce good profits despite Batavia furnishing a substantial annual capital sum to Tonkin. During these early years, Batavia spent around 1.1 million guilders on Vietnamese silk. Despite this enormous sum, the average annual profit yielded in
Japan stood at only 30 per cent. The reason for this low profit margin was the ready availability of Chinese silk that still accounted for 63 per cent of the total amount of silk which was imported to Japan by the VOC, hence Vietnamese silk had a share of only 37 per cent. The profit margins on these two sorts of silk were relatively proportional: Chinese silk brought 70 per cent of the total profit while Vietnamese silk made a contribution of a modest 30 per cent.

Of high profit (1641–54)

The 1640s to the mid-1650s witnessed the spectacular success of the Company’s Vietnamese silk trade from the point of view of both large capital and high profit margins. Large capital sums were remitted for the Tonkin trade, inspired primarily by the encouraging profit margins which the Vietnamese silk trade had been yielding and also by the current decline in the Formosa trade. During this fourteen-year period, out of around 12.8 million guilders’ worth of goods the VOC imported to Japan, approximately 7 million or 54 per cent consisted of raw silk and silk piece-goods. Out of this 7 million, Vietnamese silk fetched around 50 per cent, meaning approximately 3.5 million guilders were spent on Vietnamese silk. The wide gap between the purchase and sales prices of Vietnamese silk still offered high profit margins. Throughout this period, the purchase price of Vietnamese raw silk stood at around 3.5 guilders per catty, while the average sales price fetched in Japan was 8 guilders per catty. This offered an average gross profit margin of 130 per cent for the entire period, much higher than that on Bengali and Chinese yarns which yielded 105 and 37 per cent respectively.

The high profits obtained from the Vietnamese silk trade during this fourteen-year period was even more significant to the Company’s Japan trade, considering the gradual reduction in the net profit made in recent years. Whereas the annual net profit of the Japan trade had varied between 1 and 2.4 million guilders in the 1635–9 period, it fell to only 0.5 million in 1642 and fluctuated between 0.38 and 0.95 million in the 1649–54 period. In the most lucrative year of 1649, for instance, the purchase and sales prices of Vietnamese raw silk were respectively 3.64 and 9.97 guilders per catty, making a profit margin of roughly 174 per cent. Hence, the Vietnamese silk cargo which was valued at 299,000 guilders that year would yield a profit of around 363,660 guilders. Consequently, of the 709,000 guilders the Company’s Japan trade yielded this year, Vietnamese silk contributed roughly 51 per cent. For the entire 1641–54 period, Vietnamese silk contributed 71 per cent to the gross profit of the Company’s silk trade in Japan and around one third of the total profit which the Deshima factory transferred to Batavia.

Decline (1655–c. 1671)

The mid-1650s to the early 1670s witnessed the low profit margin compounded by the irregularity of silk production in northern Vietnam, which
reduced the annual capitals remitted for the Tonkin trade. The import volumes of Vietnamese silk now depended on two factors: the erratic demand on the Japan market and the export volume of Bengali silk to Japan. Since it had been introduced to Japan for the first time in 1640, Bengali silk gradually won itself a stable position on the Japanese market and, from the early 1650s, proved to be more marketable and hence profitable than its Vietnamese counterpart.\textsuperscript{38} If the purchase price of Vietnamese raw silk in the years 1637–49 had fluctuated between 2.54 and 3.64 guilders per catty, it rose to 4.43 and 5.84 guilders per catty in the 1665–8 period, causing a sharp increase of around 66 per cent in the purchase price. In the meantime, the sales price of Vietnamese yarn in Japan fell drastically, offering profit margins of only 58, 34, and 29 per cent respectively in the years 1652, 1654, and 1656. Between 1665 and 1669, the Company’s export of Vietnamese silk to Japan revived; the value of the annual cargoes stood at around 300,000 guilders. This short-lived recovery can be attributed to the decision of Batavia to lower the annual import volume of Bengali silk to Japan to at most 170,000 pounds in order to stabilize the sales price\textsuperscript{39} and the elevation of the Tonkin factory to the status of permanent in 1663.

In spite of these changes, Vietnamese silk did not regain its once-lost pre-dominance over Bengali silk on the Japanese market. The annual profits remained small. In 1668, for instance, the Vietnamese raw silk cargo valued at 369,000 guilders raised a profit of only 26 per cent in Nagasaki.\textsuperscript{40}

The last quarter of the seventeenth century, alongside the rapid reduction in its silk export to the Japanese market, the VOC’s export of Vietnamese silk to Japan was insubstantial, valued at hardly above 20,000 guilders per shipment. Obviously, the profits were proportionally paltry. Yet, the decline of the Tonkin–Japan silk trade opened the other “back door” for the export of the Vietnamese silk products to Europe and Manila thence to the New World.

**The “back door”: Vietnamese silk to Europe**

The Dutch Company’s export of Vietnamese silk to the Netherlands constituted no more than a sideline in comparison to its silk export to Japan. Shortly after the establishment of the official trading relation with northern Vietnam in 1637, the Dutch began to send Vietnamese silk textiles to Batavia, where they were reloaded on board the homeward-bound ships. The export volumes of Vietnamese silk piece-goods to the Netherlands in the first years were neither substantial nor regular in comparison to those sent to Japan, since Chinese piece-goods still constituted the staple in the homeward-bound cargoes. From the early 1640s, political turmoil in mainland China obstructed the regular influx of Chinese goods to Formosa and reduced the annual import volumes of Chinese products of the Company.\textsuperscript{41} As a consequence the VOC fostered the import of Vietnamese silk piece-goods to the Netherlands.

In 1644, the chief of the Tonkin factory, Antonio van Brouckhorst, suggested to Batavia that in order to facilitate the purchase of Vietnamese silk and
piece-goods for both Japan and the Netherlands, it would be advisable to
leave one junior merchant and some assistants supplied with substantial
amounts of money to reside permanently in the capital Thăng Long to buy
silk in the off season.\textsuperscript{42} This proposal was approved; the Company’s export of
Vietnamese silk and piece-goods ran smoothly in the years which followed. In
the 1645 trading season, for instance, out of the 135,000 taels (approximately
385,000 guilders) which the Company provided for the Vietnamese silk trade,
Batavia instructed that 122,400 taels (90.4 per cent) was to be spent on raw
silk and silk piece-goods for Japan, the rest of 12,600 taels (9.6 per cent) was
to be used to buy raw silk and silk piece-goods for the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{43}

When the profit margins which Vietnamese silk cargoes fetched in Japan
fell rapidly from the early 1650s, Batavia resolved to suspend temporarily the
Vietnamese silk export to Nagasaki, but ordered the Dutch factors in Hanoi to
purchase Vietnamese silk piece-goods only for the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{44} In response to
the current shortage of copper coins, hence, the devaluation of silver, the pur-
chase price of Vietnamese raw silk increased on average 20 per cent. Vietnamese
weavers, shaken by the high price of the raw silk, only wove piece-goods after
foreign merchants had advanced the sum required to pay for them in full.
Because of this, the 1655 and 1656 cargoes of piece-goods which the Tonkin
factory sent to the Netherlands were valued at only 25,773 and 16,000 guilders
respectively.\textsuperscript{45}

If the 1645 composition of silk and silk piece-goods had been 90.6 per cent
for Japan and 9.4 per cent for the Netherlands, it was already 68 and 32 per
cent respectively in 1661. Out of 264,144 guilders allotted to the Tonkin trade
that year, Batavia ordered 84,144 guilders to be spent on local piece-goods for
the Netherlands, consisting mainly of pelings.\textsuperscript{46} This composition was perma-
nently maintained throughout the decade of 1660–70. In 1664, for instance, out
of the 164,703 guilders Batavia sent to Tonkin, 50,000 were to be spent on
silk piece-goods for the home market, the rest would be invested in raw silks
for Japan, making a rough ratio of 30/70.\textsuperscript{47}

In the last three decades of the Company’s Tonkin trade, the annual capital
reserved for the procurement of Vietnamese piece-goods for the Netherlands
showed an overall increase, prompted by the slump in the Company’s export
of Vietnamese raw silks to Japan reinforced by its cancellation of the Tonkin–
Japan direct shipping route in 1671. As the profit margin on Vietnamese silk
in Japan fell drastically during the 1670s, the Dutch factors in Hanoi were
instructed to procure Vietnamese silk piece-goods, most popularly among them
pelings, for the Netherlands. From the early 1680s, the Company’s export of
Vietnamese silk to Japan virtually ended; besides some local miscellaneous
items, the Dutch factors in Hanoi bought Vietnamese silk piece-goods for the
European market only. The annual capital for purchasing Vietnamese piece-
goods consequently increased to between 100,000 and 150,000 guilders per
year. In 1681, for instance, out of 113,318 guilders invested in the Tonkin
trade, Batavia ordered its factors to buy no goods other than pelings and
musk for the Netherlands, earmarking nothing for the Japan trade.
To make sure that this composition would be adequately fulfilled, in his letter to Chúa (King) Trinh Tác, the Dutch Governor-General requested the latter not to supply the Company with any raw silk that year. Choosing not to heed the Governor-General’s request, the Chúa forced the Dutch factors to accept a large amount of Vietnamese yarn, but at better prices. The next year, the English and the French also arrived in Tonkin with large amounts of capital to buy silk piece-goods for Europe, escalating the fierce competition between these European rivals and consequently pushing up the purchase prices, particularly those of pelings and musk. Given these circumstances and resultant prices, the Vietnamese piece-goods cargo reportedly yielded no profit in the Netherlands.

This discouraging trading situation dragged on notwithstanding exertions by the Company to improve the state of its Tonkin trade. In 1686, the Governor-General again demanded the Chúa to pay the Company in either cash or such silk piece-goods as pelings instead of raw silk because Vietnamese yarn was currently not marketable and therefore not profitable. Batavia’s request again fell on deaf ears; Chúa Trịnh Cảnh forced the Dutch factors to accept raw silks for the silver which the factory had advanced him earlier.

In 1688, Batavia instructed the Tonkin factory to order local spinners to spin Vietnamese raw silk using Chinese and Bengali methods, hoping that the innovation in spinning would make it suitable for the European market. Therefore, in the summer of 1688, samples of Chinese and Bengali raw silk were sent to Tonkin to be spun. Soon afterwards, the well-thought-out plan proved illusory. After a year of bringing in low prices, Vietnamese yarn again grew scarce and expensive as the harvest had been poor. In spite of this, the Dutch factors still managed to have 72 catties of Vietnamese raw silk spun using the Chinese and Bengali techniques. It seems that these samples failed to find favour with Western consumers as nothing came out of this attempt. Consequently the export of Vietnamese silk piece-goods stumbled for another decade before it finally ended when the Company abandoned its Tonkin trade in early 1700.

Vietnamese silk in London

The period 1672–97 was perhaps the most famous illusion and misinformation which the English East India Company (EEIC) suffered in the East during the seventeenth century. Prompted by their Dutch counterpart’s profitable Japan trade, in the late 1660s, the English in Bantam designed what was to become the illusive East Asian strategy during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Ideally speaking, the English would set up trading bases in Cambodia, Siam, Tonkin, and Taiwan to facilitate the purchase of local products for the Japanese market, from where silver would be obtained to run the profitable intra-Asian trade like the Dutch had been doing so successfully in the past decades. For the factory in the northern Vietnamese kingdom of Tonkin, it
should send annually a silk cargo to Japan in exchange for silver, a trading model which their Dutch counterpart had been hitherto enjoying. The English, however, did not know that, by the late 1660s, Vietnamese silk had become so dull in the Japanese market that, in 1671, the VOC decided to abolish the direct Tonkin–Japan silk trade. To rub salt into the wound, the Japanese Bakufu refused to grant the English permission to reside in Nagasaki for trade purposes. This placed the English Company in a dilemma and forced its directors to look for alternative solutions if they were to maintain the newly-established Tonkin factory. The English factors in Tonkin, therefore, confidently proposed to their superiors the plan of exporting Vietnamese silk piece-goods to London.52

In fact, shortly after their arrival in northern Vietnam in the summer of 1672, the Tonkin factory had already informed Bantam and London about a number of local products suitable not only for the Japan trade but also for the English market as well. These were musk, bamboo cane, lacquered works, and especially a variety of silk piece-goods such as baas, loas, the thua, galingall, chemongees, pylangs, hockings, and chiers.53 The factory also gave the assurances that these goods would be ordered in time, ready to be shipped out. As it turned out no English ships arrived in Tonkin between 1672 and 1676; in 1674 the factory again confidently reminded the directors about the high quality and marketability of these products. “Now as to the improvement of made silkes here,” wrote the chief to Bantam, “soe as they made fitt for the markett in Europe, wee must expect directions from your Honours if you thinke it worth the while and to send one or two hither that have some judgement in weaving”.54 Both information and samples of Tonkin silks were well received in London. Meanwhile the directors in London had been aware of the VOC’s “considerable investment at Tonkin in white silke, wrought silke and muske for Europe”.55 All these considerations were taken into account in the eventual decision to give the Tonkin trade a new lease of existence.

In the next twenty-five years, the Tonkin factory was regarded as a supplier of, besides silk, such miscellaneous products as lacquered wares and musk, Vietnamese silk piece-goods for the English market. In the years leading to the early 1690s, missives from London to Tonkin often included the written list of silks demanded for the next home-bound shipment. Embroiled in private trade, embezzlement, and contradiction among factors, the English factory in Tonkin, however, often failed to meet the Company’s demands. Return voyages from Tonkin were often light in invoices but rather heavy with complaints, plus some fair promises for a better trade in the near future which increasingly irritated the Court of Committees in London. By the early 1690s, disappointment grew so high that the Court of Committees now became very stern toward their Tonkin factors. Having complained in the 1690 missive that silk price was particularly low in London, the directors went on to express their frustration about the frugality of the Tonkin trade in a missive in 1692: “Other discouragement we had likewise from sending out any ship to you directly from hence vizt. the dearness of freight and demorage in this time of
war, being 50 per cent more than formerly and the low prices of all your silk wares wrought, your raw silk and musk which are cheaper yet here than they were in times of peace.\(^{56}\) In 1695, the directors seemed to have completely lost their patience with the sloppy Tonkin trade, hence they decided to close the Tonkin factory. Two years later, Fort of St George (Madras/Mumbai) sent the last ship to Tonkin to close down the Tonkin factory, ending the English saga in northern Vietnam.

"Pacific route": Manila and the New World (c. 1660s–1670s)

The trading connection between Manila and northern Vietnam was intermittent despite some attempts made by the Spanish in Manila (and later, the English) during the second half of the seventeenth century. Throughout the century, the Spanish in Manila never made any overtures to open official relations with northern Vietnam. Yet, they occasionally sent ships to Tonkin to purchase local goods, particularly silk and musk. According to a Dutch observation in 1651, the Spanish in Manila sent a junk to Tonkin to explore the possibility of creating a triangular trading network between Manila, Tonkin, and Cambodia. In order to facilitate this mission, the Governor of Manila had even given the owner of this junk, a Spanish Brabander, the title of “ambassador” of Spanish Manila. In the following year, this junk returned to Tonkin with a capital of 30,000 taels in which the Governor of Manila reportedly had a share of 20,000 rials. Every penny of this capital was exchanged for Vietnamese raw silk and various sorts of musk. In Cambodia this cargo yielded a handsome profit. The appearance of this Spanish “interloper” in Tonkin worried the Dutch factors, who then suggested to their superiors in Batavia that this junk “be diverted” to other places.\(^{57}\)

While the Dutch sought vainly for a ruse to stop the Spanish intrusion into the Indo-Chinese markets, the latter geared up their commercial strategy to penetrate the Tonkin trade by co-operating with the Japanese free merchant Resimon, who had been living and trading in northern Vietnam for many years, in order to strengthen the Tonkin–Manila trade route. Since Resimon was a powerful merchant and a well-established broker in Tonkin, the Spanish tried to utilize this entrepreneur to carry out the import and export trade. Resimon, in turn, made use of the Spanish shipment to send Vietnamese silk to Manila, where raw silk was then woven into pieces to be exported to the New World or to be consumed there or diverted to Europe. To maximize the trade with Manila, in 1654, Resimon bought a junk and hired a Dutch pilot to manage the regular voyage between Tonkin and Manila. The Dutch factors protested about the interference of Resimon but to no avail.\(^{58}\)

By the late 1660s, the Spanish involvement in the Tonkin–Manila trade was suspended after suffering several disastrous losses. In 1666, the Castilian vessel operating regularly between Manila and Tonkin foundered in the Gulf of Tonkin. Although the crew survived, their cargo was a complete loss. In the following year, Resimon, who had been actively involved in the Tonkin–
Manila trade since the mid-1650s, died, leaving this trade route abandoned. Two fatal misfortunes within two years were severe blows to the Tonkin–Manila trade route in which the Spaniards had been active participants, and impeded the brief Spanish commercial relations with northern Vietnam.\(^{59}\) In the summer of 1672, shipping between Manila and Tonkin was resumed when a “Manila junk” again arrived in Tonkin. The shipping invoice attracted English attention as silk was noted among the other merchandise. In November of the same year, the English Chief Merchant William Gyfford, having learned about the invoice of the “Manila junk”, reported to his superiors about the potential of Manila as an export outlet for English manufactured goods and Tonkin raw silks. Four months later the chief presented a detailed plan on the Manila trade, highly confident of its success. Briefly, the Tonkin factory would send silk to Bantam where it would be reshipped to Manila in March in order to meet the ships from Mexico for rials of eight. In July these ships would sail to either Tonkin, where they would proceed further for Japan with ready goods, or Bantam, where they would depart for England. “Soe that with these two trades, Japon and Manilh”, asserted the chief, “you may be able to furnish this place with money sufficient to share somewhat like with the Dutch in this trade of silke”.\(^{60}\) Hearing no reply from the Company of their proposal about the Manila trade, in 1674, the English factors in Tonkin again enthusiastically reminded their superiors about the potential Manila–Tonkin trade for two reasons. First, the Japan trade was now a thing of the past while Manila “proves almost as good as Japon” and “free for all nations to come thither”. Second, it was said that Vietnamese raw silk, being very cheap in Tonkin, could reap very high profits in Manila, where the local Chinese could weave them into beautiful pieces of garment to be exported to the New World. The chief, therefore, urged Bantam to reconsider this project and tried to convince the directors in London to negotiate with Spain in order to establish a factory in Manila.\(^{61}\) Just a year later, however, the bad news of the imprisonment of a Company’s servant in Manila arrived, with which the English Manila project was shattered into pieces.\(^{62}\)

Epilogue

Such industries such as silk, ceramic, and lacquer were maintained by Vietnamese people as traditional household handicrafts for over a thousand years before the arrival of European merchants in the East. From the early seventeenth century, however, under the rapid expansion of global trade as well as the country’s socio-political transformations, these handicraft industries expanded rapidly, especially in the northern Vietnam kingdom of Tonkin. Silk, ceramics and, to a lesser extent, lacquered wares, and various sorts of woodworks were now manufactured in large quantity to meet the increasing international demand. From around the second quarter of the 1600s, due mainly to the scarcity of Chinese silk in the regional and international market, Vietnamese yarn became the most suitable substitution for the Chinese product.
Vietnamese silk was exported in great quantity to Japan between the late 1630s and the late 1660s, mainly by the Dutch and the Chinese, and to Europe by the Dutch and the English. Vietnamese raw silk was sporadically shipped by both Spanish and Southeast Asian merchants to Manila where the local Chinese weavers turned it into piece-goods to be sent to the New World. Besides silks, other commodities such as ceramics, lacquered wares, and woodwork were also exported to various markets around the world, though less in quantity compared to silks. Vietnamese ceramics were widely exported to the regional market during the 1660s and 1670s when approximately two millions pieces (predominantly daily utensils such as bowls, plates, cups, and jars) were shipped mainly to the insular Southeast Asian markets solely by the Dutch, Chinese, and English. In the meantime, Vietnamese lacquered wares and woodwork were often included in cargoes forwarded to London by the English factors in Tonkin during the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

These handicraft industries engineered the growth of the country’s commodity economy. For decades, Vietnamese historians have been amazed by the “unprecedented expansion” of the commodity economy during the seventeenth century. The dearth of concrete data, however, prevented scholars from delineating a full picture of this historical phenomenon. Recent research drawn from Western archives reveals how the rapidly increasing export of silks and ceramics influenced the country’s overall economic expansion such as the rise and fall of domestic prices, the fluctuation of the silver/cash exchange rate, and the shifting of labour from the other agricultural sections to the silk industry, etc. For instance, in order to produce annually 90 tons of raw silk (as estimated by the Dutch), at least 9,000 households (around one per cent of Tonkin’s population) had to work intensively in the multiple processes, from mulberry cultivation to feeding silkworms and harvesting raw silk. It should be added that there was a great amount of additional work relating to the silk industry such as dyeing, bleaching, reeling, and weaving raw silk into pieces, not to mention extensive labour working in the other crafts such as lacquered wares, woodwork, etc.

In a global perspective, these handicraft products helped bridge the isolated Gulf of Tonkin to connect Vietnam with the outside world. The fact that Vietnamese commodities were largely exported to regional and global markets postulates that Vietnam had integrated, though half-heartedly, into the global exchange system and hence the process of globalization during the early modern period.

Notes

1 The “new historiography” referred to the so-called “Marxist” or “Socialist” historiography which prevailed in North Vietnam since 1954 and the whole of Vietnam since 1975.
For example, the “official history textbooks” used both at schools and universities in Vietnam failed to detail the commodity economy expansion owing to the lack of concrete information, and thus could only make general statements on this economic phenomenon.

Officially, the concept of the “early modern period” still does not exist in the conventional Vietnamese historiography. According to the conventional periodization, the “medieval period” lasts until 1858 when the French invaded and colonized Vietnam. Nevertheless, in my recent works, I have consistently proposed that the period from late sixteenth/early seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century could be well regarded as the “early modern period” in Vietnamese history considering the country’s rapid socio-economic transformation under the strong regional and international influences. Hoàng Anh Tuan, “Internationalizing national history: early modern globalization and seventeenth-century Vietnam” (in Vietnamese), in Lê Hồng Lý (ed.), *Historical Heritage and New Approaches*, Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 2011, pp. 247–82.

Not only textbooks and research papers but also the teaching at universities also overemphasized this “internal viewpoint”. It is often stated that the availability of silks, ceramics, lacquers … attracted foreign merchants to Vietnam, not the other way around, namely the arrival of foreign merchants then contributed to stimulate the local industries for export.


Hoàng Anh Tuan, *Silk for Silver*, p. 27.


[20] Itowappu (or pancada in Portuguese), a system in which Chinese silk imported to Japan was purchased by Japanese merchants at prices fixed by the Japanese authorities, namely the heads of the five shogunal cities (Miyako, Edo, Osaka, Sakai, and Nagasaki) in order to prevent rising prices as a result of competition. This system was first applied to the Portuguese in 1604, to the Chinese in 1633, and then to the Dutch in 1641. It was annulled in 1654 and was re-applied from 1685.


It should be mentioned here that the seventeenth century also witnessed the development of the Chinese trade with Tonkin. Although we do not have any accurate figures about the Chinese purchases, fragmentary information in the Dutch records suggests that the total Chinese investment in their Tonkin trade amounted to around two-thirds of that invested by the Dutch (in fact, there were many years in which the Chinese investment in their Tonkin trade even surpassed that of the Dutch Company: in 1664, for instance, the Chinese arrived in Tonkin from Japan with 200,000 taels of silver (c. 570,000 guilders) to buy silk for the Japanese market, while the Dutch factory was provided with 347,989 guilders only). If this is correct, then another sum of approximately 9,009,352 guilders was invested in Vietnamese products, mainly silk, by the Chinese during the 1637–1700 period, apart from the purchases made by the Japanese and Portuguese in the earlier period as well as those of the English and French during the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

Oskar Nachod, *Die Beziehungen der niederländischen ostindischen Kompagnie zu Japan im siebzehnten Jahrhundert*, Leipzig: Rob. Friesie Sep., 1897, Table A (Umsatz-Tabelle) and Table C (Einfuhr von Rohseide), pp. CCII–CCVI.


Klein, “De Tonkines-Japansche zijdehandel”, pp. 169, 173 (Table 4).


In the 1644 trading season, Zeelandia Castle reported to the Deshima factory in Japan that half of the Company’s demand for Chinese goods to be procured there could not be fulfilled. In 1648, the Governor of Formosa kept lamenting that the export of Chinese commodities to this island from the mainland had dwindled to almost nothing. This situation remained more or less the same in the 1650s. NFJ 57, Dagregister comptoir Nagasaki, 10 Sept. 1643; NFJ 61, Dagregister comptoir Nagasaki, 15 Sept. 1648.


Dagh-register Batavia 1661, pp. 89–91.

Dagh-register Batavia 1664, p. 298.


NA VOC 1377, Missive from Leendert de Moij and Johannes Sibens to Batavia, 5 Jan. 1682, fos. 556–564.

NA VOC 1438, Missive from Tonkin to Batavia, 24 Jan. 1687, fos. 669–670.
For the English misfortune in Tonkin during the early 1670s, see: Hoang Anh Tuan, “From Japan to Manila and back to Europe: the abortive English trade with Tonkin in the 1670s”, *Itinerario*, 29, 3 (2005): 73–92.

Pilangs or pylangs (linh): one kind of silk piece; loas (lua): silk piece; hockings (hoang quyen): yellow silk piece; the rest: baas, the thua, galingall, chemongees, and chiers are all types of unidentified silk pieces.

The English must have observed the great advantage that the Dutch had been enjoying for decades in exporting Vietnamese silks to Japan, where locally-mined silvers were exported largely to the Asian market to foster their intra-Asian trade. The VOC’s Vietnamese silk-for-Japanese silver trade, however, began to significantly decline from the mid 1650s onwards.
An international sea port of Đại Việt

Nguyen Van Kim

Tradition and position of the port

In the northeast and southwest territories of Vietnam, there are two gulfs which hold very important geo-economic and geo-strategic positions. The Gulf of Tonkin had close historical, economic, and cultural relations with northeast Asian countries from time immemorial. Conversely on the western sea-area of the Gulf of Siam from the early centuries CE, the marine polity of Phú Nam (Funan) had established relations with territories in Southeast and South Asia.1 With an area of 126,250 sq km (36,000 sq miles), the Gulf of Tonkin is one of the largest gulfs in Southeast Asia. It is bounded by the Vietnamese and Chinese coasts in the west and north respectively, and the (Vietnamese) “East Sea”, that is the South China Sea in the south. The northeast coastal area of Vietnam, comprising ten provinces and cities extending to a length of 763 km, fronts a large part of the Gulf of Tonkin. Three Chinese provinces – Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan – in the nearby vicinity of the Gulf of Tonkin had centuries-long commercial, political, and cultural contacts and relations with Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries.

The Gulf of Tonkin, an important part of the South China Sea, with its economic potentialities and rich cultural environment was the foundation for the famous maritime culture of Hà Long. The cultural vestige of Hà Long has been found not only on the northern area but also in the south and the middle of Vietnam. Hà Long culture also extended its influence to South China, and mainland and insular Southeast Asia.2 In the process of establishment and development, Hà Long culture established its wide relations with many countries in the region through commercial routes and the interlinking of islands.3

Since Đồng Sơn culture, learning from the dynamic culture of Hà Long, communities of ancient Viet expanded their relations with Hainan and Taiwan, Ryukyu and Kyushu in Japan, several places in Korea, and other maritime cultures in East Asia.4 The discoveries of bronze drums and tools of Đồng Sơn culture in various parts of Southeast Asia reflect the widespread and strong vitality of this culture. Moreover, such findings point to the
existence of long-distance trade links with East Asian countries during these early times.

As a gateway with connections with the southeast and southwest coasts of China, the Gulf of Tonkin, especially at its centre where the port of Vân Đồn was situated, was considered as a major trade route and intermediate location between continent and ocean. Vân Đồn was strategically at the centre of relations not only between the East and West, namely between peninsular Southeast Asia and the Southeast Asian islands, but also between the North and the South, that is between Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia as well as South and West Asia. Thanks to Southeast Asian waters, the Chinese World and the Indian World were able to be connected to one another. Also, through maritime contacts the two Asian civilizations expanded their influences, particularly to Southeast Asia. In pre-modern times, owing to the ports in Southeast Asia, ships from the West were able to reach Southeast Asia to trade. It is important to note that alongside economic relations, there were flows of culture and civilization. As a dynamic area of the South China Sea, the Gulf of Tonkin facilitated cultural exchanges amongst countries from within and without the region. Thus, if the South China Sea was considered a “Mini Mediterranean of Asia,” the Gulf of Tonkin, especially the port of Vân Đồn, played an important role in economic and socio-cultural intercourse in the region.5

Owing to its proximity to the economic and cultural centre of South China, since the early centuries CE ships from various Asian countries came to trade at Giao Châu (Jiaozhi), an ancient Chinese region that comprised present-day North Vietnam and parts of Guangxi. At the same time, monks and adherents of Buddhism and Brahmanism also visited Giao Châu to propagate their religious traditions.6 Giao Châu had been a flourishing place, a meeting-point of migration flows and stopover destination for envoys, missionaries, and merchants who visited Southeast Asia and China. By the tenth century CE, several Southeast Asian countries had established relations with China and India. Consequently, the areas to the northeast of Giao Châu, namely Guangdong and Fujian became the gathering places of merchants and delegations.7 These areas were also the crossroads of the two great ancient civilizations of China and India.

In the third century BCE, after occupying Nam Việt, the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) and the subsequent Hán dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) intensified the exploitation of the peoples in the southern regions. Commerce with areas in the (Chinese) “Southern Sea”, namely the South China Sea, was a lucrative venture for Chinese mandarins and merchants. According to Pre-Hán dynasty books, Nam Việt was located “close to the sea, having plenty of rhino horn, ivory, tortoise-shell, pearls and gems, silver, copper, fruits, cotton. The Chinese came there to trade and became wealthy.”8 In the Eastern Hán dynasty (25–220 CE), economic relations with the Southern Sea areas, basically with Guangchau and Giao Chi flourished. Chinese and Việt merchants often brought rice from Giao Chi to sell in districts of Cửu Châu and Hợp Phố.
They also visited Hợp Phố to trade for pearls. In the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), trade flourished in the area of Giao Châu that subsequently contributed to the sharp decline of Guangchau’s trade.\(^9\)

In the independent era, the Lý dynasty (1009–1225) increasingly realized the importance of the northeast sea (Gulf of Tonkin) area vis-à-vis relations with other countries in the region. Consequently in 1149, King Lý Anh Tông (1138–1175) established “Vân Đồn trang” (Vân Đồn’s village or station) to stimulate relations with foreign countries as well as to ensure security. Shortly after its establishment, Vân Đồn emerged as one of the most important international ports of Vietnam. In the Trần dynasty (1225–1400), Thăng Long’s government similarly placed emphasis and importance on the northeast sea area thereby ensuring national security and economic advantages. With the transition from trang (莊) to tran (鎮, essential district), Vân Đồn became an economic zone with a system of ports, settlements, administrative towns, and several stations (trang) to control traffic, cargoes, tolls, and security. During the Trần dynasty, there were a number of densely-populated settlements in Vân Đồn. In fact, Vân Đồn developed as a fully-constituted entity receiving much heed from the dynasties of Lý, Trần, and Lê (1428–1788).

Playing the role as a principal port in Vietnam and one of the important ports in Southeast Asia, Vân Đồn maintained its commerce for seven centuries.\(^{10}\) It was the Vietnamese major port, playing an important economic and political role and having the most long-standing and continuous process of development in the history of Vietnamese ports. This port had close ties with the inshore stations, ports and islands, estuarial ports, and remote areas, such as Văn Ninh, Mỏng Cái, and Cát Bà island, as well as with the trade villages of silk, ceramics, and other crafts in the Red River delta, and the northeast and northwest areas. Subsequently the Gulf of Tonkin assumed a strategic position not only for the northeast area but also for national security and strategies of economic development. The northeast area, especially the provinces of Quảng Ninh and Hải Phòng were often the initial places to stimulate foreign economic activities as well as to receive the influences of cultural tendencies, intrusions, invasions, and military and political challenges from without.

**System and scale of Vân Đồn**

Although relations between northeast Vietnam and the neighbouring countries in the region began early, it was not until the reign of Lý Anh Tông that the station of Vân Đồn was established. Vân Đồn’s initial function was to receive trading ships from Trào Oa (Java), Lọ Lạc (Lavo), and Xiêm La (Siam).\(^{11}\) Since then Vân Đồn often featured in Vietnamese history. When Vân Đồn was established, it was an administrative unit consisting of numerous islands in a large area. The islanders did not practise agriculture, instead lived by harvesting and trading in sea products. The natural advantages and profits from trade contributed not only to domestic economic development
but also to the extension of Vietnamese knowledge and political views on a regional scale.

In 1349, King Trần Dụ Tông (1341–1369) elevated Vân Đồn from tran to tran. The strategic position of the northeast sea-border was therefore confirmed. In addition, the Thăng Long government also carried out liberal foreign policies towards the countries in the region. Like other foreign economic exchange centres in the southern region, particularly the ports in Thanh-Nghệ-Tĩnh, Vân Đồn also established its relations with Lào, Chen-la, and Champa and became the most important foreign economic exchange centre in the northern Vietnam. During the occupation of the Chinese Ming (1407–1427), Vân Đồn changed its status from tran to huyện (縣, district). After regaining independence, in the Early Lê dynasty (1428–1527), Emperor Lê Thánh Tông changed the northeast sea area to Châu (州, remote district) in 1466 but was reinstated to Huyện (縣, district) under the Nguyễn (1802–1945).

The administrative border of Vân Đồn changed throughout history. It is essential to have an objective, clear, and comprehensive view about the spatial circles of the port. Moreover, we also have to distinguish the terms of “Cửa biển Vân Đồn” (Vân Đồn’s harbour), “Núi Vân” (Vân mountain), “Trang Vân Đồn” (Vân Đồn station), “Trần Vân Đồn” (Vân Đồn district), “Châu Vân Đồn” (Vân Đồn remote district), “Cảng Vân Đồn” (Vân Đồn port), and so forth. Each name referred to the difference in administrative border, function, and importance, despite possessing certain common characteristics.

Drawing from a variety of historical records, modern historians have made many efforts to locate the port of Vân Đồn. In 1936, Professor Yamamoto Tasturo suggested that “relying on the records of Annam, which defined Vân Đồn as Vân Hải district, the centre of the district of Vân Đồn was probably on the island of Vân Hải.” According to Professor Trần Quốc Vương “Vân Hải district was located on an island in Hạ Long bay, namely Vân Hải island or Lợn Lòi isle (Boar isle), just nearby the Cái Bàn isle. In the reformation period, Vân Hải island and its surroundings were gathered into the district of Vân Hải.” Having the same view as Professor Trần Quốc Vương, in the annotation of Nguyễn Trãi’s Dư địa chí (Treatises on geography), Professor Hà Văn Tần claims that “Vân Đồn was an island in Hạ Long bay located on the eastern side of Cái Bàn isle. It was named Vân Hải island or Lợn Lòi isle (Boar isle)”. Similarly, Associate Professor Đỗ Văn Ninh suggests that the port of Vân Đồn was a system of harbours with its centre at Cái Lạng and Sơn Hào. Hence, Đỗ Văn Ninh pioneered the term of the “system” of Vân Đồn trading port, but in his explanations, the system only embraced some harbours and inlets in the present-day villages of Quan Lạn and Minh Châu.

Based on results from fieldwork and archaeological excavations carried out between 1990 and 2008 in several island-villages in Vân Đồn, onwards from 2002, we believe that within seven centuries, Vân Đồn was founded and developed as a system of harbours, not just a single port or harbour. Therefore, from the beginning of its establishment, Vân Đồn had a rather large
system of harbours and ports, many of which had relations with neighbouring countries in the region.

In fact, in each period, at least economically, there were always certain trading centres in the area of Vân Đồn which emerged, developed, and declined throughout history. Relying on various historical sources, it is affirmed that the area of Công Đông-Công Tây was the most important centre of Vân Đồn during the Lý-Trần. Under the Ming occupation, the centre of Vân Đồn remained at Cộng Đông-Công Tây. The appearance of the name “Vùng Huyện” (District wharf) lends credence to this hypothesis. In the Early Lê dynasty, especially under the reign of Lê Thánh Tông (1460–1497) when the concept of the national position and territorial sovereignty became strong, the Thăng Long government paid much attention to the Northeast area. Therefore, the centre of Vân Đồn moved eastwards, further towards the East Sea, namely to the villages of Quan Lạn and Minh Châu. Consequently this explains the rapid development of large harbours at Cái Làng, Sơn Hào, and Con Quy during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Relying on various documents and results from the study of geographical names, archaeological objects, and cultural and religious architecture, it is suggested that from the Lý and Trần dynasties, the port of Vân Đồn encompassed a rather large area. In the Mạc dynasty (1527–1593), and especially the period of Lê Trung Hưng (1583–1788), under the impact of the development of the Asian commercial system, Vân Đồn was enlarged with a new system of harbours as a port complex, that according to the viewpoint of area studies could be labelled as a region and sub-region. The region and sub-region explicitly possessed close ties with each other in the sense that both were parts of the whole system. In this system, Vân Đồn comprised not only seaports but also river ports, attracting both indigenous and foreign traders and merchants connecting Northeast Asia with Southeast and Southwest Asia. Any changes or commercial affairs at Vân Đồn directly influenced the kingdom of Thăng Long. Thus, the Thăng Long government undertook many efforts to control the port area.

Since the Lý, Trần and Lê dynasties, there were three sub-regions in the area of Vân Đồn. The first sub-region was concentrated in the area of Cống Đông and Cống Tây (contemporary Thắng Lợi village). The administrative base of “Vân Đồn station” in the Lý dynasty and “Vân Đồn district” in Trần dynasty was probably located here. The historical relics of Buddhist architecture such as the pagodas of Lẩm, Cát, and Trong suggest the subsistence of a cultural and administrative centre influenced by religious nuance. The presence of these pagodas in the sea-area reflected not only the widespread influence of Buddhism and the sea-oriented vision of the Trần dynasty, but also the concern of the authorities with the religious life of the merchants and inhabitants. Alas, these temples were ruined and only some archaeological traces remained. They were probably destroyed during the Ming occupation or in the time when the administrative centre was moved to the area of Cái Láng in the late fifteenth century and the beginning of sixteenth century.
Religious architecture and ceramic objects found in several harbours indicate the economic roles of Cổng Đồng and harbours on both sides of the island of Cổng Tây. In addition to numerous ceramic objects found along the northwest bays, namely from hamlet 1 to hamlet 5 on the south-eastern side of the island of Cổng Tây, ceramic objects were also discovered. The areas of Cổng Đồng and Cổng Tây possess a vast quantity of ceramics which are significant for studies and preservation, not only for the historical remains of Thừa Cổng, but also for the port of Vân Đồn. Because of its favourable location, the area of Thừa Cổng (or Thông Đồng “river”) was the economic, diplomatic, and cultural centre of Vân Đồn in the periods of the Lý and Trần dynasties. The variety of historical objects found in harbours and coastlines also suggest the presence of different merchant groups distinguished by their occupations and specialization in trade. It is possible that foreign ships from nearby countries came to trade, offer tributes, and establish a diplomatic relationship with Đại Việt. It is important to note that while Thăng Long’s government paid much attention to protecting political security, they also respected the tradition and customs of foreign merchants. In the beginning of the fifteenth century, in his Dư địa chí (Treatises on geography), Nguyễn Trãi wrote that “foreign merchants could follow their own traditional cloths and custom.” It demonstrates the flexibility and cultural views of the Thăng Long government.

Meanwhile, the second sub-region was situated in the present-day villages of Minh Châu and Quan Lạn. In the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, this region played an important role in affording security, controlling tolls, and ensuring the diplomatic and commercial activities of the first sub-region, namely the centre of Vân Đồn. From the late fifteenth century, this sub-region replaced Cổng Đồng and Cổng Tây as the premier centre of Vân Đồn, remaining important until the early eighteenth century. The uncovering of Chu Đậu ceramics or Chu Đậu ceramic styles, various types of earthenware produced by kilns in northeast Vietnam, and Chinese ceramics of Ming and Qing dynasties in this area substantiates this argument. Moreover traces of old settlements, wells, and religious relics indicate the past existence of a thriving and densely-populated area. From the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, for various reasons and coupled with the decline of the international port, however, this sub-region gradually lost its economic function.

Besides the above-mentioned sub-regions, in the Lý, Trần, and Lê dynasties, the third sub-region was also established on the eastern side of Vân Đồn, situated in present-day Ngọc Vừng village. Trade was probably carried out in the area of Cổng Yên and Cổng Hẹp. Ceramic objects found in this area had the same features as the ones in Cái Làng, Cổng Đồng, and Cổng Tây, except for the predominance of sixteenth- and early eighteenth-century ceramic wares. In my view, the area of Ngọc Vừng was not only the trading place but also the security base of the southern perimeter of the port.

The three sub-regions formed a system, which can be designated as the first region or the first area. This region consisted of Cổng Đồng, Cổng Tây, Cái Làng, and the group of islands of Ngọc Vừng. This is the central core region,
playing the most important role in the political, economic, and social activities of the port of Vân Đồn for about six centuries (Map 7.1).

But during this time, Vân Đồn's development was held back because of isolation from without. It merely handled the supervision, monitoring, and supplies of goods from the interior including handicraft centres in the Red River delta and forest products from the northeast and northwest mountainous areas. Stations were established at river-mouths in order to secure the area of Vân Đồn as well as for the economic and political centres in the interior. It caused the establishment of a group of harbours and coastal ports that encompassed the sub-regions stretching from Yên Hùng, Cửa Lục, Bãi Cháy, Cửa Ông, and Cái Bầu to Tiền Yên-Văn Ninh in the North and Cát Bà in the South and probably Cô Tô in the East. Presently Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics and potteries are found in abundance in these areas. The similarities in styles and dating of the objects point to the close ties between the estuarial harbours and Vân Đồn. This is the second region established at the river-mouths and on islands in the area of Vân Đồn. This second region

*Map 7.1 Main islands of Vân Đồn*
played an important role in facilitating the transport of goods from domestic political and economic centres to external trading ports, ensuring security in ports and interior political and economic centres, and also receiving and delivering commodities from the first region.

Noticeably, together with the close ties with harbours and ports, the sub-regions in this second region were also in contact with each other following the South–North axis that is, from Yên Hùng to Vân Ninh. Traders brought ceramics and other commodities to the northeast areas for export and then carried back foreign products to the centre. In this manner, the roles of Vân Ninh and Yên Hùng were exchanged. In his Voyages and Discoveries (1688), the English explorer William Dampier described the route from the river-mouth of Thái Bình river to Tenam (Tiên An or Tiến Yên). His boat mainly “went along the shore, throughout narrow canals and currents of water amongst numerous islands on the eastern side of the bay.”

Results from field research in the areas of Vân Ninh, near K’a Long bordering the river, show that ceramic and earthenware objects are found on the ground surface in many large fields. Particularly in the hamlets of Thọ Sành, Vạ Đạt, and Rừng Miếu, the objects were abundant in the cultural layer at over two metres deep in some places. It demonstrates the trade relations and influence of this leading centre in foreign diplomatic and economic activities. Over the centuries some export products in the area of the Red River delta were brought to the north and subsequently to foreign markets. Besides silk, forest, and sea products, An Nam ceramics and pottery undoubtedly were favoured in the markets in Southern China. Founded under the Lý dynasty, Vân Ninh maintained its position as an important regional trading centre of Đại Việt until the eighteenth century. The area of contemporary Vạ Đạt is still referred by the local inhabitants as “Vân Đồn”, where “Vân Đồn market” is located (Figure 7.1).

![Figure 7.1 Vân Đồn seaport system](image-url)
As an international trading port that facilitated foreign trade over many centuries, Vân Đồn extended its trading activities to Southern China and Southeast Asian countries. According to Kenneth R. Hall, in the fourteenth century there were six trading zones in the world, in which the economic zone in Southern China and seaports in Vietnam played a crucial role. This trading system extended to the Gulf of Siam, Malay Peninsula, and some parts of Java where another zone was established.

Besides being a trading centre and harvesting of sea produce, Vân Đồn served as a rendezvous for ships from Southeast Asia and also probably Ryukyu (Japan). Ships utilizing the maritime silk route from Northeast to Southeast Asia anchored at Vân Đồn. Consequently, ports in the areas of Thanh-Nghệ-Tĩnh (Châu Hoan, Châu Ái, Thuận Châu, and Hòa Châu) were not only foreign economic exchange centres in southern Đạ Việt, but also entrepôts for the northeast area, especially Vân Đồn. Trading, diplomatic, and tributary activities contributed to the development of the port. This is the third region of Vân Đồn. This third region had a complex of economic and diplomatic activities that also reflected the political sensitiveness, inventiveness, and adaptability of the Thăng Long governments and the economic strength of Đạ Việt.

Moreover, in the seventeenth century, under the impact of international trading activities, Đạ Việt’s commerce expanded towards the mainland. Foreign merchants gravitated to the economic and political centres, densely-populated areas, handicraft centres to acquire commodities. The establishment of a system of estuarial harbours impacted on the economic position of Vân Đồn; this subsequently became one of the main contributory reasons for the decline of the port. In other words, the commercial relations in Tonkin in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries with the emergence of a system of estuarial harbours and ports in the northeast area with the centres of Domea (Tiên Lãng in Hải Phòng city), Hiền town (Hưng Yên province), and Thăng Long ended the heyday of Vân Đồn. But from archaeological finds, Vân Đồn maintained foreign trading activities until the early eighteenth century. In 1661, the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, [Dutch] United East India Company) even had a plan to promote its trading activities in this area.

Thus, together with the system of estuarial harbours, Đạ Việt’s commerce continued to develop based on a system of seaports.

While the Lê-Trịnh authorities laid emphasis on the estuarial ports, the seaport of Vân Đồn continued its economic activities as evidenced in the presence of Chinese and Vietnamese ceramic objects in the areas of Cái Làng, Sơn Hào, and Con Quy. Undoubtedly following the flourishing period of the Trần dynasty, Vân Đồn remained the meeting point of economic interactions between Đạ Việt and foreign countries, between Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, ensuring dynamism of Vân Đồn as an important seaport in Southeast Asia.

In order to understand the role of Vân Đồn as an economic and diplomatic centre in Vietnamese history, one needs to put in perspective Vân Đồn’s wide
and diversified interactions and relations with the areas in the Vietnamese northeast sea, as well as cognizance of the changes in the economic and diplomatic relations between the countries in the region. The establishment of three regions was imperative in ensuring activities and promoting the development of each of the regions. In economic, cultural, and political activities, the first region or the centre of the port of Vân Đồn played the crucial role. Nonetheless this first region could only perform its crucial function in relation and assistance of the second and third regions, the system of three regions always shifting to the changes in the economic and political environment as well as to the policies of polities (Figure 7.2).

In contemporary regional and international integration, the Gulf of Tonkin possesses a strategic position in the economy, and national security and defence. The Gulf of Tonkin with its centre at Vân Đồn commands very rich natural resources, especially sea products, oil, also tourism. It is also the gateway and meeting-place of particular trading routes between Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, between northeast Vietnam and southeast and southwest China. The potentialities and advantages of Vân Đồn include its cultural legacy, trading position, and past resistance against foreign invasions contribute to the motivations for the development of the northeast sea area, namely the Gulf of Tonkin environs. With its potentiality and strategic position, the Gulf of Tonkin had capacity sufficient to be a dynamic economic zone but is an area of contention amongst countries that intended to expand their influence over the region.

Notes


17 The statement of the administrative centre of Vân Đồn at Thừa Công can be seen as a supposition. A few scholars have argued that only in the case of the Lý ceramics discovered can we demonstrate this statement. So far, however, some pieces of Sùng ceramics have been found. Archaeological research in Thừa Công in particular and Vân Đồn in general has been restricted to a few small surveys and excavations. Moreover, under the Lý dynasty, commodities for exchange were often easily portable and precious products, such as silk, spices, pearls, and coral which hardly left any evidence. Lý ceramics were not widely exported because of the competition from Chinese ceramics. Additionally, ceramics was one of various criteria to suggest the position of a region or trading port. This is an interesting point in the study of the establishment and development of the port of Vân Đồn.

18 Nguyễn Văn Kim, “Hệ thống thương cảng Vân Đồn”, p. 56

19 Amongst 1,976 objects discovered in the excavation in July 2002 in Hamlet 5 with an area of 12 sq m, there were 599 Chinese glazed pottery objects and 747 Chinese porcelain objects. Most of them were the Long Tuyền styles dated the fourteenth century. Although the excavation trench was relatively narrow, it has proved to be the richest site for the Long Tuyền ceramics in Vietnam. This evidence suggests that after the three wars with the Mongols in the thirteenth century, Đại Việt still maintained relations with China and imported from there high-grade goods. Analysis of ceramic objects from excavations and field survey reflects the differences in distribution of objects amongst the harbours of the island of Cống Tây. It is probable that this was the location of a family or ship's master who traded in some particular products. This fact reflects the division of production and specialization of merchants in Vân Đồn.

20 Nguyễn Trãi, Du địa chí, p. 466.

21 To levy tax and control the trade in the northeast area, the Lê and Trịnh dynasties established stations at Cửa Đô, Ngọc Vừng, and several estuarial harbours. According to Phan Huy Chú, there were two main stations, the Suạt Ty in Yên Hưng and An Luông in Văn Ninh. The Suạt Ty station in Quy Nhơn (Yên Hưng) controlled ships from the Bạch Đằng river and Chánh river to the sea and Anh Luông station situated at the river-mouth of the Bach Long Vi river controlled ships trading in the Chinese–Vietnamese borders. See: Phan Huy Chú, Lịch Triều Hiền Chƣơng Loại Chí, tập 1 [History Book of Dynasties, Vol. I], Hanoi: History Studies Publisher, 1960, p. 114.

22 In fieldwork during 1992 and 2006, we conducted surveys in the villages of Hoàng Tấn, Tân An, Hà An, and Hoàng Tiến and discovered in the areas of Dương Hạc, Gò Vật, Seo Bể, Hòn Đầu various types of ceramic objects on the ground surface dated to the Trần, Mạc and Lê dynasties. In Dương Hạc and Hoàng Tấn villages, we also discovered evidence of a ceramic kiln and a pagoda of the Trần dynasty.

23 Passing along Cửa Lực westward to Gạo Rang where the ancient Mạc fort was located, we encountered a bay with a dense collection of ceramic objects. As in Yên Hưng, ceramic objects here are similar to the ones found in Vân Đồn. In Tuần Châu and Bái Cháy, many objects of the Han, Tang, and Six Dynasties periods were found. In 1997, Paracel ceramic object dated the ninth and tenth century was also found in Bái Cháy. In Tuần Châu, indications of a ceramic kiln of eighth- and ninth-century date was found.

24 This area has Cửa Ông temple which refers to the merits of the royal commanders Trần Quốc Tạng and Hoàng Cân. According to Dampier, this area had 5 or 6 local service offices, one of them, the Cửa Suốt office, maintained till today.
25 In a survey in June 2008, we discovered in the coastal areas of Bi Lập hamlet, Văn Yên village, on Cái Bào island a field with numerous Vietnamese ceramic objects of the Trần and Lê periods and Chinese ceramics of the Qing dynasty. We would like to express our thanks to Dr Trịnh Năng Chung for recommending this archaeological site to us.

26 Results from a survey in July 2007 reveal that in the bay of Làng Cũ, Xuân Dâm village, numerous Vietnamese ceramics and porcelain of Chu Đậu and Mỹ Xã of Trần period and Chinese ceramics of the Yuan and Ming dynasties were found. Local inhabitants told us that by 1978, the area around the bay of Làng Cũ had been populated by the Chinese. This indicates that in Cát Bà there were probably a number of bays participating in the commerce of Vân Đồn.


28 In Văn Ninh, we discovered evidence of some ceramic kilns. This fact indicates that in addition to ceramics brought from the kilns in the Red River delta, the inhabitant in Văn Ninh also produced few local products. As well as Chinese merchants, historically traders from the countries in Southeast Asia also visited Văn Ninh.


31 Concerning to the position of Nghệ An-Hà Tĩnh ports and their transition to the Gulf of Tonkin please see Momoki Shiro, “Đại Việt and South China Sea Trade from the Xth to the XVth Century”, *Crossroad – An Interdisciplinary Journal of South Asian Studies* 12, 1 (1998). According to Lê Tác’s *An Nam chí lược* [Short History of Annam], aloe wood, ivory, and rhino horns collected from the areas of Cửu Châu and Nhật Nam were often used as tributes to the courts. Under the Lý and Trần dynasties, the countries like Ailao, Champa, and Chenla on their way to China had to stop at the ports in Nghệ Tĩnh of Đại Việt. On the contrary, Champa was also an important point in the Chinese routes to the South. In his book, part of Champa, Lê Tác stated that “(Champa) located on the coast, Chinese vessels reaching to Chinese vassals often stopped at Champa to exchange for wood and water. It was the largest harbour in the South.” Lê Tạc, *An Nam chí lược*, p. 72.


34 In the international relations at that time, Vietnamese ceramics and porcelains were virtual commodities. The discoveries of Annam ceramics in Saika, Osaka, Edo, and Nagasaki reflect the popularity of Vietnamese ceramics in Japan. On the other hand, Vietnamese ceramics have been found in over thirty sites in Southeast Asia and some in international ports. See Hasebe Gakuji, “Tìm hiểu mối quan hệ Việt – Nhật qua đờ gốm sứ* [Learning Vietnam – Japan relations through ceramics]”, and Aoyagi Yoji, “Đờ gốm Việt Nam đươc đờ gốm ở quân đạo
8 Batu Sawar Johor
A regional centre of trade in the early seventeenth century

Peter Borschberg

Preamble: the expanse of the Johor-Riau Empire

The Johor-Riau Empire is considered by the vast majority of historians to represent one of the so-called successor polities of the Melaka Sultanate which succumbed to the Portuguese in 1511. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this is also the understanding clearly conveyed to the early European colonial powers that at times entered into contracts of commerce and forged military alliances. On deeper analysis, however, it is evident that Johor’s primacy as a successor polity of Melaka and an heir apparent of the Melaka sultan’s daulat (mystical right to rule) did not remain uncontested. Among the most noteworthy contenders during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were Aceh and Perak whose rulers jockeyed to improve their name and reputation (nama) and thus also for a higher or improved standing among a clearly fluid hierarchy of rulers in Asia.¹

At its apex at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Johor-Riau Empire commanded the allegiance of peoples – chiefly but not exclusively Malay speakers – who lived across an impressive geographical scope spanning the southern portions of the Malay Peninsula, the Riau Archipelago (including Singapore), the Anambas, Tambelan, and Natuna groups, a region around the Sambas River on south-western Borneo, and Siak in central-eastern Sumatra.² Strongly allied to Johor in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were Pahang and the eastern Sumatran polity Aru. The former’s ruler, however, was generally on good terms with Portuguese Melaka. Aru, on the other hand, forged a military alliance with Johor ostensibly to resist absorption into an expanding Acehnese Empire.³

From Johor Lama to Batu Sawar after 1587

Much work has covered the flight of the Melaka royal entourage fleeing into the jungle, to Muar, Bintan, and Johor Lama. For the present study interest begins with the 1587 Portuguese attack on the royal administrative centre at Johor Lama and the destruction of its fort, Kota Batu.⁴ This was burnt to the ground and rebuilt c. late 1590s or possibly in the early 1600s.⁵ There were
then several important upriver settlements during the early seventeenth century that included Johor’s new administrative centre at Batu Sawar (near present-day Kota Tinggi) and another smaller settlement known as Kota Seberang.

A pioneering extensive examination of Batu Sawar was undertaken by the Dutch academic Pieter Gerritsz Rouffaer in an article published in 1921 entitled “Was Malaka Emporium vóór 1400 A.D. genaamd Malajoer? En waar lag Woerawari, Ma-Hasin, Langka, Batoesawar? [Was Melaka an Emporium before 1400? And where were Wurawari, Mahasin, Langka and Batusawar located?]” Largely based on Malay Hikayats coupled with printed Dutch travel materials of the early seventeenth century, Rouffaer retraced the
shift of the royal residence and administrative centre after 1587 from Johor Lama upstream to a location originally called Tanah Putih (lit: “White Soil”) that subsequently was renamed Batu Sawar. This was the royal residence and administrative centre of the Johor-Riau Empire for some 25 years, between 1587 and 1609/12, and possibly longer. For Dutch language materials, he drew extensively on the published travelogues of two early Dutch United East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC) fleet commanders: Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge (hereinafter referred as Matelieff) who had visited Batu Sawar in September 1606 and that of Pieter Willemsz. Verhoeff who arrived in January 1609. But as the section on Batu Sawar progresses, Rouffaer apparently displayed far more interest in the period between 1610 and 1612. Coincidentally this time span provided the immediate historic backdrop to the commissioning and the writing of the Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals). One of the oldest surviving copies of the text – commonly known as Raffles MS 18 – as is widely known is said to be a copy of the text that once belonged to one of the royal princes of the Johor court, Raja Bongsu, whom Rouffaer ascribed the actual commissioning of the work on or around 13 May 1612.

The present study will revisit the principal early modern sources utilized by Rouffaer besides expanding the range of primary materials adduced. Whilst Rouffaer was increasingly drawn to the textual history of the Sejarah Melayu, the present undertaking, however, by contrast, is more concerned to collate as much information as possible pertaining to Batu Sawar as a regional trading centre. In this connection additional materials not perused by Rouffaer will be consulted, including four epistolary memorials written by Matelieff to the Dutch government, internal VOC records (including records of the Batu Sawar factory and intra-factory correspondence) and the writings of Jacques de Coutre. The latter was a jeweller and merchant who lived in Southeast Asia between 1594 and 1603. Although most of this time he spent in Melaka, De Coutre travelled extensively across the region and apparently conducted business in Batu Sawar on at least two occasions. These visits are recorded and described at some length in his autobiography, Vida de Jaques de Couttre, presently owned by the National Library of Spain in Madrid.

**Batu Sawar and the sons of Raja Ali Jalla Bin Abdul Jalil of Johor**

On the occasion of his visit to the Batu Sawar court in September 1606 to ratify a second treaty with Johor, Dutch Admiral Cornelis Matelieff observed:

> The city of Batu Sawar lies on the Johor River, about five or six miles from the sea. It is a very beautiful river, broad and deep, subject to the ebb and flood up to the city; but before the city it is fresh. Most of the land is lowland. The people mostly live along the river. The houses stand on poles. There are two places which are called fortress; one of them is Batu Sawar, the other lies on the opposite river bank and is called Kota Seberang.
Batu Sawar is about 1,300 treden in circumference,\textsuperscript{15} built as a square with high palisades 40 feet tall and set closely together; it has some fortifications to the side, but not well made. It lies on a flat field close to the river. The nearest hills are a quarter of a mile away from [the city]. One could easily make the river surround it. Inside, the city is closely packed with straw houses, apart from those belonging to the king and some noblemen, which are made of wood. In Batu Sawar and Kota Seberang combined, it is estimated that there are no less than 3,000 to 4,000 fighting men, but most of the people live outside the fortress. ... Kota Seberang may be some 400 or 500 treden in circumference and is also square as well. Not many people live there, and the riverside where they live is also defended by palisades. The land lies low and is flooded with every tide ...\textsuperscript{16}

In his account of Batu Sawar, Matelieff also described in some detail the four surviving sons of Raja Ali Jalla bin Abdul Jalil. These four Johor royal princes wielded different degrees of power and authority at the court after their father's death in 1597. Matelieff's description raises some interesting questions about the dynamics of power (and possibly also multi-polarity of authority) at the court. In this regard, a letter penned by Raja Bongsu (alias Raja Seberang), one of the surviving four sons of Raja Ali, provides valuable background information that not only helps unlock the dynamics of power at the Batu Sawar court, but more importantly also provides an explanation for the politically strained relations with Patani (Pattani) at the time.\textsuperscript{17} The latter court was technically a "vassal" or client polity of Siamese Ayutthaya.

The four surviving "brothers": 'Ala'udin Ri'ayat Shah III, the ruling Sultan of Johor until c. 1615; Raja Siak or the "Prince of Siak" as he is sometimes called; the Raja Laut; and Raja Bongsu. 'Ala'udin appeared to be a weak, ineffective monarch and apparently a truly tragic character. The Dutch admiral described 'Ala'udin as an inept ruler who was more interested in guzzling alcohol and fooling around with women than in taking care of his kingdom.\textsuperscript{18}

Raja Laut (lit. King of the Sea), about whom virtually nothing is known, was decried as another alcoholic and womanizer of considerable notoriety, who, in the words of Matelieff, deserved to be "thrust with bound hand and feet into the sea".\textsuperscript{19} Rouffaer reckoned he may have been the Johor Laksamana (admiral), realistically within the realm of possibilities.\textsuperscript{20} More recently, researchers sought to equate him with the Sri Raja Negara who was based in Singapura and whose fleet came to assist Matelieff during the seaborne attack on Melaka in 1606.\textsuperscript{21} Whatever his exact identity may be, Raja Laut undoubtedly retained command and authority over the orang laut (lit. sea people; also known as selates or saletes from period European sources). They acted as Johor's naval force, as they had been during the Melaka Sultanate. Given the reputation of the orang laut, Raja Laut probably also engaged in plundering vessels around the Singapore Straits and the nearby maritime
waterways. This would have hardly endeared him to the VOC and may help explain at least some facets of his truly dreadful reputation among the Dutch. He may have been what from early Portuguese sources was known as the “Lord of the Straits” (Senhor do Canal [de Singapura]),\textsuperscript{22} that is the “ruler” of Singapura who not only controlled the maritime arteries with his orang laut, but also imposed hefty tributes and imposts for access through the waters of the straits.

The third sibling, Raja Siak, also known as Raja Hassan, was described by Matelieff as a conniving, evil type of person.\textsuperscript{23} He is said to rarely make his way to Batu Sawar and instead generally remained in his “fieldom” on the great island of Sumatra. Contemporary source materials comment on his partiality towards the Portuguese over the Dutch; the actual reasons, however, were unknown. One surmises that his fieldom being one of the principal sources of pepper in the region, the Raja Siak was doing brisk business with Portuguese Melaka and others. He also maintained a monopoly over bezoars that were harvested from various animals of the jungle, ranging from porcupines to orang utans. Given the exorbitant cost and compact size of these bezoars, evasion of Raja Siak’s royal monopoly was not surprising. Jacques de Coutre candidly conceded in Book 1, Chapter 20 of his autobiography (\textit{Vida}):

 Particularly from the kingdom of Siak they [unspecified traders] used to bring many porcupine bezoars, which are only found in that kingdom in the maws of porcupines, [and] which are all hunted on behalf of the Raja Siak. However, the hunters always purloin some stones and bring them to us [i.e. to the Portuguese] to be sold at a cheaper price as compared to those sold by the raja.\textsuperscript{24}

It is also useful to bear in mind that, during the early modern period, bezoars were believed to possess certain magical or mystical powers to ward off spells and various forms of evil. They also were thought to bear crucial medicinal value as an antidote against all sorts of poisons (a common threat to the rich and famous) and as a sovereign remedy against potentially fatal illnesses, including notably cholera.\textsuperscript{25} Although generally unsightly, bezoars were very precious and very costly. They were bought and sold like gemstones and at prices that were comparable to the most expensive diamonds from Borneo or rubies from the Taung-nyu Dynasty Kingdom (that is “Pegu”, “Burma”). The pepper trade and the monopoly over porcupine bezoars were principal sources of revenue for Raja Siak.

The fourth sibling, Raja Bongsu, alias Raja Seberang or also Raja di Ilir, subsequently succeeded his brother ‘Ala’udin around 1615 as Sultan of Johor and ruled as Abdullah Ma’ayat Shah until his death on the Tambelan Islands in or around 1621.\textsuperscript{26} Unlike his other three siblings, Raja Bongsu was liked and generally admired by the Europeans. He shared the rule with his almost permanently intoxicated, and thus generally incapacitated, half-brother
‘Ala‘udin. Raja Bongsu was generally in charge of “foreign affairs” which meant that he held sway over relations with external parties, and consequently exercised a major say and role in forging treaties and alliances with the European powers. In addition to his duties and responsibilities at court, Raja Bongsu was also (over-) lord proper of the aforementioned negeri (dependent polity or client settlement) of Kota Seberang. Matelieff explained:

Raja Bongsu … is now called Raja Seberang meaning “king of the other side” because he lives on the other side of the [Johor] river from the city of Batu Sawar. Here he also has a fortress and part of his subjects.27

It is from Matelieff that we also learn further particulars about Raja Bongsu’s personal “fiefdoms” (that is negeri) on the island of Borneo. In the memorial Discourse on Trading Possibilities for the VOC in the East Indies Matelieff explained: “[The Raja] has a place there, I believe at the river called Sambas, which belongs to Raja Seberang [i.e. Raja Bongsu].”28 Sambas was known for jungle produce, tropical camphor, bezoars, and diamonds. The rough diamonds were panned by the locals in the river beds. The Sambas River and its tributaries formed one of the most important diamond producing regions in Southeast Asia and acted as a direct competitor to neighbouring Sukadana.

The exposé of the four brothers has not only brought their (sometimes questionable) personal characteristics to light, but also evidences that each of the brothers independently maintained his own sources of revenue with which each could sustain his clientele, supporters and entourage, and his presence at the Batu Sawar court. Background knowledge of the brothers provides the key for unlocking the jockeying for power and influence at the court against the weak and evidently inept ‘Ala‘udin. Focusing on Raja Siak and Raja Bongsu who each favoured different European allies (the former favouring the Portuguese and the latter, the Dutch) it becomes evident that external relations were driven by personal political ambitions as well as personal commercial interests.

Relations with early European colonial powers

The two early European colonial powers at Batu Sawar were the Portuguese from Melaka and the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Contemporary accounts indicate that the traders from Portuguese Melaka were enjoying brisk business in Batu Sawar. A contributing reason owed to the policies pursued by the captains of Portuguese Melaka who effectively drove business to Johor. But admittedly, relations between Johor and Portuguese Melaka were far from stable, oscillating between friendly and hostile, and occasionally evoking armed responses on either side.

Relations between Portuguese Melaka and the Johor court were cultivated by a resident agent or “ambassador” of the Portuguese known as Khoja Ibrahim (Coya Abraham). He is described at the end of book 1 of Jacques de
Coutre’s *Vida*, but unfortunately surviving information about this individual is very sparse. Of his identity we only know that he was a Muslim from Portuguese Melaka, and as the title “Khoja” (an honorific, derived from the Persian) also suggests, he was almost certainly himself a merchant. He apparently owned a house and (sometimes?) resided at Batu Sawar. Khoja Ibrahim’s moment as the man on the spot in Batu Sawar came when he desperately sought to defuse an escalation of violence that involved harassment of Johorese commerce and shipping by Portuguese naval officers and the taking by the *shahbandar* (harbour-master) of Batu Sawar of about 150 hostages, most of whom were Christian traders from Melaka. But the situation – and indeed the whole political atmosphere – was rapidly deteriorating in Johor by the final weeks of 1602. Three merchants who arrived from Melaka were mobbed and killed on the spot at Johor Lama. When Júlio de Barros, a nephew of the Bishop of Melaka, handed over an important letter from Melaka’s governor, Fernão d’Albuquerque, to the Batu Sawar court, Barros was ordered to be killed together with all the Portuguese and Christians held hostage by the *shahbandar*. Khoja Ibrahim’s life was spared – so we are informed by de Coutre – because he was a Muslim. De Coutre soberly reminisced in his autobiography: “If I had been there [in Batu Sawar at the time] I would have undoubtedly perished with the rest.”

By the first decade of the seventeenth century Johor’s external relations had become very volatile, not least because of new relations forged between Raja Bongsu and the VOC. But after October 1610 at the instigation of Raja Siak as well as a diplomatic charm-offensive launched by Melaka through its envoy, Temenggong João Lopes d’Amoreira, relations with the Portuguese improved markedly, at least for the period up to the Acehnese attack on Johor in 1613.

By the dawn of the seventeenth century, the Dutch, too, were forging ties with Johor. The first Dutch admiral to arrive in Johorese waters, Jacob van Heemskerk, had left one Jacob Buys behind to man a recently-established factory at Batu Sawar. Buys was far from enthusiastic about this new position and needed lots of persuading so that he would stay behind. The establishment of the Dutch factory at Batu Sawar, as is evidenced by a letter of van Heemskerken penned on 27 August 1603, was also tightly knit to the opening of formal diplomatic relations between the Dutch Republic and Johor. These relations (so we are informed by Heemskerken) were largely the brainchild of Raja Bongsu who also arranged to dispatch envoys or ambassadors to Europe aboard the vessels of the Dutch commander. These early, yet formal, relations were subsequently strengthened by Admiral Matelieff a few years later who replaced Buys with a small team under the leadership of Abraham van den Broeck in or around September 1606. Van den Broeck is also reported to have served Admiral Matelieff as a secretary prior to assuming his duties as *opperkoopman* (chief purveyor) at Batu Sawar. Van den Broeck was joined by Nicolaas Puijk in overseeing the “logie” (lodge) or factory in Johor. Both of them were transferred to Banten in May 1609 shortly after the visit of
Admiral Pieter Willemsz Verhoeff to the Johor royal court. This also marked a critical transition in the overall relations between the VOC and its Malay allies across the archipelago, not least on account of the ratification of a truce forged in Europe for a period of twelve years between the Dutch Republic and the Iberian powers. Leadership at the Batu Sawar logie passed to Jacques Obelaer on 10 May 1609 who acted as opperkoopman with Abraham Willemsz de Rijk as his deputy, and one Hector Roos, who is described as a diamantkenner (diamond specialist).\(^{33}\)

In sharp contrast to the situation with other early factories of the VOC across Southeast Asia, the records from the Batu Sawar factory are limited to a few pages in mostly neat handwriting and relating exclusively to the months of January to July 1608.\(^{34}\) Part of the reason for this paucity of documentation may well have to do with the short life span of the factory. What little we can glean from the sparse records as well as from intra-factory correspondence, shows business was pretty patchy. After the construction of a new settlement further up the Johor River known as Pasar Raja sometime around or after mid-1609, business in Batu Sawar had already begun to wane. A contributing factor may be attributed to the blockade imposed by the Portuguese on the Johor River during the greater part of 1608 in retribution to Johor for maintaining good relations with the Dutch. Kota Seberang, the negeri of Raja Bongsu, was still going strong, but it was never a large settlement to begin with. Once the royal residence and administrative centre had moved to Pasar Raja, Raja Bongsu thereafter acquired the title “Raja di Ilir” – that is the “Raja [of the] downstream” – downstream from the vantage point of the new administrative and royal centre.

**Batu Sawar Johor: testimonies of a trading city from European sources**

Besides the Europeans there were many other merchants from other parts of Asia who came to trade, and/or, in fact resided in Batu Sawar. In reconstructing Batu Sawar as a centre of trade in the early seventeenth century the point of departure should certainly be the observation by de Coutre who in his *Vida* and memorials described two visits to the Johor royal capital. From the fairly detailed information, however, one assumes that he had been there almost certainly on more than two occasions. De Coutre appeared to be well aware of Batu Sawar’s history and its commercial significance at large. He recorded thus:

> One can note that the city they call Johor Lama was destroyed by Dom Paulo de Lima [Pereira],\(^ {35}\) as I have stated before, and this success undoubtedly will have been recorded in the chronicles pertaining to India. The king [of Johor] used to have his court in this city. [The settlement] that was built after the city of Johor Lama was ruined is called Batu Sawar. Now we call this other city “New Johor”. It is a port frequented by many carracks from diverse nations. The local people dress in the
same manner as the inhabitants of the kingdom of Pahang; they are Malays by blood and are very smartly dressed. As arms they use lances, harquebuses, spears, swords, rodelas, krisses that are typical of the Minangkabau people – which is what they are called – and artillery. It has a beautiful river and a port with many large and small ships, and it is a land where merchants do vast volumes of trade and there are abundant provisions.

Some of this information is repeated elsewhere across the different writings of de Coutre, albeit with some minor nuancing. For the sake of completeness, it is well worth reproducing additional short excerpts:

The king of the city of Johor Lama fled and went to live on the island of Bintan, and later returned and built another city, [located] 14 leguas upstream, which is called Batu Sawar, [but which] the Portuguese call New Johor.

In the aforementioned city of [New] Johor, there are many people who make a living only from merchandise and from sailing from one land to another.

Although piecemeal and in bite sizes, the information provided by de Coutre yields invaluable insights into Batu Sawar as a place of trade. With an eye cast on commerce, the main points of interest are as follows: the city was founded as a royal residence after the destruction of Johor Lama. Having briefly moved to Bintan, the Johor sultan relocated his court and administrative centre to a new town further upstream known as Batu Sawar. Also known as “New Johor” (Jor Nuevo and other variant spellings) Batu Sawar had a port, a shahbandar, was frequented by ships from many nations, and within the city, there were many who conducted “vast volumes of trade” and made a life only “from sailing from one land to another”. Finally, there was an abundance of foodstuffs. According to Dutch accounts, this food was not grown locally, but imported from outside from as far away as Java.

Batu Sawar had become the preferred alternative port of call when the Portuguese captains of Melaka pursued policies disadvantageous to foreign merchants. In his memorial Information on Building some Castles and Fortresses in the Singapore Straits and other regions of the South, de Coutre explained the situation and the channelling of business through Batu Sawar.

When the Javanese know that in Melaka there is some captain who treats them badly – as sometimes has been the case – though their course is through the Strait of Kundur to Melaka, they go from inside and around the islands in search of the island of Bintan, and then they go to [New] Johor. These vessels come laden with nutmeg, mace, cloves and other merchandise. The Portuguese then go from Melaka to
This account of Batu Sawar as a destination of trade and commerce reveals two important points: firstly, the settlement’s significance as a marketplace to the Portuguese traders of Melaka and specifically for the petty traders of cloth and garments, and secondly, Batu Sawar’s position as a regional transshipment hub for the three classic spices cloves, nutmeg, and mace as well as the role played by the Javanese merchants in this specific trading activity.

Additional information to substantiate de Coutre’s observations can also be gleaned from Dutch materials dating from the early seventeenth century. During the second half of the calendar year 1609 and in the first months of 1610 the Portuguese of Melaka used the absence of Dutch ships to impose a blockade on the upstream towns of the Johor River region. This blockade was the latest effort by the Portuguese to cajole Johor into abandoning their friendly relations with the Dutch company and, in turn, forge new friendly relations with Portuguese Melaka. With hindsight one can say that this move bore fruits, for the diplomatic offensive on the Batu Sawar court deepened and widened pre-existing rifts between the four royal brothers, their respective commercial interests, as well as the particularistic needs and wants of their clients and entourage. We are informed by Dutch sources how (facing a fomenting rebellion in October 1610) Raja Bongsu caved in and under duress agreed to sign a peace treaty with Portuguese Melaka. The principal instigator of this Luso-Johor peace deal was reportedly Raja Siak. We are duly informed that almost immediately after inking the new deal, local residents were seen strutting around Batu Sawar like peacocks robed in the latest Indo-Portuguese fashion. In addition to finished clothing, the Melaka merchants also brought cloth pieces from India, unspecified manufactured wares, and preserved food.

This report squares with the information provided by Matelieff in his memorial *Discours op de handelinghe die men in Oost-Indien van wege de Vereenichde Compagnie soude driven* (Discourse on Trade Possibilities for the VOC in the East Indies) in which he observed: “Some cottons and other knick-knacks are sought after there [in Batu Sawar]”, but the principal commodity in demand according to Matelieff was “gold in its rough form rather than our minted gold”. To the residents of Batu Sawar, the availability of clothing, wares, unminted gold, and abundant food provisions became the immediate and very tangible benefits of the Luso-Johor peace agreement. The threat of an uprising mentioned in the Dutch sources quickly began to defuse after October 1610. But it would appear that Raja Bongsu’s power base at the Batu Sawar court had been clipped, limited, or damaged as a result of the improved relations with the Portuguese.

The pepper trade

It is important to bear in mind that it was Raja Siak who championed the commercial interests of Portuguese Melaka. His power base in eastern
Sumatra enabled him to control certain aspects of Batu Sawar’s “international trade” in specific commodities and goods, notably pepper and bezoars. In fact, van Heemskerk claimed in his letter to the directors of the United Amsterdam Company dated 27 August 1603, that Johor was “clearly the most suitable place in all of the East Indies to load pepper and sell textiles from Cambay and São Thomé”. Such initial excitement surrounding the Batu Sawar pepper trade is mirrored in the surviving records of the Dutch factory there. In his report *Ongelden ende provision by de vloote gedaen tott Johor* (Expenses and Provisions for the Fleet done at Johor) written and signed by van den Broeck, covering Dutch cargo loadings for the period January–July 1608, large consignments of pepper were recorded. The first consisted of 46,573 kati (about 27,944 kg) with an assigned book value of 5,474:0:13¾ guilders and a second comprising 76,819 kati (about 46,091 kg) worth 9,751:12:3½ guilders. But initial enthusiasm surrounding Batu Sawar as a Dutch market for pepper declined precipitously after 1609. The reasons are explained as follows.

Just as the Portuguese employed heavy-handed, arm-twisting tactics to entice peace and commercial compliance by Johor, it would also appear that Raja Siak used his leverage in the pepper trade against the Dutch. Admiral Matelieff, who kept abreast of developments in Johor long after his return to the Dutch Republic in 1608, was informed of the problems relating to the VOC’s pepper trade in Batu Sawar. In one of his epistolary memorials dated 31 August 1610, he made a shrewd observation:

> The king of Johor, who is our friend, is being reduced to misery because of our friendship; and what is more, the pepper which his land produces is transported to Patani and bought at a higher price by us there than in Johor.48

The issue at stake was that Johor and Patani were fierce rivals and enemies (due to some dynastic problems that are explained in colourful detail in a joint letter by Sultan ‘Ala‘udin and Raja Bongsu to Stadholder Prince Maurice dated 6 February, 1609). The Dutch were purchasing Sumatran pepper at Patani where they paid a higher price and higher tolls than in Johor. Yet Johor was the VOC’s principal ally in the region. As a result, the Dutch were seriously commercially damaging this ally and friendly power. Undeniably a perplexing situation appears. Why were the Dutch purchasing pepper at a higher price and with higher tolls in Patani than in Johor? It makes little economic sense, but perhaps unknown to Matelieff, there may be a question of available supplies at stake here. Was Raja Siak discouraging or withholding supplies of pepper from Sumatra to Batu Sawar in order to starve the VOC of business? How much business was being channelled to the Portuguese of Melaka? The VOC’s inter-factory correspondence remained silent on these questions. What transpires, however, is that the VOC wanted to secure more reliable and less expensive supplies of pepper by closing
factories that were not near to the sources of production. In this vein, Matelieff candidly recommended:

The factory at Patani should be moved, for no goods are produced there. Pepper is imported there from Jambi and Indragiri and other places on the island of Sumatra, although a small quantity of pepper does grow at Patani itself. The people are friendly, but because there is no king, the mandarins, or orang kaya, do as they please. Batu Sawar too was in no better position, and just as the orang kaya in Patani did “as they please” – charge the price and tolls that they wanted, or had irregular supplies at their disposal – the supplies from Sumatra in Batu Sawar were substantially controlled by Raja Siak, a ruler who was known to be openly hostile to the Dutch.

The evidence presented thus so far portrayed Batu Sawar as a market where unrefined gold, textiles, finished clothing, preserved food, and some limited manufactured goods were bought and sold. The Batu Sawar factory recorded for 28 April 1608 that a consignment of cotton cloth pieces arrived from the VOC’s sister factor at Banten with an assigned book value of 10,393:3:7 guilders. That is larger than the value of any single consignment of pepper listed in the admittedly sparse surviving VOC factory records of Batu Sawar.

**Borneo diamond trade, sambas and Raja Bongsu**

Raja Bongsu possessed a specific power base at the Johor court, in fact, signed himself in 1606 as one of the kings (possibly in the sense of co-ruler) of Johor, and dealt chiefly with what in modern terminology referred to as “foreign affairs”. He maintained his own pockets of “subjects” (in negeris) both at Kota Seberang, and especially, on the island of Borneo.

Borneo, specifically Sukadana and Sambas, was an important source of diamonds. Sukadana, however, was not friendly toward the VOC at the time, and dealings there were described as very volatile and potentially life-threatening. The region around the Sambas River and its tributaries, by contrast, was described as a “fiefdom” of Raja Bongsu. Given his strong leanings toward the Dutch cause, it was no surprise that the VOC did take an interest and explore the possibilities of establishing a diamond trade both in Borneo and in Batu Sawar, for the second team of factors headed by Jacques Obelaer had a diamantrkenner (diamond expert) named Hector Roos.

There was a good reason for posting Roos at the Batu Sawar factory. The VOC records evidence that diamonds were among the noteworthy positions traded. In his report *Expenses and Provisions for the Fleet done at Johor* under the entry for 20 January 1608, van den Broeck listed the loading of 151 (raw) diamonds of unspecified weight and quality to which he also assigned a book value of 486:3:2 guilders. It is important to note that this is a single
consignment on a single date. As a comparison, the list also features 11 bezoars with an aggregate book value of 97:14:19½ guilders. Pepper represented together with textiles the lion’s share of Dutch trade in the Johor capital, but the trade in diamonds was not negligible, and hence emerges as a matter of particular interest.

Trade in this specific, compact high-value commodity was carefully weighed by Matelieff for both Sambas and Sukadana.

I cannot think of a solution for the diamond trade from Sukadana to keep it for the Company, for the entire trade consists in subtlety and knowledge; and if things go wrong just a little in this trade, one is left behind with loss and shame instead of great gain and profit. But if this trade is well managed, great profits can be made as is easily seen from the purchases made there by Hans Roeff and others. But it is a villainous people full of deceit and those who go there, run the risk of being robbed and killed if they are not strong and careful. A nice quantity of diamonds is produced there, and the Gentlemen [Directors] know of what quality they are, too.\textsuperscript{55}

If the king of Johor stayed – he has a place there, I believe at the river called Sambas, which belongs to Raja Seberang – we would be safe there, and let the stones [i.e. diamonds] be brought there from upriver. An argument against this, however, would be that the king of Johor, who is very greedy, would want to shear the sheep and let us shear the pigs. One ought to make a deal with him; if, alternatively, it could be done without involving him, that would be more profitable but less safe. One should find an occasion to discuss it with the king of Johor and see what his inclinations are in this matter; without that, I cannot make a definite assessment …\textsuperscript{56}

With the Portuguese, the diamond business is a free trade. The [D]irectors’ servants receive monthly wages which are earned while they are asleep, however, and this merchandise cannot be managed while asleep. We ought to find a way of sharpening the clerks’ wits and in case they sleep, they would miss out on their money just as much as the [D]irectors miss out on theirs.\textsuperscript{57}

In a memorial written a few months later (dated 18 May, 1609)\textsuperscript{58} and passed via the lawyer Hugo Grotius to the senior Dutch statesmen Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and Stadholder Prince Maurice, Matelieff elaborated on his earlier thoughts concerning the Borneo diamond trade. He emphatically warned that the compact, high value nature of the unpolished and uncut stones exposed the diamond trade to corrupt company servants, and implicitly, potentially large losses for the Dutch company:

Diamonds are also a very important business with a lot of money involved, but I cannot see how it could be kept in the Company’s hands,
for the merchandise is too small and too valuable to have trustworthy factors keep it. Experience has taught us that most of the factors who die during their [home] voyage have a lot of diamonds with them, while those who come [to Asia] alive have none; but it’s a type of people – well, writing at length about them would just be dirtying paper.\textsuperscript{59}

The foregoing excerpts thus paint the following bigger picture: It is known that Raja Bongsu had negeris around Sambas where the diamonds were found, and the quality of the diamonds was very high. The real problem was how best to expand business in these precious stones, preferably by establishing a direct reach (presumably through the establishment of a factory) to the productive regions around Sambas. If the VOC was to expand the diamond trade, Raja Bongsu was almost certainly inclined to reap the overwhelming share of the profits for himself. Bypassing the Raja or conducting trade without him would for sure be more profitable, but also far more dangerous for the company and its servants.

A second important consideration in expanding the diamond business were the company servants of the VOC. Due to the nature of the business – the trade in a compact, high value commodity – there were additional problems to bring into the balance. The diamond trade required not only considerable expertise, but servants had to be on their toes and remain alert. The problem was that company servants earned a fixed salary, independent of their performance at the workplace. There was no real incentive to work hard, other than perhaps to exploit alternative sources of income and fill one’s own pockets on the side. Given the nature of this capital intensive, knowledge-based trade in diamonds, corrupt practices were likely to rear their head.

It is not known how the expansion of the diamond trade in Batu Sawar or even in Sambas might have evolved, for the Dutch factory there was destroyed by fire during the Acehnese invasion of 1613. Thereafter Dutch business with Johor halted abruptly, and later only recuperated to a trickle. Batu Sawar’s apex as a regional trading centre for the Johor-Riau Empire – and the region – had already passed.

\textbf{Concluding remarks}

This present study has reconstructed the Johorese capital Batu Sawar as a centre of trade during the period c. 1587–1612/13. As is evidenced by many contemporary written testimonies of both Portuguese and Dutch origin, ‘Ala’udin’s younger half-brother known as Raja Bongsu first acted as co-ruler of Johor (at least as early as 1602), and after the Acehnese invasion of Johor became sultan and was thereafter known as Abdullah Ma’ayat Shah.

Evidence drawn chiefly from European provenance mentions the deep divisions at the Johorese court during the decade 1602/3 to 1612/13. Each of the four surviving sons of Raja Ali represented strong commercial interests and
foreign policy preferences, and each maintained their own negeri(s), clientele, and entourage. The most significant rift between the brothers, and certainly the most commented on, was between Raja Bongsu and Raja Siak. The former wielded considerable power and authority at the Batu Sawar court (especially as co-ruler) with 'Ala'udin, and generally also in foreign policy, with additional personal (commercial) interests in Sambas and its diamond trade. Raja Siak, by contrast, commanded the trade in pepper and bezoars from his subjects in eastern Sumatra. Importantly, the two rajas preferred different European trading partners and allies: Raja Bongsu actively cultivated the Dutch, dispatched an official embassy to the Netherlands and forged an alliance (via two separate treaties) with Admiral Matelieff in May and September 1606. Raja Siak, on the other hand, did brisk business with the Portuguese and is known to have engineered a peace treaty between Johor and the Portuguese in October 1610. Raja Siak's foreign policy triumph also led to the brief political marginalization of Raja Bongsu between late 1610 and 1613.

As a centre of trade, Batu Sawar was described as a place, in the words of Jacques de Coutre, “many people ... make a living only from merchandise and from sailing from one land to another”. The identity of these merchants, alas, is not known with certainty and it would be sheer speculation to conclude that they were all or even predominantly “locals”. The Javanese and the Portuguese merchants called at and were active in Batu Sawar where they traded in the classic three spices of nutmeg, mace, and cloves. Batu Sawar had emerged as a trans-shipment destination, ostensibly also on account of its low tax regime. The bulk of trading activity, however, was conducted in pepper, textiles (including finished clothing), and food, with significantly large portions by value (rather than volume) also traded in bezoars and rough diamonds. Some of the pepper was grown locally on the Malay Peninsula, but most of it was produced in Sumatra. The pepper was bartered or paid for in textiles and sometimes also in unrefined or unminted gold. The uncut diamonds were panned by locals in the riverbeds of Borneo, chiefly in the region around the Sambas and Sukadana Rivers. Sambas was Raja Bongsu's personal negeri and due to his preference for the Dutch as an ally and trading partner, it was no surprise that the VOC did brisk business in diamonds. The Dutch even stationed a diamond expert at their factory at Batu Sawar. The exploration of further business opportunities in Batu Sawar, however, came to an end with the Acehnese invasion of Johor in 1613. Although Batu Sawar was garrisoned by the Acehnese and rebuilt with their help, commerce and business opportunities there never meaningfully revived.

Notes
2 For further background information on Johor in this period as well as its relations to the VOC, see the classic work by Leonard Y. Andaya, The Kingdom of Johor


7 These materials are contained in Isaac Commelin, *Begin ende Voortgang Vande Vereenigde Neerlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie* [Beginning and Progress of the United Netherlands Chartered East India Company], 4 vols, facsimile reproduction of the original printed in Amsterdam in 1646, Facsimile Uitgaven Nederland, 1969.

8 Rouffaer, “Was Malaka Emporium”, pp. 440, 443. The source of this information is the *Sejarah Melayu*.


13 For the text and historical context of these two treaties, see Borschberg, *Hugo Grotius*, app. 14, pp. 215–23, and CMJ, pp. 65–74, 160.


15 The *trede* is a Dutch measurement for distance. It is not certain here whether it is the small *trede* (approx. 0.75 metre) or the large *trede* (approx. 1.5 metres). See also CMJ, p. 521.
Peter Borschberg

For the English translation, see CMJ, pp. 191–2, another translation in Borschberg, Hugo Grotius, app. 11, pp. 208–9.

CMJ, supplementary document VI, pp. 441–5.


CMJ, pp. 154, 509; Borschberg, Hugo Grotius, p. 215.


Ibid., pp. 402–3.


CMJ, p. 153; Borschberg, Hugo Grotius, p. 214.


See The Hague, Nationaal Archief van Nederland, VOC 626 and 627 (1.04.02 nos. 626 and 627).

Concerning the destruction of Johor Lama by Dom Paulo Lima de Pereira, see Borschberg, Singapore and Melaka Straits, pp. 212–28.

A type of shield. See JDC, p. 339.

Ibid., pp. 92–4.

Borschberg, Singapore and Melaka Straits, app. 5, p. 248.

Ibid., app. 5, p. 250.

See Borschberg, Singapore and Melaka Straits, app. 5, pp. 236–51.

Ibid., p. 244.


This means rough, unprocessed and unrefined gold.

Van Heemskerk was at the time still unaware that the United Amsterdam Company had been merged into the VOC in March 1602.
Batu Sawar Johor

47 Hugo Grotius, *De Jure Praedae Commentarius*, app. II, doc. 4, p. 539.
48 CMJ, p. 350.
50 CMJ, p. 289.
51 The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02 no. 626.
52 CMJ, p. 160.
54 The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02 no. 626.
55 CMJ, p. 295.
56 Ibid., p. 295.
57 Ibid., p. 297.
58 Ibid., pp. 321–34.
59 Ibid., pp. 329.
Urban growth and municipal development of early Penang

Nordin Hussin

Introduction

Penang’s early municipal history is poorly documented and there are few records available to make a closer study possible. Penang, one of many English East India Company’s (EEIC) colonies in the East, was first headed by a Superintendent (Francis Light, from 1786–1794), then by a Lieutenant-Governor (the first being George Leith 1800–1803), and finally by a Governor in 1805. In the early period, the EEIC establishment in Penang was very small, consisting of Francis Light as Superintendent, J. Gardyne as storekeeper, Mr. Bacon, as monthly writer, Adam Ramage as Beachmaster, Long, a Malay writer, and Nakhuda Kecil who was the security guard. All official correspondence was sent from Penang to Calcutta and then from there to London for the final decision. Although the British gained possession of the settlement in 1786, it was not until August 1794 that the Superintendent, Francis Light, was issued with a set of instructions on legal matters by the Governor-General in Council in Calcutta. These instructions constituted the first regulations for the settlement and were called “Lord Teignmouth’s Regulations”. The regulations authorized Francis Light to be the Superintendent of the island and granted him power and authority.

From 1786 until 1867 many changes took place in the administration. Between 1786 and 1805, Penang was administered from Calcutta in India but in 1805 it enjoyed the same status as the three other Presidencies of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. Another important change was effected in 1826 when Singapore, Melaka, and Penang became known collectively as the Straits Settlements with Penang initially, and then Singapore, as the administrative centre or headquarters. Although these possessions were initially administered separately as Presidencies this was found to be too costly so their status was reduced to that of Residencies in 1830. As such, they came under the control of the Governor of Bengal in Calcutta. In effect, this meant that the Straits Settlements were administered as if they were part of the Bengal Presidency. Then, in 1851, the Straits Settlements were placed under the direct control of the Governor-General of India to reduce the financial expenditure of the administration. Due to much agitation from local merchants and British
Officials, the Straits Settlements along with Labuan (ceded to the British in 1846) were separated from India in 1867. They were then administered directly by the Colonial Office in London.

**Early British administration of Penang**

*The issue of taxes*

When Penang was ceded to Francis Light in 1786, his first municipal act was to dig a well at the beginning of Light Street for the supply of water for the settlers. No other amenities were provided for the early settlers and all the houses were built from attap (thatch). This material, however, was easily inflammable so it was not surprising that a fire broke out in the town in 1789. The town was also swampy and without good drainage thus contributing to the spread of fever and illness. The poor drainage system took its toll when Light himself became the victim of malaria, which eventually led to his death in 1794.

Light was replaced by Philip Manington in 1795. During Manington's term of office John McIntyre was appointed as Clerk of the Market and as Scavenger besides having to cope with the municipal administration of the town. Since there was an increase in the municipal expenditure, Manington proposed a tax on the houses and shops owned by natives in the bazaar. McIntyre was tasked (1) to collect the ground tax, (2) rent out property in the town, as well as (3) collecting taxes on houses and shops. These taxes were implemented for the first time in 1795. The taxes were used for clearing and draining the swampy areas of the town, constructing a proper system of sewage and drainage, and maintaining the streets.

However, disputes soon arose among the town's inhabitants over the taxes imposed. As a result, there was no income and hence no major improvements to the bad and unhealthy conditions in the town. In addition, the heavy rainfall caused floods and adversely affected the roads. The drains too were clogged with dirt, filth, and stagnant water, giving rise to unbearable smells. Tropical diseases could spread easily in such unhealthy living conditions, exposing the residents to the risk of contracting serious diseases. Even the Superintendent who succeeded Francis Light, Philip Manington, suffered an illness which forced him to resign from his position in 1796. He was succeeded by Macdonald who held the post of Superintendent from 1796 to 1799. The new Superintendent realized the unhealthy living conditions in the town and made plans to move the administration centre to another vicinity located south of the island in a small town called Jamestown. However, the idea was abandoned because of lack of financial support from the higher authorities in Calcutta who were even then entertaining the idea of abandoning Prince of Wales Island in favour of the Andamans.

Macdonald was not on good terms with the majority of the people in Penang, especially the merchants but his term in office saw many changes.
which helped to transform the town. It was during his tenure that the government decided to construct the Customs House, Hospital, and Prison and streets were widened and a new road was constructed from the town into the interior of the island. Under him the streets and roads in the town were clearly marked and extended to sixty-five feet wide. They were also reconstructed in straight lines with intersecting streets meeting at right-angles. Macdonald introduced many ideas to improve the standard of living of the town but his plans were interrupted by the Napoleonic wars in Europe (1789–1814) when the colony suffered financial problems and required financial assistance to strengthen its defence against French attacks in the East.

One potential source of revenue was taxes, in particular, municipal taxes. At the point when Macdonald left not much action had been taken to implement municipal taxes on property in the town, probably because of his antagonistic relationship with the business community. However, his successor, Lieutenant-Governor George Leith, was able to introduce taxes. In 1800 a proper planning and advisory body, the Committee of Assessors, was set up by the government to study the implementation of these taxes. The committee appointed by Leith consisted of three officials, namely, John Brown (Company officer), who held the posts of provost, sheriff, gaoler, coroner, bailiff, constable and police officer, James Scott (merchant), and David Brown (merchant).

Although its main purpose was to determine individual tax assessments the Committee of Assessors had wider functions which included the supervision of road construction and drainage systems. At its first meeting it decided that convicts would be used for constructing Bishop and Church Street and that major improvements in the town would be focused on the commercial area as planned by Francis Light. This area included Light Street, Beach Street, Chuliar Street, Church Street, Pitt Street, King Street, Bishop Street, and Market Street.

A dilemma faced by the Committee of Assessors was to set a tax rate that would give the administration the revenue it needed for the development of the town but not invite opposition from its citizens. Leith had begun the practice of using more convicts as labourers and had requested the government in Calcutta to supply more convicts from India for constructing and maintaining the streets. The number of convicts employed in 1800 was 130, increasing to 772 by 1805. This cheap form of labour saved the financial budget and improved the living conditions of the town. The convicts received a minimum wage of 40 piece monthly. With the low cost labour force, there was no good reason for the Committee of Assessors to impose a high tax on the town’s inhabitants. Furthermore, the committee realized that if it were to impose a high municipal tax this would scare off prospective new settlers and the whole plan of transforming the colony into a new important settlement would fail.

Public health

Although many changes took place during the Macdonald and Leith administrations, the problem of keeping the town healthy remained a deep concern.
In 1805, the administration discovered that within the limit of the Penang municipality, particularly within the boundary ditch northward and southward of Leith Street, the swamps and jungle extending to the south and the ditch itself were injurious to the general health of the town. Since the town was expanding, the European cemetery which was an isolated area in earlier days, was soon surrounded by houses. The town was still unhealthy due to the practice of planting paddy in its vicinity. This resulted in the problem of stagnant water, encouraging mosquitoes to breed and attracting rodents, especially during harvesting, thus aggravating further the poor conditions, health-wise, in the town.

During an investigation, the authorities discovered that the tract of land south of the town, extending from the sea three or four miles inland, was unhealthy because it was covered with jungle and swamp. It was also bounded on the sea front by a mud bank. The authorities were convinced that the acute infections of the liver, bunions, fevers, influenza, and dysentery which occurred during the Southwest monsoon, which lasted five months annually, arose from the wet conditions. At the same time newly-cleared jungle areas for cultivation close to the town and a poor drainage system created a breeding ground for malaria. But while authorities were fully aware of the situation they were helpless due to a lack of funds for the construction of a proper drainage system in the newly cleared areas. Illness related to the poor conditions became a common occurrence in Penang. In 1805, 302 Europeans were admitted to the hospital although a total of 292 were discharged and found fit for duty and only nine or 2.9 per cent died. Among the natives 211 were admitted, with 202 discharged and six losing their lives.

Penang, however, had one saving grace and that was the highland it had in its hinterland which had a temperature equivalent to that experienced in a European spring. Its cool temperature which seldom deviated from 62 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit, was 12 degrees lower than that in the low-lying areas, so that it was seen as an ideal retreat for the European community to escape from the heat or to recover from sickness. However, at that stage, this highland, was only accessible after a two hour journey.

The only early evidence of town administration was the appointment of John McIntyre as Clerk of the Market and Scavenger in 1795. A Mayor appeared to have been appointed but the date of his appointment is not available and his function and power were not clearly defined in the documents. The sole clear trace of the town Mayor was a case of his abuse of power through violence against a Chinese in 1807. In addition to the civil servants who administered the colony, there were also two important bodies regulating the daily life in town, the Committee of Assessors and the Capitans (Kapitans) of the various communities.

**Committees of Assessors**

From 1800, it seemed that the town was ruled and governed by several Committees of Assessors elected by the Governor in Council for the improvement of Penang’s early municipal history.
of the town. The aim of forming various Committees of Assessors was to discuss, study, and solve social and economic problems that affected the lives of the town's population. In effect, they were advisory bodies which could not pass or enforce regulations on their own. These were not permanent institutions as they only existed for a specific purpose and term. Although the appointment of a Committee of Assessors was done on an ad hoc basis, it was, nevertheless, an important body as it assisted the government in making policy decisions. Each committee was chaired by a government official and its other members consisted of distinguished native chiefs and eminent Europeans not in the service of the government. In practice, the Europeans and natives who were nominated by the government to sit in the Committees of Assessors were from the wealthy section of the society.

A Committee of Assessors might exist for a few weeks or months depending on the task it was appointed to perform. For example, if it was felt necessary to build a road into the interior part of the country or to widen existing roads or build new bridges, the government would form a Committee of Assessors to discuss matters relating to their construction. This committee would then discuss and decide on the funding, cost, planning, and building of the infrastructure.

From 1796 to 1814, as noted in Table 9.1 below, thirteen Committees of Assessors were formed by the Governor in Council.

Table 9.1 Committees of Assessors formed in Penang 1796–1814

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Committee of Assessors</th>
<th>Date/Year formed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors on obtaining a revenue from trade</td>
<td>1796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors for the valuation of property for assessment</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors on Kellner, the police magistrate</td>
<td>18 August 1806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors on Kellner, the police magistrate</td>
<td>22 August 1806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors on the regulation on the market</td>
<td>8 September 1806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of British Inhabitants of Prince of Wales Island</td>
<td>1806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors on constructing water works and supply</td>
<td>1806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors on maintenance and building of roads and bridges</td>
<td>1807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors on Land Holder of Penang</td>
<td>1807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors to formulate regulations on road users</td>
<td>1807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors to abolish slavery</td>
<td>1808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors on the fire of 1814</td>
<td>1814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Assessors to guard against the possibility of future fire</td>
<td>1814</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the thirteen Committees of Assessors above the most important were the committee for obtaining revenue from trade,\(^{24}\) the body for looking into the actions of the police magistrate which brought about fundamental changes to the administration of the market,\(^{25}\) and the one on the building and maintaining of roads.\(^{26}\)

A difficult task for any committee was to raise funds or revenue. The Committee of Assessors for obtaining revenue from trade had as its term of reference the seeking of more income for the administrative expenditure of the town and for the colony as a whole. No tax, however, was levied on the port of Penang as its founder, Francis Light wanted it to be a free port in order to attract more merchants and traders. But, with Light’s death the new Superintendent of the colony decided to abolish the island’s free port status. Macdonald hoped that the imposition of a tax would generate more income which could then be utilized for the town’s administration and thus further benefit the community.\(^{27}\) But he was opposed by a very powerful group of English traders and merchants on the island and according to an observer, “Major Macdonald however appears to have been a man of more firmness if not severity of disposition than Mr. Light and he went heartily to war with the difficulties that surrounded him. Under a friendly administration of the first Superintendent [Francis Light], and the three years interregnum which appears to have followed, the merchants had grown into as the [M]ajor terms it ‘a most contumacious body’ and he directed his attention first to the reduction of these traders to a proper understanding of their position”.\(^{28}\)

As a result of his confrontational stance, the merchants united under their leader James Scott to oppose the taxes.\(^{29}\) These merchants had earlier worked with the government but had resigned to venture into trade and business so that their interests were not necessarily in tune with those of the administration. They took Macdonald’s actions to be a personal attack on them and were of the opinion that the administrator was envious of their wealth and success. The ill feeling engendered led to serious disputes and a strained relationship developed between the Superintendent and the merchants in the town. James Scott, the leader of the merchant community, and a powerful person in Penang, in particular, did not get on well with Macdonald, a factor which was partly responsible in forcing the latter to resign as Superintendent of the island in 1799. The idea of imposing a customs tax was only successfully implemented during George Leith’s period.

Two Committees of Assessors were set up to investigate the police magistrate Kellner.\(^{30}\) In colonial Penang, the police magistrate administered law and order in the town and territories. His jurisdiction ranged from the administration of justice to the administration of the markets, the bazaar, the streets of the town, and the island. With such extensive powers, the possibilities of abuse and corruption existed. Even as early as 1800, there was evidence of anger and resentment among the inhabitants of Penang, with reports sent to the Governor and Council alleging abuse in the market by the police magistrate. However, a committee was only set up in 1806 to investigate the allegations.
and, even then, due to the power and influence of the police magistrate, it ended in failure. A new committee was set up, under an official of higher ranking than the police magistrate. Strong evidence was obtained that the police magistrate was indeed corrupt and had abused his power by manipulating the prices and weights of goods in the market. Following the inquiry, he was replaced.

Management of the market

After the departure of the magistrate, a new Committee of Assessors was appointed to regulate market administration. New regulations were introduced and the changes in the management of the market which followed were effective in reducing manipulation of prices and regulating the import of food products from Kedah. Under the new rules the police had to ascertain that goods were sold and purchased according to the proper regulations and not sold in huge quantities. However, these regulations did not have any effect on suppliers from Kedah who sold most of their goods to traders in large quantities. In order to preserve stability in the markets and good negotiations between buyers and sellers, an official was appointed as a superintendent of the markets.

The Superintendent of the markets was given an assistant to help him carry out his duties. He was required to maintain a register of all imported goods and daily internal suppliers, to enable the Committee to determine prices at a specific period. The Committee had suggested that the Superintendent should be vested with discretionary powers but in cases which were beyond his capacity, reference should be made to the police magistrate. The Superintendent was to be well equipped with adequate scales, weights, and measures for his job in the market. He and his assistant were prohibited from buying and selling, either directly or indirectly, any of the restricted goods such as rice and meat. Nobody, except the bazaar guard, was allowed to wear any form of identification, such as a badge.

The new regulation was effective in curbing violence and aggression against the retailers. In addition, trading hours were specified, starting at seven o’clock in the morning and ending at six in the evening. These hours however, did not apply to the sale of fish and vegetables which could be sold at most times. During the regular market hours, the Superintendent or his assistant was to be constantly present. Since the Committee felt that no native was competent enough to be the superintendent that post was entrusted to a European who understood Eastern languages. An Englishman who professed a good command of Chinese and Malay languages named McIntyre was appointed as the first superintendent of the market.

The committee also set up regulations for the bazaar and market of Penang, specifying that all persons were prohibited from selling fowls or other kinds of poultry in Penang except within the bazaar. If they broke the law, the punishment was in the form of fines as follows: one fowl, one copang and for
every duck or goose, two copang. Part of the proceeds of the fine would be
given to the informer and the rest used for expenditure for the maintenance of
the streets.\textsuperscript{34}

With the enforcement of the new rules and regulations for the market, new
problems emerged, especially in relation to the implementation of the new law
on the sale of poultry. McIntyre declared that those who boarded prows/boats
and fixed the value of the poultry based on their own self interest had caused
problems and had deterred the natives from supplying goods to the market.
The Clerk of the Market had to then appoint a Panglima Pagar,\textsuperscript{35} a security
guard, to reside in the market for a specific period of time, from eight until
twelve in the morning and from two to six in the evening. This person was
also to act as an intermediary between the buyer and the seller when neces-
sary and should, as far as possible, seek justice for both parties. One of the
main tasks of the Panglima Pagar was to act as an arbitrator in cases of dis-
putes. A respectable Malay was chosen for this office and was paid a sum of
SpD 25 per month.

\textit{Capitans}

Apart from the Committees of Assessors, the English administration in
Penang instituted the practice of appointing a Capitan or Headman for each
ethnic Asian group. The power and the function of this office were similar to
those of the Capitans in Dutch-Melaka.\textsuperscript{36} When first introduced, the Capitan
was empowered to administer justice and exercise social control in his own
community. However, the Capitan’s judicial functions were abolished after
1808, when the Court of Judicature was set up and no more Capitans were
appointed by the government. Despite this, the Chinese, Malays and Chuliars
continued to take their disputes to their elders rather than to the Recorder’s
Court.\textsuperscript{37}

During the period when the Capitan had judicial powers, the proceedings
of the Capitan’s Court were held every Monday and Thursday at the Capi-
tan’s premises, assisted by two persons called assessors. All judgements in
cases of debts under SpD10 were considered final. But in cases where the debt
exceeded SpD10 and a litigant was dissatisfied with the Capitan’s verdict, he
could lodge an appeal at the Magistrate’s Court.\textsuperscript{38} The power given to the
Capitans covered small disputes that happened in their own community.\textsuperscript{39}
They also had to assist the police department by rendering their help in
fighting crime. Each Capitan was provided with five peons who also acted as
police constables performing beat duties in the town during the day and night.
In addition, the Capitans had to keep a register of the births and marriages of
their own ethnic group, report new migrants, keep a regular count on the
numbers of their ethnic community, regulate assessments of the standard of
living, and manage social and religious activities.\textsuperscript{40}

The earliest known Capitan of the Chinese was Cheki\textsuperscript{41} alias Chu Khee\textsuperscript{42}
alias Patcan alias Koh Lay Huan alias Chewan who was appointed in 1794.\textsuperscript{43}
Sometime in the early nineteenth century, he was succeeded by Teaquah. The first Capitan of the Malays was Tuanku Syed Hussain and for the Chuliars it was Kadir Maiden alias Cauder Maydeen. As the functions of the police department began to grow in maintaining law and order, the power of the native Capitans began to diminish and subsequently, they merely held a ceremonial status in their ethnic group. However, the informal power of these Capitans was still very strong within their own ethnic group. For example, the majority of the Chinese still went to their Capitan to solve their socio-economic problems like settling land or family disputes. Some of the Capitans were also very influential and the government usually sought their assistance in dealing with specific social problems. For example, during the outbreak of a cholera epidemic in the Chuliar community in 1819 the government requested the Capitan's assistance to explain the disease to the community in order to help curb its spread.

The bane of fire

Most colonial towns had, at some time or other, suffered from outbreaks of fire which caused much destruction of property and loss of lives. For example, Melaka suffered many fires in its early history as a result of which the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, [Dutch] United East India Company) enforced very strict regulations regarding building materials and the layout of buildings in the town. Only brick buildings were allowed and those unable to afford them were forced to move out of the town. Fire fighting facilities and fire fighters were always on alert in case of fire incidents. Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century Melaka was better planned to cope with fire hazards. However, Penang, which was then in its early stage of development was without any fire regulations or firemen. It was also an ill-planned town without any strict regulations on building materials. Most of its houses were built from materials prone to catch fire. Since the town’s establishment there were three major fires, namely, in 1789, 1812, and 1814. These fires burnt down almost the whole town. The first outbreak on 23 April 1789 burnt down Malabar or Chuliar Street, including fifty-six houses belonging to the Chuliars. Most of the shops situated on this part of the town were owned by Chuliar merchants, as was noted before. As retailers of Indian cloth, many of these merchants had their warehouses and godowns on this street. In the confusion caused by the fire, petty thieves took advantage of it to steal goods from the shops and warehouses and many bales of Indian cloth were stolen and hidden away. The authorities appeared to have succeeded in recovering the goods and apprehending the thieves. Some of the stolen goods were found on ships anchored in the port and in houses and shops in Aceh Street and the petty thieves who were caught were whipped and exiled from the island. The cause of the fire could not be ascertained but the loss was said to amount to Spd20,000. Those who suffered losses were given assistance by the authorities.
The authorities later encouraged the town dwellers to build brick premises and helped them by reducing the price of bricks to Spd3.00 per mill. Other expenses required for the rebuilding of houses made from brick were also reduced. Since fire had destroyed many valuables and property belonging to the merchants and traders in the town, they became more conscious about the question of safety in their neighbourhood. Many responded by rebuilding their shops and other premises with bricks although petty traders and small business merchants, perhaps due to the high expenses involved, still rebuilt their shops with materials that could catch fire easily.

However, a more cautious attitude or some degree of civic mindedness developed and the administration began to receive petitions regarding acts of negligence or disregard for the safety of others. Thus if a neighbour's mode of business and premises were thought to have the potential to endanger property and life, a complaint was lodged with the authorities. When complaints were filed, the authorities had to investigate the premises. For premises prone to fire, the owners were ordered to dig more wells and to have more fire fighting facilities, like buckets, fire fighters, and wells filled with water. Premises such as those used by arrack distillers were considered as unfriendly.

Although the first fire caused many property losses and made the authorities aware of its adverse effects, many town dwellers remained negligent and continued to take risks. Thus, another fire broke out in 1812, which burnt down nearly half of the town area. The only place that was saved from the fire was the Beach Street area, which housed most of the government warehouses, godowns, and marine store houses. This fire appeared to have destroyed a lot of the property belonging to the wealthy Chinese in the town. Records show that the majority of the fire victims were Chinese followed by a small percentage of Malay and Chuliar merchants and traders who had their premises in the centre of the town's commercial area.

The real extent of the damage and the actual number of people who lost their property during this fire cannot be ascertained from the records as the list of fire victims (see Tables 9.2 and 9.3) only covered the town's major landholders and merchants. The majority listed were Chinese merchants and landholders but some revenue farmers were also included. Only a small number of individuals from the other ethnic groups were recorded in the list. The 1812 fire burnt down nearly all of the property that belonged to the wealthiest Chinese in the town, for example, Tequa, Che Em, Low Amee, Khoo Hooan @ Chewan, Baba Yair, and By That Poye. The property losses of the European and other Asian ethnic groups appeared not to have been as extensive as those of the Chinese. The only Malay who appeared to have suffered losses in the fire was Syed Harron who claimed that his property losses came to Spd10,000. However, there were many shopkeepers and house owners who suffered losses in the fire but whose names were not entered in the list. This can be surmised from the fact that the authorities reported a total of 500 shop owners and house owners as having been affected by the 1812 fire and that out of all premises destroyed, 227 were owned by traders and mechanics.

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The third fire which occurred in 1814 also destroyed almost half the town area. The worst affected areas included the whole of Chuliar Street, Armenian Lane, Market Street, the southern part of Beach Street, Penang Street, King Street, Queen Street, and Pitt Street. The 1814 fire was believed to have started from Chuliar Street in a house belonging to a Chuliar named Cauther. His house was attached to a shop selling prepared food. Many of the people interviewed about the fire confirmed that the fire started from the Cauther residence. At the time of the fire Cauther’s child was ill from smallpox and it was believed that while preparing medicine for his sick child he accidentally started the fire which spread immediately to the whole house and the neighbourhood. Cauther, however, denied the allegations.

In any case, the 1814 fire destroyed many of the town’s residences, shop houses, warehouses, and godowns owned mainly by wealthy Chinese, Malay, and Chuliar merchants and traders. Table 9.2 shows that many of the properties destroyed were built from attap although a substantial number of brick buildings were also destroyed. The Chuliars suffered the most as 640 buildings belonging to them were destroyed. The Malays and the Chinese also suffered big losses but nowhere as close to the devastation that visited the Chuliar community. This was because the fire had destroyed the whole of

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### Table 9.2 Number of houses in Penang destroyed in the 1814 fire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Brick shops/houses</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Attap shops/houses</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malays</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>17.28</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>18.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuliars</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>49.26</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>75.59</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>71.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenians</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabs</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21.32</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>6.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>15.21</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>84.78</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 9.3 Number of people inhabiting the houses/shops destroyed in the 1814 fire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malays/Arabs/Armenians Merchants</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>21.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuliars/Pulicats/Surat Merchants</td>
<td>2,283</td>
<td>68.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>9.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,325</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chuliar Street before spreading to some parts of Beach Street, Penang Street, and King Street.

Table 9.3 shows the number of people affected by the 1814 fire. As can be seen, the Chuliars accounted for more than 68 per cent, the Malays, 21 per cent, and the Chinese 9 per cent.

Although as many as 2,283 Chuliars were adversely affected by the fire, the principal victims among this group was smaller as can be seen from the number of buildings destroyed as well as the small number of brick buildings affected. This was because most of the Chuliars affected were workers who were temporary migrants, merchants, or traders who had come to Penang during the trading period and therefore did not own real estate property. With the Malays, few were listed as fire victims because not all appeared to have reported their losses to the government, unlike the Chinese victims who usually reported their losses. Moreover, as with the Chuliars, the majority of the Malays affected in the 1814 fire were traders and merchants from the archipelago who came to Penang during the trading season. On the other hand, while the number of Chinese affected by the fire was smaller compared to the Chuliars and Malays, principal sufferers among them were higher compared to the other two ethnic groups.

The report from the committee of inquiry after the 1814 fire incident stated that all attap buildings in the town would be demolished and replaced with bricks and tiles which would be distributed free to the poor. The government also requested that Melaka bricks and tiles be used in rebuilding the town. The committee also discovered that actual losses in the fire had been exaggerated and that the total loss sustained did not exceed the sum of 500,000 Spanish dollars. They also identified a number of poor people who had been victims but whose names were not included in the list. The committee also concluded that the actual loss suffered by the merchants from the Coromandel Coast and native merchants and traders was Spd150,000 dollars while the sum of Spd350,000 represented losses sustained by individuals and residents on the island. Out of the total amount that was evaluated, one third was determined as loss in buildings and the remainder in merchandise and sundries. The government also distributed aid to the poor by giving rice and charity and they were also given the opportunity to borrow money to rebuild their houses and shops provided the loan was repaid within five years.

In the aftermath of the fire, the government ordered that all brick buildings were to be built eastward of Pitt Street, which was to be widened to 120 feet and extended in a direct line as far as the Prangin River. All houses in the street were required to be constructed with bricks and roofed with tiles within five years. The committee also discovered that the many attap buildings in Beach Street and in the lower end of Bishop Street, belonging to carpenters and blacksmiths, were very vulnerable to fire and would affect the neighbouring warehouse. It was therefore suggested that buildings in the lower end of Bishop Street and on either side of Beach Street, as far as Armenian Lane, be demolished and replaced by brick buildings, with similar aid for
rebuilding. The government also passed a regulation that all houses situated in Pitt Street should be rebuilt using brick.⁵⁹

After the fire incident, the government prohibited the building of huts or houses with attap roofs and those who could not afford or who refused to use bricks and tiles were ordered to move out of the town area. Attap houses had to be built away from the commercial areas. Orders were issued for the immediate removal of all huts or sheds within the fort or near the commercial area and new regulations required that a space of not less than five to six feet should be left between each building. Further, wells for fire prevention had to be frequently checked and maintained. Military officials were used to conduct and submit a full report on all types of houses belonging to the Company (EEIC) or rented by the government for public purposes. The failure of the fire engine during the fire also led the government to take immediate action to create a fire department with more manpower and equipment.

The fire which had destroyed the main area of the town had pressured the government into forcing the town dwellers to change their attitude when rebuilding their premises. Although the government was very firm about its policy of rebuilding the town with bricks and tiles imported from Melaka, the majority of the town people were still unable to afford the high cost of rebuilding their premises. Even officers in the committee owned attap houses in the commercial area of the town and they too refused to rebuild their houses with bricks.⁶⁰ Rebuilding was still costly even though the government had reduced the prices of bricks and tiles. Moreover, the money loaned by the government and payable in five years created financial problems for certain merchants, traders, and house owners whose businesses were ruined after the fire incident. Most were unable to repay their debts and ended up insolvent.

The discussion about the physical development of Penang and the experiences the town went through during and after the fires, show that the new colonial port-town evolved and grew despite the ad hoc approach to its planning and teething problems it faced. As can be seen, from a small beginning when it was inhabited by only a few hundred Malays, Penang was turned by the English into an important European colonial town with a multi-ethnic population and a port capable of rivalling Melaka in importance as a trading centre in the Straits of Melaka. With the arrival of the Chinese and Chuliars as well as other ethnic groups, the new town was transformed into a cosmopolitan centre inhabited by more than 90 per cent immigrants who, along with the English administrators, helped to shape Penang into a viable colonial port-town

Conclusion

Penang, as the first English colony in Southeast Asia and the furthest of the EIC outposts in Asia, was a frontier settlement. For many years after its opening in 1786, it was not considered a vital settlement by Calcutta so that its early history was one of struggle to prove that it could provide trade benefits and that its strategic location would enable the Company to control the
Eastern trade route. No doubt this situation was an impediment to its development and shaped the way it was administered at least in the early years. The burden of opening a new settlement was further exacerbated by the lack of financial support from the EIC headquarters in Calcutta.

As we have seen, it was not until 1794, the year Francis Light died, that he was formally appointed as the Superintendent of Penang and received instructions from Calcutta on legal matters in the running of the new colony. In the circumstances, much was left to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the pioneers who governed Penang. But it was founded by a country trader who, only later, became an EIC official and its early development was controlled by a few mercantile personalities whose main focus was on trade. This meant that less attention was given to the administration of the town until the pioneers were replaced by better trained administrators. Thus, it was only after Light’s death that some semblance of an ordered administration began to emerge.

On the whole, Penang’s administration was characterized by a make-shift and ad hoc approach to development. It was not until 1795 that a tax of some sort was introduced to raise revenues while social and public amenities remained poor for a long time. It is not clear whether the ad hoc nature of the administration was due to a minimalist approach to governance or a lack of financial means, but the practice of selling public land in the early years to raise money for development and then of buying back land to develop further, could be said to be symptomatic of haphazard management.

It could also be seen that the administration did not utilize the talents of Penang’s population to the fullest. Although the official community was small, instead of integrating the community into the administration as was the case with the Dutch in Melaka, the authorities in Penang chose a system of occasionally appointing influential private individuals to help run the town. This was done through the system of appointing ad hoc committees instead of permanent bodies. Again it is not clear why this was the case. It could well have been due to the bad experience Macdonald went through with the mercantile community so that there was fear of giving their members more influence than they already had. But whatever might have been the reason, the temporary nature of the Committee of Assessors discouraged continuity and experience and would have worked, to some degree, against effective administration.

Nevertheless, on the whole, Penang progressed, albeit, slowly and stumblingly and the proof of its success was its ability to attract new arrivals who were not only traders but settlers who were prepared to engage in longer-term activities such as agriculture and remain permanently. At the same time, the population of Penang created for themselves a social environment that had all the features of a viable and permanent society.

Notes
1 See, for example, “Notices of Pinang”, Journal of Indian Archipelago (JIA), 5 (1851): 400–29.
In September 1805, a new administration was formed for Penang, headed by a Governor and Council. Philip Dundas was appointed as Governor and Treasurer. Governor Dundas had previously in the Bombay marine and had been Master Attendant there. A nephew of Lord Melville, he was selected for the post of Governor of Penang because of his knowledge and experience of nautical affairs, qualifications suited to the aim of turning Penang into a naval depot and ship-building port. Governor Dundas was assisted by his Council. At that time, the first and leading officer was John Hope Oliphant, the Warehouse Keeper and Paymaster. He was allowed a commission of 3 per cent on sales of Company’s goods and his income, including his commission, was to be revised annually. The second was Alexander Gray, Superintendent and Paymaster of Marine, and a naval and military storekeeper. He was also allowed the same commission in addition to his salary. The third was Colonel Norman Macalister. The other officers included Henry Shephard Pearson, who was the Council Secretary; Thomas Raffles, Assistant Secretary; James Phillip Hobson, Accountant and auditor; William Robinson, Assistant accountant; Quintin Dick Thomson, Sub-warehouse-keeper and Paymaster; W.E. Phillip, Collector of Customs and Land Revenue; John Erskrine, Assistant to the Superintendent and Storekeeper of Marine and Marine Paymaster; William Dick, Surgeon; and 2 Assistant Surgeons and 10 writers. For further reference, see, “Notices of Pinang”, JIA, 4 (1852): 18–22.


C.H. Phillips, The East India Company 1784–1834, Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1961, p. 8. Phillips points out that “… each week the court of Directors met at least once, on Wednesday, and often 3 times. All letters from India and appeals from their servants were taken to court, final decisions were taken on reports of sub-committees and dispatches for India were read and signed by at least 13 Directors”.


Attap or Artab refers to the palm leaves used in thatching and house-building.

Letter from Philip Manington, dated 13 May 1795, in SSFR, G/34/7.

This tax was to be collected on all houses and shops belonging to the Chinese, Malays, Bugis, Chuliars, Moors, Malabars either merchants, shopkeepers or tradesmen of different occupations according to the extent of the grounds around the house or the size or rental price of the houses, see, SSFR, G/34/7.

Under his administration, Major Macdonald drew up a list of officials to govern the colony. This list consisted of: First Assistant (a confidential counsellor and magistrate); Second Assistant (a collector of revenue and guardian of farms); Secretary (a confidential assistant to Superintendent); Three European clerks (for Superintendent and Assistants); two or four boys (from orphan school); Clerk of
the Marshal (as superintendent of the department and of that part of Police which respects cleanliness); two European clerks (as assistants to Clerk of the Marshal); Head Constable and Gaoler; three interpreters; three Malay writers; 12 Peons; three Native Capitans and three writers for the three native capitans. See, “Notices of Pinang”, JIA, 5 (1851): 111.

13 The problems of the town were not only limited to the physical aspects, such as the hygienic level of the living quarters and the amenities but also the defence of the town. For further explanation on this, refer to a report prepared by Major Kyd in SSFR, G/34/7.


17 Report by B. Loftie, acting Head Surgeon, 14 February 1810 in SSFR, G/34/9.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Complaint made by a Chinese shopkeeper named Gee against Captain Drummond, Town Mayor, 9 February 1807 in SSFR, G/34/17.

24 This committee was formed by the new Superintendent of the colony after the death of Francis Light. It comprised Major Macdonald (Superintendent and President) Messrs McIntyre, James Scott, Lindsay, Hutton, Roebuck, Young, David Brown, Sparran, Mackrell, Nason. Young served as Secretary. This committee consisted of the mercantile community of George Town. See, “Notices of Pinang”, JIA, 5 (1851): 97.

25 On 18 August 1806, a special Committee of Assessors was formed in order to investigate the allegation that the police magistrate had misused his power through corruption. This Committee comprised W.E. Phillips as Chairman, and its members included James Scott, George Seton, Thomas Jones, John Dunbar, N.B. Bone and N. Bacon. This group was appointed to represent the European community. In addition, Tegua, Chewan, Chee Im, Nakhuda Tamby Sahib, Jelanbebes, Cauder Moodeen @ Kadir Maidin, Che Amaat and Che Amat Gee and Gee Pootee were elected on behalf of the native members. However, the Committee of Assessors was not able to make further investigations into the activities of the police magistrate. This led to the appointment of new members to sit on the Committee on 22 August 1806. The new Committee consisted of John Dickens, Chairman, J.P. Hobson, and James Carnegy. It was chaired by the magistrate who later charged and prosecuted the police magistrate for corruption. The police magistrate was found guilty of all the charges. The Kellner case created a great impact on the administration, leading to the formation of a special Committee of Assessors. The Committee was set up to legislate market regulation and its first meeting was held on 8 September, 1806, chaired by W.E. Phillips, with George Seton, John Dunbar, and N. Bacon as the European members. The native community was represented by Che Wan, Chee Im, Gee, Gigee Pootee, and Nakhuda Tombee Saib. The Committee passed a resolution that, in compliance with the direction of the Governor and Council, the Committee was required to submit suggestions for the
administration of the markets of Penang. See Proceedings of a special Committee of Assessors on 25 August 1806 in Board’s Collections (BC), F/4/262 5837.
26 See the discussion during the meeting of the Committee on 17 February 1806 in SSFR, G/34/13. Also, see “Notices of Pinang”, JIA, 5 (1851): 400–29.
28 Cameron, Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India, p. 312. For further discussion on the disputes between Macdonald with James Scott and the English merchant and traders in Penang, see, “Notices of Pinang”, JIA, 5 (1851): 93–119.
30 See letter dated 12 August 1806 in SSFR, G/34/14 from Douglas Wilson, a merchant in Penang, to the secretary to Governor regarding a protest related to an act committed by Kellner in SSFR, G/34/14.
31 See the discussion during the meeting held on 8 September 1806 of the Committee of Assessors to formulate market regulation in Penang in SSFR, G/34/14. The committee was presided over by W.E. Phillips while the European members were George Seton, John Dunbar, and Nath. Bacon. The native members consisted of Chee Wan Chee, Eam Gee, Gige Pootee, and Nakuda Tombee.
32 See proceedings of a special Committee of Assessors on 25 August 1806 in F/4/2626 5835. See also the discussion during the meeting held on 8 September 1806, of the Committee of Assessors to formulate market regulation in Penang in SSFR, G/34/14.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 The term Panglima means “warrior” while the word “Paga’ri” literally means “fence”. Hence Panglima Pagar is a person who secures a premise.
37 For further discussion on the function of this court and the early problems of the administration of justice in the town, see, “Notices of Pinang”, JIA, 5 (1851): 292–305.
39 See, for example, an application by Syed Hussain who asked for a written declaration to allow Muslims to practice Islamic law, in the letter from Captain Light, dated 30 July 1792, to the Governor-General in Council at Fort William in SSFR, G/34/5.
41 This name appeared in the list of mortgages granted at Prince of Wales Island on 24 February 1795. On 5 August 1794, Cheki, the Chinese Capitan mortgaged his pepper plantation at Sungai Kluang to James Scott for Spd1, 300 with an interest of 12 per cent per annum, see, SSFR, G/34/7.
42 See the list of Chinese inhabitants residing in Georgetown, Prince of Wales Island, in December 1788. Chu Khee came from Kedah together with eighteen members of his family. He was mainly a merchant. See SSFR, G/34/3.
43 A detailed account of Capitan Koh Lay Huan can be found in Wong Choon San, A Gallery of Chinese Kapitans, pp. 12–15.
45 Information regarding Cauder Maydeen is limited and scattered. Nevertheless, his name appeared in some of the meetings of the committees of assessors. For example, his name appeared in one meeting regarding the curbing of cholera.
affecting most of the Chuliar community. See Report of Committee 26 October 1819 in BC, F/4/634 17218.

According to Wong Choon San in his *A Gallery of Chinese Kapitans*, p. 10: “… there
is negative evidence to suggest that most of the disputes amongst the Chinese were
dealt with by their elders without recourse to the English way of administration of
justice”.


See, Captain Light’s letter, dated 18 July 1789 in SSFR, G/34/3.

Minute by Governor Seton, 2 July 181, in SSFR, G/34/35.

See the report of the fire in SSFR, G/34/10.

After the 1789 fire, Francis Light and Captain Glass built ten brick houses, shops
and warehouses and encouraged the town dwellers to follow his example by redu-
cing the prices of bricks and *chunam* (plaster) He also requested 20 bricklayers and
30 coolies from Bengal to be sent to Penang to help in rebuilding the houses. See
Captain Light’s letter dated, 18 July 1789 in SSFR, G/34/3.

Fort Cornwallis, 29 September 1814, in G/34/10; See also Collector of Customs
and Land Revenue, 30 April 1806 in SSFR, G/34/13.

See the complaint by Mr. Douglas to the Collector of Customs and land revenues
regarding an arrack farmer who had his distillery near his warehouse which could
endanger his property, 30 April 1806, in SSFR, G/34/13.

List of people who were the principal victims of the fire of 29 June 1812 in G/34/37.

Superintendent of Police to the Secretary to the Governor in SSFR, G/34/45; See
also Minute by W.E. Phillips in SSFR, G/34/45.

See, for example, the petition made by Pulicat merchants Mahomed Syed, Muck-
toon Saib, Boojoo Mahomed, and Ismail Mahomed dated 6 October 1814 in
SSFR, G/34/45.

Fort Cornwallis, 10 October 1814 in SSFR, G/34/10.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Superintendent of Police, 18 January 1816, to Secretary to Governor in SSFR,
G/34/54.
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Part III

Kingship and state systems

“… divine glory was considered the most important attribute of kingship, for it enabled rulers to govern and command obedience.”

Firdawsi (940–1020 CE), Persian poet
10 Revisiting “kingship” in seventeenth-century Aceh

From *ira et malevolentia* to *pax et custodia*¹

*Sher Banu A.L. Khan*

**Introduction**

One of the major distinguishing features of insular Southeast Asia during “the age of commerce” according to Anthony Reid is the generally high autonomy of women in kinship and family, commerce, diplomacy, and politics. Indeed, Reid postulated that the proliferation of women rulers contributed to the region’s age of commerce since female rulers were the best guarantee against tyranny and women made the state safe for commerce.² The kingdom of Aceh Dar al-Salam was ruled by four female rulers in succession from 1641–1699. Besides Aceh, in Patani, another Malay Muslim polity, six queens ruled: Raja Ijau (1584–1616), Raja Biru (1616–1624), Raja Ungu (1624–1635), Raja Kuning (1635–1649), Raja Mas Kelantan (1670–1698), Raja Mas Chayam (1698–1702, 1716–1718).³ Several more instances of female rulers in the region were in Sukadana (1608–1622), Jambi (1630–1655) and Solor (1650–1670).⁴ Yet, we know less about these female rulers compared to their more powerful male counterparts such as Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh, Sultan Abulfatah Ageng of Banten, Sultan Agung of Java, or Sultan Babullah of Ternate.

Studies on leadership in Southeast Asia’s early modern era tended to centre on kingship – leadership which was necessarily male. According to O.W. Wolters, “men of prowess” endowed with an abnormal amount of personal and innate soul stuff enabled them to distinguish their performance from their kinsmen and others in their generation. This spiritual identity and leadership capacity were recognized by others and they would give him their allegiance so that they in turn would receive material and spiritual benefits.⁵ In his revised edition of *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, however, Wolters considered the roles and positions of women and questioned whether women too should be attributed with this “vastly energetic role of women of prowess” and wondered what would have been their relationship with men of prowess?⁶

In the early modern era, besides wealth from international trade and technology from the West, one major global force that transformed Southeast Asia was religion. In insular Southeast Asia, Islam became widespread and
Islamic principles of governance, commerce, and gender relations were adopted and adapted. Barbara Andaya and Wazir Jahan Karim argue that world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam relegated women to a domestic space, reducing their power and their public roles. Indeed orthodox Islam frowned, even forbade, women from taking up leadership positions. Ironically how could it be possible that there were numerous women rulers in Malay-Muslim Southeast Asia? Since most of these sultanates adopted global Muslim ideas on kingship, what was the basis for legitimacy for these Muslim queens? What would a study focusing on “queen-ship” in early modern Malay/Muslim insular polities reveal about these female rulers and the sociocultural contexts they operated in and how would this differ from the model of Islamic kingship in Malay sultanates?

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to generalize features of female rule or “queen-ship” in insular Southeast Asia in the early modern era. This present essay instead analyses the rule of the four sultanahs of Aceh with focus on Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah (r. 1641–1657), to offer insights into female participation in politics at the highest level in particular and power and gender in Southeast Asia in general. Contrary to the view that successful leadership tended to be male (“men of prowess”) and that Islam forbids female rule, this essay will demonstrate that under these female sovereigns, the basis of legitimacy relied less on notions of sacral and charismatic power based on prowess but on Muslim notions of piety and the just ruler. The sultanahs also adopted leadership styles that differed from their male counterparts, namely being more collaborative, institutional, economically pragmatic, and protective of private property and security, and placing emphasis on social welfare. Whether this could constitute “female leadership” remains debatable but it certainly provides different and/or alternative models of leadership and thus should be assessed differently from “absolutist rulers” and “men of prowess” as the criteria of effective leadership in the early modern period.

This chapter also illustrates how in a particular political and social milieu, such as the Acehnese context of the mid-seventeenth century, there existed a complex process of negotiations where global mainstream Muslim political thought was being localized, reinterpreted, and adapted by stakeholders to suit local conditions, namely the need to explain the acceptance of female rule in Muslim Aceh. Again it presents another model in which Islam as a global influence during early modernity was adapted as a basis of political legitimacy and governance in a Muslim polity that differed from the more pervasive model of “Islamic Kingship/Muslim Sultanates”.

**Four Acehnese Sultanahs 1641–1699**

In the seventeenth century, Aceh was known as a pepper-producing port that rivalled the Portuguese port of Melaka (Malacca), and achieved its “golden age” under the famous Sultan Iskandar Muda (r. 1607–1636). Whilst Iskandar Muda was renown, his daughter, Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah, who ruled
Aceh for thirty-four years (r. 1641–1675), longer than her famous father, did not receive her deserved place in history. Widowed at the age of twenty-nine when her predecessor husband, Sultan Iskandar Thani (r. 1636–1641) died unexpectedly, she found herself succeeding her late husband when she was inaugurated as Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah three days after. In an unprecedented and never again repeated episode in Acehnese history she was succeeded by not only another female ruler but three more in succession. They were Sultanah Nur Alam Naqiatuddin Syah (1675–1678), Sultanah Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah (1678–1688), and Sultanah Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah (1688–1699).

**Ira et malevolentia to pax et custodia**

Aceh, like most of the other polities in the region, was ruled by a monarch who derived his/her legitimacy from age-old customs and tradition, lineage and religion. Temporal and religious powers, in theory, rested in the ruler’s hands. His royal prerogatives included political appointments and ownership of land and resources. Other political institutions were in place to assist the ruler in his task of governing the kingdom. The long sixteenth century saw increased wealth from international trade, weapons from new technology in the West and these brought about the transformation of Muslim kingdoms such as Aceh, Johor, Mataram, Makassar, and Banten into “absolutist states”. Sultan Iskandar Muda and Sultan Agung amongst others effectively harnessed this new wealth and military power and transformed themselves into powerful kings who ushered in a period of “royal absolutism”. In contrast, the Acehnese queens were viewed as pageants and mere figureheads whose rule saw the decline of royal power and the rise of the orangkaya (political and commercial elite). “Royal absolutism” needs to be re-evaluated since in practice, absolutism was limited by nobility, the rulers’ personalities, and provincial or local conditions. Provincial leaders could still temper a strong ruler such as Iskandar Muda since control of farther outlying territories and men raised for war came under their influence. For example, local elites in Sumatra West Coast, unhappy with the trade conditions imposed by Iskandar Muda, requested a change of allegiance from Aceh to the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, [Dutch] United East India Company) in Batavia even when they were supposedly under the yoke of this mighty king. *Ira et malevolentia* (“anger and hostility”) rather than “royal absolutism” characterized Iskandar Muda’s rule and since it was based on force of personality, wealth, and coercion, no lasting institutions or rule of law supported it. The following sections illustrate that Aceh’s female rulers certainly did limit royal power, but far from being weak, meek figureheads, they adopted a different style of leadership, more protective rather than predatory characterized by *pax et custodia* (“peace and custody”) which helped to stabilize Aceh politically and enabled Aceh to thrive economically until the end of their reigns.
Pageantry versus piety: contrasting the letters of Sultan Iskandar Thani and Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah

Local Muslim rulers’ letters to foreign potentates best illustrate how they represented themselves and how they wished to be perceived by other powers. It is customary in all royal Malay letters to describe the attributes of the ruler (the sender of the letter) to the recipient at the beginning of the letter. These attributes are very carefully chosen and they reveal much about the image the ruler sought to impress upon the recipient. Comparing both Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani’s letters with Sultanah Safiatuddin’s gives an indication of not only how they represented themselves but also their bases of legitimacy, authority, and role as rulers.

The indubitably male sovereign epithets sultan al-muazzam wa-al-khaqan al-mukarram, “the great sultan and illustrious king” found in the Sultans’ letters applied to Taj al-Alam. Both the Bustan us-Salatin and Adat Aceh addressed Safiatuddin and her successors with the title “Paduka Sri Sultan”. It is useful to note however that the uniquely Acehnese Berdaulat, “the Sovereign one”, was accorded to all queens of Aceh, while all male rulers of Aceh from the time of Iskandar Muda bore the title Johan Berdaulat, “the Sovereign Champion”. Both Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani claimed universal status as rulers, for example, Iskandar Thani described himself as “… King of the whole world, who like God, is glittering like the sun at midday, whose attributes are like the full moon …”14

Evidences from her letters reveal that she legitimized her rule on the very basis of Islam as Iskandar Thani’s but she emphasized the more universal qualities of the moral duties as a ruler. In Iskandar Thani’s letter, he was heralded as the sultan al-muazzam wa-al-khaqan al-mukarram followed by Muslim epithets of kingship, zill Allah fi al-‘alam and khalifat Allah. It is noteworthy that the Sultanah similarly, took the full Muslim epithets zill Allah fi al-‘alam and khalifat Allah, that is she as the khalifat or Caliph, to illustrate that her role and duties as the shadow of Allah or representative of Allah on earth were similar to that of her male predecessors, regardless of sex. However, by the very title that she chose, Taj al-Alam Safiatuddin Syah or Safiyat al-Din Syah, “Taj al-Alam” meaning “Crown of the World” and “al-Din” (referring to obedience to Allah and dispensing judgement and rewards according to Allah’s laws), she set herself apart from her male predecessors. Whilst basing her rule on her status as crown or sovereign of the world she placed her rule firmly on the foundation that she was chosen by Allah, she was a vicegerent of God to rule according to his laws. Although Iskandar Thani saw himself as the representative of Allah on earth, no such submission to Allah’s laws was mentioned.

Another radical difference was the Sultanah’s emphasis on her roles and duties as a Muslim ruler. There are twenty-six distinct sets of attributes in Iskandar Thani’s letter – all but five are repeated in Safiatuddin’s letter. The five that are excluded pertain to descriptions of the king’s material wealth...
such as how shiny (cemerlang cahayanya) his gold (mas kudrati) is and how bright (gilang gemilang) his copper (swassa) is. The other omission is the description of the ruler as being studded and decorated with gems and precious stones. In contrast to her husband’s emphasis on the material, almost all of the new formulations (giving a total of thirty-two sets of attributes) in Safiatuddin’s letters, are of a religious or moral nature. Sultanah Safiatuddin emphasized her role rather than prestige as Khalifah (“God’s Deputy on Earth”). In this letter, she writes that she is one “who manifests Allah’s wisdom and blessings, who upholds Allah’s laws, who clarifies those that are in doubt, whose shine brings forth Allah’s light and goodness, who exhorts people to Allah’s path, who treats Allah’s creations with mercy, who dispenses Allah’s justice with utmost care, who hides that which is ugly and forgives those who have sinned, and whose words are gracious.”17 The Sultanah’s humility contrasts with Iskandar Thani’s arrogance when he boasts in his letter that he is “lagi raja yang ngurniai kesukaan akan yang dikasihinya dan kedukaan akan yang dimarahinya [a king who dispenses good fortune to those he favours and misfortune to those who have incurred his wrath].”18

One other letter stood out in terms of not only the compliments attached to the preamble of the letter but also in its main content. In her letter to Joan Maetsuyker, the Governor General in Batavia, in 1659,19 she wrote:

God says that since antiquity there are no better things as these two things; namely, think always about God above all and always do good to other people. That the Governor General on his part I trust shall do. Over such work, one is more and more blessed and is honoured and praised by all other men in this world. The Acehnese and the Dutch have for many years continued in peace and friendship, but now as it has pleased God, we have come to war, but these differences are small, and with the help from God Almighty and the good resolve of a good outcome from the G[overnor] G[eneral], once again the Acehnese and the Dutch are one. Therefore, the Governor General, herein, would do no other but to settle [the differences]. The wise people in earlier times say to warn [us] that always remember two things, namely always think foremost of God and of death and forget two things, all the virtues that we do to other men and all the bad things that are done to us, so that our conscience will remain pure and calm.

In this letter, Sultanah Safiatuddin used Islam not as a means to show the difference between the kafir (infidels) and Muslims but as a common denominator, a universal call to perform good deeds and bring about peaceful diplomacy. In contrast, her male predecessors, especially Sultan Al-Kahar used religion to wage holy war (jihad) against the Portuguese.

The Sultanah’s presentation of herself in her letters as a pious Muslim ruler was supported by contemporary accounts of her rule. The highest-ranking ulama (religious scholar), the Syeikh al-Islam Nurruddin al-Raniri (d. 1658)
writes in the *Bustan us-Salatin* about Sultanah Safiatuddin’s piety in observing the daily prayers and reading the Quran, commanding people to perform good deeds, dispensing laws and punishments justly and due to her royal power there were many faithful believers who prayed five times a day and pursued knowledge.\(^{20}\) Besides her piety, Al-Raniri depicted Sultanah Safiatuddin as a great and generous queen who never failed to reward her nobles, captains, soldiers, and foreign delegates generously. For example, she presented one mission from Gujerat with twenty-eight elephants unparalleled in their size and courage, one of which had four tusks instead of the usual two.\(^{21}\) Al-Raniri remarked that no ruler could give a more generous reward than that given by the queen.

A Muslim traveller, Al-Mutawakkil, who arrived in Aceh during Safiatuddin’s reign wrote:

> a very gracious, perfect Muslim woman, generous with money, rules them. She can read and knows science, beneficence and agreement on the Quran. She is called Safiyati ‘l-Din Shah Bardawla [Berdaulat, meaning sovereign]. Her name is written on the coins, on one side Safiyati ‘l-Din and on the other side Shah Berdawla.\(^{22}\)

The VOC officials who were present in Aceh mentioned that the Sultanah observed fasting in Ramadhan. Dutchman Truijtman related that since it was fasting month, they could not eat or drink during audience day. Later in the evening however, they were treated with food served in gold plates and honoured with betel box.\(^{23}\)

Sultanah Safiatuddin’s generosity was evident from the many observations of the various VOC delegates who resided in Aceh. Pieter Willemszoon reported in 1642 that she granted an English surgeon by the name of Mr Thomas, the title of “Orangkaya” and gave him four slaves as a gift.\(^{24}\) Besides the customary largesse of clothes and daggers to the Dutch envoys attending her court and generous amounts of pepper and tin presented to the Governors in Melaka and Batavia, Company officials in Aceh mentioned the thoughtful and frequent gifts of baked foods and fruits, which the Sultanah ordered to be brought to the Company’s lodge.

The third Sultanah, Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah was another generous queen. In 1683, she welcomed the delegation from the Syariff of Mekah, headed by the representative of Syariff Barakat named El Hajj Yusuf E. Qodri with great ceremony. When the envoys returned to Mekah, they were laden with gifts of gold, five golden lamps for the Ka’bah, sandalwood, camphor, and money to be donated to the poor people in Mekah.\(^{25}\)

The Sultanahs’ religious tolerance was also manifested in their allowance for Franciscan priests to minister the Catholic community in Aceh. This freedom to foreign residents to practise their religion was denied with the restoration of male rule in 1699. Furthermore, in 1688 with the death of the third queen, Zakiatuddin, some of the orangkaya and conservative ulama who
opposed the appointment of the last female ruler captured Fr Bento de Christo and took away his possessions. It was only after Kamalat Syah was appointed as the fourth queen in 1688 that Fr Bento was released and returned to his duties.\footnote{26}

### Execution of Islamic law

According to Ito Takeshi, by the end of the sixteenth century, Islamic law had become an integral part of the law of the Sultanate of Aceh.\footnote{27} However, the extent to which the courts and institutions of state were active and Islamic law meted out largely depended on the ruler. During the reigns of Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani, punishments meted out were often harsher than the provisions of the syariah (Islamic law). Iskandar Muda had an orangkaya, who requested him for deferment in preparation for war, killed together with his whole family. Iskandar Thani punished four of his concubines by amputating their hands, feet, and noses, opened their bellies and excised flesh from the bones and then burnt their bodies on suspicion of attempting to assassinate him.\footnote{28}

Sultanah Safiatuddin treated opposition from her own orangkaya more circumspectly and meted out punishments more mercifully. She merely admonished the Maharaja Sri Maharajah accused of taking her royal lands at court. Pieter Sourij, a Dutch envoy, who attended an audience day held by Safiatuddin where many criminal and civil cases were discussed and debated, related that a delinquent who was supposed to be punished was pardoned by her. Pieter Sourij reasoned that this was due to her nature as a woman.\footnote{29}

Another characteristic feature in Safiatuddin’s style of administration of justice was to call upon the relevant courts to administer cases rather than to mete out punishment based on personal power. According to Ito, during her reign, Islamic law had become an integral part of the law of the Sultanate.\footnote{30} She, together with a group of religious judges headed by the Kadi Malik al-Adil as the head, administered law and order of the realm. For example, a Muslim captain from Bengal by the name of Mirs Mamoet was accused of having sexual intercourse with the daughter of a certain Sayyid Sierip. Whilst the case was still being investigated, the Sayyid killed Mirs Mamoet because Mamoet had refused to marry his daughter. A fellow Bengali merchant, in retaliation to this murder, requested the Sultanah to put the Sayyid and his daughter to death. The Sultanah instead referred this to the relevant courts and adjudicators. The Laksamana and the Lebai Kita Kali eventually settled this case since the case involved a murder (to be tried at the criminal court) and a sexual liaison (under the jurisdiction of the religious court). The verdict was death for both father and daughter. The Sultanah, however, had the right to hear the final appeal. It turned out that the Sultanah saved the father from the death sentence but the daughter was sentenced according to the law of the land, which was strangling for fornication.\footnote{31} This institutionalization of royal power with the system of checks and balance did not survive the queens.
Relations with the ulama

The Adat Aceh mentioned the existence of a number of religious scholars from Pidie during her reign. The Kadi Malik al-Adil, referred to by the Dutch as Lebai Kita Kali (Kali being the Acehnese variant of the Arabic Qadhi) was given first place in the order during Saturday audiences. With the return of Abdul Rauf al-Singkel (1615–1693), a local ulama, from Mekah to Aceh around 1661, the Sultanah’s subsequent royal patronage further stimulated and encouraged the orientation to Islamic law in the judicial administration of the Sultanate.

Royal patronage was continued under her successors and under their reigns Islamic learning and literature proliferated, representing what was apparently a truly golden age of Islamic and Malay cultural renaissance in Aceh consequent of the effective collaboration between the sultanahs and the ulama. Al-Raniri wrote at least seven well-known books pertaining not only to religious knowledge but also history, literature, and law during the time of Sultanah Safiatuddin including Shiratul Mustaqim (The Straight Path), Syatiful-Qutub (Medicine for the Heart) and Bustanul Salathin fi Dzikril-awwalin wal-Akhirin (The Garden of Sultans concerning Biographies of People in the Past and Future). The same Sultanah also commissioned Abdul Rauf al-Singkel to write a book on fiqh (laws pertaining to ritual obligations) entitled Mir’at al Tullab, the first book on Canon Law written in Malay. Sultanah Inayat Zakia-tuddin also commissioned Abdul Rauf to write his Commentary on Forty Hadiths. Although there was no mention of mosques being built on the instruction or sponsorship of these female sovereigns, Dampier noted in 1689 that the kingdom had a great number of mosques.

Relations with the orangkaya

The scholarly consensus claimed that these female rulers were mere figureheads, placed on the throne and tolerated by the male elite since they could hold on to their powers unencumbered. On the contrary, the Hikayat Aceh revealed that tyrannical and weak kings were despised by the orangkaya and were usually deposed or even killed. All three female rulers except Kamalat Syah remained on the throne until death not because they were tolerated but because they were accepted. One of the main reasons for acceptance was due to the decision-making process that involved the orangkaya through muafakat (consensus-building) that signalled a distinct departure from the style of their male predecessors. This custom of muafakat had been practised in Aceh and instilled in the minds of its people from the simple villager to the nobility at court. This age-old collective decision-making process was revived through regularized audience days by Sultanah Safiatuddin. Jan de Meere first mentioned a Saturday audience in 1640 when he visited Iskandar Thani at court though it is not clear whether this was a regular court practice. During Sultanah Safiatuddin reign, Dutch envoys mentioned the weekly Saturday audiences which continued
under her successors. Two English envoys who visited Aceh in 1684 noted that every Saturday, the orangkaya met at the palace where all that had any business would come and appear before the Sultanah. Here, all matters were heard and determined and the orangkaya were silent unless the Queen called upon them. Saturday audiences were held regularly and would be cancelled only during heavy rain and flooding and when they fell during important religious and state festivities. Sunday audiences then replaced them. The Sultanah and her orangkaya were absent only because of illness. Many important matters were debated, discussed, and decisions made through a consensus and affirmed by all in attendance with the word, daulat, during these audiences. On audience days, there were debates but arbitration was made by the Sultanah since she had the final say that was the mark of legitimacy. VOC official Pieter Sourij wrote that “the Queen was an absolute queen and her words and verbal orders remain to be law”. Indeed, the seating order of the state officials based on rank was first regularized and established under Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah.

While collaborative rule was an important feature of the style of governance instituted by Sultanah Safiatuddin, another characteristic feature was the distribution of the country’s wealth amongst the ruling elite and the elites’ freedom to acquire economic wealth. According to Beaulieu, the surest ways for the orangkaya to court death during Iskandar Muda’s reign was to be notable for “the good reputation they have among the people, and secondly their wealth”. Such predatory behaviour was not attested during the reigns of the queens. The orangkaya were free to make profits in peace. VOC officials such as Pieter Sourij, Peter Willemszoon and Arnold Vlamingh reported the numerous orders for gold thread and Japanese paper by the orangkaya in exchange for pepper they procured from them. Despite tremendous pressures from the Dutch for a large share in the tin trade of Perak, the Sultanah also made sure that her orangkayas’ right to procure tin from Perak for their own trade was protected. Jan Harmanszoon reported that eight vessels that sailed to Perak belonged to the Acehnese orangkaya. He also noted numerous trading ships belonging to the Sultanah and her orangkaya, which traded at Sumatra West Coast. The Laksamana’s ship for instance brought gold, benzoin and camphor from Sumatra West Coast. The Sultanah’s ship alone brought 100 bahar pepper from Sumatra West Coast, the Laksamana’s 15 bahar and the Acehnese Panglima 20 bahar. In return, the orangkaya presented the customary tribute to her.

Localization of Muslim political thought: Islam as a basis of legitimacy

Sultanah Safiatuddin’s style of governance and her management of the male elite helped her to stay on the throne. But was her representation of herself as the Khalifah (leader of Muslims and Shadow of Allah) accepted as legitimate by her male elite, especially the ulama?

Though the Quran and hadith do not state that women are forbidden to rule, the Prophet’s wife Aisha bint Abi Bakr’s (613/614 CE–678 CE) legacy
shaped early Islamic views. Her disastrous participation in the first civil war, resulting in not only her defeat but carnage amongst Muslims, was used as an exemplar of how women’s involvement in politics would only lead to disaster. Despite her prestige as the beloved wife of the Prophet and the mother of all believers, her political actions remained a source of censure for Sunni and Shi'i Muslims alike. This common censure evolved into an almost universal Islamic principle, at least in mainstream Islamic lands, forbidding women to participate in politics, much less take up leadership positions.\textsuperscript{45} Even Al-Ghazali (c. 1058–1111), who was sensitive to women’s spiritual merits, cited manliness, good horsemanship, and skills in bearing arms as necessary qualities a ruler should possess.\textsuperscript{46} Following the tradition set by al-Mawardi, he was severe towards women, barring them from holding even subordinate positions, such as those of a vizier, minister, or judge.\textsuperscript{47} Basing his interpretation on a hadith, he believed that power required independent reasoning and strength of determination for which women were apparently too frail.\textsuperscript{48}

Sultanah Safiatuddin presented herself as the Khalifah, chosen by God, who had the moral duty to uphold Allah’s laws regardless of her gender. However, it would indeed be difficult for her to remain in power if she was not seen as legitimate in the eyes of her male elite, especially the ulama. It is suggested that how leadership and female roles and status were contested, conceived, defined, and practised in a Muslim society depended on how the power-holders of the time interpreted Islamic tenets. There was no eternally or universally established model of Islamic political, social, and cultural forms since such forms were historically constituted.\textsuperscript{49}

**Malay/Islamic political treatises**

At this juncture it is prudent to draw on the earlier Malay/Islamic political treatises that laid out the theory on kingship, such as the Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh, Taj us-Salatin, Bustan us-Salatin and the Adat Aceh. The Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh\textsuperscript{50} based on syariah listed the prerequisites to becoming a ruler: the candidate must be a Muslim of good lineage, an adult (have reached puberty), courageous, wise, just, loving and soft-hearted and/or merciful (lembut hati), conversant with the nuances of language, a keeper of promises, not physically handicapped, truthful, loving, patient, restrained (keeping anger in check, controlling baser instincts), forgiving, firm yet submissive to Allah’s will, and thankful to Allah.\textsuperscript{51} Being male is not a pre-requisite listed in the Kanun.

The Taj us-Salatin, a political treatise, written in Aceh in 1603 by Al-Jauhari (d. 1002 or 1008),\textsuperscript{52} viewed female rule as legal in the absence of a male heir. In chapter five of the Taj us-Salatin, under the heading of kerajaan (governance) and the hukumat (laws) regarding the sultan, the writer, albeit, reluctantly stated that a female could succeed a male king, but, only in special circumstances viz. in the event of the non-existence of a male heir in the royal family, and/or to prevent crisis (darurat) in the country.\textsuperscript{53} Although he placed
caveats on female leadership, the very discussion on the legality of female leadership put this indigenous scholar’s thesis in sharp contrast to the views held by his contemporary counterparts in the Muslim heartlands then. Mainstream Islamic doctrines formulated in the Middle East (West Asia) implied that a leader should necessarily be male.\textsuperscript{54} Taj us-Salatin’s explication of theories of female leadership unconsciously or inadvertently taken on a distinctly local interpretation of Islamic doctrines to explain and reflect a local political reality, namely the existence of female rulers in the Malay Archipelago way before the issue of female succession arose in Aceh.

Although Al-Jauhari saw female rule as slightly more tolerable than chaos,\textsuperscript{55} he actually detailed the theoretical basis of female leadership in the Malay world in ways that bridged adat and Islam. One condition attached to a female ruler in the Taj us-Salatin was that she discuss matters with male ministers and heed their advice. On the other hand, a male raja was forbidden to discuss matters concerning the kerajaan with women, though kings too were encouraged to discuss state matters with their male ministers.\textsuperscript{56}

Although heavily influenced by al-Gazali’s Nasihat al-Mulk,\textsuperscript{57} Nuruddin al-Raniri did not view female rule as contrary to Islamic tenets, despite following closely the Nasihat’s explication on intelligence (aqil) and women (wanita).\textsuperscript{58} Whilst al-Raniri clearly agreed with al-Gazali on women in general, he deviated on the issue of leadership position of women. He and Abdul Rauf al-Singkel in 1641, did not view female rule as a contravention of Islamic law. Indeed, al-Raniri wrote in the Bustan stating that Safiatuddin’s rule was accepted and justified because she possessed the qualities of a good ruler, notably that she was just, generous, loving, caring and pious and exhorted her subjects to do good.\textsuperscript{59} The possession of these virtues determined rightful rulers regardless of their sex. The Bustan described good male rulers in much the same way. This neutral attitude toward female rule suggests a less conservative and extreme interpretation of Islamic tenets regarding female roles and reflects local acceptance of women’s autonomy and Aceh’s tradition of having powerful women in positions of power.\textsuperscript{60} It demonstrates a respect for sovereignty daulat per se regardless of the sex of the person in whom it is manifested.

**Adat as basis of legitimacy**

According to traditional Malay ideas of political leadership as found in indigenous chronicles and hikayat, the ruler, or raja had a central role since the state or the government was constructed around his person. So central was his role that customs, ceremonies, and laws of the land were said to be in his hands.\textsuperscript{61} From the Malay point of view, the mark of a true king lay in his behaviour, not his wealth, prowess, or the number of his subjects. An exemplary raja should exhibit excellent manners (baik budi bahasanya) and speak in a graceful/sweet (manis), gentle (lemah lembut), and polite way. One of the most important duties of a raja was to bestow titles, gifts, and honours to his subjects according to their rank.\textsuperscript{62} A raja should behave with propriety (patut)
and if he did not, he would be considered unjust (tiada adil). If a raja was unjust, the subject could leave him and settle elsewhere but the subject was not allowed to rebel or overthrow a raja because this was regarded as derhaka (traitor, disloyal).

From the perspective of the adat (customary tradition), gender does not factor at all in the Malay conception of leadership. A female could be as well suited to be an exemplary raja as a male. Indeed judging from most contemporary observers’ description of female rule in Aceh as gentle, generous, and graceful, the female sovereigns were the epitome of good leadership. The generosity of Sultanah Safiatuddin and Sultanah Zakiatuddin to both subjects and foreign envoys and the justice meted out through a more humane penal system illustrate a leadership style that is favoured by adat. The adat sanctioned the practice of decision-making through musyawarah (consensus-seeking discussion and consultation). Muafakat, which female rulers promoted, created an environment where power and wealth sharing was possible, turning the relationship between nobility and royalty from one of conflict to co-operation.

Collaborative rule meant a reduction of royal power but it did not bring about a deterioration or decline of royal power. On the contrary, it strengthened the institution of royalty since Iskandar Muda’s personalism was fragile and arbitrary. Both Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani exhibited a style characterized by wrath and malevolence (ira et malevolentia). This does not merely signify subjective mood but a system where a king could consciously and explicitly decide to deal with those who offended him by distraint to ensure obedience. Royal anger could effectively though not technically put a man outside the law.

In contrast to predecessors who tended to be predatory and punitive, the female sovereigns were more peaceful and protective of their subjects (pax et custodia). Whether royal rule based on coercion and fear was much more expensive and difficult to execute, or whether it was perhaps naturally offensive to women, Aceh’s female rulers preferred to ensure support based on rewards and a sharing of the kingdom’s wealth to promote a collective stake in the kingdom’s survival. This style ensured a more stable royal elite co-operation since the orangkaya also had a high sense of dignity and honour concerning their rights as individuals in the kingdom and their responsibilities towards their ruler and kingdom. It was not surprising that they displayed resentment or even violent opposition towards rulers who violated their rights and honour. A ruler who respected these rights and honour would be accepted and recognized as worthy to remain as their sovereign till death. It is unfortunate that the style and substance of pax et custodia and limited monarchy did not survive their reigns. Sultanah Kamalat Syah’s successor, Sultan Badr al-Alam Syariff Hasym Jamal al-Din, changed the rules of the game once more and resorted to the style of the Sultanah’s male predecessors by accumulating more royal wealth at the expense of the orangkaya and foreign merchants. This ushered in a period of political crisis in Aceh in the eighteenth century and paved the way for the gradual decline of the monarchy that to a large extent was in fact arrested, albeit temporarily, by a line of female monarchs.
The end of female rule

Female rule ended in 1699 when the last female ruler, Sultanah Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah was deposed. As mentioned above, leadership and female roles were contested, conceived, defined, and practised in a Muslim society depended on how the power-holders of the time interpreted Islamic tenets. The arrival of the Mekkan delegates in Aceh in 1683 saw the rising influence of a more conservative and orthodox interpretation of Islam. Much respected by the Acehnese for their illustrious descent and Islamic knowledge, they were quickly accepted into court circles. According to one source, one of the members of this Syariff family, Sayyid Syariff Ibrahim al-Jamal al-Lail was appointed as the Kadhi Malik al-Adil. This foreign Arab group, more due to power politics than being ignorant of or indifferent to the peculiarities of Acehnese political traditions, opposed the idea of a female at the helm of a Muslim kingdom. The death of the moderate local ulama, Abdul Rauf al-Singkel in 1693 might have allowed the orthodox Arab group to gain more influence. In the 1690s, the procurement of a schrijven (letter but referred as fatwa by latter scholars) from Mekah stating that the exercise of the highest authority by a woman was against Islam strengthened the hand of this Arab group and Kamalat Syah had to step down.

Conclusion

More needs to be done to determine and understand the relationship between female rule and “the age of commerce” in Southeast Asia, and the diverse picture of statehood and governance during the period of early modernity. To what extent is leadership gendered or is it more a question of personality? This chapter does not suggest that there were no pious male rulers or no warrior queens but female leadership under the Acehnese Sultanahs based on moral force, consensual style of decision-making based on musyawarah, sanctioned by adat and Islamic tenets provides an alternative model to the charismatic men of prowess model of kingship. The female rulers also provide a model of royal–elite relations different from the masculine or male-centred ones of Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani which were largely characterized by jealousies, rivalries, competition, hierarchical relations, and arbitrary control of the ruler. This female model of leadership appeared to be better suited to facilitate peace, commerce, and diplomacy in “the age of commerce” and it was a key reason that helped Aceh to remain independent and economically autonomous in the seventeenth century.

Indeed female political leaders are not a rarity even in contemporary Muslim Southeast Asia as represented by Megawati Soekarno Putri and Wan Azizah Ismail. This long tradition of having females at the helm is no mere historical accident but reflects an indigenous political culture of female autonomy. However, it is important to note that there are other important factors enabling or limiting female leadership, namely male attitude and
the way religion (Islam) is being interpreted. The *orangkaya’s* consensus in accepting Safiatuddin was an important factor enabling her appointment besides her impeccable lineage as the daughter of Iskandar Muda and widow of Iskandar Thani. The local *ulama’s* acceptance of female leadership as not contravening Islamic law enabled Safiatuddin to ascend the throne but the *ulama* from Mekah’s opposition led to Kamalat’s deposition. Female rule, however, could not have lasted for fifty-nine years without the Sultanahs themselves playing their parts. Benevolent and pious, these female rulers met both the criteria of *adat* and Islamic tenets and help to soften their male predecessors’ harsh and tyrannical rule without entirely emasculating it.72

### Notes

2. Anthony Reid, “Female roles in pre-colonial Southeast Asia”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, 3 (1988): 639–42. Besides Aceh, the queens of Patani also ruled the kingdom when it was at peace and commercially thriving.
6. Ibid., p. 169.
8. These concepts are borrowed from studies on *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, see below notes 63–6.
14. “*Coningh vande gantsche werrelt, die gelyck een Godt daerover is, glinsterende als the son op den middach, een Coningh, die zyn schynsel gelyck de volle maen geeft …*”
see Iskandar Thani’s letter to Antonio van Diemen in Chijs, Dagh-Register, 1640–1, pp. 6–7.

15 This is referring to the Arabic spelling or version of Safiatuddin which is Safiyat al-Din.

16 Elizabeth I and Empress Wu Zhe Tian used providentialism as the most effective means of legitimating a female monarch. See Anne McLaren, “Elizabeth I as Deborah: Biblical typology, prophecy and political power”; in Jessica Munns and Penny Richards (eds), Gender, Power and Privilege in Early Modern Europe, Abingdon and New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2003, pp. 99, 105. Empress Wu Zhe Tian (r. 683–708) of China argued that she should be allowed to serve her country against strict patriarchal custom on grounds that she was the reincarnation of a previous female saint whom Buddha himself had promised spiritual rebirth. See P.N. Stearns, Gender in World History, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 36.

17 Author’s translation.


19 Chijs, Dagh-Register, 1659, pp. 103–4.


21 Ibid., pp. 43–4.

22 The Hollanders in the Sirrah of Al-Mutawakkil, from papers of R.B. Serjeant found in Edinburgh University Library, p. 124.

23 NA, VOC 1171, Dagh-Register van Johan Truijman, 1649, fol. 205v.

24 NA, VOC 1143, Dagh-Register van Pieter Willemszoon, 1642, fol. 508r.


28 Ibid., p. 181.

29 NA, VOC 1143, Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, 1642, fol. 565v.


31 NA, VOC 1143, Dagh-Register van Pieter Willemszoon, 1642, fos. 503r–503v.


37 Takeshi Ito, “The world of the Adat Aceh”, pp. 32, 43.

Ibid., p. 25.
40 NA, VOC 1143, Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, 1643, fol. 680r.
41 Ito, “The world of the Adat Aceh”, p. 44. See also Adat Aceh, transliterated by Ramli Harun and Tjut Rahmah, Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1985, p. 69.
42 A. Beaulieu, Memoirs of Admiral Beaulieu’s Voyage to the East Indies (1619–1622) drawn up by himself, translated from M. Thevenot’s large collection of voyages in John Harris, Voyages and Travels, 1744, p. 257.
43 NA, VOC 1155, Vervolch van Atchin’s dagh-register, fol. 442v.
44 Truijtman mentioned that the usual gifts from the Shahbandars were brought ceremoniously to court for her Majesty’s satisfaction as part of their duty in serving her. NA, VOC 1171, Dagh-Register van Johan Truijtman, 1649, fol. 223v.
51 Ibid., p. 38.
53 Ibid., p. 60.
54 See fn. 45, 46.
55 Taj us-Salatin, Khalid, p. 61.
56 Ibid.
58 Ibid., p. xxxix.
59 Bustan us-Salatin, Teuku Iskandar, p. 73.
60 According to Ibrahim Alfian, Queen Nur Ilah (d. 1390), and Queen Nahriasyiah (d. 1428), ruled over Pasai, (antecedent of Aceh) and Kedah. Ibrahim Alfian, “Ratu Nahriasyiah”, in Wani ISa Uta Baga Nuatara dalam Lintasan Sejarah, pp. 3, 16. Sultan al-Mukammi’s (r. 1589–1604) chief advisors were female and he had a female Admiral. See The Voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator ed. by A.H. Markham, London: Hakluyt Society, 1880, p. 150.
62 Ibid., p. 196.

65 *Pax et custodia* is the counterpart of *ira et malevolentia*, see Joliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, p. 97.


67 Badr al-Alam Sharif Hashim who replaced Kamalat Syah was himself induced to abdicate after a mere two years in power. Of the eight kings who succeeded him, only one died a natural death. Thomas Bradwell, “On the History of Acheen”, p. 20. Badr al-Alam’s successor, Perkasa Alam was deposed after one year in power. His successor, Jamal al-Alam though managed to rule until 1723 was also deposed. See also William Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, introduced by John Bastin. 3rd edn. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 455, 458.

68 This same delegation from Mekah was mentioned by Snouck Hurgronje in his article, “Een Mekkaansch Gezantschap naar Atjeh in 1683”, p. 553.


71 Recent studies show a prevalent style of leadership for women – the “transformational leadership” theory characteristic of a “feminine model” which focuses on co-operation, lower levels of control, collaboration, and collective decision-making. This contrasts with a “transactional leadership” style characteristic of male leaders identified with competition, hierarchical authority, and higher control for the leader.

72 Nicholas Karamzin described the greatest achievement of Catherine the Great of Russia “was to soften autocracy without emasculating it” in “Karamzin’s Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia” A Translation and Analysis by Richard Pipes, Cambridge: MA, Harvard University Press, 1959, p. 130.
11 Catching and selling elephants

Trade and tradition in seventeenth century Siam

Dhiravat na Pombejra

Introduction

In present-day Thailand, the Asian elephant (Elephas maximus) often has to endure much indignity and hardship. Its natural habitat has drastically dwindled, and its economic role is much reduced. Yet for several centuries the elephant has been much valued and used by Asian societies. Thomas Bowrey, who had much knowledge of the elephant trade in the Indian Ocean during the seventeenth century, praised the elephant as “the most Sensible Animal in the Universe in many respects” not only for their capabilities, but also “the Affection they beare one another after beinge Civilized.”

European visitors to Asia wrote copiously about elephants. In the case of Siam, Western accounts usually concentrated on the sacred “white elephant”, as well as the use of elephants in the royal court and in warfare. The elephant features in old Siamese manuals and in Buddhist art. The old Law of the Palace also concerned itself in detail with the use of royal elephants. Yet in Siamese “primary sources”, and in most secondary sources, two key dimensions are largely missing: trade and diplomacy.

Hundreds of elephants were shipped from Mergui to Bengal and the Coromandel Coast annually during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. Why did it make commercial sense to transport these heavy animals across the Bay of Bengal? Who were the participants in this trade? Were there any consequences other than the exchange of goods? In looking at these issues, it appears that the trade in Siamese elephants, apart from being a sector of the maritime trade between mainland Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, also had an impact on diplomacy, manpower control, and material life.

Two principal activities of the Siamese court during the seventeenth century were hunting and selling elephants. The kings also gave away these captured (and tamed) elephants as presents in the conduct of diplomacy. These activities were intrinsically connected. It could therefore be argued that the role of the Siamese elephant in the burgeoning maritime trade of Asia was a part of “early modernity” rather than just an extension of “tradition.” The catching
of elephants in Siam had a distinct commercial aspect to it, with state participation a prominent feature of the whole phenomenon. The seventeenth century coincided with an “age of commerce” for the Siamese crown (as well as for Southeast Asia in general), and was a time when there was a relative absence of major wars on the Southeast Asian mainland.

The elephant in the court life of Ayutthaya

The category of royal elephant much mentioned in Western sources was undoubtedly the “white elephant”.\(^5\) It was given exalted status at the royal court, because possession of white elephants was supposed to demonstrate the ruler’s high merit. At important court functions, the white elephant appeared as part of the king’s accoutrements.\(^6\)

Jacques de Coutre, a Flemish gem trader, visiting Ayutthaya in the late sixteenth century, gives an extraordinarily vivid account of King Naresuan’s elephants. These elephants were waited upon by several men, who supposedly fed them from plates of gold. The funeral of one of Naresuan’s favourite mounts was as grand and elaborate as a high-ranking person’s, with Buddhist monks chanting funeral prayers inside the dead elephant’s disembowelled, perfumed carcass.\(^7\)

Asian monarchs had long used elephants both in war and peace. Their key role in mainland Southeast Asian warfare is reflected in various episodes of the Siamese Royal Chronicles. In these annals, the elephant was the mount of kings in battle. In sixteenth-century Ayutthaya, even after the advent of western firearms, Queen Suriyothai and King Naresuan still fought individual duels with Burmese commanders on elephant back, albeit with contrasting results.\(^8\)

In peacetime elephants were essential components in court ceremonial. Their role reflected old Hindu-Buddhist “traditions”. Each year the kings of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ayutthaya went on pilgrimages to the Buddha’s Footprint at Phra Phutthabat. The king would travel by boat in a procession of royal barges from Ayutthaya to the town of Tha Rua, and thence proceed by elephant to the shrine.\(^9\) These were processions designed to demonstrate royal piety and power, through courtly splendour. Royal processions to donate new robes as alms to the monks after each Buddhist Lent season also involved elephants.

Catching elephants

Given their extensive use in warfare and ceremonies, elephants had to be caught regularly. The large-scale elephant hunt in Siam was an enterprise which only kings, with their control over manpower and land, could embark upon. Elephant hunts were regarded as a royal prerogative by the Mughal emperors, while Southeast Asian evidence suggests that kingship or statecraft were associated with skill in elephant-hunting.\(^10\)
The natural habitat of the Asian elephant is the tropical forest, or forested zones bordering agricultural land. Pre-modern Siam, in common with the rest of Southeast Asia, had forests in abundance – hence the herds of wild elephants that could be captured and tamed. The Abbé de Choisy recounts that the area around Ayutthaya itself was a source of wild elephants for King Narai (1656–1688). Indeed, there was an elephant kraal (phaniat) not far north of the Royal Palace where kings used to trap wild elephants lured in from nearby forests. Father Guy Tachard described the royal kraal in Lopburi as “a kind of Amphitheatre of a large and long square Figure, encompassed with high Walls and Terrasses, where the Spectators are placed”, inside which there was “a Palisadoe of thick Pillars fastened in the Ground at a foot distance from one another, behind which the Huntsmen retreat when they are pursued by the fretted Elephants.”

The royal elephant hunts in Siam were examples of “theatre state” at work. They conveyed a “traditional” message denoting the kings’ control over their forests and hills, as well as huge amounts of manpower. During the sixteenth century the monarchs of Siam staged regular hunts, and King Maha Chakrathat’s possession of several “white elephants” supposedly led to war with Burma, when King Tabinshweti’s demand that Siam hand over these elephants was refused.

Royal elephant hunts in the Ayutthaya period lasted several days, involved thousands of people and animals, and covered large expanses of ground. An outer enclosure was set up deep in the forest, and rows of fires lit all night. The wild elephants were then chased from the larger enclosure into the kraal itself by men with firearms and by tame elephants until, according to Choisy, as they came closer, the wild elephants were “sufficiently close to throw nets over them in which their legs become entangled”. The captured elephants were next tied to a post, after which the process of taming them began in earnest.

The climax of the hunt was thus the corralling of the wild animals, an event usually presided over by the king himself. The terrace from where the king and his retinue could watch the final rounding-up of the wild elephants contained a pavilion which was covered with a Siamese-style roof, and was in itself considered a phra thinang or “royal seat”. The captured elephants were then tamed, with the help of the elephants which had been used to lure them into the kraal. Selection then took place: not all the elephants would have met the court’s exacting standards. The old elephant manuals were very specific about the characteristics of auspicious and non-auspicious elephants.

During the seventeenth century, the elephant hunt was still very much a royal activity. In Nicolas Gervaise’s words, King Narai’s “favourite pastime” was hunting tigers and elephants, which “he does all the time that he is at Louveau, that is to say from November to the end of July or the beginning of August”. Gervaise claims that “[n]ever a year passes during which he fails to take more than three hundred elephants”. Indeed, the principal reason for
the king favouring Lopburi (“Louveau”) over Ayutthaya in the latter half of his reign was this passion for hunting. Narai, however, was not unaware of the commercial benefits that could be gained from the captured elephants.

In the conduct of diplomacy, royal elephant hunts could serve another purpose: apart from impressing the foreign envoys with his command of resources, the king could also have impromptu “informal” audiences arranged which would enable him to meet those envoys outside the strict diplomatic protocol of the Siamese court.\(^{(18)}\)

Nicolas Gervaise touches on the human element involved in the catching of elephants. There was much hardship and suffering as well as the thrill of the chase. He relates that the king’s pleasure in his hunting was “dearly paid for by the thirty thousand men who are usually employed for it”, since many of these men “die of exhaustion, some being obliged to run night and day in the forests ... while others are ceaselessly occupied in constructing terraces and palisades” with which to trap the elephants. They could not take any rest, for fear of being physically chastised.\(^{(19)}\)

Since they took place regularly, and such was the king’s train that a hunt could be compared with the royal court on the move, these hunts could sometimes act as the setting for events of political import. Court intrigues were sometimes reflected in the Ayutthaya chronicles’ accounts of royal elephant hunts, or the capture of auspicious elephants. During the sixteenth century the usurper Khun Worawongs and his paramour the royal consort Si Sudachan were lured to a fatal ambush by false reports of a herd of elephants waiting to be captured just outside Ayutthaya.\(^{(20)}\) In 1644 a dramatic demotion took place at one of the royal hunts. The Okya Phrakhlang was stripped of his rank and title by King Prasat Thong (1629–1656) for arriving late at the kraal as the hunt was reaching its climax. The demoted minister was thrown into prison, only obtaining release through the intercession of the king’s eldest son.\(^{(21)}\)

Elephants could also bring political power. In the 1680s Phra Phetracha was Master of the king’s elephants, giving him access to much manpower. Constantine Phaulkon told Choisy that King Narai possessed a total of “20,000 tame elephants”, with 1,000 being in his retinue at any one time, and that each royal elephant was served by twenty-four men, eight for each four months of the year.\(^{(22)}\) Even allowing for some hyperbole on the Greek mandarin’s part, the number of men at Phetracha’s disposal must have amounted to several thousands, thus giving him a vital advantage over his rivals. Phetracha’s coup of 1688 ended the dynasty established by Narai’s father King Prasat Thong, Phetracha becoming in July 1688 the first monarch of Ayutthaya’s last dynasty.

**Selling elephants**

Siamese royal elephant hunts seem to have had a markedly commercial aspect to them from around the mid-seventeenth century onwards. King Narai
probably sold over a hundred elephants annually between the 1670s and mid-
1680s. In three seventeenth-century documents, a clear connection is made
between Narai’s elephant hunts and overseas trading activities. George
White relates in 1679 that the forests of Siam were well stocked with wild
elephants, which were caught and tamed. The king kept about 1,000 for
himself and “yearly exports about 50 to Bengal and Metchlepam ships at
Tenasserim”. with an even greater number being sold to merchants of those
two regions.

The Persian scribe Muhammad Rabi writes that each year the king of Siam
“catches about three or four hundred elephants in the jungle and has his men
tame them”, and confirms that the king sold these elephants to the Deccan
and Bengal, ready markets which were not too far away. Indeed, he was of the
opinion that the elephant export trade was “[o]ne of the important sources of
income” for the ruler of Siam. Gervaise, claiming that the king caught around
300 elephants each year in his hunts, then relates that the king reserved “the
most beautiful for his own use” and “presents those that are less so to the
mandarins who are in favour … The rest he sells to foreigners, who send them
to the Mogul and to neighbouring kingdoms.”

Earlier in the century it does not seem that the Siamese crown had much of
an actual part in shipping the elephants across the Bay of Bengal. King Prasat
Thong traded with the merchants from India who came seeking elephants. But
King Narai’s entry into the elephant export trade marked a change from a
“traditional” stance to one of entrepreneurial initiative. Not surprisingly, the
elephant was one of the monopoly commodities of the Ayutthaya kings,
along with ivory.

Though perhaps not in itself a sign of “early modernity”, the Siamese royal
monopolies system had by the seventeenth century become more institution-
alized. Such a development was obviously a part of the kings’ attempt to
centralize royal power and administration, within pre-modern contexts. King
Narai’s eagerness to dominate or monopolize much of Ayutthaya’s trade was
counter-productive, resulting instead in lessened foreign trade. Since the
royal trading monopolies of Ayutthaya included elephants and ivory, no-one
could export these items. Foreign traders wanting to buy them they had to do
so from the royal factors. Ivory could be obtained as contraband, but whole
live elephants would have been more difficult to smuggle out.

Although sources from Narai’s reign stress the king’s role in the elephant
trade, there were also many other participants in this trade. Indeed, Indian (or
India-based) merchants dominated the trade. The subahdar and state officials
of Bengal, as well as the Nawab of Orissa (Inoriya Muhammad) were partic-
ipants in the trade up till the 1680s, while elephants were bought for the
King of Golconda through the shipping which connected Coromandel’s ports
with Mergui.

The Persian diamond trader and official Muhammad Said Mir Jumla,
active both as a general in Golconda and – after going over to Aurangzeb’s
side – as governor in Bengal, was also involved in the elephant trade. He
ordered elephants to be bought from Aceh, and enjoyed a close relationship with Bengal merchants in the trade to Siam, which must have included the import of elephants via Mergui. It was only natural that Narai’s court, where Persian officials were in favour, should have corresponded closely with the court of Golconda, where Shi’a Persians also thrived both in trade and administration.32

The Indian ports most active in this trade were Masulipatnam on the Coromandel Coast, as well as Hugli and Balasore, used by merchants based in (or trading to) Bengal. Indian and Persian traders (based in India) thus came to sell their textiles, while the goods they took back to India included elephants, ivory, tin, lead, spelter, Japanese copper, and Chinese ceramics.33

Traders from Bengal, Gujarat, and the Tamil (Kling) ports had since at least the early sixteenth century traded in Siam, and textiles probably formed part of their cargoes.34 Textiles from Gujarat, the Coromandel, and Bengal were much valued in Southeast Asia. The Siamese always required fine-quality Indian textiles because these were used regularly in court life.35 Coromandel goods wanted in Siam regularly included fine cotton cloths such as betellas and sallampores (salempuri), good quality painted or block-printed cloth such as chintz, lungs, bedspreads or coverlets, cloth slippers, linen, and red yarn. Bengal textiles in demand in Ayutthaya included silk, gingham, cummerbunds, allejas, taffeta, handkerchiefs, and clothing described in the sources only as “women’s dress” and “mourning dress”.36

That we know anything about the elephant trade is because the Europeans were wary of Indian or “Moor” competition in the textiles trade. Selling Indian textiles in Siam was one way of obtaining goods available for resale in other Asian markets. The East India Companies were not interested in taking Siamese elephants to India, though once the Dutch took control of the Sri Lankan coast they traded in Ceylonese elephants for several decades. Apart from sporadic English private trade in the Bay of Bengal of elephants from Siam to India, the Europeans usually took the role of onlookers, jealously guarding their textile trade with Southeast Asia, in this case Siam.

The demand for Indian cloth in Southeast Asia led to a seventeenth-century boom in the trade between the Coromandel Coast and ports such as Mergui and Aceh. Indian merchants bought up the textiles in the Coromandel at “high prices”, but at the same time were able to sell them at far lower prices than those offered by the Dutch, for example.37 The frequent glutting of the textile market in Siam reduced profit margins to about 20 per cent to 50 per cent, making it much more difficult, indeed almost impossible, for the European companies to compete with the Indians.38

Statistics on elephant trading in the Bay of Bengal are scarce. Few ports involved in the Siam–India trade had shipping lists compiled by the Europeans. Even when extant, these lists are far from complete – not every year, nor every port, is documented. For the English East India Company (EEIC), for instance, only a few Masulipatnam shipping lists survive which are directly relevant to the Siam trade.
There was a constant demand for elephants from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia in the courts of India. From available evidence “[i]t appears that the major import market for elephants was Bengal, but the kingdoms of Golconda, Bijapur and Tanjore emerged in the seventeenth century as buyers of these animals.” It was difficult for the Mughal, Golconda, and Bijapur courts, situated in drier zones, to obtain elephants from the monsoon forests. It was probable too that the natural habitat of the Indian elephant had decreased. Elephants were used in India for warfare and ceremony, as they were in Southeast Asia. Mughal officials of mansabdar status were expected (in theory) to maintain stables of horses and elephants in accordance with their honour, rank, and high salary.

In European sources the Ceylonese elephant was accorded pride of place among Asian elephants. But elephants from Siam, Burma, the Malay Peninsula, and Sumatra also found a market in India. In 1639, when a Bengal embassy was in Ayutthaya, the Dutch opperhoofd there asked the Bengal envoy why he should buy Siamese elephants when Ceylonese elephants were cheaper and more easily obtainable. The envoy, with diplomatic finesse, replied that the “Siamese breed of elephants] is better, and more highly regarded among the Moors”.

The transportation of these animals could however be difficult, costly, or even dangerous. First of all the elephants had to be taken from the Siamese hinterlands to the port of Mergui. This ancient trans-peninsular route was potentially hazardous because it had to cross the Tenasserim Range. To do so in the rainy season would have been especially difficult as the hilly terrain became slippery even for pack animals. We know that elephants were taken from the Ayutthaya area all the way west to Mergui from a Dutch document which reports that in late 1661, “Moor” merchants from “Masulipatam, Coromandel, and Bengal” had just left Ayutthaya for Mergui “with more than 100 elephants, where they had six ships prepared”.

The overland route linking the Bay of Bengal with the Gulf of Siam avoided the hazards of having to sail through the Straits of Malacca, but it could, in unfavourable conditions, take a long time to travel. Pierre Lambert de la Motte, the French Vicar Apostolic who came to Siam in 1662, had to endure a torrid crossing of the Tenasserim Range, in rainy weather and across muddy terrain. The Persian embassy of 1685, though travelling after the rains, still took a month and a half to get from Mergui to Ayutthaya. Commercially, it would seem that the European companies, who used the sea routes when transporting Indian textiles to Siam, had an advantage – the Indians had to pay higher unit costs when using the land route. However, as shown above, the Indians could sell their cloth at a lower price in Siam, and make profits from selling elephants and tin in India.

Once in Mergui, the elephants were loaded carefully onto the ship assigned to carry them to India. Once in the hold, their feet were bound with rattan to prevent them moving too much. Each ship could carry up to 26 or 27 elephants. Each elephant needed at least 70 banana trees to feed it during a
journey which usually lasted 15–16 days, though in some seasons it could last a full month. The elephants would then consume around 100 banana trees each. It was especially important not to panic the animals, because an enraged elephant could very well sink the whole ship. Even an improperly fastened one could bite chunks off a ship and force the abandonment of the voyage altogether.46 Many elephants died while on this journey across the Bay of Bengal, though most seemed to survive what must have been – for them – an arduous, extremely uncomfortable voyage.47

How much did an elephant sell for? A Bengal envoy bought two elephants in Siam in 1644 for a total of 160 (Siamese) catties, equivalent to 19,200 guilders, or 9,600 guilders each.48 In 1649 four of the VOC’s (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, [Dutch] United East India Company) Siamese elephants (received by the Governor-General as gifts) were sold in India for a total of 13,000 rupees, which would make each animal worth 3,250 rupees each. This price seems low compared with the 1644 price (a guilder was then roughly equivalent to 1–2 rupees).49 As for freight costs, Bowrey, writing in the 1669–1679 period, gives the rate for carrying an elephant to Masulipatnam from Southeast Asia as being between 500 and 800 rupees each, depending on the animal’s height and weight.50 Another variable would of course have been the demand for such merchandise at any given time.

**Giving elephants in diplomacy**

Asian potentates valued rare and expensive animals as gifts, especially horses and elephants. Since they possessed so many elephants, Siamese kings were able to use them as gifts in diplomacy. King Prasat Thong sent elephants as gifts to the subahdar of Bengal (Shah Shuja, son of Emperor Shah Jahan) and the governor of Hugli in 1643, while King Narai sent elephants as presents to the Qutb Shahi court of Golconda in 1664.51 In conducting diplomacy with the Dutch Prasat Thong regularly sent gift elephants to the Governor-General in Batavia from around 1633 till the early 1650s. His son King Narai also sent elephants as presents to Batavia.52

Gift exchanges were a form of trade in the pre-modern period, and the value of each batch of presents was carefully calibrated by both sides. But the Dutch were not overly pleased with these large, live presents. To the VOC, which had commercial profit as its raison d’être, elephants were a burden. High maintenance beasts, they ate a lot and required the labour of two or three people to look after each of them. Besides, the Governors-General in Batavia did not ride elephants in processions, let alone in battle. The Dutch cleverly reused some of these animals as gifts, or as merchandise.53 They sent the elephants on to Surat and the Coromandel Coast, where the Company had trading agencies and forts, so that they could be used as presents for important personages in India, or be sold.

Since elephants were royal monopoly goods, the India-based merchants and trader-diplomats thought that they could obtain their elephants more easily.
through formal contact with the Siamese court. By sending envoys to Ayutthaya bearing fine gifts, the Indians hoped for royal permission to export large numbers of elephants from Siam. An example of this was in 1636, when a Bengal embassy came to Prasat Thong’s court, wanting to purchase fifty elephants. The subahdar of Bengal sent another embassy to Siam in 1639 in order to ask for the Siamese king’s cooperation in the export of elephants. By sending envoys with precious presents for the king and cargoes of textiles, the governor of Bengal was able to obtain elephants more easily.

In 1643 an embassy from Malik Beg, governor of Hugli (on behalf of Shah Shuja), brought presents of Persian gold cloth and Bengal textiles for both the Siamese king and his brother. The envoy was allowed to export twelve elephants for his master. Furthermore, King Prasat Thong sent two elephants as gifts to Shah Shuja, while his brother and one of the king’s sons sent one each. In order to understand the commercial aspect of these embassies, we must look at what Malik Beg received in his role as intermediary between the courts of Bengal and Ayutthaya. On this occasion he sent an envoy of his own, who in return for the letter and gifts brought from Bengal was able to buy six elephants for his master. The king also gave Malik Beg two elephants as presents.

In 1655 the elephant trade from Siam to India suffered a severe blow. An epidemic affected the animal population of Siam, causing the deaths of many elephants and “great damage” to Prasat Thong’s trading activities. But shipping from the shores of India to Siam picked up again in the early part of King Narai’s reign. In 1658 there arrived in Mergui eleven “Moor ships” from Masulipatnam, Pulicat, and Bengal, as well as two Portuguese vessels from the Coromandel. The arrival of so many ships bringing textiles, mostly to be exchanged for elephants, flooded the market in Siam with Indian cloth.

**King Narai and crown shipping to India**

An event that might have been expected to affect Indo-Siamese trade adversely was the Dutch blockade of the Chao Phraya river-mouth in 1663. Yet, other than causing fewer ships from Bengal and the Coromandel to arrive in Mergui in 1664, the blockade seems to have had a limited impact. It was after all a naval operation which took place in the Gulf of Siam, quite unconnected with the sea routes of the Bay of Bengal.

Diplomatic activities between India and Ayutthaya had revived in the early 1660s. In 1663 Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah of Golconda sent an embassy bearing letters, gifts, and a large cargo of textiles to King Narai’s court. In the same way as earlier embassies had been sent from Bengal to Siam to facilitate trade, this Golconda embassy was aimed at obtaining commercial advantages. The amount of textiles sent to Siam on this occasion had been so large that it was estimated that the country would be sufficiently stocked with Indian cloth for a full three years.
The enterprising King Narai sent ships to buy textiles in India, and also used diplomacy to further his ends. In 1668 he sent an embassy to Bengal and the Mughal court, which returned to Siam on a ship departing from Hugli in 1671. This embassy was rumoured to have been better received in Delhi than in Dhaka, though nothing of consequence came of it. Batavia’s assessment in 1669 was nevertheless that the Siamese elephant trade was likely to go on damaging the VOC’s sale of Indian textiles in Siam, since the “Moor” traders sold their textiles for a very cheap price, but got their profit from selling Siamese elephants in India.60

Maritime traffic between India and Siam was intense during the years 1668–70. In 1668 it was reported that eleven ships large and small had come to Mergui from the Coromandel, Bengal and Surat, bringing textiles which again glutted the market.61 The year 1670 saw fourteen vessels with cargoes of textiles come to Mergui from various Indian ports.62 No data is available on the number of elephants shipped to India in these years, but it would be reasonable to suppose that they formed the bulk of many return cargoes from Mergui.

In terms of numbers of elephants traded, the high point seems to have been the period between around 1663 till 1684, judging from data in the shipping lists of both the EEIC and the VOC, as well as data in merchants’ letters. The principal traders mentioned in shipping lists of the early and mid-1680s included King Narai himself, the governor of Bengal, Golconda and Bengal nobility, and finally Hindu as well as Muslim Bengal- and Coromandel-based traders.

There are hints about the numbers involved in the European sources which have survived. To give an idea of the numbers involved in the heyday of this trade, and the identities of the participants, data from EEIC shipping lists of 1682 and 1684 for the port of Masulipatnam will be highlighted here.63 But these figures are mostly for Masulipatnam alone. The traffic from Mergui to the Bengal/Orissa ports, as well as other Coromandel ports, could have carried considerable numbers of elephants too.

Between March and December 1680 several ships arrived at Masulipatnam carrying elephants from “Tenasserim” (Mergui), Pegu, and Arakan, ten of them from Mergui. One of the King of Siam’s ships which brought a cargo of elephants was the “Derrea Dowlat”, captained by the English interloper Samuel White, later promoted to be harbour-master (shahbandar) at Mergui.64

The 1682 shipping list mentions six ships having arrived from Mergui, belonging, among others, to the King of Siam and the Persian merchant Mir Abdullah Bakir. These ships between them brought a total of 71 elephants. The King of Siam’s ship sailed back to Mergui in April. Dutch shipping lists for Bengal at this juncture also reveal that a large number of elephants were transported from Siam for sale in India.65

The 1684 shipping list records that during the March–April period, 115 elephants were brought from Mergui to Masulipatnam on six vessels
belonging to the King of Siam (three ships) and various private traders including Captain Cropley (a Scotsman formerly in King Narai’s service) and the Spaniard Don Joseph de Heredia. For this same juncture, data also exists of ships belonging to the Bengal merchant Khemchand carrying 21, 22, and 19 elephants from Mergui to Balasore in 1680, 1682, and 1683 respectively.

In summary, it appears that Siam’s thriving overseas commerce climaxed in the mid-1680s, as reflected in this flourishing of the India–Siam route. There was steady growth in the trade via Mergui with Bengal and the Coromandel in the middle years of the seventeenth century, and the 1670s and 1680s were the golden years in this relationship.

The trade in elephants from Siam declined after 1685, for a variety of reasons. The Dutch had attacked Masulipatnam in 1686 after a conflict with Golconda. Then the campaigns of Aurangzeb in southern India, which saw Mughal troops conquer both Bijapur and Golconda, led to a hiatus in the maritime trade of Coromandel. The fall of Golconda could not fail to affect trade between Siam and the Coromandel. Relations between Ayutthaya and Golconda had already deteriorated before that, largely owing to piratical activities by King Narai’s English employees in the Bay of Bengal, leading to a state of war between the two kingdoms.

Since Coromandel traders had thrived in their eastwards shipping from at least the 1630s onwards, these political disruptions must have seriously affected even the resilient Chulia and Persian traders. Arasaratnam speculates that Coromandel maritime commerce after the period from the mid-century to mid-1680s, which had been “the greatest decades of the commerce of this coast”, became stagnant, and in the eighteenth century moved into “a period of positive decline”.

The situation for the Bengal–Siam trade seems to have been similar, with a peak around the 1670s and early 1680s, followed by a drop in ship numbers from Bengal to Siam, then an even sharper decline at the turn of the century. There was a falling-off in the frequency of ship departures from Bengal to Mergui, a decline partly attributable to the lessened participation of Mughal state officials.

In Siam during the 1680s the influence of Indo-Iranian officials at the royal court waned. Muhammad Rabi summed up that “[a] while back almost all the elephants sold in India were from Siam and the Siamese were prospering with the trade”, maintaining large herds of elephants. But “[i]n the last few years … there have been disputes and uprisings in Siam and the Indians have been buying elephants from other countries”, causing the price of elephants in Siam to fall.

The “disputes” Muhammad Rabi referred to occurred as the era of Indo-Iranian ascendancy at King Narai’s court came to an end shortly after the death in 1679 of Aqa Muhammad Astarabadi (Okphra Sinaowarat), leader of the “Moors” in Siam. Constantine Phaulkon became the next royal favourite, his rise to eminence much resented by rivals both “Moor” and European. Indeed, Phaulkon’s rise had followed upon his clever exposure of Haji Salim
Mazandarani, Narai’s Persian envoy to Isfahan who ended up getting the Siamese crown into huge debts when his ship ran aground in Surat. Then in May 1688 King Narai fell victim to a palace revolution led by his Master of the Elephants, Phra Phetracha, and died later that same year.

Furthermore, trade between India and Siam had always involved more than just an elephants-for-textiles exchange. Tin from the Malay Peninsula was a key export commodity in Siamese foreign trade, and Indian traders had a considerable share in this trade. In 1678 two Chulia brothers were appointed by Narai as governors of tin-rich Phuket and Bangkhli in southern Siam.71

A long-term factor in the decline of the elephant trade was the change in the deployment of elephants in war. The onset of more developed firearms from the sixteenth century onwards, with the use of large cannons in sieges being a prime example, caused the elephant’s demise as a war machine at the vanguard of South and Southeast Asian armies. Elephants (even trained ones) tended to panic at the sound of gunfire, and they were soon relegated to being pack animals, though they remained the kings’ and commanders’ mounts, as a matter of prestige and tradition.

**A final flourish?**

King Thai Sa’s reign (1709–1733) was remarkable for the thriving Sino-Siamese junk trade, especially the export of rice to famine-hit Fujian. But if the Siamese chronicles and, indeed, the VOC sources are to be believed, there was also trade with India in this reign.72 A passage in the Royal Chronicles mentions a large crown ship taking over thirty elephants from Mergui to sell in India in exchange for textiles, suggesting an episode from the seventeenth rather than the eighteenth century.

Any initial scepticism about the passage, however, is dispelled when looking at a VOC Coromandel shipping list for 1720–1. An entry mentions the arrival from Siam of a large “king’s ship” bringing twenty-four elephants, along with other goods such as tin.73 Apart from being a triumphant vindication of the Siamese Royal Chronicles’ accuracy (or near-accuracy), this evidence suggests that Thai Sa continued his predecessors’ maritime contacts with India, and that the traders on the Coromandel–Mergui route had enough resilience to revive the elephant trade in the Bay of Bengal.

This was however no more than a brief last flowering of the export trade in Siamese elephants: there appears to have been no more shipping of large numbers of elephants across the Bay from Siam after around 1722.

**Conclusions, contexts, and repercussions**

Was the trade in Siamese elephants in the Bay of Bengal during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a “traditional”, “classical” phenomenon which just happened to be recorded by European East India Companies? It would surely be more accurate to characterize it as something which changed,
for a while, the contacts between South Asia and Siam, and contributed to the development of maritime trade, political groups, and administrative structures. The exchange of embassies between Ayutthaya and the courts of India was connected with various historical developments in Siam. One was the flourishing of a “Moor” element at Ayutthaya’s court. It is arguable whether the rise of the “Moor”, especially Persian and Shi’a, faction at King Narai’s court owed more to the thriving trade between Siam and ports in India, or to the desire of the Siamese king to engage knowledgeable Indians and Persians as his officials. What is clear is that the two factors were interlinked.

One principal reason why the “Moors” and other India-based merchants did so well in the textiles-for-elephants trade of the seventeenth century was the existence of Indian and Persian communities in Ayutthaya, Mergui, and other seaboard towns in Siam. The flourishing Bay of Bengal trade naturally led to a tighter control of Mergui and Tenasserim from the centre, as crown ships entered the scene. The kings used foreign officials directly responsible to him. Narai favoured the Muslims, making them royal bodyguards and even appointing some to positions of state. This “soon attracted many others … from the Mogul empire, from Bengal and from Golconda, who were given an equally warm welcome.”

The “traditional” structure of the Siamese state consisted of four major ministries (wiang, wang, khlang, na) and two super ministries (chakri and kalahom). The khlang or krom phrakhlang was in charge of foreign affairs and the royal treasury. Sometime in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century saw the growth within this ministry of the Port Department of the Right (krom tha khwa) under Muslim trader-officials. This phenomenon owed not a little to Siam–Indian commerce in the seventeenth century, a key part of which was the elephants-for-textiles trade. In this instance the foreign trade of Siam was expanding, giving space in the state structure to new groups of people.

Indians, Persians, and at least one Turk became officials of the kings of Siam. The heyday of Indo-Iranian influence at the court of Siam was during the seventeenth century. According to The Ship of Sulaiman these “Moors” occupied high positions, some of which put them in control of port towns and foreign trade. One of these port towns was Phetburi, where there was an Iranian governor called Sayyid Mazandarani in 1685, while another was Bangkok, with its Turkish governor. Mergui itself was at one time controlled by an Iranian official. Ancestors of the Bunnag family, which was to rise to even greater eminence in the Bangkok period, assumed important positions in the Siamese bureaucracy.

In terms of material life, the trade which exchanged elephants for textiles contributed to the taste which Ayutthaya residents developed for Indian cloths and clothing. The royal court certainly used these textiles extensively. But it is clear that ordinary residents of Ayutthaya also had access to them. A late eighteenth-century Siamese document mentions markets in Ayutthaya which sold Indian textiles: one selling pha lai (patterned cloth – possibly chintz), plus another two selling textiles including those from Gujarat.
The architecture of Siam, as well as certain courtly practices and tastes, were influenced by contact with the Indo-Iranian civilizations. The reception hall for foreign envoys in King Narai’s palace at Lopburi, which used to be thought of as being “Gothic” or French-influenced, may instead be seen as having been inspired by Islamic architecture, especially in the Deccan.

To sum up, the Siamese court caught and tamed wild elephants for two very “traditional” reasons: warfare and ceremonial use. The actual process of hunting the animals demonstrated the kings’ recourse to vast supplies of manpower, and the court’s upholding of tradition. By the middle of the seventeenth century, however, hundreds of these elephants were being exported to Bengal and the Coromandel.

The elephant trade engaged in by the court of Ayutthaya thus combined elements of traditional kingship with those of a more mercantile nature. Merchants had of course always plied the Bay of Bengal between India’s ports and Mergui-Tenasserim. Textiles had been brought over to Siam since at least the sixteenth century. But in the seventeenth century the Siamese court’s active participation in overseas trade, with crown ships carrying cargoes of live elephants to India, showed the processes of increased centralized control. It also reflected Siam’s place in an Asiatic trading system which, although penetrated in parts by the European presence, was still dynamic. This topic does not tick all the boxes of “early modernity”, but it hints at the structural as well as dynamic changes which formed a transition between the “classical” and the “modern”.

Notes


3 Winai Pongsripian et al. (eds), *Kot monthienban chabap chaloem phrakiat [Law of the Palace]*, Bangkok: Dansutha, 2005, pp. 94–7, 104–15, etc.

4 On early modernity in Southeast Asia, see Anthony Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era. Trade, Power, and Belief*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 1–19, and Victor Lieberman (ed.), *Beyond Binary Histories. Re-imagining Eurasia to c. 1830*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1999, pp. 1–18, especially p. 14, where Lieberman identifies as some common traits of the period between the fifteenth and late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries “territorial consolidation, firearms-aided intensification of warfare; more expansive, routinized administrative systems; growing commercialization”.


6 See, for example, ibid., pp. 111 ff.
8 Richard D. Cushman (tr.) and David K. Wyatt (ed.), *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya* (RCA), Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2000, pp. 32–4, 130–1; Queen Suriyothai donned a man’s clothes and died fighting the Burmese on elephant-back, while King Naresuan defeated the Burmese Crown Prince in an elephant duel at Nong Sarai.
9 See Prince Damrong Rajanubhap, *Athibai ruang phra bat* [Explanation about the Buddha’s footprint], introduction to *Bunnawat kham chan*, Bangkok, cremation volume, 1959.
13 RCA, pp. 42 ff.
15 Winai Pongsripian (ed.), *Phamana phumisathan phra nakhon si ayutthaya* [Description of Ayutthaya], Bangkok: Usakane, 2008, p. 104.
18 The examples date from when Louis XIV’s envoys were in Siam. See for example Choisy, *Journal*, pp. 215–16.
20 RCA, pp. 24–5.
24 Masulipatnam on the Coromandel Coast, a port used by Europeans as well as by Golconda kings and nobility.
25 Mergui, often called “Tenasserim” by the Europeans, served as the port for Tenasserim, a town further up the eponymous river.
28 NA, VOC 1290, Report by De Rooij, 20 Nov. 1672, fol. 248.
33 For instance, in 1661 the Surat-based merchant “Moondas Naen” took 28 piculs of ivory from Mergui, along with other goods. Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India (DRB), 31 vols., ed. by J.A. van der Chijs et al., Batavia and The Hague: Landsdrukkerij/ Nijhoff, 1888–1931: DRB 1661, 16 May 1661 entry, p. 121.
34 Extract from Tomé Pires’ “A Suma Oriental” in Thailand and Portugal. 470 Years of Friendship, Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1982, pp. 34, 36–7. Pires, however, does not include elephants as an export commodity of Siam, only ivory.
35 See for example, John Guy, Woven Cargoes. Indian Textiles in the East, Singapore: Thames and Hudson, 1998, Chapter VII.
42 NA, VOC 1131, Siam dagregister, 29 March 1639 entry, fol. 863.
43 DRB 1661, 11 Dec. 1661 entry, p. 469.
45 Arasaratnam, Merchants, pp. 143–4.
46 Bowrey, Geographical Description, pp. 74–5.
47 See data in shipping lists for the high incidence of elephant deaths, such as NA, VOC 1414, Coromandel shipping list, 1684–1685, fol. 569 verso; VOC 1378, Balasore shipping list, 1682, fos. 1398–1399.
50 Bowrey, Geographical Description, p. 76.

On Siamese diplomacy at this juncture, see Bhawan Ruangsilp, Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya. Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom c. 1604–1765, Leiden: Brill, 2007, pp. 70–4.

NA, VOC 1157, Siam dagregister, 16 Feb. 1644 entry, fos. 655–656.


NA, VOC 1227, Van Rijck and Poolvoet to G-G, 13 Nov. 1658, fol. 450. Complaints about the glutting of the textile market in Siam formed a common refrain in Dutch documents.

NA, VOC 1249, Poolvoet and Council to G-G and Council, 2 Dec. 1664, fol. 1843; DRB 1664, 17 Nov. 1664 entry, p. 486.

DRB 1663, 9 Dec. 1663 entry, p. 659.


On Samuel White at Mergui, see Maurice Collis, Siamese White, London: Faber, 1936.

See for example NA, VOC 1378, Balasore shipping list, 1682, fos. 1398v–1399; VOC 1387, Balasore shipping list, 1683, fos. 1264–1266.

Arasaratnam, Maritime India, p. 143.

Collis, Siamese White, esp. Part II.


Prakash, Dutch East India Company, p. 229. There were no departures of Asian ships from Balasore for Tenasserim between the 1697–8 and 1701–2 seasons (op. cit., pp. 226–7).

Muhammad Rabi, Ship, p. 150.


RCA, p. 406. I have altered Cushman’s translation slightly.

NA, VOC 1962, Coromandel shipping list, 1720–1721, fol. 555. There is further evidence of this revival in a Coromandel shipping list of 1727, which states that between September 1726 and August 1727 two vessels arrived from Tenasserim, laden with fifteen elephants, plus other goods.

Muhammad Rabi, Ship, pp. 46–7, 50.

Gervaise, Natural and Political History, p. 236.


Muhammad Rabi, Ship, pp. 46, 50, 58, 97–9.

Data on the Turkish governor of Bangkok comes from French works such as Choisy, Journal, p. 150; and Tachard, Voyage, p. 134.
One such official and Bunnag ancestor was Aqa Muhammad. See Julispong Chularatana, *Khunnang krom tha khwa* [krom tha khwa officials], Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2003, pp. 37–48, 156–204.


A curious case of “Euro-centrism”: the Gothic had long gone out of fashion by the time of King Louis XIV.
12 Cham–Viet relations in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận under Nguyễn rule from the late seventeenth century to mid-eighteenth century

Danny Wong Tze Ken

For years, studies on Cham–Vietnamese relations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have centred on the political and quasi-tributary relations between a declining Cham kingdom and a rising, if not dominating, Nguyễn southern Vietnam (Đàng Trong). Some existing scholarship also highlighted aspects of relations between the rulers of the two political entities by focusing on some aspects of court history. However, existing sources consulted thus far – mainly in the form of Vietnamese chronicles and veritable records – could not penetrate beyond the official selection of materials and therefore could only provide an official version of the relationship between the Cham and the Vietnamese, without the possibility of shedding the veil that shrouded the official nature of the relations. The existence of a set of materials in the form of day-to-day transactions between the two peoples during the late seventeenth and greater part of the eighteenth century could perhaps provide a new dimension to the nature of this relationship. Known as the Panduranga Archives or Royal Archives of Champa, the collection consists of letters, financial orders, purchase contracts, loan agreements, as well as receipts from other forms of transactions. It is the intention of this paper to reconstruct some aspects of Cham–Viet relations in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận through the consultation of these sources as well as others.

The present study attempts to investigate the nature of Cham–Vietnamese relations during the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries when territories of Champa in the region of Panduranga came under Vietnamese control. The Vietnamese southern advance into the region at this time was spearheaded by the Nguyễn family, who had started to control the southern region of the country from the mid-sixteenth century, and had by the beginning of the seventeenth century broken with the central government in Thăng Long (Hanoi) that was under the control of a rival family. With this break, the Nguyễn set up their own political entity that placed them in the forefront of the southern neighbours of the Vietnamese, including the Cham. Not long after the Nguyễn established their rule, they had to confront the Cham in 1611. The Cham were defeated and the Nguyễn extended Vietnamese influence/control beyond the former borders. The two sides later clashed militarily on
several occasions which saw the Cham being defeated yet again. With each defeat the Cham yielded more territory to the Nguyễn, while the latter continued the southward movement of the Vietnamese people. By 1692 the Cham, who only held the region around the present two provinces of Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận, were finally defeated. To the Cham, this last independent political entity was known as Panduranga (or Pandara). It was the last bastion of Cham territories since the Cham had first established the polity of Lin Yi during the second century CE. By the seventeenth century, as a result of Vietnamese southward movement, what little that remained under Cham control was to face a final onslaught from the Nguyễn in 1692. At the end of the military engagement the Cham were defeated and the Vietnamese took over the last Cham territory. The Nguyễn attempt to exert immediate control over the newly annexed territory was disrupted by a Cham revolt. After the revolt was put down, the Nguyễn decided to install one of the Cham dignitaries as a puppet ruler over the region and demanded a quasi-tributary arrangement. This was shortly followed by the setting up of a Vietnamese administrative unit superimposed on the quasi-independent Champa and quasi-tributary arrangement. This laid the political and administrative foundation of the Cham–Viet relations in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận from the final years of the seventeenth century until the fall of Nguyễn rule in 1776.

**Existing literature**

Researchers on relations between the Cham and the Vietnamese have drawn their sources mainly from Vietnamese chronicles and records. Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư (hereafter Toàn Thư),¹ the court chronicles compiled during the Lê Dynasty, outlined this Cham–Viet relationship up to around 1471 when the Cham polity of Vijaya (or Cha Ban and Do Ban in Vietnamese chronicles) fell to the invading army of Lê Thánh Tông. As the Toàn Thư was last revised in 1479, there were no records of Cham–Viet relations in the official court history of the Lê. Even though there is a sequel to the Toàn Thư – Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư ThụcBien – the focus of the text is on the rivalry between the Trịnh family who controlled the Lê Court and the Nguyễn family who took control of the region south of the Nhật Lệ River in 1558. It was from the Nguyễn records that most of the subsequent information on Cham–Viet relations was obtained, albeit from the Nguyễn perspective. After establishing themselves in the southern region, the Nguyễn came face-to-face with the last Cham polity of Panduranga. The existence of this last Cham entity was not well known. Until recently, Vietnamese historiography had treated Champa as a single unit, at least pre-1471 Champa. However, the existence of a separate Cham entity beyond Vijaya was then probably unknown to the Vietnamese. Yet, when the Nguyễn came face to face with the Cham at Panduranga, there were no indications that the Nguyễn were surprised. Instead, the manner in which the text of the Đại Nam thực lực tiên biên (Veritable Records of the Former Đại Nam) was written seems to suggest that the Nguyễn also treated the Cham at
Panduranga as the remnants of the pre-1471 Champa. More recent scholarship seems to suggest otherwise. Eric Crystal suggests that the Cham were effectively made up of five different polities, inter-connected but independent of one another. In 1611, however, such information was unknown to the Nguyễn when they were attacked by the Cham, this time from the polity of Panduranga. The continued existence of Champa beyond 1471 or, more correctly, a Cham polity, is evident in the Chinese records of Dong Xi Yang Kao of 1618 and Kai-Hentai (the compilation by the Japanese on the affairs of the Chinese during the transition from Ming to the Qing Dynasty). Like the Nguyễn, all these records treated the Cham at Panduranga as the remnants of the Cham polity that was destroyed by the Lê in 1471.

For many years, research on relations between Nguyễn and the Cham during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries relied heavily on official Vietnamese sources. Đại Nam thực lục tiên biên (Veritable Records of the Former Đại Nam) traced the Nguyễn's relationship with the Cham from their first engagement in 1611 until around the 1740s when it was last mentioned. In Đại Nam liệt truyện Chính Biên, the Nguyễn Dynasty's (1802–1945) biographical collections of both individuals and its neighbours reference to Champa (Chiêm Thành) is found in Volume 33.

The last group of Nguyễn sources that deals with the Cham is the court reports on the Nguyễn efforts in wiping out the Cham in 1832–5 after the latter rebelled and sided with the revolting Lê Văn Duyệt. The first is a report, entitled Khách Đình Tiểu Bình Binh Thuận Tinh Man Phỉ Phương Lược (Royal Commissioned Report on the Efforts to Pacify the Barbarians at Bình Thuận Province), while the Đại Nam thực lucr Chính biên, De Nhi ky (Veritable Records of the Dai Nam, Second Volume), also devoted pages to this incident.

Po Dharma's study on the last years of the Cham polity at Panduranga confirmed the existence of a separate Cham entity beyond the 1471 Vijaya era. More importantly, apart from drawing his sources from both Vietnamese and European sources, Po Dharma also introduced the use of Cham sources from the region and on the region. Even though most of the sources he consulted were in the form of literature and stories, they were still able to convey images of a separate Cham polity in the south beyond Vijaya that would last until around 1835. These sources, written mainly in prose and usually as literature, are still far from being widely accepted as historical sources.

More recent work on the relations between the Cham and the Vietnamese is the work by Toshihiko Shine which focuses on the relations between the Vietnamese and the Cham and the hill tribes, particularly the Raglai people. An earlier study on the relations between the Nguyễn and the Cham was also attempted by the present writer. In both cases, Vietnamese court records and chronicles remained the main sources while other sources, including some Cham sources, were also consulted.
Nguyễn–Cham relations up to 1693

When the patriarch of the Nguyễn family, Nguyễn Hoàng (d. 1613) took over the province of Thuận Hóa in 1558, his administration was not in direct contact with the Cham. That contact was the concern of the Vietnamese administrators of the then southernmost province, Quảng Nam. However, that began to change when Nguyễn Hoàng added Quảng Nam to his administration in 1570. This brought the Nguyễn into direct contact with Champa. While the Nguyễn sources are silent on the Cham polity of that time, it is likely that Nguyễn Hoàng was aware of the existence of a Champa polity that could threaten his position. He not only saw the Cham as a military threat, but also realized the extent of their influence, as is evident in the many Cham ruins and relics found in central and southern Vietnam which can be taken as a measure of the persistence of that culture.

Until the middle of the seventeenth century Champa marked the southern limits of the Vietnamese sphere of influence. In other words, it was a stumbling block to the southward movement efforts of the Vietnamese. Even though the Vietnamese under the Lê defeated the Cham in 1471 and annexed the northern part of their territory, the kingdom reassembled at its present capital in the region around Phan Thiet and continued to send periodic tribute to the Lê Court at Thánh Long. This practice seems to have ceased with the Mạc usurpation of the Lê throne in 1526. In spite of the superior tone of the Nguyễn sources vis-à-vis the Cham, it is clear that the Champa encountered by Nguyễn Hoàng in the 1600s was still a force to be reckoned with. As late as the end of the sixteenth century, the Cham were still able to honour their alliance with the Malay Archipelago when in 1594 the Cham ruler sent a force to assist the ruler of the Malay Kingdom of Melaka-Johor in trying to dislodge the Portuguese from Melaka. After an initial period of cordial relations a Cham force crossed the demarcation line at Thạch Bi Mountain, which marked the southernmost extent of Vietnamese territory, to attack the Vietnamese settlements at Phú Yên.⁹

Nguyễn Hoàng’s forces managed to curb this Cham invasion but probably did not have the strength to carry out a punitive action against the Cham; the Nguyễn had to maintain its larger forces in the north against its rival the Trịnh. It is clear that during Nguyễn Hoàng’s lifetime, the Cham polity at Panduranga was still very much a formidable force. They were actively engaged in overseas trade; the Cham ports of Phan Rang, Phan Rĩ and Cam Ranh Bay continued to receive visitors from the Malay Archipelago as well as from Portuguese sailors. The Cham also traded with the English East India Company (EEIC), which was operating from its factory in Cambodia. The Champa market was particularly valuable to the English; in 1617 alone they were able to sell more than 16 tons of goods to the kingdom. Champa was also a supplier of goods which they were particularly interested in for their lucrative trade with Japan: fish skins, flax, silk, eaglewood, calambac (gaharu), sandalwood, ebony, and elephant tusks.¹⁰
Subsequent Nguyễn–Cham relations saw the two kingdoms having a long stand-off until around the 1650s when the Cham under their ruler, Po Nraup, decided to attack Phú Yên. In response, a Nguyễn army was sent by Nguyễn Phúc Tân (r. 1648–1687) and swiftly defeated the Cham near Phú Yên. The remnants of the Cham forces retreated across the Phan Rang River. Under the peace treaty, the Nguyễn took control of the entire area north of the river, including the region from Cu Mong to Kauthara (Khanh Hòa). In these newly acquired lands, the Nguyễn established the two prefectures (phủ) of Thai Khang and Dien Ninh, which together made up the Thai Khang dinh (Khanh Hòa Province). With this annexation, the Vietnamese extended their territory beyond the Thach Bi boundary marker for the first time since 1471.11

With the defeat, Po Nraup was obliged to send tribute to the Nguyễn court. It was at this point that Champa’s status as a vassal state of the Nguyễn southern Vietnam is confirmed for the first time by the Đại Nam thực lực tiến biên. This imposition of tributary relations meant that an unequal relationship between the Nguyễn and the Cham at Panduranga existed. This was an altered relationship on two counts. Whereas in the past the Cham were reported to have sent regular tribute to the Trần and later the Lê at Thăng Long, tribute was now being sent to the Nguyễn court at Thuận Hóa. Also prior to this, the Nguyễn and the Cham were more or less of equal strength and stature, in the post-1653 period the Cham became subordinate to the Nguyễn.

The annexation of Panduranga and the re-imposition of tributary relations

Between 1658 and 1692 the Nguyễn and the Cham seem to have co-existed without any major conflict being reported. One reason for this lack of conflicts was the Nguyễn’s preoccupation with Cambodia. The Nguyễn expansion to the south had brought them into direct confrontation with the Khmer. Meanwhile Champa was trying to strengthen its position by exploring ties with Siam, the other rising regional power on mainland Southeast Asia. In 1682 a French Catholic priest at the court of Ayutthaya (Ayudhya) reported that the King of Champa had submitted voluntarily to the King of Siam. While no other information is available regarding this event, it suggests an attempt by the Cham to forge an anti-Vietnamese alliance with Siam.

In 1692 the Cham once again challenged the Vietnamese. Unlike previous occasions when Vietnamese response was less forthcoming and mild, by then the Nguyễn had already entered a twenty-year truce with its northern rival, the Trịnh. Therefore, the Cham attacks were met with vigour and full military might. The Cham attack on Dien Ninh prefecture and the Binh Khang garrison was quickly resisted, and the Nguyễn army crossed the Phan Rang River and captured the Cham king Po Saut. The Nguyễn took over the remaining Cham territory, which the Vietnamese had continued to refer to as
“Chiêm Thành”, and renamed it Thuận Thành Trấn (Submissive Citadel), signifying its incorporation into Nguyễn southern Vietnam. The Nguyễn also set up three army garrisons to pacify the newly annexed territory. \(^{12}\)

With the establishment of the new Nguyễn administrative centres and the three military garrisons, Panduranga was finally subjugated by the Vietnamese. Instead of placing the newly acquired territory directly under a Vietnamese official, however, Nguyễn Phúc Chu (r. 1691–1725) installed his own Cham nominee to rule Thuận Thành Trấn in place of the old ruler Po Saut. Po Saktiraydaputih (known to the Vietnamese as Kế Bà Tứr), Po Saut’s lieutenant was sent back to Thuận Thành. The territory was elevated from a tran (garrison town) to the status of phu (prefecture) and renamed Bình Thuận (Pacified and Submissive prefecture). Po Saktiraydaputih was given the rank of khách lý (a civilian official) in the Nguyễn bureaucracy, and his sons were given military appointments in the new prefecture. The move constituted the abolition of Cham royalty and its replacement by a Vietnamese-style administration, although the decision was subsequently reversed.

The establishment of Bình Thuận Phu in the former Phố Hải-Phan Rang-Phan Rí area was followed by a series of battles between the Cham and the Vietnamese; this resulted in a severe famine and led to an outbreak of plague. Apart from the difficulties caused by the military clashes, the new Vietnamese administration was ill-prepared to govern the Cham. The main problem was the inability of the Nguyễn to establish an effective military presence in Champa. This was partly resolved when the Nguyễn ruler, Nguyễn Phúc Chu (r. 1691–1725) renamed the area Trấn Thuận Thành, and appointed Po Saktiraydaputih as the tâ dó đóc (Governor) to administer the region on behalf of the Nguyễn. \(^{13}\) The Nguyễn action could be attributed to several reasons. First, the Nguyễn Lord, who had just assumed his position in 1691, was conscious of the difficulties of immediately extending his control over a newly defeated Champa with only ethnic Vietnamese officials, which would have been tantamount to an all-out suppression of the Cham and would have provoked serious resistance. Thus the value of using a Cham governor nominated by the Nguyễn Court. Po Saktiraydaputih was a sensible choice as he was the lieutenant of Po Saut, and also a member of the Cham royal family.

Nguyễn Phúc Chu’s decision was proven correct, as by end of 1693 remnants of the Cham forces rallied to the call of a Cham official Óc Nha Thát, who teamed up with a Chinese named A Ban (or Ngô Lãng). The latter was reputed to have supernatural powers, including invulnerability, and thus was able to attract the support of the Cham who wanted to resist the imposition of Vietnamese culture and political domination. The attacks had caught the Nguyễn by surprise and the Vietnamese forces were forced to retreat. The advance of the Cham forces was only halted at Phan Rang when the commander of the local Nguyễn forces threatened to execute Po Saktiraydaputih should the Cham forces advance further. Fearing for the life of Po Saktiraydaputih, Óc Nha Thát and his followers retreated. After another attempt to dislodge the Vietnamese failed, Óc Nha Thát and his followers retreated into
Khmer territory. These revolts led Nguyễn Phúc Chu to grant Champa greater autonomy, renaming it Trần Thuận Thành and elevating Po Saktiraydaputih to the title of phiên vương or “Barbarian King”. The anomalous situation of a “king” being placed at the head of a subordinate administrative unit such as the tran is interesting and shows the complexity of Champa–Nguyễn relations. On one hand, it seems that the Vietnamese looked at Champa as part of their territory, hence the appellation Trần Thuận Thành. At the same time, they could not impose a fully Vietnamese-style administration and were compelled to compromise. On the other hand, by giving Po Saktiraydaputih the title “king” and by resuming the vassalage relations with Champa, the Nguyễn acknowledged their recognition of it as a semi-independent political entity.

Why the Nguyễn felt obliged to restore the Cham monarchy is rather obscure. Perhaps at the time they did not have the means to totally wipe out Cham political and administrative structures and replace them with Vietnamese structures. It is possible that the Nguyễn were not strong enough to overcome indigenous powers, who were obliged to pay tribute to the Nguyễn based at Phú Xuân, thus resuming the tributary relationship.

Nguyễn Phúc Chu’s decision to elevate Po Saktiraydaputih to the status of phiên vương marked the first stage of the Nguyễn southern Vietnam’s ascendancy as a separate state, as he assumed a role not dissimilar to that of the Lê court, showing that the Nguyễn now had sufficient authority to accord a royal title to a conquered neighbour. Champa’s earlier payments of tribute to the Nguyễn were an extension of its previous relations with the Lê; the last Cham mission to Thăng Long had taken place in 1509. However, the traditional link between the Cham and the Lê was broken with the Mạc usurpation of the throne in 1529 and the ensuing civil war. After the break with the Trịnh-dominated Lê court, the Nguyễn assumed the latter’s role in dealing with Champa because they were the sole Vietnamese power with which the latter came in contact. The move to accord a royal title to the Cham ruler in 1694 reflected the Nguyễn’s objective of ruling a separate realm of their own, an objective which would subsequently be pursued in their relationship with the Cambodians, Lao, and uplanders, who were treated in the same manner as the Cham. This laid the foundation of the relationship between the Cham and the Nguyễn which was to last until the Nguyễn domain came under siege from the Tây Sơn rebellion (in 1771) and was absorbed by the northern regime of Le-Trịnh in 1776.

The following sections will investigate the nature of this relationship by focusing on political, social, and economic relations. Apart from the Vietnamese chronicles and official records consulted thus far, the subsequent sections will also draw evidence from the collection of the Royal Archives of Champa (hereinafter RAC-CSA). This collection has been given different names by different people at different times. In 1980 Yoshiaki Ishizawa published a report on and an index of the collection of documents written in Chinese characters. He also provided brief annotations on the Royal Champa
Archives, but simply mentioned that they were Cham documents written in Chinese characters or font. The first reference to the documents as “Royal” was by Chen Zhizhao, who named the collection, eighteenth Century Royal Archives of Champa. In the same year, Po Dharma and a group of French scholars published an annotated catalogue in French on the same documents. However, they did not use the term “royal”. The original collection came from the village of Palei Lawang (Loan) at Bình Thuận. It was collected by the French scholar-administrator, E. Aymonier, who presented the papers to the Société Asiatique at Paris.

**Political and administrative relations**

It is obvious that by 1693 Champa was no longer an independent entity, but had been integrated into the Nguyễn domain. The Cham people continued to live in small pockets from the region of Quảng Nam down to the Panduranga region, the seat of the court under Po Saktiraydaputhi. The ruler’s palace was at Bal Chanar, not far from Phan Rì. Even though the Cham continued to refer to their kingdom as “Panduranga”, it was actually occupied territory. The Cham court co-existed with a garrison based at Bình Khang, and for the Vietnamese, Thuận Thành Trần was merely another frontier unit under the jurisdiction of that garrison. In September 1697 the region west of the Phan Rang River was re-designated as the districts (huyện) of An Phước and Hoà Đa. These areas were placed under the jurisdiction of the new Bình Thuận prefecture which was subordinate to Trần Thuận Thành; the Cham were powerless to prevent such a move. Nguyễn–Cham relations after this point were in fact those of a centre and its province; despite his royal title, the Cham ruler was effectively reduced to no more than a governor of his own people. His role was more cultural and economic than political, but the survival of his position was probably what enabled the Cham to co-exist with the Nguyễn during the latter’s southward expansion until the early nineteenth century.

The Nguyễn–Champa tributary relationship provides an insight into Phú Xuân’s attitude to its new status as a suzerain. On one hand, the tribute had great economic and practical value but, more significantly, this self-created tributary relationship was a manifestation of the Nguyễn achievement of an independent state ruling over its newly acquired tributary. The court at Phú Xuân was now the centre of a system of tributary states made up of weaker states and uplanders, including the conquered Cham. The Tiền biên and Phú biên tập lược [Miscellaneous records of the pacified frontiers] list the goods sent by Po Saktiraydaputhi as tribute in 1694 and 1709 (Table 12.1). The letter accompanying his submission stated: “Thy servant (thần chính) Po Saktilraydaputh of Thuận Thành Trần prostrates himself to present the annual gift of 1709.” These goods were kept in the Nguyễn central storage house for personal use or as gifts; cash was also accepted in replacement for undelivered items. The Phú biên tập lược mentions three male elephants as part of the 1709
tribute; two were actually delivered at the Vietnamese-controlled territory of Binh Khang prefecture, while the third was replaced by a payment of 150 quán. In the same way, the oxen sent in 1709 could be redeemed by paying 60 quán a head.\textsuperscript{18}

However, this administrative relationship between Thuận Thành and Phú Xuân did not prevent friction occurring in day-to-day affairs between the Cham and the Vietnamese settlers. The Cham were also dissatisfied with the Nguyễn administration of Binh Khang prefecture, whose jurisdiction covered the Phố Hải-Phan Rang-Phan Rí region. There were issues over the jurisdiction of law enforcement, trade, taxes, slaves and labour contracts and administrative boundaries. The Cham were at a distinct disadvantage when dealing with the Vietnamese in these matters.

An agreement made in the ninth month of 1712 between Nguyễn Phúc Chu and Po Saktiraydaputih included five provisions to govern Vietnamese–Cham relations in Bình Khang. Nguyễn records noted that the agreement was made at the request of the Cham ruler, and that the Vietnamese “granted” a list of rules (not an agreement).\textsuperscript{19} It is difficult to ascertain if Po Saktiraydaputih had in fact requested such an agreement, but clearly it was important, at least to safeguard the interests of the Cham. Nevertheless, some of the articles were biased against their interests:

1 Anyone who petitions at the palace [of the Cham ruler] has to pay 20 quán to each of the Left and Right Trà (court officials), and 10 quán to each of the Left and Right Phan dung (another official rank); Those who petition at Bình Khang Dinh have to pay 10 quán to the Left and Right Trà, and 2 quán to the Left and Right Phan dung.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\hline
\textbf{Item} & \textbf{Quantity} \\
\hline
Male elephants & 2 \\
Yellow oxen & 20 \\
Elephant tusks & 6 \\
Rhinoceros horn & 10 \\
White scarves & 500 \\
Long boat & 1 \\
Yellow wax & 50 catties \\
Dark wood & 200 trees \\
Fish skins & 200 catties \\
Hot sand & 400 pails \\
Leaves for weaving conical hats & 500 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Details of tribute sent by Champa in 1694 and 1709}
\end{table}

2 All disputes among ethnic Vietnamese (the text refers to them as “Han people”) or between Vietnamese and a resident of Thuận Thành [i.e., the Cham] shall be judged by the Cham ruler [Phiên vương] together with a Cai ba and a Kỳ lục [treasurer and judicial official respectively, both positions held by ethnic Vietnamese]. Disputes among the people of Thuận Thành shall be judged by the Cham ruler.

3 The two posts (trầm) of Kiến Kiên and Ô Cam shall be closely defended against spies. The authorities shall have no power to arrest residents of the two stations.

4 All traders who wish to enter the barbarian areas (Man sách) must obtain a pass from the relevant post.

5 All [Cham] from Thuận Thành who have drifted to Dinh Trần Phiên (in the Mekong Delta) have already been allowed to return home and must be well-treated.

From the agreement it is apparent that by 1712 the Cham territories were well penetrated by Viet settlers from Nguyễn territories and that there was no distinctive demarcation between Cham and Vietnamese areas in Bình Khang. The terms of the agreement also suggest that the Nguyễn had conceded a great deal of administrative authority over the Cham to their own ruler. Nevertheless, such a great influx of foreign culture and large numbers of people inevitably forced the Cham to accept the presence of the Viet people while at the same time adopting some of their ways of life, including dress and language.

Relations with Champa during the period 1697–1728 are described by Vietnamese sources as amicable. In 1714, for instance, after the completion of the renovation of the famous Thiên Mụ Temple in Phú Xuân, Po Saktiraydaptih took his three sons to attend a religious celebration hosted by Nguyễn Phúc Chu, a devout Buddhist, who was “very pleased” with their presence. He appointed each of the sons as a hâu (noble in charge of a village). Three months later, the Cham ruler requested assistance from the Nguyễn for the establishment of an official court. The Tiền biên records how Nguyễn Phúc Chu ordered the drawing-up of a plan specifying the respective positions of the military and civil officials in the court. Given the nature of the Nguyễn chronicles, it is difficult to be sure whether Po Saktiraydaptih actually requested this step or whether it was imposed on him. In any case, it represented another step towards Vietnamization.

Under Po Saktiraydaptih the Cham people remained subordinate to Nguyễn authority between 1700 and 1728, a period when Phú Xuân was expanding its power into Cambodian territory. However, even when the Vietnamese were preoccupied with the situation in Cambodia, the Cham did not take the opportunity to free themselves from their control. In 1728 Po Saktiraydaptih passed away. Apparently the cordial relations that he had cultivated with the Nguyễn were not acceptable to his own people, as he was deemed to have represented Vietnamese authority and, shortly after his death, the Cham at
Phan Rí revolted. As a subdued region given the status of a kingdom by the Vietnamese, Thuận Thành was crucial to the prestige of Nguyễn rule, especially in the context of the tributary relationship. Nonetheless, it is possible that the roots of the revolt can be traced to several issues which underlay the tributary relations between the two kingdoms.

When Nguyễn Phúc Chu made Po Saktiraydaputih ruler of Thuận Thành in 1694, he also set up the prefecture of Bình Thuận, encompassing the whole of the Cham ruler’s domain. This meant that Vietnamese authority overlapped with the jurisdiction of their vassal. At the same time, Nguyễn policy also encouraged the resettlement of Vietnamese in Bình Thuận, resulting in an influx of settlers with a different culture and religion, which inevitably contributed to the conflict. Given the Vietnamese sense of cultural superiority towards all non-Viet people, they looked down on the Cham, especially after their victories over the latter. These frictions generated resentment, culminating in the 1728 revolt. In response, Nguyễn Phúc Chu’s successor Nguyễn Phúc Chú (r. 1725–1738) dispatched a military force to re-establish control over Thuận Thành. He then reinforced the Vietnamese presence in the area by further resettlement, inevitably intensifying the rivalry for space and resources.

According to Po Dharma, the main factor causing the Cham revolt of 1728 was dissatisfaction over the socio-economic situation. The Cham often lost their land and rice fields, slaves, and even family members to the Vietnamese settlers. Economic dealings also involved borrowing of money at exorbitantly high interest, in some cases as high as 150 per cent per annum. After Nguyễn Phúc Chú managed to calm the situation in 1728, subsequent Cham rulers proved to be subservient to Nguyễn authority. Far from revolting or attempting to break free from Vietnamese control, the ruling class of Thuận Thành supported the Nguyễn, especially in the wars against Cambodia and Siam. A French missionary who was in Lâm Thuyên, Thuận Thành, wrote in 1746 that since 1728 there had hardly been any problems in Champa.

After Po Saktiraydaputih, however, no Cham king developed such a close relationship with an individual Nguyễn ruler, even though Vietnamization continued to the extent that subsequent Cham rulers adopted the family name of Nguyễn for themselves. It is likely that this non-conflict, if not cordial, situation between the Cham rulers and Phú Xuân persisted until the Nguyễn lost control of the Cham territories in the early 1770s.

It is apparent that post-1728 Nguyễn–Champa relations were still governed by the regulations set by Nguyễn Phúc Chu and Po Saktiraydaputih, thus providing some degree of continuity with the earlier period. However, behind this administrative arrangements, the process of Vietnamization was set in motion, and soon the position of the Cham became more and more vulnerable. The Vietnamese swamped the Cham regions, and the autonomy of the local rulers (who continued to be from the line of Po Saktiraydaputih) became more untenable. After 1728 their relations with Phú Xuân were downgraded: all transactions with the Nguyễn were conducted through the local Vietnamese prefectures of Bình Khang and Bình Thuận, and they rarely had direct contact with, or access to,
the Nguyễn ruler at Phú Xuân. Thus, in many ways, the autonomous Cham ruler as envisaged by Nguyễn Phúc Chu became nothing more than a local chieftain under the jurisdiction of the prefecture administrators.

It is interesting to note that Cham–Viet relations continued very much in the same fashion even after the end of Nguyễn rule in 1776. In 1784, when the Tây Sơn was in control of Bình Thuận, an order was sent from the Vietnamese commander to the ruler of Champa who was tasked with garrisoning Thuận Thạnh, asking him to prepare to defend against the Siamese army which was rumoured to be invading with the intention of restoring the Nguyễn rule in southern Vietnam. The Cham ruler was also asked to mobilize his troops along with the various hill tribes under his jurisdiction to work with a Vietnamese commander to set up garrison posts at the various vital entry points to the district in order to prevent the entry of hostile hill tribes and spies. The same order also mentioned that it was the duty of the Cham ruler to arrest those who were suspected and bring them to justice.27

Vietnamization

Our understanding of the period between the installing of Po Saktiraydapatih as Nguyễn-sponsored Cham ruler and the end of the Nguyễn rule in 1776 is at best fragmented and incomplete. Part of this is due to the nature of the sources thus far available to us, namely the Vietnamese chronicles and records which are highly selective and broad in approach covering most of the major events. The image that emerged from the interactions between the Cham and the Vietnamese seemed to be in the mode of Vietnamization. Champa’s own cultural identity was increasingly threatened by the large number of Vietnamese in its territories. The adoption of the Han-phong, or Sino-Vietnamese culture by the Cham had begun with the annexation of Panduranga in 1693. However, by 1702, barely eight years later, the Cham had widely adopted Vietnamese names. In one of the earliest documents found in the Royal Archives of Champa, which is a contract of money borrowing between a Cham and a Cham couple, at least one of the Cham already had his name changed to a Vietnamese surname, in this case, just like the Cham royal family, Nguyễn.28 Subsequent documents offered even more evidence of how the names of Cham people were almost fully changed to Vietnamese names. Official documents involving official transactions were, after 1700, all drafted in Sino-Vietnamese. The existence of the common feature of Cham signature, named diĕm-chi – the marking of several short lines beside their names in Sino-Vietnamese – indicates that the Cham did retain some aspects of their own culture or practices. This practice persisted until the 1740s, suggesting that in many spheres of activities, including official transactions, the Cham were adopting the Vietnamese way of doing things, but perhaps not in a wholesale manner, leaving more intimate actions such as signing of personal signatures in the Cham manner unchanged. At the same time, one may even speculate that while the transactions were done in Sino-Vietnamese, it is doubtful if the
Cham really understood the written language – though the meanings of the transactions were probably explained to them.

**Socio-economic activities**

The Royal Archives of Champa provide glimpses into some aspects of economic life of the Cham people living in Bình Thuận. These include the question of money borrowing and debts. The original nature of how the collection was compiled in the first place is unknown; neither do we know just how many others were available originally. Many of those that survived and made up the Société Asiatique Collection are documents pertaining to loan transactions. They detail the prevailing nature of this activity amongst the Cham. In most cases, the amount borrowed was small, usually around five (5) quán (string of cash of 1,000 copper coins each), and over a relatively short period of several months (in most cases, five months). Most of the transaction agreements that involved five quán stipulated a repayment of eight (8) quán, providing a very high interest rate of at least 60 per cent. In fact most cases had an interest rate of 50 to 60 per cent. This perhaps was lower than the 150 per cent suggested by Po Dharma. There were of course exceptions, as in the case of Côn Lai, a Cham from Bình Thuận who borrowed a sum of 10 quán from a,Thương Phú Thán and his wife. It was agreed that Côn Lai would repay the loan with 23 quán after five years. However, it stated that should Côn Lai abscond, a Môi Nha would be responsible for repaying the loan. Thus this case involved the use of guarantors.29

In most loan transactions, the collateral would be the interest as stipulated in the documents. In some cases the collateral was servitude – people pledged themselves as servants (or slaves?) to the creditor in lieu of payment, either in full or in part. The case of Trường Lan is one such example. Trường Lan’s brother Trường Ông and sister-in-law Côn Khôn entered into a loan agreement with the Sài Nhan family for a sum of 20 quán over a period of one year. Trường Lan became part of the mortgage with the creditor; he was to serve the Sài Nhan family for the duration of the loan. The agreement stipulated that Trường Ông was to be exempted from the loan interest if they claimed back Trường Lan by paying the debt after one year. If Trường Ông decided to claim back his brother before the said deadline, interest of 15 quán would be imposed. It was also agreed that if Trường Lan absconded, Trường Ông and Côn Khôn would be required to pay back the debt with sufficient interest.30

In another case, Nguyễn Văn Mối borrowed 25 quán from a couple by selling himself into servitude to work for the couple until he completed repaying the full amount. Nguyễn Văn Mối was 27 years old at that time. A guarantor was also involved in case Nguyễn Văn Mối absconded.31

In a case where the debtor defaulted on payment, servitude was often accepted in lieu of payment or mortgage until the sum was settled. Côn Tha Môi and several of his friends, including Côn Tha Môi, had borrowed 7 quán from a couple but failed to repay the loan by the stipulated deadline. As a

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Danny Wong Tze Ken
result, Côn Tha Môi had to serve as a nô or slave to the couple while his friends continued with the payment without interest. And in the case of Côn Tha Môi absconding, one of his fellow debtor-friends would have to take his place until the loan was fully repaid.  

One of the most likely reasons for creditors accepting servitude in lieu of repayment or interest was that much of Champa was still involved in agricultural activities.

Why did the Cham need such loans? It is a question that is still unanswerable. It could be that some of the loan money was invested in farming activities or trade, which we know very little about. It could also be that the Cham needed the money for meeting the requirements of some religious rituals. There are cases where such intention was made known, but they are rare. Among the reasons were needing money to buy a boat, or because of illness.

Even though the Nguyễn-sponsored Cham ruler belonged to the elite upper class within the Cham community, he could engage in business and money borrowing. In 1740 a Cham woman, Vương Thị Mon, possibly of higher class, issued a claim against the Bàn Trần Vương (the Cham ruler) for the return of her servant. In settlement, which involved the issuance of another document, Vương Thị Mon received payment from the Bàn Trần Vương for the purchase of the servant. In another case, a claim was presented to the Bàn Trần Vương for the repayment of his debts. For this the Cham ruler had to sell off his paddy field, servants and his man sakhir (barbarian village).

There were other transactions which involved the Cham ruler, including one in which he managed to obtain the full payment of the balance of a loan of 200 quán he made to Cai-hop Nhân (a military commander) from the latter’s wife after Cai-hop Nhân passed away. In this case, Cai-hop Nhân was probably a Vietnamese officer; so was his wife, Trần Thị Minh. As the Cham were increasingly Vietnamized by adopting Vietnamese names it is difficult to ascertain the identities of most of the people involved in these transactions. Apart from some names which were peculiar to the Cham, the only way to identify them is through the diêm-chi signature method on the documents that was still being practised by the Cham.

The Cham rulers seem to have had their fair share of business activities, many with ethnic Vietnamese or the Vietnamese officials. In one case, a Cham prince (with the title of Cai-dợi Mien Truong Hậu) bought a horse from an officer named Nguyễn Minh Nhu at a price of 30 quán. The document clearly stated the physical characteristics of the horse, which was 653 catty in weight and 69 inches tall, and ginger in colour. The agreement also stipulated that should anyone lay claim to the horse, the horse seller would have to compensate
the buyer, the Cham prince, 60 quán. But instead of paying cash to settle the payment for the horse, the prince paid in kind – a 22-year-old slave girl named, Lý. But the story did not end there. Once the payment was made, the horse was not delivered immediately to the Cham prince. Instead, it was examined by a department in Thuận Thành trấn before it was released to the prince. Once again, the characteristics of the horse were stated in the document, which was issued by the officer garrisoning troops in Thuận Thành trấn.

The horse-buying incident could perhaps suggest several things. First, the practice of substituting cash payment with a servant seemed to be a norm, as is evident from other cases mentioned earlier. Secondly, the promised payment of the price of the horse should there be any dispute about the ownership of the horse seemed to be a very high price to pay as a guarantee. In a way, it suggests the likelihood of rampant cheating cases or mistaken horse-identity and horse-theft during that period. Thirdly, the withholding of the transfer of the horse to the Cham prince subject to inspection seems to suggest some form of control was exercised by the Vietnamese authority on the Cham population for security purposes. In this case, the purchase of a militarily-useful horse might have led to speculation on the true intention of the purchase, though the actual nature of the inspection is not known.

Probably due to the volatile situation in the Cham territories, the Nguyễn evidently exercised firm control over the Cham population. Movement of Cham from one district to another probably required travel documents with the appropriate permission. In one such related case, a permit was issued at huyện Hòa To in phủ Bình Thuận to a female servant named Trần Thị, to be brought back to phủ Bình Khang. The requirements of such permits seem to suggest the wariness of the Nguyễn authority over movements of Cham.

Thus far, evidence of transactions between ethnic Cham and ethnic Vietnamese is difficult to pinpoint. Apart from several cases of obvious identity, and those involving the Cham rulers, very few clear ethnic Vietnamese individuals could be clearly identified. This was of course a result of the Cham adopting Vietnamese names. This shortcoming has in many ways, dampened efforts to have a clearer understanding of Cham–Viet relations in the area concerned.

### Later political relations

Cham–Viet relations during the later part of Nguyễn rule in southern Vietnam are clearer from the perspective of the transactions that took place between the Cham ruler and the Nguyễn ruler at Phú Xuân. For this, most of the information is found in external sources. Writing about a brief visit to the court of Nguyễn Phúc Khoát (r. 1738–1765) in 1749–50, Pierre Poivre, a French merchant and leader of a delegation from the French East India Company, observed how every year the Nguyễn ruler viewed with great pleasure the arrival of the tribute delegations from Champa, Cambodia, and the various uplanders or smaller kingdoms like Laos. According to Poivre, these entities regularly sent tribute to the Nguyễn.
Poivre also observed Nguyễn Phúc Khoát’s arrogance towards tribute emissaries from Champa.⁴³ This attitude reflected the Nguyễn court’s view of itself as the centre of a tributary system consisting of its immediate neighbours, particularly after Nguyễn Phúc Khoát officially began using the title vương in 1744. This new-found confidence was important as a means to equalize their position vis-à-vis the Trịnh. However, this system was not as clearly defined as the tributary system in the subsequent Nguyễn dynasty.⁴⁴ Nguyễn Phúc Khoát’s rule apparently saw an improvement in relations with Champa, as the latter was no longer considered a threat; in fact, the ruler at Thuận Thành was now allowed to maintain a garrison of Cham soldiers. Unlike the Lê-Trịnh government in the North, which strictly prohibited Vietnamese contact with the uplanders or minority tribes, the Nguyễn relationship with these peoples, including the Cham, was much less restrained. This was especially so for the military, and under Nguyễn Phúc Khoát the Nguyễn army comprised both Viet and non-Viet troops – something unheard of in the Lê-Trịnh army or traditional military forces. According to Phú biên Tạp lucr, at least three units of Nguyễn Phúc Khoát’s army comprised non-Viet people: the units attached to Vietnamese garrisons at Bình Thuận, Trần Biên and Phịen Trần. Some units in the garrison at Bình Thuận were entirely Cham; this force, consisting of four cavalry and seven boat units, was under the direct command of the Cham ruler. The Nguyễn administration only exempted the province from paying rice tax for the troops; the king of Thuận Thành was responsible for their wages and supplies. The troops had a Vietnamese cai bạ and cai đôi (administrator and commander of a company of troops respectively), the rest of the officers were Cham.⁴⁵ However, the Nguyễn belief in the trustworthiness and allegiance of the Cham rulers did not always guarantee peaceful co-existence, as demonstrated by a short-lived rebellion in 1746, the last act of Cham resistance that century. Dương Bao Lai and Diệp Mâ Lâng, two leaders of the “Th уверен Thành barbarians”, led a gang of people to attack Trần Biên. The actual nature of this resistance is unknown, but it was defeated by the garrison force from Trần Biên.⁴⁶

The last disturbance caused by the uplanders recorded in the official chronicle occurred in 1770, a year before the Tây Sơn rebellion (1771–1802) broke out. In July that year, Trần Phúc Thành, the ký lục of Quan Nam, was appointed cai bạ (magistrate-administrator) responsible for the welfare of five prefectures in the south and was ordered to lead Nguyễn forces from Qui Nhơn and Phú Yên. His army’s mission was to stop the uplanders from present-day Quảng Ngãi from conducting raids and plundering in the vicinity of Phú Yên. It is not clear whether these disturbances were a prelude to the Tây Sơn uprising, whose base was in nearby Bình Định.

**Concluding remarks**

Cham–Viet relations have thus far been dealt with through the perspective of conflicts and the setting up of a tributary arrangement. This perspective was
inevitable given the nature of the sources available to historians, namely court chronicles of the former Lê and Nguyên dynasties. The lack of Cham perspectives has been acknowledged and attempts to redress this shortcoming have been made. However, the literary-inclined nature of the Cham sources made their historical authenticity questionable, and a clearer if not more objective perspective of this relationship between the two people is still beyond reach.

It is hoped that this present attempt, while still at an exploratory stage, will provide some new understanding of this post-1693 relationship. Our attempt to understand the events that transpired in the Bình Thuận area after the Cham came under Nguyên rule in 1693 has probably improved through the detailed information that has emerged from the collection of documents known as the Royal Archives of Champa. The documents, mainly in the form of business transaction agreements, receipts, claims, permits, and orders, provided some glimpses into the day-to-day activities in this quasi-tribute world of tran Thuận Thành (Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận) that was created by Nguyên Phúc Chu in 1693 until the Tây Sơn rebellion. For the first time, it is possible to look into what transpired beyond the official Nguyên sources which have hitherto dominated our knowledge on these Cham–Viet relations.

However, as the sources are still raw, and are part of a work-in-progress project, there are still many questions left unanswered. Chief of these is the question of identity. The few documents presented above demonstrate the ambiguity of the many names stated in the documents. Apart from several obvious cases involving ethnic Cham and ethnic Vietnamese, it is difficult to ascertain the true identity of the parties involved. While most of those involved were Cham, it is still difficult to tell if those with Vietnamese names were actually Vietnamese. This is especially so after the Cham underwent Vietnamization which included the adoption of Vietnamese names. Another question is the manner in which the documents were collected or inherited. As most of the documents were legal documents involving business transactions, they inevitably provided some perspectives which may not necessarily be accurate. The existence of many documents involving loan transactions which involved the borrowing of money and the nature of their repayment agreements seems to suggest that the Cham were severely exploited by the Vietnamese, having agreed to debts that involved very high interest rates, some as high as 60 per cent over a relatively short duration. While it is possible to argue that these documents are spread over many decades, therefore the situation may not necessarily be so grim, it is not known if these were the only documents ever created.

The challenge ahead is to have a closer reading of these documents and read them against the larger context of the Nguyên’s domination over the Cham territories, in the hope that clearer pictures will subsequently emerge.

Notes
1 Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, (Keio University) or Complete Annals, Chen Chingho (ed.), Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Research, Tokyo University, 1985.


9 This was probably a Cham reaction to Nguyễn Hoàng’s decision to establish Vietnamese administration unit of prefecture (phủ) at Phú Yên.


11 Tiền Biên, 4: 5a–b.

12 Tiền Biên, 7: 4a–5b.

13 Tiền Biên, 7: 12.


16 It was from here that Po Saktiraydaputih gave an audience to officers of the French East India Company ship Galatée in 1720, see Lê Thành Khôi, Histoire du Viêt Nam: des Origines à 1858, Paris: Sudestasie, 1971, pp. 264–5.

17 Tiền Bien, 7: 12.

18 Phú biên tap luc, written by Lê Quý Đôn in 1776, provides a list of the tribute items of 1709; it includes similar items to the 1694 list, except for an extra male elephant in the 1709 tribute. See Phú biên tap luc (hereafter PBTL) (Miscellaneous records of the pacified frontiers), Vol. 2: 30a.

19 Tiền Biên, 8: 14a.

20 The term “sách” was used in Vietnamese text to designate villages inhabited by highlanders. Champa is believed to have included Austronesians and Austroasiatics living in the Central Highlands. For a study on the relations between the Cham and the Raglai, see Shine, “Symbolic role of literacy”.

21 Tiền Biên, 8: 18b (Thiên Mụ) and 20b (plan for court).
“Father de Flory to Langellerie”, 28 May 1728, MEP, Cochinchine, Vol. 739, fol. 600. This missionary account of the revolt is the only one available, but it does not offer details.


“Father Bennetat to M. Dufau”, 20 July 1746, MEP, Cochinchine, Vol. 742, fol. 652.

It is not known when the first Champa ruler adopted or was given the family name of Nguyễn. When Emperor Gia Long established his dynasty in 1802, he appointed Nguyễn Văn Hậu, a chieftain from Thuận Thành, as *phiên vương*; this ruler and his successors used the name of Nguyễn until 1835; *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi*, Vol. 10: 19 (Bình Thuận).


RAC-CSA: Loan and Servitude Agreement between Nguyễn Văn Mởi and the Binh Couple, 8th Day, 12th Month, Chính Hòa 22nd Year (1702), p. (1a and 1b).

RAC-CSA: Loan Agreement between Côn Lai and the Thường Phủ Thành couple, dated 19th Day, 9th Month, Cảnh Hưng 8th Year (1747), Piece 8 (11a and 11b).

RAC-CSA: Loan Agreement between Thường On and Côn Khôn and Sái Nhan Couple, dated 9th Day, 4th Month, Vĩnh Hưu 6th Year (1740), Piece 9 (2a and 2b).

RAC-CSA: Loan and Servitude Agreement between Nguyễn Văn Mởi and the Binh Couple, 8th Day, 12th Month, Chính Hòa 22nd Year (1702), Piece 1 (1a and 1b).

RAC-CSA: Loan and Servitude Agreement between Côn Tha Môi et al., and a couple at Huyễn Hòa Đa, dated 7th Day, 9th month, Vĩnh Hưu 7th Year (1741), Piece 13 (1a and 1b).

RAC-CSA: Loan Agreement between Côn Lai and Côn (?), dated 19th Day, 8th Month, Cảnh Hưng 4th Year, (1743), Piece 8 (12a and 12b).

RAC-CSA: Loan Agreement for former Ban Trấn Vương Chinh That, dated 25th Day, 12th Month, Cảnh Hưng 8th Year (1747), Piece 44 (1a and 1b); and Order from Ban Trần Vương, dated, 1st day, 8th Month, Cảnh Hưng 5th Year (1744), Piece 51 (8a and 8b).

RAC-CSA: Claims against the Bản Trấn Vương, dated 3rd Day, 2nd Month of Cảnh Hưng 4th Year (1743), Piece 23 (5a and 5b).

RAC-CSA: Receipt of Payment of a Loan, dated seventeenth day, 3rd month, Cảnh Hưng 14th Year (1753), Piece 55 (1a and 1b).

RAC-CSA: Receipt of Payment for a Horse, dated 4th day, 6th month, 5th year of Cảnh Hưng (1751), Piece 23 (17a and 17b).

RAC-CSA: Permit issued to Trần Thị, dated 26th Day, 7th Month, Vĩnh Hưu 5th Year (1739), Piece 8 (5a and 5b).

For a discussion on the tributary relations of the Nguyễn dynasty, see Alexander Barton Woodside, Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch’ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971, pp. 246–61; even for that later period, Woodside suggests that it was still very much a case of “model versus reality”. Although several of Nguyễn Phúc Khoát’s predecessors are also referred to as “vượng” in Vietnamese sources, apparently he was the first to formally adopt the title, which placed him on a par with the Trịnh Lords in the North without directly challenging the Lê ruler’s status as emperor (đế).

PBTL, 3: 83.

Tien Bien, 10: 13.
Part IV

Indigenizing Christianity

“Faithful indigenous churches take their teaching from the unchanging biblical text while engaged and participating in the ever-changing cultural milieu.”

Ed Stetzer (1966–), author
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13 The glocalization of Christianity in early modern Southeast Asia

Barbara Watson Andaya

Though still problematic when applied to societies beyond Western Europe and the Americas, the term “early modern” is gaining currency in Southeast Asian studies. Historians generally agree that the period between 1400 and 1800 was a time of unprecedented change in which the region was integrally involved in processes that resulted in “a genuinely global periodization of world history”.1 The expanding interactions that characterize this period are central to discussions of religious change in Southeast Asia because of the spread of Islam and Christianity. In tandem with increased trade networks, both faiths introduced new connectivities that scholars of contemporary religious plurality have characterized by the fashionable but inelegant amalgam, “glocalization”.2

Introduced by Japanese economists in the late 1980s, the concept of doc-hakaku (“global localization”) became one of the “marketing buzzwords” of the late twentieth century. In business circles “glocalization” is used to describe a product or service that is developed centrally but distributed globally through a re-fashioning to accommodate consumers in different types of markets. Adopted by sociologists to discuss the ways in which local contexts temper global pressures, the concept has also been incorporated into the sociology of religion, helping to theorize the ways in which transnational networks can reach out to specific congregations. Studies of various cultures have shown that religious “goods” were not necessarily consumed in the ways elite producers intended, and local actors appropriated the “product” in ways that often led to unintended consequences.3 Nonetheless, such processes have their limits, for the “brand” must be globally recognizable, and the degree of adaptation to a local environment is always constrained. In the religious context such restraints were reinforced by the fact that teachings presented as universally applicable were transmitted by agents of societies where religious praxis, aesthetics, and modes of worship were regarded as intrinsically superior to those of the receiving culture.

In Southeast Asia these comments are particularly relevant to any regional analysis of the spread of Christianity in the early modern period. The ongoing process of localization is as evident among local converts as it is among followers of other world religions, but we rarely see the type of European
adaptation to local practices displayed by, for instance, the Jesuits in China, Japan, or India. Although the situation in Vietnam is something of an exception, conversions in Southeast Asia were confined to areas where Europeans wielded economic and political power, so that the relationship between clerical authority and native Christians was asymmetrical. This asymmetry is the focus of the present chapter.

The argument addresses glocalization in Southeast Asia by first drawing on the contemporary concept of the “alpha” city, used in urban studies in reference to places like New York, London, Paris, and Tokyo that are considered nodes in the global economic system and as purveyors of international culture. As Christianity moved out into the non-European world the major sites of European control in Asia – Goa, Melaka, Manila, Macau, and Batavia – developed to become the Christian “alphas” by acting as religious conduits and arbiters. From these religious enclaves individuals and sacred objects moved and circulated as vehicles for the globalizing influences of Christianity, reinforcing the idea of an interlinked and supra-national community.

It is in this context that the marketing metaphor can be invoked. In today’s business environment multinational companies are constantly alert to any attempt to counterfeit a product, or to change core elements such as the logo or a distinctive packaging that might dilute universal recognition. Similarly, in Asia, Africa, and the Americas the concept of the essential universality of Christianity was repeatedly pitted against missionary beliefs that new Christian communities should as far as possible replicate the established practices of Europe. In Southeast Asia as elsewhere the notion that Christians were members of a “world religion” operated simultaneously to facilitate the conversion process while constraining the ability and willingness of Church authorities to adapt to local conditions. The fact that Christianity has become deeply embedded in notions of self and community among millions of Southeast Asians is thus a testimony to the depth and persistence of local agency.

Christianity, global influences and “alpha” cities in early modern Southeast Asia

From the beginning of the sixteenth century, as the spread of Christianity became enmeshed in the European goal of commercial profit, religious networks in Southeast Asia were reshaped. European-controlled cities subsumed much older trading connections, but also generated international links that transformed them into junctures for the dispersal of Christian influences. The development of a Portuguese seaborne empire, the Estado da India, for instance, resulted in new bonds of belief between areas that had previously been indirectly linked, if at all. Though frequently at odds with the Portuguese, the spread of Spanish colonialism into the Americas and the Philippines also created interlocking Catholic connections through which many different influences converged. The global migrations of the religious orders, especially the Jesuits,
contributed to a shrinking world as missionaries moved between different zones of activity. In the early seventeenth century the arrival of the Dutch United East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC) and its Protestant affiliation disrupted or diverted some of these pathways, but reaffirmed others while promoting chains of religious globality that connected native Christians appointed as “visitors of the sick” in the small communities of eastern Indonesia to the far-off Reformed Church hierarchy in the Netherlands.

In Southeast Asia, Melaka, captured by the Portuguese in 1511, serves as an example of the religious globalization that characterized the sixteenth century. In commercial terms, economic continuities continued, for Melaka was still one of the richest entrepôts in the east, a highly cosmopolitan town in which the Portuguese were merely a new elite. The imprint of the new Christian presence was nevertheless dramatic and indisputable, since from the outset, the Portuguese saw their venture as a battle of Christians against infidels. The great mosque was destroyed, and much of Melaka was rebuilt to accommodate numerous convents, churches, chapels, and other religious establishments. Visiting priests may have railed against the lack of piety among its Catholic population, but in the eyes of Southeast Asians Melaka was indubitably Christian, a meeting place for Christians from all over the region and a nexus in the sixteenth-century global missionizing project.

Under the Portuguese, Melaka’s primary connections with India were focused on Goa, conquered in 1510, the hub of the Portuguese seaborne empire and from 1558 an archbishopric. Appointed by the Portuguese king, the archbishop administered a region that reached from Africa to Japan, while Goa itself became the dissemination point for evangelism within India and to many other places in Portugal’s overseas domains. As a religious and educational “alpha” city, seventeenth-century Goa could boast at least seventy Catholic establishments, including thirty-one churches, and by the eighteenth century the Jesuits alone were in charge of sixty parishes. Although scholars have traced an Indo-Portuguese style in secular architecture, Goa’s churches generally followed European models closely while infusing them with the global message of Christian triumph. The cathedral, the Sé, for instance, was built with its counterpart in Valladolid in mind, and the high altar carried a painting of Saint Catherine of Alexandria (on whose feast day Goa was captured) standing on the body of the Sultan of Bijapur.

In the latter half of the sixteenth century Melaka assumed added religious importance as a half-way station between India, Japan, and Macau, established as a Portuguese trading base in 1557 with the permission of the Ming Emperor. The connections made possible through this maritime route are well illustrated in the celebrated encounter between the Spanish Jesuit, Francis Xavier, and the Japanese Anjiro, a merchant from Kagoshima. When they met in Melaka, Anjiro expressed interest in conversion and was therefore sent to study in Goa. After his baptism, he accompanied Xavier back to Japan, again passing through Melaka. Fostered by personal interaction, the
networks traversing Portuguese Asia were so resilient that they survived the anti-Catholic fervour accompanying the Protestant Dutch capture of Melaka in 1641. By 1712, when the Dutch gave them more freedom of worship, Melaka’s Catholics outnumbered Protestants by six to one, and even though successive bishops had taken refuge in Flores and Timor, Melaka continued to be a diocesan town until 1818.8

The fact that Melaka was controlled by a Protestant administration, however, did mean a lessening of ties with Macau, which was also under Goa but operated semi-independently as a significant point of global connections. Although Macau remained “a Catholic island in a Chinese sea” existing at the pleasure of the Ming dynasty, it developed into a centre for Portuguese operations in East Asia, most clearly evident in its multi-ethnic community. The Portuguese-born community was always small, and because of the lack of Portuguese women, the wives of European residents were variously Eurasian, Chinese converts, Christian Japanese exiles, or baptized former slaves from places such as Timor, Java, Makassar, and India.9 As a Catholic “alpha” in its own right, Macau was seen as the door to the Christianization of China and Japan, and thus the most suitable site for two Jesuit colleges similar to that already established in Goa. The Franciscan and Dominican friars, the Poor Clare nuns, and the Augustinians also established religious institutions in Macau. Missionaries hoping to spread Christianity in Vietnam, China, and Japan viewed Macau as a bulwark of the faith and a source of financial support; donations from Macau even helped the Dominicans build a fortress on the distant Indonesian island of Solor.10

The wealth that came to Macau’s Lusitanian merchants and to the religious orders helped finance religious buildings and charitable foundations, transforming the town into a showcase of Catholic architecture and a critical point of connectivity as Catholicism moved to become a “world religion”. Begun in 1602, the impressive Madre de Deus Church (today only a façade) was probably modelled after the Gesù, a Jesuit church in Rome, but it also replicated artistic features common in the Iberian Peninsula while exhibiting aspects reminiscent of the architecture of Portuguese India. When Peter Mundy arrived in the early seventeenth century he expressed his admiration for the workmanship of the Chinese-made roof, the “spacious ascent [of] many steppes” and the “new faire frontispiece”.11 It is nonetheless unlikely that he appreciated the symbolism of the façade, a “sermon in stone” that portrays the globalization project through depicting (as the Chinese characters inform us), “The Holy Mother trampling on the dragon’s head”. In European art the dragon was a symbol of heresy, but in China it connoted benevolence and as such had been adopted as the Ming emblem. At a time when the Ming Empire was beginning to crumble, this could be read as the expression of a triumphant and European-driven globality that would overwhelm the barbarism of the east. In this context, artistic protocols were uncompromising. Even the three statues of Mary are in accordance with a Vatican-approved-style Mary should be represented as a young woman in a
white robe and a blue cloak, with her hands in an attitude of prayer, or folded over the breast.  

While the final closure of the Japanese market in 1639 was a financial disaster for many Macau merchants, it did mean a revival of older links with Southeast Asia. The majority of Macau’s traders were Luso-Asians who had close links with the “black Portuguese” diaspora in Southeast Asia, and a Malay chronicle from Borneo even mentions “Macau people” as a specific group.  

By the eighteenth century Catholic communities in eastern Indonesia were thus inclined to see Macau, rather than Goa, as the symbol of Portuguese power in Asia. In 1772 a French visitor to eastern Timor commented that most chiefs were Catholic, that he had seen a church in virtually all the coastal villages, and that trade with the Macau Chinese was thriving.  

Rivalling Macau in the number of its religious buildings was another alpha centre, Spanish Manila. The walled centre, the Intramuros, enclosed the convents and churches of six major religious orders, and the opulence of its architecture aroused comments from many visitors. Though successive earthquakes necessitated modification to the towers and spires that typified Spanish Gothic cathedrals in Seville or Toledo, the town plan replicated typical arrangements in other Spanish colonies, laid down by royal orders in 1573 in an early attempt to “globalize” architecture.  

Spanish repression of indigenous trade meant Manila never became an entrepôt like Melaka, but it attracted a highly cosmopolitan population and was a telling symbol of Spain’s Asian presence. Most importantly, it was a key node in the new path of communication across the Pacific, a central point for the Acapulco–Manila–Macau–Nagasaki links by which Chinese silk and porcelain were exchanged for Japanese and American silver. The so-called Galleon Trade also established a pathway for religious interaction as well. A Jesuit mission was established on Guam in 1668 and for a hundred years became a significant point of connection on the Pacific route between Acapulco and Manila.  

Standing apart from these four Catholic-controlled centres was Batavia, taken by the VOC in 1619. The Dutch maritime empire arose in the context of commercial ambition and trade rivalries with the Iberian powers, behind which lay the heritage of Dutch conflict with Catholic Spain and the conviction that Calvinist Protestantism conveyed the true message of Christianity. The VOC charter of 1602 said nothing about the promotion of religion, but the VOC directors instructed the first Governor-General not merely to ascertain those areas best suited for trade, but also to identify places potentially suitable for Christian evangelism. While the VOC did not formally accept responsibility for missionizing, it was obligated to maintain “public belief”, by which was meant support for reformed Calvinism. Though rarely enforced, the statutes of Batavia thus laid down that only the Reformed Church had the right to propagate in Dutch-controlled areas and those found guilty of flouting this order, whether Christian, Moor, or “heathen”, could theoretically be put in jail, banned, or lose their lives.
As the centre for VOC operations, Batavia’s commercial pre-eminence was confirmed by the extension of pre-existing trade routes and through linking previously unconnected places like the Cape of Good Hope and Java. For many Dutch Protestants, the VOC’s global reach provided an unprecedented opportunity to take the gospel to remote nations and to combat the global spread of perceived “Papist” superstitions and blasphemies. Dutch grave-stones still surviving in Melaka (taken from the Portuguese in 1641) are a reminder of the new connections Protestantism established. Maria Quevelfer-ius (1629–1664), we are told, was the wife of Johannes Riebeck, previously governor of the Cape of Good Hope and subsequently of Melaka. She was born at Rotterdam, educated in Leiden, married in Schiedam, and now lies “in this tomb [in Melaka]”.

Globalizing connectivities

The Christian influences that moved through these alpha centres and globalizing networks were in the first instance carried by individuals. The most renowned is Francis Xavier, whose travels through Asia are memorialized in statues and shrines, in names attached to schools, and in his tomb in the Church of Bom Jesus, Goa. But there are other lesser known individuals whose peregrinations also had far reaching results. For example, at the age of 66, Mother Jerónima de la Asunción (1555–1630) left her birthplace, Toledo, to travel to Manila where she had permission to establish the first religious community for women. Her long journey by land and sea from Spain to the Philippines lasted over a year, and her “global renown” and reputation for saintliness created a public demand for her images not only in the Philippines but in Mexico and Spain itself. Another such traveller was François Caron (1634–1706), born in Hirado of a European father and a Japanese mother. Sent back to the Netherlands to complete his studies in theology, he arrived in the Indies as a Protestant minister in 1660. Caron spent thirteen years in Ambon before finally returning to the Netherlands where he published forty sermons that were recycled back to the Indonesian archipelago. His “Kitab Krong” (Caron book) became standard use in Protestant church services well into the nineteenth century.

For local converts these Christian connections also fostered emotional attachments to distant religious hierarchies and to a heritage of saintly protectors, reminding believers of the global spread of this new faith. In Goa three of the four bronze reliefs around Francis Xavier’s tomb depict the saint preaching and baptizing not in India but in far-off eastern Indonesia, where he is also shown escaping from hostile islanders. Filipinos celebrated the holy days of devout men and women who had lived long ago in far-away countries, Japanese boys took gifts to the Pope in Rome, and Timorese chiefs, baptized as Protestants, inserted orange flowers in their headdresses to celebrate the birth of a Dutch prince.

Sometimes bestowed, sometimes personally selected, the baptismal names of converts proclaimed personalized and
meaningful ties with the saintly figures of Christianity’s larger world. Protestantism, with its abhorrence of saint worship, had no such traditions, but converts were given new “Dutch” names, and a Ternate Sultan, anxious to demonstrate his loyalty to the VOC, called one son “Amsterdam” and another “Rotterdam”.

The movement along these Christian circuits took many different forms. The devout Filipino nun, Martha de San Bernardo, was among those sent to Macau in 1633 to establish a foundation; at the other end of the spectrum a beata (pious woman, member of the Third Order) accused of heresy, was taken to Mexico to stand trial. Catholic Indians and Eurasians were used by the missionary orders throughout much of Southeast Asia, and around 1741, when a seminary was set up in Timor, two members of an Indian order, the Oratorians, were sent as teachers. Although the VOC employed only a very small number of Indians and Ceylonese as ministers, some Eurasians did go to the Netherlands for theological training. Towns controlled by sympathetic believers became places of refuge when long-standing animosities divided Christians themselves or when Christians faced banishment or persecution as in China, Vietnam, and Japan. In 1614, for instance, a group of Japanese beatas took refuge in a convent in Manila to escape Tokugawa suppression, and Macau provided asylum for many Catholics who fled from Melaka and other areas taken by the Dutch in the seventeenth century.

The proliferation of Christian shrines, tombs, and churches also provided a meeting ground for people of very different origins, and encouraged travel to quite distant places. After their ship arrived safely in Acapulco around 1595, for example, Filipino sailors made the three-hundred kilometre journey to give thanks at the basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Nor did the individuals who travelled these pathways come empty handed. Crucifixes, rosaries, bibles, psalm books, musical instruments, religious vestments, all brought with them multiple possibilities of imagining “globality”, and most had the advantage of being light and easy to transport. Even the VOC, virulently opposed to “Popish” idolatry, found it profitable to trade in pictures of the Virgin and Mary Magdalene. Lifelike religious images were accorded a special place as sources of benevolence and protection, like the Virgin carried from Manila to south-eastern India’s “fishery coast”, in 1555 to become the Mother of the Parava fishing caste. The famed statue of Bunda Maria (Mother Mary) in Larantuka (Flores) is commonly believed to have miraculously arrived from Melaka, but it probably originated in late eighteenth-century Manila, reaching Larantuka via Portuguese Macau. Perhaps the most well-travelled Marian image, the Virgin of Antipolo, was brought to Manila from Mexico in 1626. Because she was credited with special powers some captains gained permission to have her on board their ships, and over the next century she made eight voyages back and forth across the Pacific.

In the Catholic environment the distribution of relics provides another example of how religious belief could promote the sense of a joint community. In Macau the bones of seventy-two martyrs (fifty-eight Japanese and
fourteen Vietnamese), including fifteen women are still preserved in the crypt of St Paul’s Church. In the adjacent college a full length portrait of the martyrdom of the young catechist Andrew Phu-yen, executed in 1644, which was said to inspire great devotion among all who saw it. One of the most revered of these linkages again involves Francis Xavier. From the early seventeenth century his body, entombed in Goa, was treated as “a quarry of relics”; an arm was sent to Rome, and in 1619 three bones from the elbow to the shoulder were extracted; one was sent to the southern part of Vietnam, another to Melaka, and a third shipped to Japan, and then to Macau. Indeed, in the view of the writer Antônio Vieira (1608–1697), the distribution of Xavier’s relics was a symbol that all Catholics occupied “the same world”. Newly converted Protestants hungered for similar talismans now condemned as “papist”, and in their absence, “permitted” products such as the Bible, psalters, books of sermons and catechisms, assumed a sacral status, in part because they were written in a “secret” (poor romanized Malay) language that few could read or understand.

Probably the most effective medium for the promotion of Christianity as a universalistic faith that could encompass all cultures was education. In the sixteenth century the Jesuit college of St Paul in Goa became a major site for the globalization project, and its reputation grew rapidly. Opened in 1542, the seminary included non-Portuguese boys from all over Asia and Africa with the idea that the most promising would be trained as secular priests. Just three years after its opening a Portuguese merchant from Melaka brought “four brown boys” from Makassar to join a student body that was increasingly cosmopolitan, representing at least thirteen different ethnicities. By the early seventeenth century over two thousand pupils were enrolled. The Goa seminary formed the model for similar institutions in Melaka, which attracted students from various parts of the region, including a prince from Flores. One of the most well-known products of an “Asian” schooling was Manuel Godinho de Erédia (1563–1623), who was born in Melaka, his father Portuguese and his mother a Makassar woman of good birth who had adopted Christianity. Educated in Melaka and at the Jesuit seminary at Goa, Erédia became a cartographer of considerable repute and author of one of the best early accounts of the Malay Peninsula. It is likely that the French Société des Missions Étrangères had the Goa model in mind when two priests established a college in Ayutthaya (Ayudhya) in 1664, which trained students not only from Siam but from Tonkin, China, Cochinchina, and Siam.

Though Manila became a centre for post-primary education, with colleges admitting well-born Filipinos from the late seventeenth century, they were primarily intended to serve residents of the Philippines and were never envisaged as regional institutions like those in Goa, Macau, Melaka, or even Ayutthaya. The ambitions of the VOC-sponsored schools set up in Batavia and elsewhere in the archipelago were also more modest. In the first flush of enthusiasm, it was thought that a Christian education was best imparted in Europe, and in the early seventeenth century a number of boys from eastern
Indonesia were sent to the Netherlands to learn Dutch and receive an introduction to the Dutch life style. By the 1620s, however, the programme was deemed unsuccessful and it was decided to teach students in their own country. Proposals to educate sons of traditional leaders as Dutch-speaking Protestant leaders saw few results, despite the establishment of a “Latin school” in Batavia and a short-lived seminary in 1745. The major contribution of the VOC’s educational system was the training of a cohort of primary schoolteachers in Ambon, who were posted to Christian communities throughout the eastern areas to teach the basic elements of Protestant belief, the essential prayers, and to prepare students for examination by a minister when he made his annual visit.

Ironically, the very competition to gain converts exposed deep fissures in Christianity’s touted universalism. The enmity between Protestant and Catholic was particularly evident in Southeast Asia, but internally both Christian streams were characterized by acrimonious disputes. The hostility between religious orders in the Philippines often reached extreme heights, and in mainland Southeast Asia tensions within Catholicism were exacerbated because national interests were so entangled with the missionizing enterprise. Since descendants of liaisons between Portuguese men and local women formed the core of Christian communities in much of Southeast Asia outside the Philippines, the links between Catholicism and Portugal were especially strong. A seventeenth-century account of Vietnam, for instance, describes a play performed in a public market place where a boy enacting the adoption of Christianity, asked whether he would “enter the belly of the Portuguese”, crept under the robe of an actor depicting a missionary from Portugal. On this occasion a watchful Jesuit said the question should be changed to “will you enter into the Christian law?” to avoid implications that Christian conversion meant becoming “Portuguese”. However, the universalist message was persistently undermined because converts to Catholicism saw even small differences in liturgical style or pronunciation of religious terms (for instance, when Spanish Franciscans replaced Jesuits in Vietnam) as a symbol of different loyalties.

Arguably, the most divisive issue concerned the degree to which Christian teachings – the “product” – should be “tailored” to be more compatible with local customs and practices. The debates surrounding the acceptability of ancestor veneration for Christians in China and Vietnam and the Papal interdiction have generated much academic discussion, but the refusal to condone religious compromise resurfaced in a multitude of other contexts. In tandem with the conviction that “true” Christianity could not condone any compromise with “heathen practices” was the belief in European superiority and its inevitable corollary, the spiritual inferiority of non-European converts.

**Glocalization and its limitations**

Debates about the degree to which Christianity should be adapted to the local context represent a recurring theme in the history of Asian missions well into
the twentieth century. In early modern period Southeast Asia the difficulty of amalgamating “global” and “local” is well known in the Catholic context, especially in regard to Vietnamese ancestor veneration, but in the Indonesian archipelago Protestant attitudes were even more implacable. Without the accommodating influences of the Jesuits and the ritualistic features that could be linked to pre-Christian practices, Protestantism as a “product” was only weakly adapted to the environment in which VOC missionaries were working. The very architecture and interior décor of Protestant churches, resembling those in Europe, offered less opportunity for the kind of modifications that might appeal to local congregations. Though less ambitious than Batavia’s imposing Kruiskerk, which was modelled after the Noorderkerk in Amsterdam, Melaka’s Christ Church made few concessions to the local aesthetics. Well over a hundred years later Isabella Bird described it as a “prosaic Dutch meeting house” and the only visible local touch is the moustachioed face of a Dutchman on the front door.\(^44\) The insistence on replication of Dutch prototypes caused major problems in timber-scarce areas like Kupang (Timor), where bricks and lime were the standard building materials. In 1761 the VOC resident was forced to abandon plans to construct a church similar to the one in Batavia because of the lack of wood suitable for beams.\(^45\)

At the end of the eighteenth century the never-completed Kupang church epitomizes nearly two hundred years of the Protestant presence in eastern Indonesia. Although several of the early ministers entered the field with enthusiasm, it was never easy to attract converts or transform individuals baptized as Catholics into faithful members of the Reformed Church. Clerical authorities were adamant that liturgy as practiced in the Netherlands should be followed as closely as possible, and any compromises were therefore concerned with minor matters, such as the celebration of communion with bread made of rice rather than wheat flour.\(^46\) At times, it is true, incentives could be held out for conversion. In 1677, when the entire population of a village on the island of Seram was baptized, the VOC governor uncharacteristically sponsored a feast and distributed textiles to the converts “in order to arouse jealousy amongst other heathens in the surrounding area”.\(^47\) However, it was more common to impose fines and other punishments for dereliction of Christian duties and poor church attendance. A seemingly never-ending succession of rules and ordinances flowed out from Batavia to VOC officials and Church personnel stationed in the eastern islands, addressing issues related to such matters as pre-baptismal instruction, criteria for admission as a church member, language use, marriage arrangements, administration, finances, ministerial dress, monitoring of religious practitioners. Local schoolmasters were given responsibility for preparing individuals to be examined during the minister’s annual visit, but were not permitted to compose prayers or preach independently. In addition, the constant rotation of ministers, with very few staying for any length of time, meant that there was little familiarity with language or with local customs. A minister could even be fined if his sermon exceeded the prescribed limit, checked by an hourglass.\(^48\) Lacking the processions, the rituals, the panoply,
the holy objects of Catholicism, Protestantism had little to lure converts except musical participation, but even this was tightly controlled, with approval given only to the psalms of David and selected hymns. Because there was little room for innovation, Dutch church music did not adopt the alternating chanting more familiar to indigenous cultures, with one line read, and then people singing their response. This style was known to be an effective teaching method, but the VOC church hierarchy considered it too reminiscent of “heathen” practices and suggestions that the catechism be put into rhyme were rejected.49

It would be interesting to speculate how the “glocalization” of Protestantism in eastern Indonesia might have proceeded had it not been for the re-imposition of Dutch colonial control over Christian practice in the nineteenth century. As the VOC slipped into bankruptcy the Reformed congregations in larger centres such as Melaka and Batavia were maintained (its members often poor women and former slaves, dependent on Church charity) but by the 1790s the Protestant presence in eastern Indonesia had largely disappeared. As human resources and evangelical energies declined in company with the loss of trade and the Company’s looming bankruptcy, small Protestant congregations were left on their own under the direction of local schoolteachers.

These developments had far-reaching implications for the oldest Protestant community on the island of Ambon, where permanent ministers were stationed, where conversion had been more successful, and where native teachers, employed by the VOC, had become key figures in Christian evangelism. When the English took control of Maluku in 1796, this group remained loyal to “old customs” (i.e. as they had been taken from Batavia and The Netherlands). Between 1794 and 1819, when Dutch ministers were completely absent, it was the schoolteachers who maintained the traditions and practices attached to baptism and church membership. At the same time, they were already staking out their own claim as guardians of a certain style of Christian ritual. The Dutch returned in 1817, only to face a rebellion in which schoolteachers played a leading role, believing that the Dutch planned to destroy “Malukan” Christianity, and seeing themselves as defenders of piety against an unwelcome secularization.50 It was their scriptural knowledge that provided the uprising with its religious justification and inspiration. When one of the rebel strongholds was taken, the church bible was open at David’s great invocation, Psalm 17:

I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God … hide me under the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about. They are enclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly.51

The “glocalization” of early modern Catholicism, by contrast, was far more successful, although it followed a number of different paths. On the one hand, there were areas where links to large “alpha” centres were weakened to such
an extent that Catholic communities became independent “owners” of localized practices. For example, the expulsion of priests from Vietnam in the eighteenth century encouraged converts to assume a leadership role as mediators and interpreters of the Christian message. Two anonymous texts from the eighteenth century, “Treatise on True Religion” and “Conference of the Four Religions”, were intended to prepare converts for baptism and answer the accusation that Christians neglected filial piety and were no longer loyal to their king.\footnote{52} Another example comes from Portugal’s most distant territories in the Solor-Timor Archipelago, where Catholicism survived as a key marker of “Black Portuguese” (Topass) identity.\footnote{53} When Dominican priests (often themselves of mixed Indian-Portuguese descent) were tapped for their spiritual powers, they also contributed to the Timorese domestication of Catholicism. Prior to a Topass attack on VOC-controlled Kupang in 1749, for instance, “a few priests of native complexion” baptized not only high-ranking Timor nobles, but also the soil and some sacred trees.\footnote{54} Sponsored by the Dominicans, the Topass carried Christian banners and symbols into battle, but animal sacrifices and the drinking of blood were also performed to ensure success. Visitors to Timor noted that although local Catholics “knew little more than a few prayers”, they never failed to wear a rosary or a cross around their necks as a form of protection.\footnote{55} The interiorization of a Catholic identity was therefore deep and long-lasting and the Dutch Jesuits permitted to return to eastern Indonesia in the mid-nineteenth century were appalled at the extent to which Catholicism had been localized. Reshaping these practices so that they resembled the more restrained style of northern Europe became a prime concern.

Undoubtedly, the most effective “glocalization” of Christianity occurred in the Philippines, where the domestication of Hispanic Catholicism in virtually every aspect of Christian life has generated a corpus of historical studies. Emblematic of the manifold ways in which Catholicism was translated into a familiar cultural idiom is the Miag-ao church in Cebu. Built with the assistance of local Christians, its pediment is decorated with a bas-relief sculpture of St Christopher – a universal Catholic icon, but here represented as a Filipino – who is carrying the Christ Child and planting a fully grown coconut palm (an attribute of the Immaculate Conception), with papaya and guava trees nearby.\footnote{56} Innumerable other conceptualizations and their tangible representations – revered images, all with their own specific histories, celebrations associated with a particular location, pre-existing “holy places” now transformed into pilgrimage sites, theatrical presentations of religious stories – show how the dynamics of Filipino cultures successfully tamed the behemoth of Spanish Catholicism. A recent study of religious music in the Philippines has demonstrated the complex processes by which Filipinos actively appropriated and reshaped a musical system rooted in a very different culture.\footnote{57} While the importation of Iberian religious music was “an explicit symbol of cultural universality … in the Hispanic World”, these new styles could incorporate indigenous features and provide opportunities for local musicians to
include elements that reflected the Filipino environment. The most well-known of these domesticated poetic and musical forms is the Pasyon, the account of the life of Christ, which established itself as an integral part of Filipino spiritual life beyond the confines of the church and fostered a sense of religious ownership through the use of indigenous languages.

Nonetheless, the Philippines case shows that the very success of Catholicism’s adaptation to “consumer” culture also exposed the limits of the global project. Like their VOC counterparts, the intrusion of the Catholic Church into the personal space of local Christians was a persistent reminder that Christianity required compliance with a certain lifestyle based upon what was considered “correct” not merely in Europe, but in the colonial alpha cities. In Goa, where the much-feared Inquisition was instituted in the mid-sixteenth century, prohibitions against customs such as birth or marriage ceremonies that were seen as “heathen” could touch even the minutia of ordinary life. For instance, in 1736 the Goa Inquisition ruled that Christians could not eat boiled rice without salt, or bathe wearing clothes before cooking, as Hindus did. The prohibition against the use of Hindu musical instruments is echoed in the Philippines where there were complaints that the “localization” of religious music imparted incorrect doctrine and where the friars were concerned at the theatricality and burlesque that had crept into Filipino renditions of religious genres. Ecclesiastical occasions should be celebrated with solemnity and should not provide opportunities for entertainment, laughter, and worldliness. Underlying all these rulings undoubtedly was the ongoing debate about the extent to which the universal missionary enterprise should allow the continuation of practices and customs that originated from non-Christian traditions.

Conclusion

The expansion of European commercial interests into Asia, the Americas, and Africa was commonly justified by the biblical injunction to spread Christian teachings, and by the “civilizing” influences that would then be fostered. This chapter has argued that the goal of Christianization was undertaken in the belief that teachings and practices as they had evolved in Europe could be successfully transported to very different environments. The early modern period was a critical period in Christianity’s claim to be a “world” religion, but in Southeast Asia as elsewhere, responses to the missionizing endeavour varied from negotiation and acceptance to apathy and outright resistance. The transmission of what was seen as a universal message was complicated by the goal of imposing European economic control, by the opposition this generated, and by competition with other religions and among Christians themselves. In this often antagonistic environment, the degree to which a global product could be “repackaged” so that it was cross-culturally appealing was always constrained, even among the most sympathetic purveyors.

In marketing terms, Southeast Asia is particularly interesting because here we can compare different interpretations of Christianity, notably Catholicism
and Protestantism, and contrast the boundaries that were imposed on localization. Although it can be argued that Catholicism was generally far more successful in this regard, we can also see continuing debates between the religious orders, and between Iberian Catholics and their northern European counterparts. Arguments about the acceptability of what is today termed “enculturation” have continued into modern times, so that in some societies, despite a long presence, Christianity is still regarded as a “foreign” religion. While an appreciation of the complex entwining of local and global, and the variety of different forms that this could take, must underpin any study of Southeast Asia’s religious history, glocalization set up “power-laden tensions” which both global institutions and dispersed consumers continue to negotiate.62

Notes
6 J. Pereira, Monumental Legacy: Churches of Goa, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 36–43. This was later cut away to avoid offence to Muslims.
24. Santiago, “To Love and to Suffer”; C. Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines*, Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004, p. 121. From medieval times the Catholic orders had been divided into three: the First Order (monks and friars); the Second Order (nuns), and the Third Order (pious men and women associated with a particular order who followed a religious discipline but could live outside, marry and have a family).
25. A. de Matos, *Timor Português 1515–1569: Contribuição para a sua história* [Portuguese Timor 1515–1569: Contribution to History], Lisbon: Faculty of Literature, University of Lisbon, 1974, p. 69.
31. B. Andaya, “Christianity, religion and identity in a Muslim environment: Mother Mary, Queen of Larantuka, Indonesia”, in K. Nelson (ed.), *Attending to Early


49 Ibid., 42.


54 G. Heijmering, “Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van het eiland Timor” [Contribution to the history of the island of Timor], *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 9, 3, (1847): 142.


57 Irving, *Colonial Counterpoint*.


62 Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred*, p. 57.
Historians agree that, in terms of gender relations, pre-colonial societies in Southeast Asia were egalitarian as indicated by the relatively high levels of female autonomy and the high status of women. Female autonomy in particular, along with overall gender equality in general, has been attributed to the cognatic, specifically bilateral, kinship system that had long prevailed across most parts of the region and that is now seen as one of the region's defining cultural characteristics. This cultural trait was unaffected by the region's so-called Indianization. Symbolic expressions of gender differences as encoded on the body had also been minimal, in a setting that emphasized human sameness and complementarity of the sexes. Because of women's high status in the region, as Barbara Andaya argues, "gender considerations can, at the very least, provide the historian with 'a useful category' for historical analysis." However, studies of gender relations prior to and in the wake of the Spanish colonial conquest of the Philippines in the late sixteenth century have tended to focus almost exclusively on specific roles, particularly that of the babaylan or shamans, who were generally female, although a male transvestite could also be one. The babaylan held a preeminent position in pre-colonial society as the principal mediator between human society and the all-important spirit-world but who, under Spanish colonial domination, were subjected to demonization, marginalization, and eventual elimination. With the advance of colonial Catholicism, the female shamans disappeared and were replaced by the male Spanish missionary priests, who then became the major human conduits with the supernatural realm. (The clandestine practice of indigenous shamanism was taken over by men, although not exclusively as some women were also part of this illicit movement.) From this admittedly significant eclipse of the female shaman and the imposition of an Iberian cultural system on the Philippines it has been asserted that female status declined in the colonial period, with women alienated from public life, decisions, and social significance. Nevertheless, the perceived trajectory of decline in female status has been rather hasty, particularly in regard to the status of ordinary women. As Cristina Szanton-Blanc has observed, when one compares contemporary concepts of maleness and femaleness in the Philippines with the Mediterranean world,
there are apparent similarities because of the use of comparable Catholic symbols and metaphors, but practices are markedly different; in the face of all sorts of historical changes, the rather elevated status of women in the Philippines remains, with Catholic symbols and mores apparently having been absorbed selectively or even transformed to conform with local culture.\(^6\)

Given this observation, if gender is to be a useful category for historical analysis, we need to understand gender relations within a broad historical frame in order to analyse the processes of change. Gender systems are best viewed as a relational process that unfolds in history in dynamic interaction with a multiplicity of factors. Indeed, the Spanish conquest of the Philippines raises the important question: how and in what ways have gender relations in the Philippines changed as a result of Spanish colonialism, when in fact the kinship structure in which these relations are located have remained unaltered in fundamental ways? The practitioners of indigenous shamanism have been cast aside, yet bilateral kinship, a central tenet, if not defining feature, of the social structure, has endured despite centuries of change.\(^7\) The persistence of bilateral kinship continues to give importance to women through the equal reckoning of descent not only from the father’s line, as in a strict patriarchy, but from both the father’s and mother’s lines. Female and male children continue to be treated as having equal claims to inheritance as had always been the case. Despite the Spanish colonial imposition of a marriage system based on the practices of the Catholic Church, the dowry system was not adapted, but rather the payment of bridewealth, or bride price, suggestive of women’s worth, has remained the overwhelming norm in Philippine society. The practices surrounding bilateral kinship continue to provide a sizeable sphere for female autonomy and high status in familial and other societal relations, even if there have been domains in social life where women have indeed been marginalized, subordinated, and even subjected to oppression.

The difficult conundrum of explaining change in some aspects of gender relations but not in the seemingly more basic kinship structure cannot be answered in the space of this brief essay. However, what this essay seeks to accomplish is to broaden the discussion by looking at ordinary women’s role in agriculture, particularly in rice cultivation. Rather than focus immediately on gender relations, the approach is to understand the wider context that would shed light on rice production, particularly the cosmological beliefs within which all social relations in the pre-conquest world were embedded and subsumed.\(^8\) Within the context of this broader social and cultural setting, the chapter moves to an analysis of colonial transformations in rice farming, which provides the lens to view and analyse changes in gender relations in rice cultivation. It is argued that other domains of social life beyond gender relations exerted profound influences on the colonial restructuring of gender relations, altering the gender division of labour obliquely rather than frontally.

Thus the first part of this chapter discusses the broad patterns of rice cultivation in the islands prior to colonialism, and within this context the predominance of female labour in certain tasks, particularly in planting and
harvesting of the rice crop, is underscored. The second part discusses the Spanish colonial project of transforming rice production through the introduction of technological changes; in tandem with the introduction of Catholicism, the technological changes in rice production provide the context for analysing the inadvertent (consistent with the sociological law of unintended consequences) reconstitution of the gender division of labour in rice farming.

Rice in the pre-colonial world

Dictionaries prepared by Spaniards in the early part of the Spanish colonial period recorded numerous words referring to rice. In Fray Miguel Ruiz’s *Diccionario Español en Tagalo* the second largest grouping of food-related words – 201 in all – consisted of words pertaining to rice. Each step in the cultivation of the rice plant and in the preparation and consumption of the rice grain was denoted by a specific word. The dictionary lists forty-one varieties of rice, sixteen of which were identified specifically as referring to varieties grown in flooded rice paddies (de tubigan) and twenty specifically as grown in upland swidden (de altos). As Doreen Fernandez concluded, rice among the Tagalog “was obviously high in the consciousness, being important to livelihood and life-style”.

William Henry Scott and Laura Lee Junker provide valuable information about rice in the ancient social life of the inhabitants of the islands that would later form parts of the Philippines. In the pre-conquest period, rice was highly valued and perhaps considered the most esteemed cereal, but it was not a daily staple. Rice production was insufficient and even chiefs did not have rice for year-round consumption: “even datus with many slaves ate root crops in certain seasons”.

In the Visayas, Scott writes: “But since only in a few places could a year’s supply of rice be produced, root crops were therefore the most common food for part of the year, or all of the year for part of the people.” Subjected to seasonal flooding, the alluvial plains of Bikol peninsula in the southeast portion of Luzon produced large quantities of irrigated rice and supported a large population, but even there Scott says: “Despite the abundance of rice in some places and for some people, the staple Bikol food was root crops.” Taro, yams, and millet were the staple cereals of the islanders. These were planted on swidden fields and around the margins of swidden patches devoted to dry upland rice.

Rice was relatively abundant in the uplands. Once a field had been cleared and was ready for planting, sacrifices were offered in the middle of the field after which planting could commence. Men walking in a row used heavy wooden poles that had a pointed end to make thumb-sized holes on the ground. “They were immediately followed by a row of women who dropped five or six seeds into each hole and covered them over with their toes, all with a speed and accuracy which elicited wonder from foreign observers for three centuries,” according to Scott. In the lowlands, wet-rice cultivation
depended on transplanting rice from seedbed to swampland, but water levels could not be controlled and rice plants stood the risk of drowning. Lowlanders desiring to obtain upland rice offered seafood, salt, and pottery in exchange.\(^{16}\)

Portions of rice harvests were given to chiefs as *buwis*, which Spanish chroniclers interpreted as tribute.\(^{17}\) Among the Tagalog “standardized measures of rice were demanded by southern Luzon chiefs from their commoner constituency, with the number of *gantas* (approximately three litres of rice) dependent on the amount of land cultivated by individual families”.\(^{18}\) Limited archaeological evidence indicates that “rice was significantly more prevalent in the presumed elite habitation zone in comparison to the non-elite residential zone”.\(^{19}\) Early on, rice was implicated with the asymmetries of social power and stratification.

Junker notes that rice was a prestigious and highly valued food because of the “high labour intensity in growing rice” relative to root crops.\(^{20}\) In addition to its texture and flavour, the ease of pounding rice (compared with, say, millet with its tough husk) might also have made it a highly preferred food.\(^{21}\) Like root crops, rice was boiled without seasoning, but with fragrant leaves sometimes mixed with rice in the cooking pot. Cooked rice was combined with viands that were frequently fried in coconut oil, barbecued, or smoked. There were various other ways of preparing and consuming rice, which could be ground to produce flour and made into rice cakes.\(^{22}\) As the Jesuit Ignacio Francisco Alcina observed in the late seventeenth century, rice was “the main nourishment (*el sustento primero*) in the appreciation of the natives and the one with the greatest nutritive effects. It is also the one that gives them greater strength and is most agreeable to their constitution (*mejor disposición en el cuerpo*) ...”.\(^{23}\)

During the pre-colonial period rice was a marker of ecological and geographic differentiation as well as a signifier of social stratification. Although not the staple food, rice was highly valued and desired. Perhaps because of its ritual and material significance and its relatively scarce supply, rice – rather than a precious mineral such as silver or gold – was the one item that pre-conquest natives lent and borrowed.\(^{24}\) The islands that Spain would colonize were thus akin to Japan, where “rice was primarily the food for the upper class throughout most of history, and was not a ‘staple food’ for most Japanese until recently”.\(^{25}\) But, as Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney notes, it “has always been the most important food for ritual occasions for most Japanese”.\(^{26}\) Indeed, in the pre-conquest islands rice was an important element of ritual and a signifier of the people’s cosmology.

The ritual significance of rice can be glimpsed from Scott’s description of harvest practices:

Harvesting was accompanied by strict religious tabus. For three days before, harvesters had to remain continent and keep away from fire. Neither could outsiders enter the house: otherwise, they believed, the rice
would be all straw with very few grains. In some places they even camped in the field all during the harvest, lest the rice decrease – as they said – by running away angry because the house had not been left to it alone. Harvesting was usually done by women, and men could not join them even if the crop would be lost for want of reapers. Even where it was the custom for men to join in, the harvest had to be begun by a woman ritually cutting a prescribed amount at a specific hour of the day. And once the harvest was finished, more tabus were enforced for seven days – for example, houses were closed to outsiders, and cooking fires had to be rekindled each time.

Rice was reaped panicle by panicle, leaving stalks standing, with a sickle … or any kind of knife … Green ears were separated to be pounded and toasted as pilipig, and the rest were sunned and stored unthreshed in field granaries … or under the house … It was threshed as needed by being trampled underfoot … scraped against a seashell … or pulled through with the hands …

This account alerts us to the fact that in the pre-conquest world rice growing, harvesting, and consumption were embedded not only in social relationships but also in the islanders’ cosmology. They apparently possessed a belief complex that, as in other parts of Southeast Asia, associated women with the rice plant and justified the near-exclusive application of female labour to rice planting, care, and harvesting.

In the system of complementary dualism of the Kodi in eastern Indonesia, as Janet Hoskins has illumined, male spirit figures are associated with sky powers but female figures are associated with rice and garden magic. The Kodi rice goddess, Mbiri Kyoni, is said to have been offered as a sacrifice and was transformed to feed the starving. The new sprouts of rice that appear seasonally are believed to contain the soul of her child. Mbiri Kyoni’s nurturance of the spirit-child is mirrored in the role of women as key ritual actors in the planting and harvesting of rice. Among the Karo Batak in northern Sumatra, Beru Dayang, the spirit of rice, is female; rice grown on upland swidden fields is seen as the Karo Batak women’s daughters.

From these ethnographies and historical accounts we may deduce that the islanders of the Philippines possessed an analogous view of the rice plant. Their magical worldview suggested that spirits resided in the grains of rice. These spirits had to be propitiated or they could become “angry” and “run away” if certain practices were not followed; one would be left with straw, empty husks, and a very poor harvest. The Philippine natives’ emphasis on female labour suggested that they believed the rice spirits to be female, as in other parts of Southeast Asia.

A key indigenous practice was harvesting rice panicle by panicle, which was widely observed, even among the sixteenth-century Igorot. Today among the Bontok, whom the Spaniards failed to conquer, rice is harvested in the same manner: “taken, as it were, unawares, and with a minimum of shock.
or disturbance”, lest a drastic motion with a sickle might scare the spirits and cause them to flee to other fields.\textsuperscript{31} In panicles, the rice stalks appear to continue to hold the spirits, and in that form present-day Bontok women keep their harvested rice – a remarkable continuity with pre-colonial practice. In the past rice was threshed “as needed,”\textsuperscript{32} and the same practice persists among today’s Bontok people.

The difficulty of growing rice and its relative scarcity in the pre-colonial world might perhaps explain the apparently antisocial practice of keeping away “outsiders” from the house during the three phases of preharvest, harvest, and immediate postharvest. But symbolically this practice could have been a gesture of respect for the rice spirits, allowing them to “have” the rice before humans would partake of it as food. In contemporary Bali newly harvested rice cannot be eaten or sold until the household has celebrated a ritual in which the essence of rice is “returned” to heaven, in a milieu where rice production is seen as a cooperative endeavour between deities and people.\textsuperscript{33} In the seventeenth-century Visayas, Alcina narrated an apparently analogous belief but in the form of a taboo: “when [rice] is newly or recently harvested and eaten, it causes a high fever or a blood-stool of sorts”, resulting in a proscription such that even the Spanish Catholic missionaries – evidently influenced by indigenous beliefs – refrained from eating rice “until about a month or two after it is harvested”.\textsuperscript{34}

It is important to observe that the predominance of the belief in rice spirits resulted in the suspension of sociality that characterized human relationships. Couples had to refrain from the most intimate contact, prohibited as they were from engaging in sexual intercourse three days before a harvest. Even casual neighbourly interactions were not allowed during the harvest period. It was as though all sociality was suspended to emphasize that social relations could only be possible through the beneficence of the rice spirits, who made individual and social life possible. In the liminal period surrounding harvest, we note that women continued to carry on a form of interaction, indeed the only meaningful interaction, and that was with the spirit-world. By being the primary harvesters of rice, women were at the centre of cosmic time in their capacity as the intermediaries of humans with the spirits that governed rice, the most esteemed of food crops. This role evoked their life-giving role in child bearing and nurturance. Thus the seeming burden on women to provide labour, often exclusively, in rice harvesting was a function of a cosmological belief system that accorded preeminent value to the role of women in the cosmic order.

Once the panicles had been stored, sociality re-entered the human domain. As long as the supply lasted, rice occupied an important role in everyday meals and in feasts and rituals. One could imagine that, after all, there was no way to hide the inviting aroma of rice being cooked wafting through the physical and social spaces of commensal beings. Again, men partook of this social world via women, whose labour linked rice cultivation to food preparation and consumption.
What happened to the rice spirits when rice was cooked and ingested? Present-day Bontok offers a cue. Ana Labrador’s ethnography underscores that rice is a crucial food in ritual, during which it “crosses the threshold of the category of mundane food to become part of a feasting fare”\(^{35}\) that otherwise privileges meat over plant food – meat being the main ritual food in ancient Southeast Asia.\(^{36}\) “So like meat, rice restores vitality after a potentially life-draining and polluting effect of a death in the family. Feasting is also part of conquering vulnerability and transcends liminality. Among the Bontok, these would not be possible without rice.”\(^{37}\) For rice to restore vitality and reinvigorate life, rice spirits must be seen as performing a lifegiving role. This belief was apparent among the Japanese whose mythologies advised that one way by which people could “rejuvenate themselves” was by “internalizing the divine power through the consumption of rice-cum-deities, which [became] part of the human body and its growth.”\(^{38}\) To the pre-conquest inhabitants of the Philippines, we may suppose that the rice spirits were believed to perform an analogous role in preserving life and restoring vitality. Rice was not simply food to be consumed but of a life force that linked people to the cosmos and its potencies, all through the intermediation of women.

**Technological change and the making of a staple**

The pre-conquest social world was radically altered by the advent of Spanish colonialism. Although the powerful changes that occurred during the contact period cannot be discussed here at length,\(^{39}\) noteworthy is the fact that the spirit-world remained but it began to be dominated by Hispanic rather than indigenous preternatural beings and the power relations they signified reflected the dynamics of colonial life. While reduced to living in compact settlements, or at least within hearing of the church bells, as a result of the colonial programme of *reducción*, the subjugated native (indio) was transformed at the same time into an individuated peasant. Under the reign of the colonial Catholic Church, the ancient communal rituals disappeared. However, each peasant household adopted its own magical strategies of entreating the spirit-world to nurture and protect the farm and its crops, a practice that has persisted to the present day.

Moreover, under Spanish rule the production and handling of rice was profoundly altered. Without a doubt, rice continued to be an important and highly valued food crop, but the system by which it was grown underwent radical transformation.

To finance the colonial enterprise,\(^{40}\) the Spanish friars introduced plough technology that harnessed the carabao or water buffalo – and, along with it, the channelling of waterways for gravity irrigation – making wet-rice cultivation possible in lowland but not waterlogged areas. The system relied on monsoon rains and the methodical transplanting of rice seedlings from seedbeds to rice fields. The irrigation system was rudimentary. As Norman Owen says of rice cultivation in the Bikol peninsula even in the nineteenth century, it:
did not have the elaborate network of canals and reservoirs we associate with “hydraulic societies”, nor were there the institutions (officials, courts, fees, irrigation associations) and endemic conflicts over water rights which characterize such societies. Most Bikol “irrigation” consisted of little more than local drainage-retention systems, a few canals through which river waters were diverted into the paddies during the rainy season. These were not normally capable of supplying water during the dry seasons, carrying it any distance to otherwise uncultivable ground, or draining the field when they were flooded …

Nevertheless, as Owen says, this technology was revolutionary in the local context, making wet-rice cultivation “normative, the state toward which all farming would move if land and labour permitted”. To propagate the new plough technology – a contribution by Spanish friars often elided in Philippine nationalist histories – a foundry for casting plough-shares was established in Manila in 1584, with the figure of Panday Pira looming large as the first foundryman. As O.D. Corpuz narrates, “Plowmaking was made a monopoly, farmed out in auction by the regime. The work of the friars in training the natives in the use of the carabao and plow was a valuable contribution. The friars disseminated the new technology by bringing trained farmers and their families with them when they were transferred to other parishes.”

The work of transforming Philippine rice farming must have been a protracted endeavour during the three centuries of Spanish colonialism from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Observing these changes during his travels in the mid-1840s, Jean Mallat reported that “the religious went around the countryside, showing how to distribute water so that everyone had his share, the manner of gathering water in large reservoirs so that it would never be lacking; they built dams with earth and incorruptible posts, converted marshland into rice-fields, taught Indios how to transplant rice in the fields.”

This transformation, however, must not be seen as a case of technological determinism, for the change in material conditions cannot be dissociated from the fact that the friars who disseminated the new rice technology were widely seen as men of prowess. I have argued elsewhere that friars were perceived by colonial subjects as endowed with an extraordinary amount of soulstuff, which effectively made them into shamans and made possible a regime of Friar Power. In the native peoples’ view, the friars’ own relationship to their own spirit-world endowed them with seemingly esoteric knowledge and the spiritual potency to make the land yield a greater amount of rice than before. The technology of irrigated wet-rice farming and the harnessing of the carabao were the manifestations of the friars’ seemingly superior place in the colonized natives’ cosmos.

Founded in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the monastic estates, located mainly in the Tagalog region and also in Cebu, engaged in cattle ranching at the outset. In time they began to engage in wet-rice agriculture. In pursuit of
greater productivity, these estates underwent expansion in the course of the eighteenth century due to the rising demand for food caused by the urbanization of Manila, which went in direct conflict with the needs of the growing population in the settlements in close proximity to these estates. This expansion precipitated native grievances, which erupted in the Tagalog Revolt of 1745. Apart from this revolt, however, the monastic lands were generally calm spaces of thriving rice production. The natives who sought to work in these friar haciendas were arguably seeking to bask in the magic and protection of Friar Power. “To be within the penumbra of Spanish magical men also meant added protection from colonial state exactions, because the religious shielded their wards from tribute collection and had them exempted from the harsh corvee labour of timber cutting, log hauling, and shipbuilding in the face of the Dutch threat during the first half of the seventeenth century”.

In the course of the eighteenth century, migration, settlement, and rice farming extended to the northern portions of the central Luzon plain. Thus more areas were opened for cultivation, which increased the aggregate rice output. The large-scale commercialization of Philippine agriculture also occurred at around the same period. Nonetheless, in the eighteenth century, the many varieties of rice – one count registered fifty-four varieties, another enumerated ninety-three – continued to be cultivated in different ways. In addition to wet-rice agriculture, rice was grown on swidden fields (or kaingin) in upland areas and was also sown directly in elevated areas that benefited from monsoon rains.

The 1740s, and especially after the expulsion of ethnic Chinese for cooperating with the British in the 1760s and the subsequent period that put Chinese immigration to a virtual halt, witnessed the ascendancy of Chinese mestizos who began to form the new class of native elites. Chinese mestizos would eventually constitute the core of the nationalist movement and the Filipino elite in the twentieth century. Among their various economic niches, Chinese mestizos became leaseholders (inquilinos) of rice lands in the friar haciendas. Some of the leased lands were cultivated through sharecropping agreements while others were sublet to indio peasants. Chinese mestizos also acquired ownership of rice lands through moneylending that stipulated deeds of retrocession, known as sanglang-bili in Tagalog and pacto de retroventa in Spanish. As landowners and rice traders, Chinese mestizos became involved in capitalizing rice production and advancing its commercialization while accumulating personal wealth. Rice started to acquire the character of a commodity, which the leaseholder and sharecropper paid to the landowner in the friar estates and elsewhere. Rice was also traded in the marketplace subject to fluctuating prices.

Later in the eighteenth century Spanish authorities, especially under the administration of José Basco y Vargas, sought a systematic approach to develop export agriculture. With the de facto opening of Manila’s port to world trade in 1789, rice production “received great impetus”; for instance, in 1793 Pampanga province exported 28,307 piculs of rice. By the early nineteenth century, the export of rice, particularly to China, would appear to have been
commonplace. Other provinces, such as Camarines Sur on the Bikol peninsula, also participated in the export of rice.  

The overall increase in rice production in the Spanish Philippines was able to support a growing population of noncultivators, including native elites, Spanish friars and officials, and Chinese traders. Following Ester Boserup’s well-known theory, it can be said that the technology of rice production kept pace with the rate of demographic growth during this period. Rice came to be regarded by Spanish priests as “the only real source of wealth” because other sources were deemed inherently unstable, and the availability of wet-rice lands became a primary consideration in deciding whether a proposed town could support its population.

Amid the spread of wet-rice farming technology and the expansion of the land area dedicated to rice production in the lowlands, it is important to observe that male labour began to occupy a crucial component of the division of labour. For the lowland indio peasant, male labour became necessary in land preparation, particularly in the ploughing of the field. The pre-conquest male tasks of clearing forest patches for swidden and creating holes on the ground for the rice seed in the old system of upland dry-rice farming were converted to the tasks of preparing the land for the planting of rice seedlings. The apparently most arduous tasks in the rice cultivation process became the domain of men in a changing production system. The new task of transplanting the rice seedlings into a wet field superseded the making of holes in the ground where women dropped the rice seed that was then covered with earth through a deft movement of their feet. In the new production system, both men and women shared in the transplanting task, a parity that was unprecedented. The tectonic shift in the division of labour, however, was most palpable in the harvesting of rice, which ceased to be the preserve of women.

Backed by an imperial religious system in the institutional Catholic Church and the mystique of Friar Power, the introduction of the plough and gravity irrigation carried the tacit message that a spiritual realm more powerful than the rice spirits had defeated and made redundant the spirit-realm that governed rice cultivation in the pre-colonial age. Under Spanish colonial rule the ancient cosmology that enveloped rice cultivation disappeared. Wet-rice technology made rice supply abundant as never before, especially in some regions. With improved yields and reduced uncertainty, as the classic theoretical proposition in anthropology goes, reliance on magic could be expected to decline, and in many ways it did decline in rice cultivation. It is true that peasants retained their spirit beliefs, which were marshalled through individuated rituals to cope with the remaining uncertainties of rice cultivation, a sort of underside of historical change. Moreover, there was the addition of Catholic-inspired rituals and prayers; for instance, the leaves that were anointed during Palm Sunday (palaspas) were deemed efficacious in producing an abundant crop: fashioned into a cross, the dried leaf would be placed inside a sack of rice seeds when it was soaked in water for germination. The most important change, however, was in the view of the rice plant itself, which was essentially
disenchanted. Preternatural beings were no longer seen as domiciled in rice grains. In the hispanized lowlands, harvested rice was no longer stored in panicles but threshed soon after harvest, the threshed rice dried in the sun and then stored. Belief in the ability of rice to cause illness if eaten soon after harvest disappeared. No longer was sociality suspended just prior to, during, and soon after harvest.

This cosmological sea change evidently loosened rigidities in the gender division of labour and banished the ancient taboos, allowing males to freely join females in the transplanting, weeding, and harvesting of rice. This high degree of gender equality in rice cultivation sets the contemporary Philippines apart from countries in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, where transplanting, weeding, and harvesting are still seen today as tasks primarily marked out for women. The dramatic shift in cosmology that accompanied the introduction of wet-rice farming in the Philippines was evidently absent in Indonesia. Likewise, in the Philippines, starting in the 1960s when the time came to shift from the old harvesting knife to the sickle, an adjustment that had to be made with the appearance of rice plants of short stature in the wake of the Green Revolution, practicality (rather than cosmology) was the principal issue.

In addition to wet-rice farming, the Spaniards introduced new crops that would become the staple of many of the colonized natives in some parts of the Philippines. Sweet potato was one of the crops that underwent a transpacific journey, leading to the Náhuatl word, camote, entering the lexicon of Philippine languages. In the same vein, maize became a new dry-land crop, a phenomenon emblematized by the entry of the word mais, originally from the Antilles, in Philippine vocabularies. Corn and sweet potato became widely accepted staple food in non-irrigated parts of the archipelago. As Fenner puts it, “Gradually, the Cebuanos must have been won over to corn, for by the nineteenth century it was grown extensively on both small and large parcels of land. Because it grows better than rice on unirrigated fields, corn, like millet, was ideally suited to Cebu’s dry climate.” Today in Cebu and the rest of the Visayas and, through the influence of Visayan migrants, in Mindanao as well, corn is the real staple of many poor households. Thus, by the nineteenth century, taro, yam, and millet had been eclipsed and replaced by sweet potato, corn, and rice as staple cereals. The process of food substitution was dependent on geography, ecology, and social class.

For the native elites, rice became the preeminent source of carbohydrates, but one increasingly disengaged from any ritual function. Indeed rice did not have any part in the major ritual of colonial society: the mass of the Roman Catholic Church. Certainly rice prepared in elaborate ways – suman, kalamay, bibingka, and the like – figured as important food items, particularly during town fiestas, the dates of which were influenced by the local rice-growing seasons, and during celebrations of kinship such as marriage. But rice itself had no place in the formal world of ritual that commensally linked humans to the Divine and with each other, unlike in other parts of Asia.
In Indonesia, for instance, the ritual preparations of rice with different colours and shapes – as balls and pyramids in various sizes – were, and continue to be, central to the *slametan* celebrations. Linked to Islam, these syncretic *abangan* practices have persisted in a region where Dutch presence since the sixteenth century had not preoccupied itself with proselytizing the native populations. In Vietnam the New Year rice cakes (*banh Tet*) are prominent culinary icons, and despite their contested messages remain central to the practice of Vietnamese identity and the primordial celebration of the cosmos and the world of farming. Similarly, in Japan the New Year rice cakes (*kagami mochi*) are offered to deities, believed made potent by them, and then shared by humans. In contrast, in the Philippines Spanish interventions in the ideational and material domains resulted in the simultaneous increase in rice production and the symbolic marginalization of rice.

Even as the native elites' composition as well as the crop's cultural significance changed, rice remained a marker of social stratification. By the nineteenth century the native elites, composed largely of Chinese mestizos who comprised the *principalia*, were only indirectly involved in rice production as leaseholders, landowners, middlemen, and traders. Rather than producers of rice, they were wealthy consumers who ate rice daily, prepared for them by female servants. Because rice was relatively abundant and easily stored in granaries, the elites consumed rice year-round. As economic agents, they saw rice as a crop that generated profits and a mechanism by which control of tenants and others beneath them socially was achieved, fostering an instrumentalist view of rice. In other words, Spanish colonialism saw the transformation of rice into a staple food, but rice had also become a commodity that was subject not only to the vagaries of weather but also of the market. At least for the elites, rice had become an indispensable food item – a pattern found in the colonial capital and the hispanized lowlands, but also on the Cordillera. Even for the non-elites, especially urban residents, the idea of rice as staple food became entrenched. Soon, for most of Philippine society, a meal could no longer be imagined without rice.

**Conclusion**

As argued in this chapter, in a colonial context where the Catholic Church and its friar missionaries were preponderant magical agents of change, the broader changes in the technology of lowland rice production could account for the historic change in the gender division of labour in Philippine rice farming. In the first instance, the technological changes that the Spanish friars diffused in the course of three centuries of colonial rule were not directed at gender per se but at the level of productivity. However, the introduction of this technological change made the ancient cosmology that surrounded rice cultivation redundant. As a result, the pre-conquest cultural basis for the predominance of female labour in the crucial tasks of planting and harvesting rice was undermined. This technological change resulted in the high degree of
gender parity in rice farming that today sets apart the contemporary Philippines from countries in Southeast Asia.

One could argue that, in the process of this change in technology and the gender division of labour, women were symbolically marginalized in rice production, in much the same way that rice itself was symbolically marginalized in colonial society. Nonetheless, had wet-rice production been introduced without the concomitant change in cosmology and gender relations, women would have carried an inordinately high burden and borne the drudgery of specific farm tasks, especially after the men had prepared the field; such a situation would have become acute from the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century in view of the intensifying pressure to produce more rice as the staple crop. As it happened, the gender division of labour in lowland Philippine rice farming followed, albeit unintentionally, a more equitable trajectory. This argument, however, does not seek to privilege materialist or technological determinism, for changes in the material conditions occurred in, were intertwined with, and derived their legitimacy from the wider cultural framework.

The gender division of labour in rice production, however, constitutes only one component of a larger tapestry of gender relations during this period of Philippine history. The transformations were occurring at different levels and varied domains of social life, with the indigenous sphere in dynamic interaction with the colonial. Should we then discern a movement toward the “modernity” of gender relations in the colonial Philippines since the seventeenth century? This question has no simple answer, not only because the trajectories of change in gender relations were moving in different directions, some more equal than others, some more hybrid than others, but also because “modernity” is a loaded term that is difficult to employ without assuming a seemingly cohesive, distinctive shift patterned after a European model or standard. Perhaps rather than being saddled with the problem of finding the appropriate labels, it may be best to undertake more historical research and analyses to illumine further the transformations in gender relations in all their complexity.

Notes
5 Brewer, Shamanism. Cf. Mary John Mananzan, “The Filipino woman: before and after the Spanish conquest of the Philippines”, in Mary John Mananzan (ed.),


8 As I have argued elsewhere, “not only were pre-conquest relations of production inseparable from, if not totally subsumed by, the islanders’ worldview but ... pre-conquest cosmological principles could be said to have constituted the pre-conquest relations of production.” Filomeno Aguilar Jr., Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press; Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998, p. 67.


10 Ibid., p. 74.


12 Scott, Barangay, p. 291.

13 Ibid., p. 35.

14 Ibid., p. 182.

15 Ibid., p. 38.

16 Ibid., p. 36.

17 Aguilar, Clash of Spirits, p. 66.

18 Junker, Raiding, Trading, and Feasting, p. 237.

19 Ibid., p. 331.

20 Ibid., p. 330.

21 Scott, Barangay, p. 39.

22 Ibid., pp. 47–8.


24 Horacio de la Costa explains the high interest rate: rice “is food, a consumable commodity; but it is also seed, a factor of production. Planted, it yields much more than double its original quantity. It must have seemed equitable, therefore, that anyone who borrowed rice should repay at least double what he borrowed, and that the interest on the loan should grow with each planting season that he failed to give it back.” Horacio De la Costa, S.J., Readings in Philippine History: Selected Historical Texts presented with a commentary, Manila, Makati: Bookmark, 1965/1992, p. 5.


26 Ibid., p. 228.

27 Scott, Barangay, p. 38.

28 Janet Hoskins, “Doubling deities, descent, and personhood: an exploration of Kodi gender categories”, in Jane Monnig Atkinson and Shelley Errington (eds),
264 Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr.

30 Scott, Barangay, p. 262.
32 Scott, Barangay, p. 39.
34 Alcina, History of the Bisayan People, pp. 198–9.
36 Reid, Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, pp. 32–3.
39 For a full discussion, see Aguilar, Clash of Spirits, pp. 32–93.
41 Norman Owen, Prosperity Without Progress: Manila Hemp and Material Life in the Colonial Philippines, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1984, p. 120.
42 Ibid., p. 121.
45 Aguilar, Clash of Spirits, pp. 15–50.
47 Aguilar, Clash of Spirits, p. 76.
On the general argument of a collision between the Hispanic and indigenous spirit-worlds in the course of the Spanish conquest, see my *Clash of Spirits*.

In a rain-fed rice village in Iloilo, for instance, “transplanting is traditionally [sic] considered as an activity which is shared equally between men and women” and “generally the sexual division of labor is not very rigid.” Lyda Res, “Changing labor allocation patterns of women in rice farm households: a rainfed rice village, Iloilo Province, Philippines”, *Women in Rice Farming*, Aldershot: Gower Publishing for the International Rice Research Institute, 1985, pp. 107, 97. In contrast, the Javanese case suggests that “women’s main tasks are transplanting (with very few exceptions), weeding and harvesting (with more exceptions …).” Benjamin White, “Women and the modernization of rice agriculture: some general issues and a Javanese case study”, *Women in Rice Farming*, p. 131; cf. Pudjiwati Sajogyo, “The impact of new farming technology on women’s employment”, *Women in Rice Farming*, p. 153.

In the Iloilo village studied by Lyda Res, the small harvesting knife called *kayog* was replaced by the more efficient sickle; by the early 1970s harvesting arrangements had also been transformed. Res, “Changing labor allocation patterns,” pp. 106, 109. In the Ilocos the hand knife continued to be relied upon in harvesting awned varieties of rice, collectively known as *pagay iloko*, which rendered the sickle technologically inappropriate. Henry Lewis, *Ilocano Rice Farmers (A Comparative Study of Two Philippine Barrios)*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1971, pp. 59–61.


See Owen for an account of a subsistence crisis in Bikol that ensued after a strong typhoon hit the region on 12–13 November 1844, devastating the local rice crop and jacking up the prices of palay. The Spanish colonial government sent relief grain; but because the policy was to sell rather than distribute the rice freely, and despite the recourse to corn and root crops, the most needy suffered from famine, resulting in higher than usual mortality rates. Norman Owen, *The Bikol Blend: Bikolanos and Their History*, Quezon City: New Day, 1999, pp. 39–47.

In Ifugao in the early twentieth century, consumption or non-consumption of rice distinguished the wealthy from poor and middle class households. On one hand, rich households considered rice as the main food eaten throughout the year. On the other, poor households contented themselves with sweet potatoes, although they had their own small supply of rice obtained from their own fields or as wages (for working the fields, gathering firewood, making baskets, weaving clothes). Poor people ate rice only one or two months each year, and saved the rest for rituals and for their children. Middle class households ate rice more often than poor households, but they too did not continually eat rice after the harvest and, instead, ate sweet potatoes. Francis Lambrecht, CICM, *The Mayawyaw Ritual: Rice Culture and Rice Ritual*, Washington, DC: Catholic Anthropological Conference, 1932.
Glossary

**abangan**  Javanese Muslims that subscribed to a more syncretic Islam than the orthodox santri

**adat**  customary tradition, practice

**adipati**  viceroy

**aql**  intelligence

**attap**  Malay, palm leaves used to thatching and house-building

**baas**  a type of unidentified silk piece

**babaylan**  shaman

**baik budi bahasa**  Malay, impeccable manners

**banh Tet**  Tagalog, sweetened glutinous rice wrapped in banana leaves

**beata**  Tagalog, pious woman

**bendahara**  Malay, chief minister, prime minister or senior minister of the royal court

**bibingka**  Tagalog, rice cake dessert

**buwis**  Tagalog, tribute in rice

**cai bạ**  Vietnamese, a magistrate-administrator

**cassia lignea**  a type of cinnamon in Flores

**chau**  Vietnamese, remote district

**chemongees**  a type of unidentified silk piece

**chiers**  a type of unidentified silk piece

**darurat**  Malay, crisis, emergency, chaos

**daulat**  Malay, denoting the mystical right to rule; sovereignty

**de altos**  upland swidden (shifting cultivation) rice; hill rice

**de tubigan**  flooded or wet rice paddies

**derhaka**  Malay, traitor, disloyal

**diamantkenner**  diamond specialist

**dochakaku**  Japanese term for “global localization”

**fatwa**  Islamic ruling, injunction

**galingall**  a type of unidentified silk piece

**gantas**  approximately three litres of rice

**hadith**  teachings, deeds, and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.); prophetic traditions

**hàu**  Vietnamese, a nobleman in charge of a village
hikayat  Malay, chronicles, stories, tales
hockings hoang quyen (Vietnamese), yellow silk piece
huyên Vietnamese, term for district
ira et malevolentia Latin, “anger and hostility”; harsh, severe
ius publicum Europaeum “the international public order”
jamu herbal medicine in the form of ointment or paste to enhance beauty
jihad struggle, holy war
kafir infidels, unbelievers
kagami mochi Japanese, lit. mirror rice cakes; New Year delicacy
kalamay Tagalog, lit. sugar; sticky sweet delicacy made from coconut milk, brown sugar, and glutinous rice
Khalifah Caliph; “God’s Deputy/Shadow on Earth”, leader of the Muslims
khám lý Vietnamese, title for a civilian official
Khoja derived from the Persian, Khwaja, an honorific title
kongsi Hokkien, lit. to share; partnership, consortium
Laksamana Malay, admiral
le’u Timorese, spiritual prowess
lemah lembut Malay, gentle and polite
lembut hati Malay, loving and soft-hearted and/or merciful
liberum commercium “the free trade”
loas lua (Vietnamese), silk piece
logie lodge or factory, trading outpost
man sach Vietnamese, denotes a barbarian (non-Viet) village
manis Malay, graceful/sweet
mansabdar ranking system of Mughal officer
mare liberum “the free sea”
uafakat consensus-building, agreement, consent
musyawarah consensus-seeking discussion and consultation
nama Malay, name and reputation
negeri Malay, dependency, polity, state
nu Vietnamese, slave
opperhoofd Dutch, supreme headman
opperkoopman Dutch, chief merchant, purveyor
orang laut Malay, lit. sea people; also known as selates or saletes
orangkaya Malay, lit. “rich people/person”; political and commercial elite
Panglima Pagar Malay, literally “commander of the fence”; a security guard
passion the account of the life of Jesus Christ
patut Malay, propriety
pax et custodia Latin, “peace and custody”; gentle, protective
pengiran (pangeran) Brunei nobleman
phaniat Thai, elephant kraal
phiên vương Vietnamese, “Barbarian King”
phra thinang “royal seat”
phrai Thai, freemen
phụ Vietnamese, term for prefecture
pilangs/pylangs  linh (Vietnamese), one kind of silk piece
raja  ruler, king
rodelas  a type of shield
sanglang-bili  deeds of retrocession in Tagalog; pacto de retroventa in Spanish
schrijven  letter
shahbandar  harbourmaster
slametan  Javanese communal feasts emphasizing social unity, camaraderie amongst participants
stadholder  Dutch, provincial executive officer
subahdar  governor, nazim
suman  Tagalog, rice cake wrapped in palm leaves comprising glutinous rice and coconut milk
syariah  Islamic law
tà dô đóc  Vietnamese, Governor of a territory
temenggong  Malay, chief of security
the thua  a type of unidentified silk piece
tiada adil  Malay, unjust
tran  Vietnamese, denotes status of a garrison town
tran  Vietnamese, essential district
trang  Vietnamese, village, station
trede  Dutch, a measurement for distance
tripang (trepang)  bèche-de-mer or sea slugs
ulama  religious scholar
wanita  Thai, women
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