

THE UNTHREATENING ALTERNATIVE:
CHINESE SHIPPING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, 1567-1842*

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The peaceable, unambitious and supple character of the Chinese, and the conviction, on the part of the native governments, of their exclusive devotion to commercial pursuits, disarm all jealousy, and make them welcome guests everywhere. This very naturally and very justly gives them an equitable monopoly of the carrying trade, from which the ambition of Europeans, and the impolitic restraints of their own commercial policy, have excluded them (Crawford 1820 III, 185-6).

For most of the past millennium China was the major trading partner of Southeast Asia. In the thirteenth century Marco Polo (1298, 209) pointed out that for every shipload of tropical Asian spices that arrived in Venice there were a hundred arriving at the Chinese port of "Zaiton" (Quanzhou). That advantage was lost during the enormous explosion of European demand for spices in the "age of commerce," but as late as the 1820s there was still a larger tonnage of Chinese than of European shipping in the South China Sea.¹ Until the Nanjing Treaty of 1842 the bulk of the foreign trade of Vietnam, Siam and Cambodia, and a substantial proportion of the remainder, was carried in "Chinese" junks – though frequently Southeast Asia-based.

There was a natural complementarity between the densely populated and technically advanced Middle Kingdom and the sparsely settled tropical regions to its south. China exported manufactures almost exclusively – ceramics, silks, paper, and a great variety of metal tools and utensils - "cast iron kettles, bowls, basins...boxes, fans, plenty of needles of a hundred different kinds...and things of very poor quality like those which come to Portugal from Flanders," as Tomé Pires (1515, 125) put it. In exchange it took from Southeast Asia an extraordinary variety of exotic spices, medicines and aromatics (Chang 1991 lists the 115 import items of a 1618 Chinese catalogue of import dues) along with some bulkier goods such as Malayan tin, Indonesian pepper, cotton and at times even rice.

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¹ Viraphol (1977, 180) reckoned the tonnage of "Chinese" (both China- and Southeast Asia-based) junks in inter-Asian trade in the 1820s at 85,000 tons, whereas the British East India Company, which monopolized British trade with China before 1833, never had more than 30,000 tons.

Two factors explain the continued dominance of the junk trade long after the technical superiority of European-rigged ships might have been expected to make it obsolete. The first was the understandable suspicion of China's rulers towards the heavily armed Europeans. Most eastern Asian states tried to keep the Europeans at arms length after the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) had demonstrated its effectiveness in enforcing monopolies, but China had the size and self-sufficiency to do so successfully. Apart from the minor toehold for Portuguese shipping at Macao, it was virtually impossible for Europeans to trade directly with China before the Ming lifted their ban in 1684. Thereafter European-rigged ships could unload their cargoes only under severe disabilities. They could trade only at Canton, under the control of the formidable Hong merchants, and they faced much higher tariffs than Chinese-style junks.

The second factor was the peaceful record of Chinese shipping in Southeast Asia, in contrast to European. After the reign of the Yongle Emperor (1402-24) there were no further Chinese naval adventures in Southeast Asia. The junks sailing to or from China with government approval (the great majority after 1684) were limited in the armaments they could carry to two cannons and eight rifles, because of Chinese official fears that they might otherwise engage in piracy (Blussé 1986, 106). Even when Chinese numbers reached dozens of junks and thousands of men in ports such as Bangkok, Hoi An, Pnompenh, Riau and Sulu they presented little threat to the local regime, whereas the lesson was not lost of what had happened to indigenous rulers in Melaka, Ternate, Jakarta, Makassar or Banten at European hands. Hence many Southeast Asian rulers also raised tariffs and other obstacles to European shipping which did not apply to Chinese. As Savary des Bruslons (1723 I, 1183-84) remarked of Cambodia, "the king and people there cannot be relied on in their commerce with Europeans, as the English and Dutch have often experienced; they are nevertheless ordinarily quite reliable with the Chinese."

Because the literature on this branch of Southeast Asia's trade (at least in European languages) is much weaker than that on European and American trade, it is often assumed to have been either unimportant or somehow an historical constant, an unchanging relic of an earlier Asian era. The reality appears to be the reverse. The abrupt changes in Imperial policy towards foreign commerce caused discontinuities in the junk trade which were more marked than those even in the European and Indian trade. To understand the development of Southeast Asian states, all of which were dependent on trade revenue to a greater or lesser degree, it is important to examine these discontinuities.

In general, foreign maritime trade was not important in the eyes of the Chinese court. Trade was tolerated as a by-product of tribute missions from the south, and the standing rule that Chinese should not journey abroad on their own account was enforced fitfully. Until the

Southern Sung dynasty Southeast Asians and Arabs conducted most of the maritime trade, often in the guise of tribute, and Southeast Asia-based traders continued to play a major role until the end. There were, however, two periods of massive Chinese imperial intervention in the Nanyang (South Seas): first under Kublai Khan in the 1290s and again under the Yongle Emperor in 1402-24. In both cases hundreds of ships and tens of thousands of men were sent to Java, and many failed to come back. In both cases there were major technical innovations as ships of Chinese or hybrid Southeast Asian/Chinese style began to be used, and new Sino-Southeast Asian maritime elites evolved to play the leading role in trade in the South China Sea (Reid 1992). In both cases the flurry of activity was followed by a retreat into isolationism, so that the Chinese marooned in Southeast Asia were left to adapt as best they might.

The beginnings of regular trade

Although I have argued (Reid 1990) that the Cheng Ho (Zheng He) voyages under the Yongle Emperor marked the most appropriate beginning of Southeast Asia's "Age of Commerce," they by no means initiated any kind of stable private junk trade to the south. On the contrary private trade was strictly banned by the early Ming Emperors, while the Imperial court itself rapidly lost interest in sending official envoys to the south. It is striking that at the time the early Portuguese reports give us the first quantifiable survey of Southeast Asian trade, around 1510, specifically Chinese junks were a minor factor, and the bulk of trade between the Malay World and China was carried by Southeast Asian ships owned by merchants whom the Portuguese called "Malay," "Javanese" and "Luzon" (Pires 1515, 119-24), though I do not doubt that some of these traders had Chinese ancestry. For the Portuguese, and for other European observers down to about 1620, the term "junk" (derived from Malay and Javanese *jong*) referred to the large ships of the South China Sea whether crewed by Malays, Javanese or Chinese. It was only when Southeast Asians abandoned these large ships under pressure of European naval warfare in the early seventeenth century that the large Asian junks of these waters became identified as exclusively "Chinese."

It was in 1567 that the Chinese junk trade began on an orderly basis with approval from the Imperial authorities. A new Ming Emperor approved the repeated plea of Fujian authorities that junks be allowed to trade legally and thus bring profit to the government. Fifty junks a year were initially granted licenses (*wen-yin*) to trade in Southeast Asia. In 1589 the number of junks licensed for the south was raised to eighty-eight, in 1592 to 110 and in 1597 to 137.

For the eighty-eight Chinese ships licensed in the each of the three years 1589-91, we know the regional breakdown of ports they

cleared for, though numerous confusing toponyms are recorded, perhaps to disguise the fact that multiple ships were clearing to the same port. The additional licenses issued in 1589, 1592 and 1597 appear to have been based on the fiction that they were going to different ports.

Table 1
Junks licensed from Fujian, 1589-91²

to	"Luzon" (Manila)	16
	other Philippines	18
	Brunei	2
	Maluku	1
	other "Eastern Seas"	7
	Total "Eastern Seas"	44
to	Vietnamese ports	8
	Champa	3
	Cambodia	3
	Siam	4
	Ligor (Nakhon Sithammarat)	1
	Palani	1
	Pahang	1
	(Portuguese) Melaka	2
	Phuket (Junkceylon)	1
	Aceh ports	2
	South Sumatra ports	7
	West Java ports	8
	(southern) Borneo ports	2
	unidentified "western ocean"	1
	Total "Western Ocean"	44

Corroborating information is available particularly for the western Java ports, listed as Banten, Sunda and Kelapa in the Chinese record. These had been the principal centres for Portuguese pepper-ships supplying the Chinese market through Macao, but within a few decades the large Chinese junks had driven them out of the business (Lodewycksz 1598, 105). From Dutch reports it appears that annual Chinese fleets to Java remained of a similar size through the first three decades of the seventeenth century — about eight junks divided between Banten and Jakarta/Batavia, each of five or six hundred tonnes ("Verhael" 1597, 25; Coolhaas 1964, 1; Meilink-Roelofs 1962, 398; Blussé 1986, 109-15). Thereafter the global crisis, particularly severe in China, the collapse of the Ming dynasty (1644), and the continued rebellion of the Zheng dynasty in Fujian and Taiwan, kept Chinese shipping at a low level until the 1680s.

For Manila, Chaunu (1960, 148-75) has provided an exceptionally detailed record of shipping from 1620 onwards, which would give the following ten-year averages for the number of ships arriving from China and Formosa:

Table 2
Chinese ship arrivals per year in Manila

1620-29	14.8
1630-39	31.1
1640-49	15.7
1650-59	6.7
1660-69	6.0
1670-79	5.7
1680-89	9.4
1690-99	16.1
1700-09	21.8
1710-19	12.3

Most of the arrivals in the 1650s, 1660s and 1670s were in fact ships belonging to the Ming-loyalist Zheng (Koxinga) regime based in Taiwan and Fujian, or else Southeast Asia-based ships. The Qing Imperial government tried to close down foreign trade altogether and even forced the evacuation of the coastal regions of Fujian, so that virtually no junks sailed to Southeast Asia with the blessing of the authorities. In 1683, however, a Qing admiral conquered Taiwan for the Emperor and ended the Zheng rebellion, and the following year the ban on trade with Southeast Asia was lifted. The junk trade expanded rapidly, with a peak of twenty-seven ships reaching Manila in 1686 and forty-three in 1709. For Batavia the busiest year was 1694 when twenty-one junks entered the port (Wills 1991, 63). The period between 1684 and a renewed imperial ban on Southeast Asian trade in 1717 represented a second boom for the junk trade, though probably not at quite the level of the earlier peak in 1590-1630. The figures for Batavia (see Table 3) show that Chinese shipping to that port not only increased until the imperial ban of 1717, but continued its upward path in 1722 after an interruption of only four years, even though the ban remained in force until 1727 (Cushman 1978, 141-2). The junk trade to Batavia grew steadily until the 1740 massacre of Chinese in that city. This period also coincides with that of the most effective VOC monopolies or quasi-monopolies of cloves, nutmeg, pepper, cinnamon, Indian cloth and a number of other crucial items, however, so that Chinese trade was undoubtedly more concentrated on Batavia in this period than it was in any port in the earlier period.

² Zhang Xie 1618, 131-32; also Chang 1991, 161-63; Innes 1980, 52-53; Chen 1974, 12.

Table 3
Chinese ships annually arriving in Batavia (Blussé 1986, 120-3)

1671-80	3.0
1681-90	9.7
1691-1700	11.5
1701-10	11.0
1711-20	13.6
1721-30	16.4
1731-40	17.7
1741-50	10.9
1751-60	9.1
1761-70	7.4
1771-80	5.1
1781-90	9.3
1791-1800	9.5

The *Tōsen* trade to Nagasaki

Fortunately we are not wholly reliant on European sources in our attempts to estimate the dimensions of the Chinese junk trade in Southeast Asia. After the closure (*sakoku*) of Japan in the 1630s, Japanese were forbidden to travel overseas on pain of death, and foreign commerce was strictly limited to Nagasaki where only the VOC and Chinese junks were permitted to trade. A triangular form of trade developed, with Chinese vessels, often based in Southeast Asian ports, travelling between one or more Southeast Asian ports, one or more Chinese ports, and Nagasaki.

The captain of each Chinese vessel (*Tōsen*) arriving in Nagasaki was interviewed by Chinese interpreters, and a report on each vessel (*Tōsen-fusetsugaki*) was duly filed. This process began in 1644, but a consistent pattern of reporting on the junks dates only from 1674. From then until 1724 there is a remarkable series of documents preserved in a collection known as the *Kai-hentai*. Although they have been used by a number of scholars, few Southeast Asianists have been able to make use of them because of the difficult Japanese in which they are written. Professor Yoneo Ishii of Sophia University has now undertaken a translation of all these documents for ships arriving from Siam, Cambodia, and the Malay world. What follows is entirely indebted to his expertise and generosity.³

Prior to 1684 it was factors on the Chinese side which limited the trade to Nagasaki. After the Qing (Manchu) dynasty established control of the capital in 1644, it fought a long battle against the freebooter Zheng Chenggong forces in Fujian and Taiwan, before Taiwan was finally reconquered in 1684. The result was that on average only

³ This translation will be published as a Data Paper of the Economic History of Southeast Asia Project at the ANU. See also Professor Ishii's summary of the documents relating to Siam in Ishii 1988, 5-7, 12-15. My attempts to aggregate the *Kai-Hentai* data are further indebted to the labours of Tan Lay-cheng and Wu Yiqi, to whom many thanks.

thirty-eight "Chinese" junks a year (p.a.) visited Nagasaki in the period 1655-61, falling further to twenty-four p.a. in 1662-72 and fourteen p.a. during the final offensive against the Zheng regime in 1673-84 (Innes 1980, 174-5). Among these junks an exceptionally high proportion came from Southeast Asian ports — 41 percent for the whole period 1674-84, and half in the years 1679-84 — thereby avoiding the fighting and restrictions of the China coast (Ishii forthcoming). After Chinese restrictions on trade were lifted in 1684, a flood of junks set out from southern and eastern China for Nagasaki, and junks reporting in from Southeast Asia never again represented more than one-fifth of the total. The totals arriving from different Southeast Asian ports are given below by decade.

Table 4
Chinese junks arriving Nagasaki from Southeast Asian ports⁴

Decade	Tongking	Cochin-China	Cambodi a	Siam	Patani	Banten	Dutch	Total ports
1651-60	15	40	37	28	20	1	2	143
1661-70	6	43	24	26	9	-	14	122
1671-80	8	41	10	26	9	1	38	133
1681-90	12	25	9	31	9	1	23	110
1691-1700	6	29	23	19	7	1	18	103
1701-10	3	12	1	11	2	0	2	31
1711-19	2	5	1	4	0	0	1	13
1720-24	0	4	1	2	0	0	0	7
Total	52	199	106	147	56	4	98	662

Unfortunately the size of the vessels and their cargoes were not recorded in these *Tōsen* documents. The Batavia shipping lists are a better guide to these matters, and show that 80 percent of the junks arriving in Batavia from China between 1685 and 1715 were between 150 and 200 tons (Blussé 1986, 123). One Batavia junk measured by the Japanese was ninety-six feet (10 m) long and 18.8 feet wide (ibid., 108). It is probably safe to assume the junks trading to Nagasaki from the Archipelago and Siam were of similar dimensions, as indicated by the crew numbers in Table 5 (which would suggest around 200 tons if we can accept Crawford's formula of forty men for 100 tons), and smaller junks ran from Cambodia and the Vietnamese ports. One of the captains who had made the trip from Cambodia to Nagasaki made the point that Cambodia-based junks "are mostly of small construction and are not big enough to load cargoes for Japan" (Ship 26 of 1695). Such junks presumably concentrated on the coastal trade to south China, leaving it

⁴ This table is derived from combining Li Tana's (1992) and Yoneo Ishii's readings of figures compiled by Iwao Seiichi. During this period there were two Vietnamese states known to foreigners as Tongking and Cochin-China, respectively the Trinh-ruled Red River Delta and the Nguyen-ruled central coast of today's Vietnam.

to the bigger junks based in South China or Siam to collect Cambodian deerskins for Japan.

Another series of reports from Nagasaki, the *Tōban Kamatsuchō*, did record cargoes, but only five such reports on junks from Siam have survived, covering the years 1711-12 (Ishii 1988, 6), and these are not available to me. We know in general terms, however, that Japan imported large quantities of deerskins from the forests of Siam and Cambodia, sugar from Siam and Java and silk from Vietnam (and China), exporting in exchange primarily metals.

The *Tōsen* documents do provide details of the voyages of the junks arriving in Nagasaki, and of their complement of crew. This information, summarized in Table 5, is of considerable interest. The crew of all vessels were simply listed as Chinese (*Tōjin*) except when Siamese or Khmer were specifically mentioned. The fact that most of the vessels arriving from Ayutthaya were based there, with crews who may not have seen China for a long time if at all, appears only indirectly from the data. Only the vessels from Ayutthaya regularly carried a small minority of indigenous crew-members, ranging from one to a maximum of nine, who probably represented the interests of the Thai royal or aristocratic owners of the vessels in question. Three vessels from Cambodia were also reported as each carrying one indigenous Khmer.

Table 5

Tōsen voyages from Siam, Patani and Cambodia

	Ayutthaya ^a	Songkhla & Ligor	Patani	Cambodia	Melaka	Batavia
No. reported	64	18	59	34	8	44
of which royal	21	-	-	-	-	-
Ave. crew	87	54	59	56	35	55
of which native	2.5	0.1	-	0.1	-	0.4
Ave. days to Nagasaki	54	58	47	45	81	85
Range	18-98	28-77	28-73	24-112	50-117	40-196
% uncompleted in year	8	-	6	-	-	7
% reporting damage or jettisoning cargo	36	28	50	41	25	28
Shipwrecks reported	4	-	2	3	1	1
% home port in:						
Lower Yang-tze (Ningbo)	5	33	22	24	-	16
Fujian	3	17	11	43	13	16
Guangdong	2	6	17	6	13	-
Taiwan	3	-	6	-	-	-
SE Asia	Siam 70%	-	Patani 6%	Siam 9%	Melaka 39%	Batavia 39% Tongking 2%

⁵ This figure is inferred, where the junk appears to have travelled directly to and from Siam with no mention of visiting a Chinese port. Inees (1980, 176) points out that after King Narai restored relations with Japan in 1661, "almost all the

The picture given by John Crawford (1820 III, 177) and repeated by Hsieh Chao-chih (cited Blussé 1986, 108-09) was that despite the unwieldiness of the ships and the poor navigation skills of their crews there were relatively few mishaps in the junks because they did not attempt to tack against the wind or sail at unseasonable times, but simply sailed a straight course before the reliable monsoon winds. The vessels did indeed obey the rhythm of the monsoons absolutely, always travelling north in the fourth, fifth or sixth Chinese month (June or July), south from China in the twelfth or first month (January or February), and south from Japan a little earlier than that. Nevertheless a very high accident rate is recorded in these figures. Cargo was frequently thrown overboard to avoid foundering, ships were dismasted or holed, and the sense of having "nearly sunk" is conveyed in many of the documents. The total shipwrecks emerge only piecemeal through the reports of other masters. In addition to the nine wrecks itemized in the table as ships coming from a particular Southeast Asian port, there were six further reports or rumours of wrecks. The commonest scene of disaster was the south China coast (six reports), followed by the Japanese islands off Nagasaki (three) and the Champa coast of southern Indochina (one).

The ships from Ayutthaya (the Siamese capital) most often appear to have made a simple voyage to Nagasaki and back, with numerous cases of ships and captains making repeated trips in successive years. Of the forty-two captains who reported on the subject, thirty-one had previously visited Nagasaki. Only a small minority (one in eight) of the ships from Ayutthaya reported stopping on the China coast on their way to Nagasaki. Since these were larger ships, typically owned and based in Siam, they probably left the Chaophraya River already with a full cargo and had no reason to stop.

The picture is more complicated at the smaller ports, where captains might sometimes call on a speculative basis. The traffic from Cambodia typically went in a triangular fashion, from a south China port to Cambodia to Nagasaki and back to China. A slightly larger proportion of ships than the Siamese, one in six, also reported stopping at a Chinese port (Putao Shang or Ningbo) for a week or two on the outward voyage to Nagasaki. One captain (ship 52 of 1689) reported that his ship had visited Nagasaki the previous year from Cochin-China (the southern Vietnamese state) and then "returned" to Fuzhou. From there he had set out for Cambodia in the second month, but discovered (presumably in Hoi An, the Cochin-China port near modern Danang) that Cambodia was in turmoil. He therefore left his junk in

Chinese junks plying the waters between Nagasaki and Ayudhya belonged to the Siamese king, members of the royal family, high officials, or especially authorized merchants" in Ayutthaya. The Siamese royal ships alone constituted 54 percent of those listed after 1690.

Hoi An and hired a smaller craft to take his cargo up the Mekong to Cambodia and carry the Cambodian produce back to Hoi An, whence he left for Nagasaki in the seventh month. Another ship (83 of 1697) set out from Amoy in early 1694 for Cambodia and used it as a base for three years, trading to other Southeast Asian countries and accumulating a return cargo with which it sailed to Nagasaki on the fifth month (June) of 1697.

Ships from the Peninsula ports, which did not provide the Japanese import requirements which deerskins and sugar represented in Siam and Cambodia, were still more interested in stopping at Chinese ports. Those reporting from Dutch Melaka were openly using the quota provided for Melaka in Japan to carry Chinese silks to Nagasaki. They invariably carried Malayan tin and pepper to China (usually Guangdong) and there loaded Chinese silks for Japan. Two thirds of the ships from Patani and Songkhla, and all those from Melaka, reported calling at Ningbo, Putaoshang, Lu-wan, Amoy or Zhoushang, for periods of between one and four weeks, or in one case for ten months. Ship 115 of 1687 was based in Amoy. Its captain had visited Nagasaki fifteen years earlier on the run from Amoy, but on this occasion decided to sail to Patani because he believed there was little competition on the Patani-Nagasaki route. The ship left Amoy on the 26th day of the first Chinese month, 1687, and arrived in Patani twenty-eight days later.

However we found little produce there and were wondering what to do when a ship from Cambodia entered Patani on the 28th day of the third month with Cambodian deerskin, lacquer and so forth, which we bought. With this cargo supplemented by some Patani products such as cowhide, Patani deerskin, sugar, honey, camphor and aloes wood we left Patani on the eighth day of the sixth month.

They reached the Guangdong coast at Peiliaoyu twenty-eight days later, paused for five days to collect water and firewood, then sailed for thirteen days towards Nagasaki. Just off Tsushima they encountered a strong southeast wind which caused them to jettison their deck cargo and their only gun. Having survived this storm, they were taken in custody by the Japanese coastguard and conducted to Nagasaki.

The *Tōsen* documents after 1688 are full of the problems created for the Chinese traders by the increasingly tight Japanese restrictions on them. In 1685 the Bakufu had imposed a quota of imports of 300,000 taels for the Dutch and 600,000 for the Chinese, which was only a fraction of the cargoes carried to Nagasaki by hopeful shippers excited to be released from the Chinese bans on trade. In 1688 the flow of junks to Nagasaki (chiefly carrying silk directly from China) reached an all-time peak of 192 vessels. Japanese authorities, already concerned to prevent an outflow of precious metals, were provoked by this disorderly

rush to take even sterner measures. A strict quota of seventy Chinese vessels a year were allowed into Nagasaki, ten of them from Southeast Asia (Tongking 1, Cochin-China 3, Cambodia 1, Siam 2, Patani 1, Batavia 2). Southeast Asian junks were also limited to a maximum import value of 200 *kanme* (20,000 taels) per junk, less than the silk-bearing junks from China. In 1708 the annual quota of junks was reduced to fifty-nine and in 1715 to thirty, of which only five from Southeast Asia (Innes 1980, 322-53). As Wills (1991, 76) puts it, the eighteenth century saw "a steady decline and marginalization of the Chinese commercial connection with Japan."

A difficult period, 1690-1750

Despite the freeing of Chinese trade after 1684 and the rise of Amoy (Xiamen) to a dominant position in Chinese coastal and overseas shipping (Ng 1983), the junk trade in Southeast Asia remained at relatively modest levels during the following half-century. The period (1690-1740) which Blussé (1986, 121-37) identifies as "the heyday of the junk trade" must not be understood as applying to Southeast Asia as a whole, but basically to Batavia. As mentioned, this was the period when Archipelago produce was most nearly monopolized by the VOC, so that there were few cargoes to be found at independent ports. It was a period of sharp decline in the Japan branch of trade, while the reign of Petracha (1688-1701) represented the absolute doldrums for the major Chinese base in independent Southeast Asia, at Siam. The Kangxi Emperor did not help matters by returning to a policy of banning private trade to the south in 1717, out of alarm that Chinese rice and ships were being sold abroad. This ban was only gradually lifted after 1727, primarily on the new grounds that rice could be imported from Siam (and to a lesser extent Luzon), which was a vital supplement to the diet of coastal Fujian (Viraphol 1977, 55-57; Ng 1991, 378-79; Suebsaeng 1971, 262). By the 1740s the fleet of Chinese junks annually trading to Southeast Asia had climbed back to 110 (Viraphol 1977, 72; cf. Ng 1991, 381), roughly the same level as during the peak of the "age of commerce" in 1590-1620.

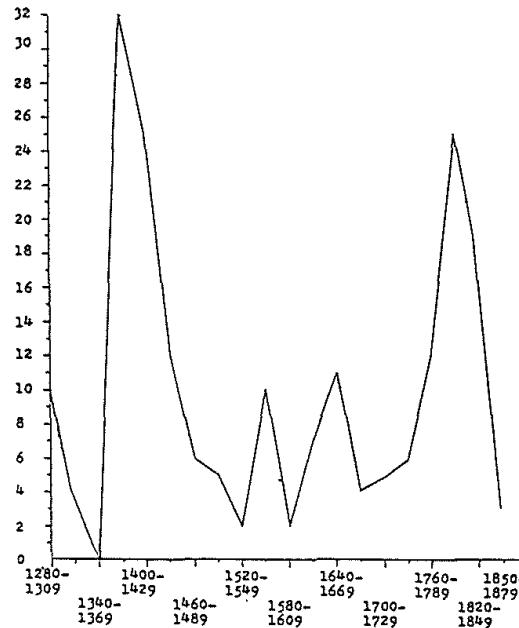
While the trade associated with tribute missions was only one aspect of relations between China and Southeast Asia, its intensity is one index of the strength of official relations between the two regions. Even during the periods of official bans on private trade, Southeast Asian states, using locally-owned Chinese junks, were able to conduct a substantial trade. The Siamese missions, for example, were officially permitted to take three junks laden with trade goods on each of their missions, and they sometimes took a chance on exceeding regulations by sending four ships or even sending two tribute missions in the one year (Suebsaeng 1971, 257). It is therefore significant that the whole period between 1460 and 1760 was something of a trough in tribute relations

between the two great peaks in the periods 1370-1430 and 1760-1820 (see Graph 1). A particularly sustained trough occurred between 1670 and 1750, when Siam — the most assiduous sender of tribute by sea — managed to send on average only one mission every seven years, as opposed to nearly one every year during the peak periods (Suebsaeng 1971, 105-123). This trend, combined with the cessation of tribute missions from the Archipelago after the arrival of the Spanish and Dutch, would have suggested that the aspect of the junk trade linked to tribute missions was on its way to extinction.

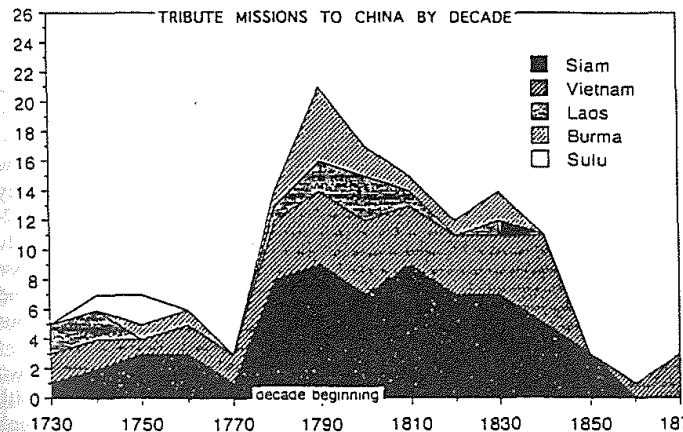
The boom years, 1760-1840

As Graphs 1 and 2 show, there was in fact an extraordinary leap in the sending of tribute missions to China after 1780, which lasted until 1850.⁶ Not only did Siam send nearly one mission by sea every year in the 1790s and early 1800s, but Vietnam, Laos and Burma increased the tempo of their missions by land to a level not seen for centuries. This phenomenon needs fuller examination.⁷ Undoubtedly one factor was the economic opportunity these missions offered at a time of global population increase and trade expansion. As Crawford (1828, 409) pointed out, "under pretext of it [tribute] the Siamese court is enabled every year to send two large junks of...between 900 and 1000 tons each, to Canton, which, at the expense of a few trifling presents, are exempted from the payment of all duties." Another factor was probably the increasing anxiety of independent Southeast Asian states about the dangers of encouraging the major commercial alternative — frequent visits by armed European ships.

A surprising feature of these graphs is the reappearance of the Archipelago after a gap of two centuries, in the form of the Sulu sultanate renewing its fifteenth-century links with the Middle Kingdom. This is a particularly striking demonstration of a broader but little-studied phenomenon in Southeast Asian trade in the mid-seventeenth century. The erosion of the effectiveness of the VOC's control of Archipelago trade, the growth of population and prosperity in China during a period of remarkable peace there, and the increasing vigour of East-West trade in various forms, created new opportunities for trade-based states in Southeast Asia to build a symbiotic relationship with Chinese shippers. Sulu had been among the ports which profited from the freeing of Chinese trade in 1684, but regular



Graph 1: Tribute missions per 30-year period, from Siam to China from Suebsang Promboon 1971.



Graph 2: Tribute missions to China from various Southeast Asian countries, 1730-1870 (numbers per decade)

⁶ The data for Siam is taken from Suebsang 1971, while for the other countries I am indebted to Li Tana's assistance in reading the *Qing Shi Lu*.

⁷ I hope that a project which I am coordinating for the Toyota Foundation on "The last stand of autonomous states in eastern Asia" will help to resolve this and other mysteries.

annual visits of junks seem to have begun in the 1720s, while by the 1750s there were on average two junks from Amoy every year. Sulu became a major regional base for the collection of sea-slugs (tripang), pearls, tortoise shell and other marine produce for shipment to China. In 1725 some of the enterprising Chinese captains engaged in this trade began overtures for formal tributary relations, which led in 1726 to the first formal tribute mission to Beijing. Further missions followed in 1728, 1733, 1742, 1746, 1753, 1754 and 1763, each sending pearls, birds' nests and other delicacies to the Imperial court. These missions represented for the sultans of Sulu both opportunities for trade more profitable than those in the ordinary annual voyages, and some degree of moral protection against Spanish, Dutch and English attempts to establish control of the Sulu Archipelago (Warren 1981, 5-9; Majul 1973, 249-55, 347-52; Ng 1991, 391-93).

Riau was another beneficiary of the rising numbers of Chinese junks annually travelling to the south in the 1750s and '60s, though its location made it more vulnerable than Sulu to political and military threats from Dutch, Bugis and Minangkabau. In Cochinchina the period around 1750, just before the chaos wrought by the Tayson rebellion, was a peak for the junk trade, with fifty to seventy vessels a year visiting the port of Hoi An (Faifo) (Li Tana 1992, 95, 98; Chen Chingho 1974, 26).

The major centre in Southeast Asia for the junk trade, however, was Siam. As we have seen Ayutthaya had been the Southeast Asian court most interested in tribute missions, and one of the ports most reliant on Chinese-manned shipping. This great city fell to the Burmese in 1767 and was almost totally destroyed. Siamese fortunes were restored by the efforts of Phya Tak, son of a Teochiu immigrant father and a Thai mother, who had been brought up in the household of a Thai nobleman and spoke fluent Thai and Chinese as well as some Malay and Vietnamese. He fled the Burmese advance to the southeast, where Teochiu immigrants were principally concentrated, rallied support to drive the Burmese out, and founded a new capital lower down the Chaophraya at Thonburi. During his reign, and that of his equally half-Chinese successor and son-in-law, Rama I, at Bangkok (1782-1809), Chinese shippers, shipbuilders and traders were particularly encouraged to locate themselves on the Chaophraya. Bangkok rose rapidly to become the busiest port between Calcutta and Canton, and the new prosperity of Siam was built on an exceptionally harmonious Sino-Thai relationship.

The dimensions of the junk trade at its height in the first two decades of the nineteenth century will probably never be known with precision. Our best guide to the subject is John Crawford, who took particularly careful notes on the trade during the many years he spent in Java (1811-16), Singapore (1823-26), and on an important British mission to Siam and Vietnam (1821). Table 6 is based on the data in

Crawford's *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820 III, 182-84), supplemented by the fuller data on Siam and Vietnam resulting from his 1821 mission (Crawford 1828, 410-12, 511-13).

The largest vessels in Crawford's survey were the three Amoy (Xiamen) junks sailing annually to Batavia, each of 1100 tons burden. In general all vessels making the long voyage to the Archipelago were of 500 tons or more. By contrast the host of small vessels crowding the harbours of Vietnam were seldom more than 200 tons. Chinese junk-captains told Crawford (1828, 512) that junks of 3000 pikuls (187 tons) were the largest which could navigate the Red River for the ports of Hanoi. The largest number of small vessels trading to Vietnamese and Siamese ports was in fact from Hainan (though classified here with Guangdong). Crawford noted that "seldom less than fifty" small vessels of between 125 and 210 tons burden visited Bangkok each year from Hainan.

Table 6
Junk Traffic of South China Sea, c.1820

Home port in	Siam		Guangdong		Fujian		Total	
Route to	No.	tons	No.	tons	No.	Tons	No.	Tons
Vietnam, North			24	3100	14	2000	38	5100
—, Centre			28	4050	20	3750	48	7800
—, Saigon			22	3625	7	2875	29	6500
Siam	81	24,560	56	10155	2	375	139	35090
Riau-Lingga			1	500	2	1600	3	2100
Kelantan					1	800	1	800
Teresngganu					1	800	1	800
Brunei			3	1500			3	1500
Sambas			2	1000			2	1000
Pontianak			3	1500			3	1500
Mampawa			2	1000			2	1000
Banjarmasin			1	600			1	600
Java			4	2000	3	3300	7	5300
Makassar					2	1000	2	1000
Ambon					1	500	1	500
Sulu					2	1600	2	1600
Manila					4-5	2000	4-5	2000
Total	81	24,560	146	29,030	59	20,600	286	74,190

If one were to remove from Crawford's estimates the ninety-six Hainanese junks trading to Vietnam and Siam and the shipping based in Bangkok, the 109 junks from Fujian and Guangdong proper do not represent a very large figure compared with Chinese listings for the 1590s or the 1740s. Crawford may have underestimated. His figures for Java are lower than those in the Dutch records (Table 3 above), and an earlier English estimate (1795) had given the much larger figure of 100-200 large junks and 1000 small ones sailing southward from China every year (Warren 1975, 16-17). I believe, however, that Crawford was most likely to have been accurate in the same area covered by the licensed junks of the earlier Chinese figures — large ocean-going junks owned in

Fujian and Guangdong, and sailing with the blessing of the Chinese authorities there. It appears that these junks had grown bigger, particularly the richest ones from Amoy, but their number had not grown much in the previous half-century. There was increasing competition for them from European-rigged ships, which could complete three voyages between Canton and Batavia per year in comparison with one for the junks, and with greater security according to Crawford (1820 III, 178).

On the other hand there was a meteoric rise in Southeast Asia-based Chinese shipping. Crawford had the opportunity for a careful study of the shipping of Bangkok in 1821, and recorded this neglected phenomenon there. The likelihood is, however, that there were numerous other junks based at Ha Tien, the lower Mekong and elsewhere which escaped his notice, and which took some part in the China trade as well as along Southeast Asian routes. His own calculations showed that building a junk in Siam or southern Vietnam cost only half what it did in a Fujian port — fifteen-sixteen Spanish dollars per ton as opposed to thirty in Fujian and twenty in Canton (Crawford 1828, 49). Southeast Asian owners of Chinese junks therefore began with a considerable price advantage.

In addition to the expansion of Bangkok-based shipping to China in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was a rapid growth role in intra-Southeast Asian trade carried in Siamese junks. At the time of his visit in 1821, Crawford considered about 200 Bangkok-based junks were trading within Southeast Asian waters, about fifty of them to Vietnam (principally Saigon), a similar number to the Malacca Straits ports, and the remainder chiefly to the east coast of the Malayan Peninsula, western Borneo, Palembang and Java. To some extent this trade was gathering Archipelago goods for the China market, but increasingly too it was collecting Indian and European cottons to provide Siam itself, in exchange for Siamese foodstuffs to feed the urban and immigrant communities of the region — rice, salt, sugar and oil. Crawford reckoned the average size of these junks to be 140 tons, and the total tonnage of this regional shipping therefore about 28,000 tons. Adding the China branch of the trade, he reckoned that 11,500 seamen were engaged in Siam's total trade, most of them ethnically Chinese (Crawford 1828, 414-16).

The transformation of Chinese shipping, 1819-1850

The establishment of the British port of Singapore rapidly altered the complexion of Sino-Southeast Asian trade. Singapore almost immediately became the principal Straits port for junks to collect Western and Indian goods, and eventually also replaced Bangkok as a Southeast Asian entrepot for trade with China. Already in the official year 1829-30, sixty-six square-rigged vessels and twelve Chinese junks

cleared Singapore for China, figures which grew to 134 and eighteen in 1835-6, and to 187 and ninety-seven in 1841-2 (Wong 1961, 276).

The junks, which had tended to focus the trade of the Gulf of Siam in Bangkok at the beginning of the century, progressively made Singapore their major entrepot. In 1829-30 there arrived in Singapore thirty-one Siamese junks and forty-nine from Vietnam. The Saigon-Singapore junk trade continued to grow rapidly, turning southern Vietnam's trade to Singapore rather than China. In 1847-8 162 junks arrived in the British port from Vietnam. In the Bangkok-Singapore trade there was a challenge from square-rigged ships, some of them owned by the Thai aristocracy, yet the advantageous tariffs enjoyed by junks kept their numbers growing right up until the Burney Treaty of 1855. Eighty-five Siamese junks arrived in Singapore in 1853-4, against only thirty-seven European-rigged ships (*ibid.*, 139-40, 278-79).

Some Southeast Asia-based Chinese traders already employed square-rigged vessels, and occasionally also European captains, before the Nanjing Treaty of 1842. The process had begun in the seventeenth century for the inter-island trade. The opening of the Treaty ports of Canton, Shanghai, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Amoy to European shipping, however, removed the most powerful economic incentive to retain traditional ship styles. Gradually even Singapore Chinese began to use European-rigged vessels to ship their goods to China more quickly and cheaply. By 1865-66 the tonnage of junks on the Singapore-China routes was only 4,500, about one-hundredth of the capacity of square-rigged ships (*ibid.*, 123).

The Chinese entrepreneurs of Southeast Asia and southern China remained in the shipping business. They continued to play a major role in the shipping networks which linked Southeast Asia to Singapore, Canton, Hong Kong and Amoy. But the characteristic features which had made the Chinese junk trade a real alternative to Western-dominated shipping networks gave way in the mid-nineteenth century. This shift was connected with the loss of effective independence of the remaining countries of Southeast Asia in the decade which followed.

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