

George Bryan Souza

Portuguese, Dutch and
Chinese in Maritime
Asia, c. 1585–1800

Merchants, Commodities
and Commerce

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Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese in
Maritime Asia, c.1585–1800



George Bryan Souza

Dedicated to

Ernest Cohen-Henriquez Curiel
“Oom Onchi” – the “Professor”

and

Henny de Vries
“Tante Henny”

cherished family, mentors, and supporters

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PREFACE

Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese in Maritime Asia c. 1585–1800 is a collection of essays that deal with a range of topics concerning the history of European and Asian merchants involved and entangled in formal and informal imperial projects and, via objects that they traded, in commerce in early modern maritime Asia.

Friends and colleagues suggested that I bring together a group of (primarily) previously published essays for publication. John Smedley, editor of *Variorum*, concurred. I wish to thank him for guiding me through a selection of essays that helped shape the flow and coherence of this volume. Regardless of this encouragement and support, I am solely responsible for errors in style, structure, and interpretation.

Each individual essay addresses a topic of fundamental importance to the reader interested in knowing more about what merchants did (with which resources and under what conditions) and how they did it, what commodities were incorporated into local, regional, intra-regional and global economies and, what was the role and function of maritime trade and commerce in economic development in general and especially in Asia in the early modern era, from c. 1585–1800. These essays are based on extensive archival research and careful analysis of diverse sets of materials found around the globe, as well as pertinent secondary literature. A number of them, in particular, relate individual or collective merchant experience to specific European (Portuguese and Dutch) imperial and commercial projects and their contestation amongst themselves and indigenous neighbors. Collectively, they form a surprisingly coherent exposition of a utilitarian view of human activity under wide-ranging different sets of circumstances and conditions, but with similar patterns of behaviors and responses that are largely independent from ethnic, racial or religious stereotyping. They raise, address, and (re-)examine pertinent questions and issues concerning agents, agencies, and objects in European Expansion, Asian and Global History.

The thirteen essays in this volume were produced over the past three decades. I was sorely tempted to re-write this body of work because of dated publication but this was simply not practicable. The reader can decide whether my decision not to re-visit the editorial treatment of these essays was correct. It was done based on the proposition that the reader should discover a latent and potent reality about the field of maritime history and of global maritime

economic history in particular while evaluating, integrating, and summarizing the research and argumentation found in these essays. Maritime studies have emerged and grown in importance and are, now more than ever, recognized as a central element in the history of early modern Asia and World or Global history.

Essays presented in this volume are roughly organized into three sections: 1) Introduction; 2) Merchants; and 3) Commodities and Commerce. The adjective “roughly” is purposefully employed, since there is some incorporation and un-avoidable overlap of thematic treatment in some essays placed in the second and third sections.

The first essay, “Maritime trade and politics in China and the South China Sea,” serves as a general introduction for the entire volume. Written prior to 1987, this essay outlined and synthesized the then-existing “state of the field” regarding the history of maritime trade in political and economic development of late Ming and Qing China and its commercial and cultural exchanges with parts of East Asia (Japan), Southeast and South Asia. Since its publication, there have been major advances in historical research and production of monographs in the field of maritime economic history that deal with its role and importance in political and economic development of local, regional, intra-regional and global commercial and cultural exchanges between early modern China and other parts of East Asia (Japan), Southeast, South Asia, and the world. This new research focuses on and provides greater understanding of commercial agents, their composition and complex behavior, and agencies. It reverses the previous imbalance in treatment and representation of Asian merchants in these commercial and economic processes. I acknowledge in this essay and elsewhere desirability for research to engage and counter-balance the overtly “Eurocentric” bias in the field.

Since a good percentage of my research deals with the Portuguese and their commercial involvement and imperial project in Asia, the thesis and arguments found in “Maritime trade and politics” appear at first glance to be blatantly at odds with and an anomaly to my stated support for research that would and has redressed the “Eurocentric” bias in examining the activities of Europeans to the exclusion or marginalization of Asian participation in the early modern history of maritime trade in Asia. A more precise description of the reasons for my work should clarify why I chose to study the Portuguese in Asia and why that appearance of my work being an anomaly is incorrect. A brief but comprehensive answer is in two parts. Simply put, I was neither convinced nor satisfied that the literature concerning the following themes had exhaustively examined or studied and presented the Portuguese case. The first theme concerns the general history of European expansion and the specific role and importance of formal and informal Portuguese imperial and commercial

projects and activities in global and intra-regional maritime trade in Asia in the early modern period. The second concerns the specific role and importance of the Portuguese presence at Macao, via their employment of a myriad of survival strategies in South China, and the specific history of their role and involvement with others in global, intra-regional, and regional maritime trade in the development of China's political economy over the same time frame.

It (the suggested anomaly) existed, in part, because earlier examinations of the Portuguese imperial project in Asia focused on studying the project from above or the metropolitan center (i.e. with focus on the failure of systemic political, military, administrative, and commercial control by Crown, other metropolitan-based aristocratic familial and commercial elites' interests, explication arising out of insufficient institutional development or management, and the role of key persona or personalities). It also persisted, in part, since earlier research unfavorably examined Portuguese commercial performances and practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth century's *vis-à-vis* subsequent competing European commercial regimes (the Dutch and English East India Companies) in Asia in the seventeenth century. This was a seemingly logical and sustainable position to allege and defend, since sources with suitable comparable data that permitted a more balanced examination and tempered evaluation had not yet been found. However, while acknowledging an absence of serial data and evidence concerning the level of commercial exchange, this essay presents research results that tantalizingly suggest that Portuguese commercial activities were more deeply involved than we had previously understood in participating, developing, and expanding China's intra-Asian maritime trade with South, Southeast, and East Asia over the sixteenth and into the early seventeenth century.

My examination of the Portuguese imperial project in general and in Asia in particular incorporated a different perspective from previous studies and one focused on a series of geographical and thematic de-centralizations in order to address and rectify this anomaly. It also uniquely, at the time, employed Dutch East India Company sources and records that highlighted, corroborated, and documented Portuguese commercial performances and practices in Asia. Simply put, the Portuguese imperial project was examined, primarily, from an individual, institutional, and communal perspective – that is from the general viewpoint of an initially overwhelmingly European-borne, male, subsequently multi-racially mixed, married, settler, diaspora, community and society in one location (Macao, China) that was characterized and supported by involvement in the political economy and formal and informal manifestations of empire and its survival via local, regional, intra-regional and global maritime trading and commercial activities.

The subsequent set of twelve essays address general and specific sub-sets of themes and issues pertaining to the historiographic anomaly mentioned and described above.

Section 2 is a sub-set of seven essays that deal with merchants: Europeans (Portuguese, primarily, and Dutch) and Asians (Chinese, primarily), who were heavily involved, reciprocally influenced, and shaped Asia's maritime trade over the early modern period. They ask a wide variety of questions, from mundane to transcendental, about these early modern merchants, their commercial organization, as individuals, partners, associated groups, institutions, their operational knowledge, behavior, and practice, and their collective activities and relationships vis-à-vis other competitors, collaborators, state and non-state sponsors.

Essay II, "Portuguese country traders in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, c. 1600," develops my investigation of the European merchant in Asia further – in particular the Portuguese private merchant – ubiquitous "country traders" or ship owners and merchants in diaspora who resided at disparate colonial port cities and enclaves shipping and surviving via their commercial and political acumen in oceanic space – in the Indian Ocean and from the coast of China in the East and South China Seas. While the historiography of the "formal" Portuguese imperial project in Asia focused on Crown control (and its utilization of proceeds of its sale) of permissions or authorizations over diverse intra-Asian commercial voyages and routes, this essay documents how Portuguese merchants actually celebrated, fixed, and priced freight contracts of goods on ships that sailed and dominated their private trade and exchanges from and to South, Southeast, and East Asia.

Essay III, entitled "Imperial defense and finance and the colonial city in the tropics: the *Senado da Camara* of Cochin and the relief of Malacca, 1587–1598," is published here for the first time. Originally written for a "From colonial cities in the tropics" workshop, European University Institute, Florence, 2–5 December 2002 and subsequently presented at the "Nodes of Empire: Portuguese colonial cities in the Early Modern period" workshop, Princeton University, 2–3 April 2004, it was prepared for inclusion in an EUI's conference proceedings volume that was never completed. It is an extremely well-documented case study that elucidates the role of private Portuguese merchants and their urban communal institutional involvement via their municipal council or *Senado da Camara* of Cochin (one of the major Portuguese colonial port cities on the southwestern Indian coast) in negotiating, participating, financing, and securing repayment (completed in 1598) from the Crown for their important and timely involvement in naval and military relief efforts of Malacca – the strategically located Portuguese colonial port city in the straits of Malacca that controlled the primary route for ingress and

egress of shipping from and into the Indian Ocean and South China Sea – from siege by hostile neighboring indigenous forces in 1587. Examination of this case study brings to the fore the very broad topic of strategic options available to the Iberian Crown (the Crowns of Spain and Portugal were united from 1580–1640) and its representatives in order to defend the “formal” Portuguese imperial project in Asia. It outlines political and economic difficulties and restrictions and inherent strengths and weaknesses of an Iberian imperial defensive strategy that depended upon obtaining manpower and support and negotiating finance from local Portuguese communities.

Essay IV, “Commerce and capital: Portuguese maritime losses in the South China Sea, 1600–1754,” re-examines perennial questions as to how and why the “formal” Portuguese empire in Asia declined in the early seventeenth century when confronted by military and political economic onslaughts of Protestant powers (England and the Dutch Republic) via their respective East India joint-stock companies. This essay presents data reconstructed from diverse European sources concerning loss, capture, or shipwreck as a result of the application of overwhelmingly superior sea power by the Dutch and English East India Companies to destroy, wrest control or interdict Portuguese or Iberian Crown naval forces and private merchant (“country traders”) shipping. It introduces and discusses those losses as background to, and reality for, severe de-capitalization of Portuguese communities and commercial interests and NOT commercial competition caused by the Protestant powers. It alleges that the resulting severe strain on capital resources available to Portuguese communities and their commercial interests in a number of cases incapacitated their capacity to support and maintain the “formal” Portuguese imperial project. Furthermore, this de-capitalization diminished the ability of Portuguese merchants and their communities to counteract depredation of their assets and resuscitate their commercial fortunes sufficiently to a level to effectively respond to Protestant competition. It also articulates and discusses evidence of shipwrecks and piracy that were contributing factors in this process, although these events cannot be directly attributable to naval actions or wartime blockades. Extensive utilization of Dutch East India Company records, amongst others, confirms and documents a range of Portuguese commercial activities not readily transparent via exclusive consultation with Portuguese sources. Based on the number of Portuguese ships during the first half of the seventeenth century captured and integrated into Dutch East India Company’s intra-Asian fleet, there is no doubt about quality of Portuguese design, functionality, and utility of their naval and merchant shipping.

Essay V, “Portuguese colonial administrators and inter-Asian maritime trade: Manuel de Sousa de Meneses and the *Fateh Moula* affair,” explores the life and career, including intra-Asian maritime trading activities, of a

prominent Portuguese Crown administrator in the 1690s (Manuel de Sousa de Meneses, Governor of Bassein at the time) in the Indian Ocean (from Surat to Bengal and return via the Malabar Coast). His commercial activities provide an example of his simultaneous role as “country trading” entrepreneur and private merchant and as Crown administrator, potential regulator and competitor of that same group. This rare revelatory examination of such Portuguese commercial correspondence and accounting records was possible because Dutch East India Company naval forces captured the vessel that carried them and Sousa de Meneses’ cargo. He had freighted and manned an indigenous vessel in Surat, which was employed in intra-Asian trade in the Indian Ocean. The Dutch interpreted his commercial activities as impingement upon their exclusive commercial privileges on the Malabar Coast authorized via treaty between Portugal and the Dutch Republic. The resulting incident was resolved diplomatically in favor of the Portuguese position, and the ship, crew, and cargo were released, although copies of original commercial papers remained in the Dutch East India Company’s possession and entered their archives.

Essay VI, “Agency, Monopoly, and Commerce: The Administrators of the *Junta do Tabaco* in Asia and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and Global Economies,” pursues examination of a sub-category of early modern merchant and their global reach – the commission agent. For over a century and a half, the primary commercial interest and pecuniary sustenance from its imperial project in Asia for the Portuguese Crown was driven in great degree by, and primarily sustained from revenues derived from, its monopoly of trade and trafficking in leaf and snuff tobacco from Brazil to Portugal and throughout its empire. From inception of this monopoly in the 1670s and into the 1770s (when their privileged mercantile positions were extinguished), two administrators (commission agents) employed by the Portuguese Crown’s *Junta do Tabaco* (Tobacco Council) at Goa, India structured, negotiated and controlled a significant percentage and proportion, if not the entirety, of Crown commercial and maritime trading exchanges from and to Portugal and Asia and from and to Asia with Africa and America. This essay identifies these commission agents, explores their lives and trajectories of their careers, and explains how they influenced Crown participation in global and intra-Asian maritime trading activities.

Essay VII, “The VOC’s price current records in the long eighteenth century: commodities and prices in global, intra-Asian and regional Asian maritime economic history,” investigates general commercial and specific price current record keeping activities of Dutch (and other northern European) merchants in employ of the Dutch East India Company (the VOC) in Asia over the long eighteenth century (from the late 1670s to the Company’s cessation of activities in the 1790s). While focusing primarily on price and

commodity data and evidence, this essay documents and explains reasons why merchants meticulously collected and replicated such information and how such compilations suggested and influenced merchant decisions concerning their future commercial activities and participation in specific markets with a particular set or sets of goods. It also suggests the centrality of price to market behavior, which explains subsequent rise and omnipresence worldwide of such commercial data in printed and published form. It explores data and evidence from Company records over this period concerning primary Asian and major competing European commodities and price behavior in global, intra-Asian and regional Asian maritime economic history. This examination identifies and establishes available sources that permit in-depth investigation of early price convergence patterns in other parts of the world outside of certain markets of nineteenth century Europe. It also advocates establishment of such a research agenda and that similar comparable “price current” sources in VOC archives be reproduced in order to develop a larger data base for further consultation, examination, and comparison with other locations in Asia and Europe.

Essay VIII, “An anatomy of commerce and consumption: merchants and opium at Batavia over the long eighteenth century,” is based upon emergence and growth of demand, consumption and commercial profitability for numerous individual and associated merchant groups in trading Indian opium in general in Asia (see Essay XI). This essay focuses in particular on Chinese, indigenous, and Dutch private merchants who officially purchased opium on credit at Batavia from the Dutch East Asia Company (see Essay XII) and commercialized it there, other locations on Java, throughout the Indonesian Archipelago, and possibly elsewhere over the long eighteenth century. It utilizes archival records that I examined at the ARSIP in Jakarta, Indonesia, while recipient of Senior Research Fellowship at NUS’s Asia Research Institute, and it provides a detailed anatomy of commerce and arrangements that each communal merchant group structured and participated in order to be competitively involved in trading this commodity.

The third and final section of this volume is entitled: “Commodities and Commerce.” It consists of five essays which examine the function, utility, meaning, and importance of objects in general and in Asia in particular in early modern commerce and maritime trade at its zenith and towards the end of the age of sail. Given that all objects have stories, may be historized, and diverse alternatives for their examination are available, I was attracted to “commodities” for four reasons that have already been enumerated. The first: within the realm of market formation via availability of surplus production or surplus production for vent and commercial exchange over distance, I was intrigued by the mundane good: the coarse or gruff – not the precious (silver or gold), luxury (raw silk or silk and cotton textiles) or exotic (bird’s nests)

– and explanation as to why they appeared in shipping lists, why they were exchanged over distance, and whether, how and why they were intrinsically important? In other words, what was their function? What was the practical relationship between their production, commerce, incorporation via logistics as an integral part of a transportation system, and demand? How did (or didn't) incorporation of an item in regional, intra-regional or long-distance maritime trade relate or contribute to economic development of a locality, region, or state?

Essay IX, "Ballast goods: Chinese maritime trade in zinc and sugar in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries," asks and answers the query made above about functionality of goods or commodities. It focuses specifically on practical engineering, weight constraints, and physical handling considerations of goods and shipping in general and in particular in early modern intra-regional maritime or "country trade" in Asia.

Essay X, "Country trade and Chinese alum: raw material supply in Asia's textile production in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries," asks and answers the query made immediately above about utility of goods or commodities. It focuses specifically on alum – a mineral substance mined in China that was abundantly available and of good quality, which was used in Asia and around the globe as a mordant in fixing color in dyed textiles in general and in silk and cotton piece goods in particular. In this instance, I examined a specific coarse or gruff mundane good and its specific proto-industrial use as part of the explanation as to why it appeared in shipping lists, why it was exchanged over distance, and whether this exchange was intrinsically important? In other words, how was and is a good used? In essence, this examination of the utility of a good parallels that of its functionality. Markets formed for alum at port cities involved in China's long-distance maritime trade, such as Canton and Macao. Its weight and density permitted its use as ballast. It traded profitably and was competitively priced vis-à-vis other commercially available competing "paying" ballast alternatives – sugar and zinc. Exportation of significant quantities of alum from China emerged and trade in this commodity grew over the eighteenth century. Resulting growth in volume of this mordant in China's intra-Asian trade to South Asia appears to have been caused by either one or a combination of two speculative possibilities. The first possibility was that demand for mordant (and hence, alum) may have increased in India's major textile producing markets in Bengal, Coromandel Coast and/or Surat over the period. The second possibility was that supplies of alum from China were cheaper, of better quality, or more easily and reliably transported and delivered via ship than available overland indigenous Indian sourced mordant supplies, which permitted proto-industrial textile manufacture producing villages that

were near Indian port cities to substitute and incorporate imported alum on an unprecedentedly widespread and heretofore un-heard of scale.

Essays XI and XII, respectively entitled, “Developing habits: opium and tobacco in the Indonesian archipelago, c. 1619–c. 1794,” and “Opium and the Company: maritime trade and Imperial finances on Java, 1684–1796,” examine in detail the utility, meaning, and importance of one object and commodity because of its properties and profitability transformed for numerous and diverse participants at multiple levels the history of intra-Asian commercial exchange over the long eighteenth century – Indian opium. “Developing habits,” for example, explores the commercial effect and impact upon trade relating to practices or the manner in which and how and why a substance is ingested or consumed through the prisms of commerce and consumption of opium and tobacco throughout the Indonesian Archipelago. The importance of opium production in Bengal, the streams of revenue that its commercialization produced for the British imperial project in India, and the manner in which it facilitated growth of the English East India Company’s trade with China over the eighteenth century is well-known. In “Opium and the Company,” the importance and the centrality of trade in opium in the fortunes and accounts of the Dutch East India Company’s commercial regime in Asia at Batavia (Jakarta) is exhaustively examined. It reveals how global opium (primarily from India – Bengal and Malwa and from Turkey – Anatolia) became the lynchpin in producing revenue locally on Java for the Company, which permitted and explains how easily commercialization of this commodity and its revenue production were channeled and harnessed by the Dutch colonial administration in the nineteenth century.

The thirteenth and last essay in this volume, “Global commodities and commerce in the Early Modern world: the case of Sri Lankan cinnamon,” examines production, commercialization, and demand for an early modern case study of a global commodity – Sri Lankan cinnamon. It discusses a theoretical and conceptual framework of analysis of commodities and their incorporation in maritime trade and economic development of a locality, region, intra-region, or of the globe on the basis of individual and/or collective commodity chain(s) in Asia. It argues that the historical behavior of a commodity chain in Asia is comparable with commodities present in all other parts of the world and in particular with those in Latin America. It advocates additional research on Asia’s early modern political economy and development to examine local, regional, intra-regional and global maritime economic and cultural contacts and connections by employing and incorporating commodity chain analysis.
