Boundaries and Beyond
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CHAPTER 12

Expanding Possibilities:
Revisiting the Min-Yue Junk-trade
Enterprise on the China Coast and in the
Nanyang during the Eighteenth to the
Mid-Nineteenth Centuries

Introduction
Scope of Discussion

The maritime expansion of the Min (Fujian) and Yue (Guangdong) people is a broad topic, which numerous researchers have examined from a variety of angles over the last few decades. It often requires meticulous, painstaking efforts on the part of researchers to assemble scattered information about the Min-Yue people’s seafaring activities in general and their junk trade in particular. The main goal of the present discussion is to take stock of the existing literature, re-read some oft-cited research materials and examine the topic from a longer and broader perspective. Often, the seafaring activities have been perceived to be the achievements of Chinese in general, rather than more specifically focused on particular ethnic groups, namely the Min and Yue people, who played the most important role in these processes. The geographical areas covered in the discussion are the Guangdong-Fujian region on the southeastern coast of China, other stretches of the China coast and the Nanyang (Southeast Asia). Setting the events against their historical backdrop, the discussion

1. This is a revamped, enlarged version of a paper written in Chinese for the “Symposium on Ocean Cultures” held at the National Cheng Kong University, Tainan, on October 9–10, 2010. The Chinese version is published in Haigang·hainan-haidao: Haiyang wenhua lunji 海港·海难·海盗: 海洋文化论集 [Ports, Shipwrecks, Pirates: A Collection of Essays on Ocean Cultures], ed. Cheng Wing-sheung 鄭永常主編 (Tainan: Center for Humanities and Social Sciences of the National Cheng Kong University, 2012), pp. 25–70.
highlights the peak period of the Min-Yue people’s seaborne activities from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. The narrative will go beyond the descriptions of ships, cargoes and ports and will focus the spotlight on the human actors. By taking a panoramic view of the omnipresence of the seafarers and their contributions to the formation of mercantile communities at home and abroad, the scattered pieces of information will be assembled to form a coherent picture. It is hoped that this endeavor will bridge some missing links in the existing scholarship.

Fujian and Guangdong provinces on China’s southeastern coast are also known by their respective abbreviated names of “Min” and “Yue”, but in this chapter, the two geographical terms will principally denote the four coastal prefectural units of Quanzhou and Zhangzhou in southern Fujian, and Chaozhou and Canton (Guangzhou) in Guangdong. Since the seventeenth century, the three ports of Amoy (Xiamen), Changlim (Zhanglin) and Canton in the Min-Yue region had been playing an increasingly important role in the Chinese junk trade. A good start would be to look at the term “Min people”. In this chapter it denotes the Quan-Zhang people of southern Fujian, also known as the South Fujianese (Minnan, or Hokkien) people. The term “Yue people” denotes the Chaozhou (Teochiu/Teochew) people when it refers to the major group of seafarers who fitted out the trading junks from Changlim in eastern Guangdong. Although Canton was a transshipment and operation base for the South Fujianese and Chaozhou people, the native Cantonese did not personally engage in maritime trade in significant numbers during the period in question. By the early nineteenth century, another group that became involved in coasting trade with Vietnam and Siam had emerged. They came from Qiongzhou prefecture in Hainan Island, then part of Guangdong province.

From the source materials, it is not always possible in all cases to identify the native-place origins of the ship-owners, shippers and merchants connected to the junk trade. Complicating the matter even further is the fact that it was not uncommon for the Min-Yue merchants to operate their maritime businesses in ports that were not their hometowns. In their eyes, this was a sound strategy that enabled them to manage the businesses in which they had the greatest stake personally. The upshot was that this practice created double or multiple identities for them in the sense that it cannot be said for certain whether these settlers should be regarded as locals or expatriates who had come from other districts or provinces. However, all is not lost, since from the sources it is still possible to puzzle out the predominant role of the Min-Yue people in the junk trade enterprise.
In the maritime history of China, the Min-Yue region stands out from that of other coastal areas. A glimpse at the rise of seaports in domestic and international trade on the China coast cogently illustrates this point. Since the Qin-Han periods (221 BC–AD 220) Canton had been a prominent port city. Quanzhou (also known to foreigners as Zaytun) in southern Fujian was another seaport that established its reputation in the maritime world between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries. During this period, Quanzhou attracted the attention of foreigners, especially Muslims from the Middle East, and its reputation as a bustling seaport practically eclipsed that of Canton. When the Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta arrived in China by sea around 1347, Quanzhou was the first city he visited. He was greatly impressed by its grandeur and remarked that, “Zaytun is an immense city... The port of Zaytun is one of the largest in the world, or perhaps the very largest. I saw in it about a hundred large junks; as for small junks, they could not be counted for multitude.”

The mid-fifteenth century, during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), saw the emergence of Yuegang in southern Fujian as a rendezvous for seafarers. Contemporary observers compared its flourishing trade and economic prosperity to the two wealthy cities of Suzhou and Hangzhou in the Lower Yangzi region. Owing to its increasing importance and to rein in the notorious smuggling activities in its vicinity more effectively, in 1567 the Ming Court decided to elevate what was then a non-administrative town to the status of Haicheng district. As the maritime trade with Manila, founded by the Spanish in 1571, increased tremendously, hundreds of trading junks embarked from Haicheng to trade with this new colonial settlement.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, a new phase in maritime expansion was dawning with the rise of Amoy in southern Fujian and Changlim in eastern Guangdong. As a consequence, the seaborne trade carried by the Min-Yue people began to gain momentum and soared to new heights. The rapid growth ushered in a golden age of inter-port trade on the China coast and in the Nanyang in terms of trade volume, the value of cargoes, mass participation and the geographical extent of their activities from the eighteenth to the first half of the nineteenth centuries. It was the entrepreneurial and resourceful merchants hailing from Amoy and Changlim who created and dominated this maritime enterprise. Canton, that had already been a major port for some two thousand years, now became a crucial operations and transshipment base for the Min-Yue people, especially those who engaged in foreign trade. Together,

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these trading ports had inherited and brought skillfully into play their long tradition of seafaring activities. They became embarkation points and windows on the maritime world for the Min-Yue merchants and emigrants.

A few words are necessary to define “port city” as a conceptual term used in this discussion. A seaport means more than a harbor in which ships lie at anchor; it also comprises the surrounding land space in which a trading community resides in order to conduct their transactions. A port also functions as a node of business networks connecting it to the interior and other seaports along trade routes.

**Main Aspects**

Adopting a macro-approach to the junk-shipping enterprise during the period in question, this chapter covers a cluster of four research blocks as follows:

(a) the socioeconomic factors that led to the development of seafaring enterprises;
(b) the formation of commercial and information networks that contributed to the expansion of coastal trade and inter-port shipping on the China coast;
(c) the golden age of the Min-Yue overseas junk trade in the Nanyang; and
(d) the participatory roles of the Min-Yue merchants in the port cities at home and abroad.

Investigating these broad areas of kaleidoscopic development that led to the expansion of maritime trade provides the tools from which to build a coherent picture of the shipping and inter-port trade in which the Min-Yue people played a key role.

**Sources of Information**

Scattered but crucial information about the Chinese junk trade is buried in the huge Chinese and western archives waiting to be unearthed in the future. Also valuable are the contemporary accounts and reports in various western languages. Owing to the nature of the sources, anyone attempting to work on the topic will face the often insuperable obstacle of having to acquire knowledge of multiple languages. For information on the socioeconomic and historical background, researchers will find the Chinese archival and printed primary sources most useful.
They are often official compilations that offer only scattered, but nonetheless indispensable information about the junk trade. In the matter of the Chinese junk trade in the Nanyang in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, western eyewitness accounts or reports are the most informative materials because they were recorded by officials or observers who had first-hand contacts with the traders in the markets. Those who can cross the language barrier and afford the time will want to consult the various archives of western trading companies that were present in Southeast Asia and trading to Canton in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These company records also contain original Chinese correspondence relating to the trade transactions in Canton.

For the first half of the nineteenth century, contemporary western accounts given by observers on the spot provide valuable information. Writings often cited in the past are the works by John Crawfurd that offer glimpses of the Chinese junk trade during this period. Crawfurd published two books in 1820 and 1828. He also left behind important official documents relating to his mission to Siam in 1822. Born in 1783, John Crawfurd became a medical doctor. During the British occupation of Java from 1811 to 1816, he served as British Resident at the Court of the Sultan of Yogyakarta. Upon his return to England in 1817, he penned his three-volume work, *History of the Indian Archipelago* that he published in 1820. The book recorded his investigation into the affairs of the Malay Archipelago during his service in Java. In 1821 he was appointed envoy on a mission to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China. His journal on the mission appeared in book form in 1828 and 1830. The documents relating to his mission to Siam were published in Bangkok in 1915. Crawfurd took up another official appointment as Resident to Singapore from 1823 to 1826. Being a keen observer, in some parts of his two books and papers he is able to reveal valuable sources of information about the Chinese junk trade in Southeast Asia. As a highly qualified expert on eastern affairs, John Crawfurd was called in for consultation by the Select

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Committee of the House of Commons in 1830, an occasion on which he presented updated information on the subject.\textsuperscript{7}

Among other oft-used contemporary accounts are the works by John Phipps, Edmund Roberts and an anonymous author that were published in 1835, 1837 and 1838 respectively. The information that they collected about commerce in China and the junk trade is valuable for research purposes. Excited by the emerging opportunity to open up the China trade and intensely interested in the British mercantile communities, John Phipps endeavored to collect and compile information that would benefit British merchants engaged in shipping as well as others connected with the trade of China and India.\textsuperscript{8} Edmund Roberts was America’s first envoy to the Far East, a post to which he was appointed by President Andrew Jackson. He led an American embassy to the eastern courts of Cochin China, Siam and Muscat in the US sloop-of-war \textit{Peacock} during the years 1832‒34. His voyage was an effort to make up for the neglected state of American commerce in the regions from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan. The intention of the mission was, whenever practicable, to establish treaty relations with the respective countries, “which would place American commerce on a surer basis and on equality with that of the most favored nations trading to those kingdoms”.\textsuperscript{9} The third account was written by one of the Englishmen residing in Canton on the eve of the first Sino-British war generally known as the \textit{First Opium War} (1840‒42). The author had a dream of the China market with “an immense population of eager traders, hard workers, and willing buyers”.\textsuperscript{10}

Documents and records collected as British Parliamentary Papers or scattered among the bulky Foreign Office files are extremely relevant,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} John Crawfurd’s testimony given on 25 March 1830; see “Third Report”, \textit{Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East-India Company, 1830}, pp. 446–73, copy from the University of California at Los Angeles Digitized Library. I thank the kind assistance of Shengqi Shu in tracing the depository of the document.
\item \textsuperscript{8} John Phipps, \textit{Practical Treatise on the China and Eastern Trade: Comprising Commerce of Great Britain and India, particularly Bengal and Singapore, with China and the Eastern Islands} (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1835), in “The Nineteenth Century Books on China” (Microfilm; Cambridge, 1995), “Preface”.
\end{itemize}
especially in seeking trading and shipping information around the first half of the nineteenth century. The only disappointment that might befall readers is that the related documents have a strong bias toward British trade with China and betray British determination to establish formal trade relations with the Qing authorities. The question of the junk trade only arose in their minds now and then, when the magnitude of the Chinese carrying trade was thought to be a threat to British trade interests. By and large, the western trading companies in Canton, the British country traders on the China coast or the company personnel in Southeast Asia were all likely to have been more intent on establishing contacts with private Chinese traders.

Around the mid-nineteenth century, which is also the cut-off point of the time period of this chapter, the fate of the junk trade seemed to be at a crossroads. Four contemporary documents that specifically describe the state of the Chinese junk trade during the time will be referred to. In May 1852, John Bowring, the then British Consul in Canton and Chief Superintendent of Trade in China, was seeking information on the foreign trade carried by Chinese junks that traded with the British consular ports in China, his intention being to look into the prospect of transferring the more valuable portion of this trade to foreign vessels. Some six months later, Bowring received three reports on the matter from his consular officers in Canton, Shanghai and Foochow (Fuzhou). One great disappointment was the absence of a response from the British Consulate in Amoy, which was the home port of so many Chinese junks. Probably this gap can be attributed to the ill-health of John Backhouse, the officiating Consul, and the lack of consular personnel to conduct an adequate investigation. Nevertheless, three comprehensive and very informative surveys compiled by the Officiating Consul Adam W. Elmslie, Consular Interpreter Harry S. Parkes, both in Canton, and Consul Rutherford Alcock in Shanghai made up to some extent for the seemingly


12. John Blackhouse had officiated as Consul in Amoy since Consul G.G. Sullivan’s death. “No extra Vice Consul was appointed ... to assist Blackhouse.” See FO 228/149,“List of all Persons on the Fixed Establishments of the Superintendency and Consulates in China on the First day of January 1853.”
missed opportunity to gain a more complete view of the Chinese junk trade. In his covering letter to the Foreign Office, John Bowring also offered his own observations. Taken as a whole, the documents provide us with rare glimpses into one of the most amazing activities of Chinese seafarers. Among these observers, Rutherford Alcock had for some years been casting his eye on the Chinese carrying trade. Before giving his response to John Bowring's instruction, he had penned a report on the matter in 1848. Indeed, his earlier essay might have piqued Bowring's interest in the subject.

Overall, on account of my linguistic limitations, I much regret not being able to consult the non-English western archival or contemporary materials. Certainly, the amount of sources consulted for the present discussion represents only the tip of the iceberg. This language inadequacy has greatly limited the depth of the survey, which is barely able to touch on the colorful aspects of the trading operations and the operators. I sincerely admire J.C. van Leur for his accomplished discussion of the Asian trade around the first half of the seventeenth century. By using the contemporary Dutch accounts, Van Leur was able to describe some aspects of the trade and the role of Chinese players in meticulous and exciting detail.

Finally, a few selected important works from the large body of modern scholarship on related topics will be highlighted. The first that immediately springs to my mind are the works by T’ien Ju-k’ang, who engaged in the investigation of the Chinese junk trade in his two publications of 1956 and 1957. Although the two works treat the


14. Van Leur wrote his essays, that were published some years after his premature death during WWII, more than 70 years ago. See J.C. van Leur, Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History (The Hague: W. van Hoeve Ltd., 1955).

15. T’ien Ju-k’ang 田汝康, “Shiqi shiji zhi shijiu shiji zhongye zhongguo fanchuan zai dongnanya zhou hangyun he shangye de diwei” 十七世纪至十九世纪中叶中国帆船在东南亚航运和商业的地位 [The position of Chinese junks in Southeast Asian shipping and commerce from the 17th to the mid-19th centuries], in Lishi yanjiu 历史研究 [Historical research], 8 (1956): 1–21; it appeared in the following year as a monograph entitled 17–19 shiji zhongye zhongguo fanchuan
seafaring activities in more general terms as "Chinese" affairs, rather
than a contribution by the key group, namely the Min-Yue seafarers, his
writings have opened up an exciting field of research in a very illuminating
way. The two works have not only provided a clear framework that
enables later researchers to follow in his footsteps, but they also present
a long view of the Chinese seafaring enterprise. They have inspired
researchers of later generations to review the topic, re-read the source
materials that the author had consulted and unearth more archival and
contemporary materials to enhance an understanding of the events.

It would be an injustice not to mention a most prolific writer in the
field, Akira Matsuura, who has been publishing on Chinese shipping
since the 1960s. His solid scholarship is revealed in his meticulous
research and powerful observations. He has unearthed scattered
information from the huge quantities of often obscure Chinese sources.\textsuperscript{16}
I also wish to salute Paul A. Van Dyke for his great work on the Canton
trade in the eighteenth to the first half of the nineteenth centuries. He
might be the only person who has made the painstaking effort to consult
the major relevant western archives, including the Dutch, Danish, and
Swedish archives in continental Europe, that have seldom been consulted
for similar research. Through what he has unearthed from the archives,
readers are able to gain rare insights into the "hidden world" of those
commercial operations. Extremely useful to the present discussion is the

\textit{zai dongnanya zhou} 17–19世纪中叶中国帆船在东南亚
on kenkyu 清代帆船沿海航运史的研究 [A study of coastal junk shipping
during the Qing period] (Suita, Osaka: Kansai University Press, 2010); \textit{Qingdai
teihe shuiyun shi yanjiu} 清代内河水运史研究 [Studies on river shipping
during the Qing], trans. Dong Ke 董科 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2010);
\textit{Qingdai fanchuan dongya hangyun yanjiu} 清代帆船东亚航运研究 [Studies on junk shipping, maritime
merchants and pirates in East Asia during the Qing period] (Shanghai cishu
chubanshe, 2009); and \textit{Dongya haiyu de Taiwan de haidao} 東亞海域與臺灣的
海盜 [The East Asian waters and Taiwan piracy], trans. Bian Fengkui 卞鳳奎
(Taipei: Boyang wenhua, 2008).

\textit{zhongguo fanchuan maoyi yu duiwai guanxi shi lunji} 中国帆船贸
易与对外关系史论集 [A Collection of Essays on the Chinese Junk Trade and

\textit{Zailun shiqi zhi shijie zhongguo fanchuan de fazhan} 再论十七至十九世
紀中叶中国帆船业的发展 [A re-examination of the development of the Chinese
junk trade from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries], \textit{Lishi yanjiu}
历史研究 [Historical research], 12 (1957): 1–11. Later the two works were
included in \textit{Zhongguo fanchuan maoyi yu duiwai guanxi shi lunji} 中国帆船贸
易与对外关系史论集 [A Collection of Essays on the Chinese Junk Trade and

\textit{zai dongnanya zhou} 17–19世纪中叶中国帆船在东南亚
information he provides on the Canton junk trade in and around the mid-eighteenth century. Last but not least the works of two scholars, namely: Sarasin Virapol and Jennifer W. Cushman, have provided very useful information about a very important branch of the Chinese overseas junk trade centering on Siam.

Marching Toward the Ocean in Perspective

This section will follow the maritime development against the backdrop of socioeconomic changes during late imperial times and take a look at how peasants were transformed into seafarers in large numbers.

In explaining the peasant exodus from rural China, not infrequently the push factor of the mountainous terrain and barren soil resulting in the scarcity of cultivable land and subsequent rural poverty is stressed. Among the three regions of southern Fujian, the Pearl River Delta and the Chaozhou-Shantou Plain, southern Fujian has the smallest area of land suitable for agriculture, but both Fujian and Guangdong provinces were in fact facing similar overpopulation and a resultant scarcity of cultivable land. The following population figures for the two provinces for the years 1393, 1749 and 1851, as shown by Dwight H. Perkins, are self-explanatory. In Fujian, the population increased from 3,917,000 to 7,620,000 and 20,099,000 respectively during the three time periods. The population pressure in Guangdong was just as severe, with increases from 3,008,000 to 6,461,000 and 28,389,000. Although this reason seems very feasible, researchers on the socioeconomic conditions in late imperial China generally concur that the land scarcity and population pressure should be treated in relative terms. Most of them in fact view the eighteenth century as an age of prosperity. This period saw the establishment of a solid economic foundation that benefited from the development of a commodity economy that had become more widespread in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This can be attributed to the dynamic response of the population to the unfavorable man-land ratio. In order

17. See Paul A. Van Dyke, The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005).
to survive, the rural communities that formed the bulk of the population chose to meet the challenges head-on. Instead of being contented with the old modes of production and living in isolation from the outside world, they made the necessary adjustments in their socioeconomic life and involved themselves in extra-village activities. Exodus from the native villages was not just an escape from desperation, but also a way to seek new opportunities.

**Rural Society in Flux**

To understand traditional Chinese society, the most convenient place to begin is with kinship relationships at the grass-roots level. In terms of the foundation of kinship, the family as the basic, core unit is formed and extended to become a common descent group known as a lineage. The lineage members are traced to a single ancestry and settled in a given locality. In the rural society of the Min-Yue region, the lineage played an important role as an economic, political, social, religious, educational and military entity. For purposes of survival, the social structure of rural society tended to be highly disciplinary and collectivized. Individuals were subject to the constraints of their lineage and the wishes of the communal leaders. Consequently, lineage functioned as a stabilizing factor and the leaders were often drawn from among the local gentry-scholars. The lineage leaders were also bona fide managers of the rural communities, representing a form of informal government.

The formal administration in a province consisted of three levels, namely: province, prefecture and district or department; no officials were appointed below the district level to the townships, villages or hamlets. The rural areas beyond the district city-walls covered an extensive zone and a large population, but were not subject to direct governance. This administrative practice made it necessary for the government to rely on the local gentry, mostly shengyuan or the first-degree holders of the

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imperial examinations, for surveillance and social control. Therefore the local gentry served as mediators between the local district authorities and the rural people, and played the participatory role of assisting the formal administration in the management of local society. The local officials and the rural leaders were interdependent and both had a stake in maintaining social stability.\(^{23}\) As commented by Zheng Zhenman, the governing institution of traditional China was made up of a two-track system consisting of the “public” and the “private”. It was a dual administrative structure composed of the state and rural lineages. To some extent, the governing institution created a condition of indirect rule and rural autonomy.\(^{24}\) He goes on to observe:

> The development of lineage organization in Ming-Qing times had gone beyond the barrier of traditional lineage relationships and added the [complementary] principles of lineage organization that could adapt adequately to other social relationships. Lineage organization had, therefore, become more inclusive and flexible. It created more possibilities for traditional society to develop. ... The lineage organization during the Ming-Qing periods can be said to have encompassed kin, locality and interest-driven relationships. Characteristically it embodied the plurality of traditional social structure in China.\(^{25}\)

In short, the political ecology of rural society bred elastic cultural traits in social and political relationships.

Owing to the shortages of production resources, rural society was also a highly competitive living environment that contributed to violent clashes between lineages. It was not uncommon for small lineages to be bullied by the larger, more powerful lineages. For self-protection, the small lineages would adopt a strategy of forming alliances in their relations with the larger lineages. In Fujian and Guangdong, to strengthen their bargaining power, small lineages sharing the same surname could form themselves into a large lineage by fictitiously declaring that they shared common ancestry.\(^{26}\) As reported in some contemporary sources,

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“large surname aggregates” and “small surname aggregates” were putatively taken to be “large lineages” and “small lineages”. Often, small lineages with different surnames found it expedient to form alliances, or pseudo-lineages. In 1727, the Governor of Fujian, Gao Qizhuo, memorialized the Qing Court:

My observation is that in the Quanzhou and Zhangzhou prefectures in Fujian larger surname aggregates tended to bully smaller surname aggregates. To defend themselves, the smaller aggregates often take up arms. It is indeed a most evil practice in that they confront and kill each other.... At the moment, a mob in Tong’an consisting of a strong group of the Bao lineage and a weak group of the Qi lineage have gathered bearing arms and are causing deadly violence.27

The following year Gao gave more information about the formation of the two surname groups through a merger:

In Tong’an, the large surname groups of Li, Chen, Su, Zhuang and Ke have allied themselves to form the Bao surname-group. Other small surname-groups have merged to adopt the common surname of Qi.28

It is interesting to note what the two Chinese characters “Bao” and “Qi” imply and reveal. The former has the meaning of “all-embracing” and the latter “unison”. The fact that the high-ranking officials did not show disapproval of the practice of forming pseudo-lineages in their memorials is amazing, given that it contravened the Confucian principle of how a lineage should be properly organized.

In 1729, the prevailing practice of forming fictitious surname groups and the inherent social violence involved were elaborated upon by Liu Shishu, Inspector of Local Practices and Customs of Fujian:

Initially, the larger surname groups bullied the weaker surname groups. Hence the latter merged to form a new group adopting the surname Qi. Recently, there have been similar cases such as those of the Tongs, the Hais and the Wans.... The Shi surname group of Jinjiang, to which Shi Shilun and Shi Shibiao belong, is a large lineage. Its members have been notorious for their involvement

28. Ibid., p. 571.
in smuggling, harboring bandits and its extremely tyrannical behavior.29

The formation of lineages, or alliances in the guise of a traditional lineage in the Confucian sense, provides evidence of a process of social development among the rural population. The traits of adaptability and flexibility in the process of forming fictitious groups had been internalized to become part and parcel of rural culture. These cultural traits provided the rural emigrants with an invaluable social experience when they had to adapt to the new environment of an outside world that was even more complex and competitive than their own in the native village. Under these circumstances, they would simply apply the social practice used in the native village of forming social organizations to the challenges of survival in strange countries.

**Agricultural Innovations and Commercialization**

As the rural economy was faced with the tremendous challenge of a growing population, adjustments were duly made in traditional agriculture to increase land productivity. New innovations included using improved seeds, changing cropping patterns and planting new crops, as well as applying advanced traditional farming techniques such as investing in farm implements, water control and fertilizer. These methods all contributed to raising farm output and yields per unit of land.30 The problem was that the labor-intensive techniques required the input of even greater manpower, and in its turn this stimulated greater population growth that consequently lowered per-capita income. To raise the standard of livelihood, the rural population took up handicraft production, converted to commercial agriculture or became peasant peddlers31 to supplement farm income. Such developments in the peasant economy became more visible after the Ming period (1368–1644). Driven by the commercialized economy, the peasants increasingly moved away from subsistence farming and involved themselves in some form of market activity.

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29. Ibid., Vol. 14, p. 717. These surnames all have a meaning of encompassing.
31. J.C. van Leur uses this conceptual term “peddlers”, when he mentions the two groups of traders in the markets, namely “the peddlers” and “the merchant gentlemen”. See, for example, J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society*, pp. 197–204.
Formation of Rural-Urban Systems

The process of commercialization at work in rural areas since the sixteenth century had paved the way for a lively economy in the economically central places and their hinterlands. In his enlightening regional-systems model, G. William Skinner classifies the central places in an eight-level hierarchy, beginning with the low-level market places, “which met the week-to-week marketing needs of peasant households”, moving to upper-level towns and cities of different sizes and importance. The peasants learned about the outside world from the market places serving the village settlements. Here they built up their social contacts and accumulated information capital. Local and regional networks provided the information and economic linkages between the village and the local township and further with their nearest large city or seaport.

Production and Maritime Trade

The commercialization of agriculture and the handicraft industry had the effect of connecting the village, town and port city in an economic chain. It also functioned as a dynamic force that propelled the development of the port city. Together the village, town and port city formed a regional economic entity that linked production and market. Thanks to the development of the commodity economy from the sixteenth century and the expanding coastal shipping from the late seventeenth century, agricultural and handicraft products were streaming in bulk to other provinces. The increasingly bustling international trade in Canton and the outward-bound junks sailing to the Nanyang from southern Fujian and eastern Guangdong took the products to foreign markets.

Since late Ming times, the Canton and the Chaozhou subregions and southern Fujian had already been developing large-scale sugar production. Taiwan followed suit to become another important sugar-producing region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As early as the sixteenth century, sugar from Guangdong and Fujian was known to have attracted the great interest of the Portuguese. In the seventeenth century, English merchants reaped great profit by exporting sugar


33. In his travel accounts, Ibn Battuta mentions that “there is abundant sugar-cane [in the land of China], equal, nay superior, in quality to that of Egypt”. See Ibn Battuta Travels in Asia and Africa, p. 282.
from South China to Europe. Besides exporting sugar to India, Dutch and other European merchants also shipped it from Canton to their own countries.\(^{34}\) During the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, ceramics from Fujian had been exported in large quantities stimulating the spread of the industry all over the province. The Dutch in Batavia also showed great interest in importing various kinds of dishes in large quantities in the 1620s.\(^{35}\) Fujian was also known for its tea production that reached its peak during the Qing period (1644–1911). Keeping pace, the silk industry in Guangdong had greatly expanded. Fujian exported its silk products to Southeast Asia as early as the Song period. In the early seventeenth century, as J.C. van Leur indicates,

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\text{[t]he amount of raw silk brought to Bantam per year was three or four hundred picul.} \ldots \text{[Large] quantities of it were also carried to Malacca and Manilla, from whence it was shipped to the Middle East and Europe by the Portuguese and Spanish.} \ldots \text{A few thousand pieces of silk, damask, and satin cloth were shipped by the Dutch.}\(^{36}\)
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As the demand for Chinese raw silk rose rapidly in foreign trade from the eighteenth century, the silk industry in the Pearl River Delta region expanded; many of its products were shipped to Europe.\(^{37}\)

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35. Ibn Battuta inaccurately attributes the production areas of porcelain in China only to Zaytun and Sin-kalan (?) in southern Fujian. However, he does provide a piece of useful information, namely that porcelain was exported to India and Yemen. See p. 289. For the Dutch import, see J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society*, p. 126.


By the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, the development of regional systems had reached adulthood. Through the by now extensive merchant networks, the producers in Fujian and Guangdong were connected with domestic and foreign markets. It was a time in which the China coast and the Nanyang were engaged in one of the most intensive and prosperous maritime trades in the world.

From the village to central places, port cities and thence venturing out to sea, peasant peddlers, merchants and emigrants had risen to the challenge. Hailing from the countryside, they had now undergone a transformation process of engagement in extra-village activities. They were no longer peasants living in quiet rural backwaters, isolated from and ignorant of the outside world. Their agricultural and handicraft products were transported via the regional and overseas networks. The movement of their commodities was accompanied by regular human mobility, geographical or upward.

The discussion will now turn to the core areas of the study, namely the port cities, coastal trade and inter-port trade with the Nanyang.

**Building a Multiport Junk-Trade Enterprise on the China Coast**

*Ports and Trading Networks*

A port city is an intersection in an extensive and complex network system. It is like the nodes of networks that grow, extend themselves, blossom and eventually bear fruit in a similar manner to tree branches. Adam McKeown describes the connotation and functions of networks in the following words:

> Networks are the transnational institutions, organizations, and personal connections that make migration into a viable economic strategy and stable system for the circulation of goods, people, information, and profit. 38

Hence, a port city is also a center for the convergence and circulation of information. Merchants are the driving force behind its development. They congregate in the port not only to seize new trading opportunities, but

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also to construct functional networks connecting the sea and the interior, other port cities and the different regions. Networks complement and overlap one another. They perform a role of information superhighway radiating from the nodes of networks.

Although the Min-Yue people were renowned for being superb seafarers who looked to the sea as if it was their “rice-fields”, they also ventured overland into the interior. A good example is the overland trade routes used by the Hong merchants for their tea purchases. Nevertheless, seaborne activities remained their greatest achievement in maximizing their coastal geographical advantage. For a long time, in their eyes the ocean was like a network of highways for their seaborne activities and expansion.

**Expanding Coastal Shipping in the Eighteenth Century**

After peace was restored following the pacification of Taiwan in 1683, the maritime ban of the early Qing was rescinded the following year. The imperial Court chose to convince itself that, despite its distrust of the seafarers, people’s livelihood should be its uppermost concern and the authorities should refrain from setting up barriers to their fortune-seeking activities. The upshot was that the once suppressed coastal shipping was revitalized and its bounds swiftly extended by the Min-Yue people. By the early eighteenth century, the merchant junks trading southward to the surrounding area of Canton and northward along the coast to Ningbo, Zhaupu, Shanghai, Jiaozhou, Tianjin, and Jinzhou all hailed from Fujian and Guangdong. “It was an annual event”, as T’ien Ju-k’ang puts it.39

After the lifting of the maritime ban, South Fujian fitted out trading junks to sail not only to other coastal ports but also to venture to the Nanyang. By 1685, there were already numerous vessels leaving from southern Fujian in search of overseas trade.40 At this time, vessels of different tonnage, departing from several seaports in Fujian, engaged in the foreign trade.41 In order to ease management and control, in 1727 Governor-General Gao Qizhuo memorialized the Court and his petition resulted in a decree that made Amoy the only designated port (zheng kou)

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40. Ng Chin-keong, *Trade and Society*, p. 56.
for the Nanyang trade in Fujian. This also led to a distinction between two types of vessels in Fujian, namely: the ocean junks (yang chuan) and the merchant junks (shang chuan). The former had a larger tonnage and were permitted to trade to the Nanyang, whereas the latter were restricted to the coastal trade. The two branches of trade were placed under the supervision and management of ocean firms (yang hang) and merchant firms (shang hang) respectively.

Playing a role that did not differ from that of Yuegang (Haicheng) in the past, Amoy became the gateway for the Quan-Zhang people venturing out into the maritime world. Many of those arriving in Amoy were sojourners, but more and more settled there and became Amoy men. As the port city had established itself as a node in the trading networks, it functioned as the operational base for maritime merchants and a transshipment center for domestic products from all over the country as well as for foreign imports.

The coastal trade centering in Amoy benefited enormously from the economic growth of Taiwan. Migrants from the Quan-Zhang subregion of South Fujian had pioneered the agricultural and trading developments in the island. Prior to the founding of the Zheng regime in 1662, the Dutch had been there and had developed rice and sugar planting. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, people from eastern Guangdong also joined the earlier migrants in agricultural production. Besides rice and sugar, the two major exports from Taiwan, other daily necessities and a great variety of native produce were transported to the island from the mainland.

Plying between Amoy and Luermen in Taiwan were the merchant junks known as the “straits-crossing ships” (hengyang chuan). Of these, the sugar ships (tang chuan) had greater carrying capacity. They made long-distance voyages from Taiwan to Tianjin with only sugar on board. The 1720 edition of the Taiwan District Gazetteer noted thousands of merchant junks making annual voyages between Taiwan and Amoy, evidence of a coastal shipping network extending outward from its center in Amoy. The type of vessel sailing southward was known as a

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42. Zhou Kai 周凯, Xiamen zhi 厦门志 [Gazetteer of Amoy] (Preface, 1832), in Taiwan wenxian congkan 台灣文獻叢刊 [A Collection of Literature on Taiwan] (Taipei: Bank of Taiwan Research Unit, 1961), Vol. 95, juan 5, p. 179.
43. Ibid., p. 166.
south-bound junk (*nan cao*). They shipped goods to Zhangzhou, Nan’ao and places in Guangdong. The north-bound junks (*bei cao*) headed to Wenzhou, Ningbo, Shanghai, Jiaozhou, Tianjin, Jinzhou and other ports in the north. Akira Matsuura cites a contemporary author, Lan Dingyuan, who observed that the Fujianese saw “the Jiang-Zhe provinces, Denglai, Guangdong [Manchuria] and Tianjin as their courtyards”. He goes on,

... sailing from Amoy on the favorable trade wind [southeast monsoon] took only slightly more than ten days to arrive in Tianjin. Farther north they went to Guandong [Manchuria], or southward from Tianjin to Jiaozhou, Shanghai, Zhaopu and Ningbo. All these seaports were destinations of the trading junks from Fujian and Guangdong.45

The figures given for the years 1731 and 1732 indicate that there were respectively 53 and 45 merchant junks arriving in Tianjin in each year. These vessels were all manned by Quan-Zhang seafarers.46 The *Amoy Gazetteer* also records that the ocean-going junks and the coastal merchant junks anchored in Amoy in the year 1796 numbered more than a thousand.47 The wealth of Amoy at this juncture had earned it a reputation as the “Silver City” (*yincheng*).48

Another port was soon to contest Amoy’s leading position in shipping. It was Changlim in the Chaozhou region. It rose to become the largest thriving seaport in eastern Guangdong in the early decades of the seventeenth century and its maritime trade scaled the heights from the early eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.49 As the contemporary Qing scholar, Lan Dingyuan, remarks, the Chaozhou people sailed to the north taking advantage of the south wind at the juncture of the spring and summer seasons. They visited Fujian, Ningbo, Shanghai, Denglai and the ports between Tianjin and Guandong. The whole journey took only 15 days. During the autumn and winter, they followed the seasonal wind [northeast monsoon] sailing from their home port to Jieshe, Dapeng, Xiangshan, Yashan, Gaozhou, Lezou, Qiongzhou and other ports on the

Guangdong coast and in Hainan Island. They could visit all these places in three days' sail.\textsuperscript{50}

Aside from Amoy and Changlim, Canton was another major port in coastal shipping. During the Tang era (618–907), Canton was the largest port in China. In Ming times, it was designated the port of entry for the tribute envoys arriving from the Nanhai (known as Nanyang during the Qing, namely: Southeast Asia). It was reported in the 1580s that, “There are always more ships and barkes [barques], th[a]n are in the whole country of Spain.”\textsuperscript{51}

In 1686, the Office of the Superintendent of Maritime Customs (known to westerners as the Hoppo) was first established in Canton. Shortly afterward, the management and supervision of maritime trade was divided into three government-designated organizations, namely the Waiyang Hang (authorized firms taking charge of the commerce of western nations, better known to the Europeans as Hong merchants), the Bengang Hang (authorized firms taking charge of Canton junks) and the Fu Chao Hang (authorized firms taking charge of Fujian and Chaozhou junks). Merchants were assigned the duties of managing and supervising the three branches of maritime trade respectively. The first group was almost wholly composed of Fujian merchants, who had arrived in Canton in response to the trading opportunities and soon established themselves in maritime businesses there. Merchants of Fujian origin continued to be the leading men of the Waiyang Hang until its failure in 1827–29. The second group was composed of Canton merchants, but very probably of Fujian or Chaozhou origins. The third group represented the wealthy Fujian and Chaozhou merchants who were actively engaged in trade with the Indian [Indonesian/Malay] Archipelago.

Overall, the rapid development of native maritime trade in Canton can be attributed to the Fujian merchants. As Harry Parkes has commented, “It is to their industry and enterprise, more than to that of the native townsmen, that the ulterior prosperity of the port is chiefly due.” Therefore it should come as no surprise that the Fujianese conducted the long-distance junk trade and were the sole suppliers of the produce of the Archipelago along the whole extent of the China coast.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{50} Akira Matsuura, \textit{Shindai hansen engan kōunshi no kenkyū}, p. 586. In his work, Akira Matsuura also provides a detailed account of the shipping activities operated by the Chaozhou merchants. See Section 5, Ch. 1.


\textsuperscript{52} The information and the quote are cited from Harry Parkes in FO 228/136, no. 15, John Bowring to The Earl of Malmesbury, 2.11.1852, Encl. 10, pp. 52b–55b.
In 1757 (22nd year of the Qianlong Emperor, r. 1736–95), the Qing Court designated Canton the only port of call for the vessels of British East India Company as well as all other European ships. All transactions with Europeans were required to go through the Thirteen Hong (Shisan Hang, the 13 authorized dealers) in Canton. Therefore, whereas Amoy was the designated port for the overseas junk trade, the Hong merchants in Canton were assigned the task of dealing with the visiting European traders. In fact, Chinese shipping and trade had progressed at such a fast pace, their actual operations did not comply with the prescribed policy guidelines. Canton was constantly involved in both the coastal and overseas junk trades that were not officially within its purview.

The main concern of the Governor-General and Hoppo in Canton was to ensure the smooth operation of the trade system. As Paul A. Van Dyke observes, they were assigning responsibilities for the control of foreigners who traded to Canton downward to the actual operators, including the Hong merchants, linguists, compradors and pilots. The so-called Canton System, to cite Paul A. Van Dyke, “was like a huge machine, with thousands of little parts that worked independently of, but in concert with, each other to move trade forward”. Unquestionably, in the operation of the trading system, the Hong merchants were the most indispensable contributors. They played the main role of mediating between the authorities and foreign merchants.

Sustaining the Network Power, 1800–43

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the native shipping enterprise had become diversified with more junks being fitted out in other coastal ports. Nonetheless, Amoy remained an active maritime player in the early decades of the nineteenth century. As Zhou Kai records in the Amoy Gazetteer, by the early nineteenth century, junks departing from Amoy continued to sail southward to Qiongzhou in Hainan Island, or northward to Tianjin, Jinzhou and other places. Recording what he saw during his visit to Amoy in the early 1830s, the words of the German missionary Charles Gutzlaff (1803–51) were full of praise for the vitality and

54. Concerning the declining position of Amoy as a shipping center, see Chen Kuo-tung 陳國棟, “Qingdai zhongye xiamen de haishang maoyi” 清代中葉廈門的海上貿易 (1727–1833) [The Maritime Trade of Amoy in the Mid-Qing Era, 1727–1833], in Chen Kuo-tung, Dongya haiyu yi qian nian 東亞海域一千年 [A thousand years of the East Asian maritime world] (Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 2005), pp. 467–505.
prosperity of the port city. He describes Amoy and its inhabitants in the following words:

Its excellent harbour has made it ... one of the greatest emporiums of the empire, and one of the most important markets of Asia....
Endowed with an enterprising spirit and unwearied in the pursuits of gain ..., they ... visited and settled in the Indian Archipelago, Cochin-China, and Siam.... The natives of this district seem to be born traders and sailors....

Another great emporium along the China coast was Canton, where all sorts of products were available. Although the native Cantonese were not active in the seafaring activities, their local industries allowed them to conduct very extensive trade in the inland provinces. As Harry Parkes comments, “the people of Canton are fully alive to the advantages of commerce, but ... prefer to invest their speculations in inland, rather than in maritime channels. They are to be met with at Soochow [Suzhou], at Peking [Beijing], or at the chief entrepots of the centre and west.” The city sent large quantities of inexpensive local manufactured goods and foreign imports to these places. The most constant import from India was low-cost cotton that offered low-rate raw materials to thousands of local handicraft manufacturers. Their products were sold all over the country. The local lapidary industry that cut all sorts of precious stones, including cornelian, agate, topaz, and worked in pearls, making beads and other trinkets especially bracelets, enjoyed the highest reputation in the country. Its annual sales amounted to several million dollars. Moreover, Canton glass also found its way throughout the country and this branch of industry engaged thousands of producers. The Canton manufacturers even exported their elegant furniture to other countries. Just as extensive was the silk industry that, as Edmund Roberts reported, had a workforce of 17,000.

Besides the goods they exported to the interior, they also brought in all sorts of commodities. Large quantities of rice from Guangxi were transported via the tributaries of the Pearl River. Cassia was another item fetched from there. The imports from Yunnan included such metals as copper, lead, zinc, and tin, as well as precious stones and betel-nut.

57. Harry Parkes in FO 228/136, no. 151, John Bowring to The Earl of Malmesbury, 2.11.1852, Encl. 10, pp. 54b–55a.
Commodities from Guizhou were composed of metals, medical herbs, tobacco and musk. From Sichuan came gold, brass, iron, tin, musk and drugs. A large volume of trade was carried on with Fujian by both land and sea. Besides black teas that traveled overland to Canton, commodities such as earthenware, lacquerware, umbrellas, tobacco, indigo, paper and grass cloth arriving by sea were all brought in on the Fujian junks that also transported sugar and camphor from Taiwan. Zhejiang, including Ningbo and Hangzhou, sent the best of silks, embroidery, ham and the very costly Longjing tea. There was an influential group of Ningbo merchants who resided in Canton. Items including cotton, silks and nankeens were among the imports from Jiangsu. The principal articles from Jiangsu and Anhui were green teas and silks. The trade with Anhui focused on green teas that had an annual value of several million dollars. There was a considerable number of Anhui merchants present in Canton. The finest porcelain came from Jiangxi. Hunan, Hubei and Honan sent in their musk, rhubarb and other medicinal drugs. Brought in down the coast from Shandong to Canton were fruits, vegetables, drugs, wines and hides. Merchants and bankers from Shanxi returned to Canton with their capital and they also brought with them musk, rhubarb, medical herbs and fans. Likewise, several merchants and rich bankers from Shanxi showed up in Canton and conducted a similar trade there. Gansu sent gold, quicksilver, musk and tobacco. As Edmund Roberts sums up, "Here the productions of every part of China are found, and a very brisk and lucrative commerce is carried on by merchants and factors from all the provinces."

Despite their active role in inter-provincial trade, it is amazing to find such a lack of interest in seafaring trading activities among the native Cantonese. In fact, they and their coastal neighbors did not have any qualms about sailing activities, as can be seen from their notorious role in coastal piracy in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, the presence of entrepreneurial merchants from outside Canton was enough to uphold the position of Canton as a major port city. Large numbers of trading junks, mostly from Amoy and Chaozhou, anchored in the harbor. These expatriates also maintained large commercial establishments in Canton. The Fujianese settlers numbered some four thousand. They controlled the largest amount of the floating capital in the city and successfully established a complex network of businesses there. In their capacity as brokers and agents, they undertook

extensive trade into the interior. A European resident in Canton was amazed by the considerable amount of foreign cotton re-exported in their vessels.\textsuperscript{62}

From the information he gathered in 1831, John Phipps calculated that a total of 846 junks put in at Macao and Jiangmen in the neighborhood of Canton. Among them, 80 had arrived from Amoy and 150 from Zhangzhou, both in southern Fujian. The vessels from Huizhou and Chaozhou in Guangdong numbered 300. Another 300 junks were plying between Jiangmen and the ports in Fujian. A total of 16 junks sailed to Tianjin and the Liaodong (Guandong / Manchuria) coast from Canton. The carrying capacity of junks undertaking short-distance voyages was below 200 tons. The 16 junks in the long-distance trade to the northern ports were large junks owned by Fujianese. They left Canton when the semi-annual southeast monsoon began to blow and returned at the end of the year. The commodities exported to the north were medicines, dried fruits, sugar, piece-goods, glassware and embroidery. Returning junks brought pears, apples, peaches, dates, raisins, figs, vegetables, peas, wines, cured mutton and venison. The smaller junks brought back silk, alum, white lead, betel-nut, ceramics, oil and numerous miscellaneous articles. The exports from Macao were composed of tin and pepper, plus other Portuguese imports.\textsuperscript{63}

The Min-Yue merchants also frequented another coastal port, Shanghai, that was on its way to becoming a major shipping center in the late eighteenth century. The majority of the maritime merchants in Shanghai originated from Fujian, Canton and Chaozhou which is a good indication of the eagerness and responsiveness of these people to chase new opportunities.\textsuperscript{64} By the 1830s, Shanghai had established itself as a prominent meeting place for merchant junks plying between the north and south. One could see hundreds of ships anchoring at its harbor. Every day there were some 30 to 40 Fujian junks arriving from Taiwan, Guangdong, the Indian Archipelago, Cochin-china, Siam and other places.\textsuperscript{65} Rhoads Murphey refers to a contemporary source about the Shanghai shipping as follows:

H.H. Lindsay made one of the few foreign efforts to guess at the volume of Chinese trade on the eve of the treaty port system. His report enumerates 400 junks, averaging between 100 and 400 tons, entering the port of Shanghai weekly during July of 1832.

\textsuperscript{62} Anon., “A Dissertation”, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{64} Ng Chin-keong, “The South Fukienese Junk Trade at Amoy”, p. 312.
If this was broadly typically of the year as a whole, Shanghai was already one of the leading ports of the world, with a volume of shipping equal to or greater than London’s.\(^66\)

Farther north lay the port of Tianjin. It became a commercial node for the Min-Yue merchants no later than the early eighteenth century. In 1797, as a record shows, “a large portion of the levies received by the Tianjin customs derives from the Min-Yue merchants, who arrive here to trade. The two provinces dispatch several score or even around one hundred junks each to trade to Tianjin.”\(^67\) The Chaozhou group formed the majority of the Guangdong merchants.\(^68\) The third and fourth months (April to June) of the year saw the arrival of the Min-Yue merchants in Tianjin on board their junks loaded with sugar, ceramics, preserved fruits and other items from the south, as well as spices and drugs, pepper, shark’s fins and other produce from foreign countries. They made the return voyage after the onset of autumn, carrying on board such northern specialties as cotton and piece-goods. An increasing number of trading junks were to arrive here in the following decades. Increasing numbers of Min-Yue merchants decided to remain and settled in, founding hundreds of business firms. By the mid-nineteenth century, there were more than five thousand Guangdong merchants in Tianjin.\(^69\)

Scaling the Heights in the Nanyang Trade

The Nanyang Trade Prior to 1800

While the Min-Yue people became the most active maritime group in China’s coastal trade, their trading junks were also making their presence felt in the Nanyang. As early as the Qin-Han periods (221 BC‒AD 220), China had established contacts with this part of the maritime world. During the Tang-Song era (618‒AD 1279), thousands of Muslim traders from the Middle East congregated in such Chinese port cities as Canton,

67. Akira Matsuura, Qingdai fanchuan dongya hang yun, p. 102.
Quanzhou, Hangzhou and Yangzhou. Chinese overseas trade prospered in the Song dynasty (AD 960–1279). The coastal ports were the gateway through which the handicraft products from the interior were exported overseas. In return, China also received foreign goods that were imported in large quantities. A Song source of 1141 records some 333 items from the foreign countries, the bulk of them consisting generally of spices and drugs.

During Song-Yuan times (960–1368), Chinese junks and maritime merchants appeared in the Nanhai (Nanyang). They even put in an appearance in the faraway countries west of Southeast Asia. During the renowned seven maritime expeditions (1403–33) led by Admiral Zheng He in the early Ming, Chinese officials came across Chinese settlements in several parts of the Indonesian Archipelago. When western explorers and missionaries arrived on the southeastern coast of China in the early sixteenth century, Chinese junks were already present in the Nanhai in increasing numbers. Two centuries later, the ocean junks fitted out from the Min-Yue region entered a vigorous stage of development. As a report from the 1740s shows, there were more than 110 ocean-going junks worth five to six million taels of silver. The cargoes kept in the Amoy and Canton warehouses were estimated to amount to several million taels in value.

Apace with the development of seaborne trade, extended trading networks were built in both the eastern part of the Nanhai, consisting of the Philippines and the eastern islands of present-day Indonesia, and the region west of it, including Siam, the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago.

Ever since the founding by the Spanish of a settlement in Manila in 1571, a new era of the junk trade had commenced between Manila and Haicheng (Yuegang), from where an increasing number of junks were fitted out to trade to Manila and thence connected to places as far away as Acapulco in Mexico via the trans-Pacific shipping provided by the Spanish galleons. For purposes of control, the Ming government initially

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boundaries and beyond restricted the number of junks going to Manila to 88 a year, but raised the figure to 110 soon after. The bustling trade between Haicheng and Manila led to a large influx of Mexican silver into Fujian that "stimulate[d] silver monetization in Southeast China".73 However, Fujian-Manila trade entered a period of stagnation caused by the restrictive exclusion policy adopted by colonial authorities in 1736. T’ien Ju-kang notes that the number of junks arriving in Manila in 1818 had been reduced to a mere ten, with a total tonnage of around 5,000 or more.74 John Crawfurd’s figures were even lower. He said only four or five ships of 400 to 500 tons each were arriving in Manila.75 At this point in time, two junks averaging 800 tons were plying between Amoy and Sulu. Another two vessels of 500 tons each, or one large ship of 1,000, visited Makassar. Sailing to Ambon was a ship of 500 tons.76

In the western sphere of the Nanhai, J.C. van Leur offers plenty of information about the Chinese trade with the Indian Archipelago. He mentions pepper as the largest export to China from the region in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By the early seventeenth century, the amount of pepper traded to China might be approximately 2,000 tons per year, or five-sixths of the total local production. Sandalwood was the next most important export. The annual amount of this wood exported was around 240 to 300 tons. Chinese junks were trading with Bantam in western Java at this time. Van Leur reckons that the number of Chinese junks arriving could be eight to ten large ships of 200 to 400 tons each. The pepper trade in Bantam was mainly in the hands of Chinese junk traders. The Chinese merchants made up a large proportion of the local rich people and owned luxury houses, warehouses and ships.77 Five junks, each of 600 to 800 tons, traded with Batavia. In 1625, says Van Leur, the total tonnage of the Chinese fleet visiting Batavia was "as large as or larger than that of the whole return fleet of the Dutch Company".78

76. Ibid.
77. J.C. van Leur, Indonesian Trade and Society, pp. 124–5, 130, 134. Van Leur offers enlightening insights into Chinese trading activities, as well as the general trade conditions in the Indian Archipelago in the first half of the seventeenth century.
78. Ibid., p. 198; Leonard Blussé, Badaweiya huaren yu zhong He maoyi 巴达维亚华人与中荷贸易 [The Chinese in Batavia and Sino-Dutch Trade], trans. Zhuang Guotu 庄国土 (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1997), pp. 120–1; Leonard Blussé and Wu Fengbin 吴风斌, Bacheng gongguan dang’an yanjiu: 18 shiji mo Badaweiya tangren shehui 吧城公馆档案研究: 18世纪末吧达维亚唐人社会
The trade peaked in the first half of the eighteenth century, when the arriving junks numbered between 10 and 20. How the Dutch authorities in Batavia felt about the impact of the trading junks is vividly reflected in their deliberations in the late seventeenth century about whether there was still a need for the Dutch East Indian Company (VOC) to dispatch its own ships to China.

As in Manila, most of the Chinese business investments in Batavia came from Amoy, but trading junks also came from other Chinese ports. In the 40 years between 1715 and 1754, for example, a total of 437 Chinese junks visited Batavia, or 88 per cent of the incoming vessels in the port. Among them, 272 ships came from Amoy, or an average of seven annually, 81 from Canton, 73 from Ningbo and 11 from Shanghai. Departing from Batavia during the same period were 244 ships heading to Amoy, 75 to Canton, 81 to Ningbo and 15 to Shanghai, a total of 418 ships, or 90 per cent of the departing vessels.

As the Quan-Zhang people formed the majority of the Chinese residents in Batavia, the Dutch authorities granted the green-prow Amoy junks preferential tax rates, tantamount to an open invitation to trade in


The Amoy junks of 1,000 to 1,200 tons each were larger than the other Chinese junks. In comparison, the vessels from Changlim in Chaozhou were of 500 tons each. Each of the junks arriving in Batavia from the Chinese ports also carried 400 to 500 migrants. Most of them became laborers in the locality. Some moved on to other places around the Indian Archipelago, while others might set up small businesses and often functioned as middlemen in the lower-end of the procuring and distributing networks stretching into the interior or other remote regions.

The good times were not to last. The Dutch authorities began to resort to stringent monopolistic laws in the hope of barring the Chinese junks from trading in the outer islands of the Indian Archipelago. Although the Company was able to reduce the number of incoming junks to Batavia, it soon realized that the sustainability and the resilience of the Chinese trading networks were hard nuts to crack totally.

Turning to the Malay Peninsula, a 1730 Chinese record notes the presence of Chinese seafarers in several regional ports including Chaiya (Xiezai), Ligor (Liukun), Songkla (Songka) and Pattani (Danian), all under Siamese jurisdiction; Kelantan (Jilandan), Trengganu (Dingjianu) and Pahang (Pengheng) on the east coast, Johor (Roufo) in the south and Malacca (Melaka/Malijia) on the west coast.

Also frequented by the Chinese trading junks was Annam (Vietnam), which had a population of approximately 23 million. Since the seventeenth century, the Vietnamese ports had become popular among the Chinese shippers in the entrepôt trade.

Ever since the mid-seventeenth century, Siam’s position had been rising steadily, making it one of the major destinations of the trading junks from China. Although a maritime ban was imposed by the Qing Court in 1656, the smuggling junks of the Min-Yue seafarers, with the South Fujianese in the majority, continued to make their voyages to Ayudhya, Bangkok

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and the southern ports by the Gulf of Siam, such as Songkla, Ligor and Pattani.85 The trade with China centering on Bangkok represented the most important branch of Siam’s foreign trade. It expanded rapidly after the Siamese expulsion of the Burmese forces of occupation in 1769.86

Among the Chinese home ports trading to the Nanyang, Amoy is the one which immediately strikes the eye. Wherever they went, the South Fujianese merchants, embarking from their home port in Amoy, retained their predominant position in the Nanyang trade for a lengthy period of time.87 Highlighting its leading role in the maritime trade in the early eighteenth century, the contemporary Qing scholar Lan Dingyuan says that the Fujianese looked on Ryukyu (Riuqiu), Luzon, Sulu, Batavia, Siam and Annam “as if they were ... offspring playing around their knees”.88 Some scattered information tells of about 21 junks departing from Amoy on voyages to the Nanyang at this time. In 1733, another Qing document gives the figures of 28 to 30 ocean junks leaving to trade abroad with a cargo worth 60 to 70 thousand foreign silver dollars each, or at times with much more than 100 thousand foreign silver dollars on each ship. Homeward bound, they brought back goods worth two to three million foreign silver dollars.89 The number of returning junks soon increased to more than 50. In 1752 there were 65 junks sailing back from abroad. The figures two years later were even more impressive, with 70 leaving and 68 returning.90 A year later, 74 junks returned to Amoy from the Nanyang.91 Since smuggling activities were always present, these figures reflect only the recorded trade shown in the official documents.

In the 1730s, the cargo carried by each ocean junk trading to the Nanyang was often worth a hundred thousand taels and a profit of 100 to 200 per cent could be expected. In 1786, as a contemporary author recalled, Amoy was crowded with ocean junks. Another source recorded that in 1796 more than one thousand ocean junks and merchant junks originated from Amoy.92

85. Sarasin Viraphol, Tribute and Profit, p. 47.
87. Chen Kuo-tung, “Qingdai zhongye xiamen de haishang maoyi”, pp. 481, 504. For the late seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, refer to Ng Chin-keong, Trade and Society.
88. Cited in Akira Matsuura, Qingdai fanchuan dongya hang yun, p. 188.
89. Cited in ibid., p. 7.
90. Ibid., pp. 30–1.
92. Ng Chin-keong, Trade and Society, pp. 56, 60–1.
Canton was an equally important embarkation point. In the 1760s, there were around 37 junks of various types that weighed anchor in Canton. Not all of the vessels belonged to Canton merchants. The junks also consigned cargo space to foreigners. For example, on top of their own cargoes, the junks plying between Canton and Batavia accepted Dutch consignments of goods aboard Canton junks. The Hong owned their own fleets and employed agents in the Nanyang as purchasers of the goods for import, including local produce and tin. They also appointed agents to penetrate China’s interior to procure such goods as tea, porcelain and silk for export. These agents took charge concurrently of selling the imported goods in the interior.

The foreign trade in Canton was often financed by several parties. Paul A. Van Dyke furnishes his readers with some rare and most valuable information about how the Canton junks were managed and financed in the 1760s. He says:

At least 9 trading houses (factories) and 13 Chinese merchants in Canton sponsored the 37 junks [as shown] in the Swedish records. Additionally, seven Chinese individuals have been clearly identified as the managers of 31 of the 37 junks. Thus, together with the merchants above, there were no less than 20 Chinese from Macao and Canton who managed, financed and serviced the junk trade to Southeast Asia. These Chinese junk traders were often connected in some fashion to the hong merchants themselves, who were licensed by the customs superintendent … to trade with the foreigners…. At least 24 of the 37 junks … were financed by foreigners….  

There was one significant change in the Chinese junk shipping in the Nanyang from the latter part of the eighteenth century. Despite the long-standing predominance of Amoy, the Chaozhou seafarers from Changlim were catching up fast. On top of their active participation in coastal trade, the Chaozhou maritime traders also sailed to foreign countries including Champa, Siam, Batavia, Luzon, Ryukyu, Japan and other places.

94. Ibid., pp. 145–60 and Chart 12.
Alongside the outgoing trade, an increasing number of the Chaozhou people had decided to stay on in Siam. The Jiaqing edition of the *Daqing yitong zhi* (The unitary gazetteer of the Great Qing) in the early nineteenth century describes the trend as follows:

To supplement the grain supply, the Chenghai [Chaozhou] merchants were licensed by the local authorities to ship rice back from Siam. This measure has been implemented for more than 40 years. However, it is said that only 50 to 60 per cent of those going to Siam have returned with their rice junks.  

This is an indication of a trend of more maritime merchants moving their bases of operation overseas.

**The Nanyang Trade, 1800 to 1843**

By around 1820, there were still seven junks heading to Java from Amoy and Changlim. From Amoy there were three junks of 1,000 to 1,200 tons each and another four from Changlim of about 500 tons. Their total tonnage was 5,300 tons. Six of these junks sailed to Batavia and one to Semarang. The Chinese junks also visited other ports of the Archipelago that were under Dutch control. Two from Amoy of 800 tons and one from Changlim of 500 tons traded to Lingen in eastern Sumatra. Three junks of 500 tons sailed to Borneo Proper (Brunei, at that time including Sarawak), two Changlim junks of 500 tons to Sambas, three junks of the same size to Pontianak, two junks of 500 tons to Mempawah, and one of about 600 tons to Banjamasin, amounting in all to about 5,600 tons.

Another Chinese text printed in 1820 mentions a large Chinese population in Kelantan and a few hundred more arriving every year. Some ten thousand Chinese resided in Penang. The majority of the Fujianese in Kelantan were engaged in pepper planting or trade, while those from Guangdong took up mining activities. The text also mentions the presence of Chinese in Malacca, Selangor and Kedah. In Kedah, the Min-Yue people came to trade. John Crawfurd notes that one Amoy junk of 800 tons and another Amoy junk of the same tonnage visited Trengganu and Kelantan respectively. Prior to 1820, a junk of 1,000 tons was trading

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to Malacca but ceased operations owing to the strong competition from the Indian traders from British India.  

The trade with Vietnam reached its peak in the early nineteenth century. As John Crawfurd observes, although trade between the European countries and Vietnam was minimal, the Chinese maintained an active presence on the Vietnam coast.

Thanks to John Crawfurd’s detailed account written around 1820, we are able to get an overview of the trade on the Vietnam coast. The China ports on the trade route included Canton, Chaozhou, Hainan, Amoy, Ningbo and Soochow. On the Vietnam side, Saigon and Cachao were the principal ports. The voyages to Saigon were made by 15 to 25 junks of 120 to 150 tons from Hainan, two junks of 300 to 500 tons from Canton, one from Amoy weighing about 400 tons and six of about 400 tons from Soochow. These Chinese ports also traded to Fai-fo, which was “almost entirely a Chinese establishment.” Three junks of 150 tons sailed from Hainan, six of 180 tons from Canton, four of 180 tons from Amoy and three of 150 tons from Soochow. In total, there were 16 junks weighing nearly 3,000 tons. Sailing to Hue, the capital, from the Chinese ports were about 12 junks of 150 to 240 tons. Trading to Tonkin were 18 junks of 120 tons from Hainan, six of 120 to 150 tons from Canton, seven of similar tonnage from Amoy, and seven from Soochow with an average tonnage of 150. There were some 20 junks of below 120 tons trading with the minor ports of Vietnam. The total number of Chinese junks visiting Vietnam amounted to 116 with a total tonnage of about 20,000 tons. From the information provided by John Crawfurd, it is possible to infer that the trade route from these ports extended to the smaller ports on the Vietnam coast, and beyond that to Siam and the British Straits Settlements.

A few words might be necessary about the port of Soochow that is mentioned in the account. Soochow is not a seaport, but lies on an inland

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101. The name Vietnam was officially adopted in 1804. Prior to that, the kingdom was known to the natives and to the Chinese by the commonly-used name of Annam. The name Cochin China used by John Crawfurd and in European sources for the country was somewhat vague. It referred generally to the southern and central parts to the south of Tonkin. After the French had annexed Vietnam, the country was divided into Cochin China in the south, Annam in the center and Tonkin in the north, under the control of the French Governor-General of Cochin China.

103. Ibid., p. 289.
104. The shipping information is cited from ibid., pp. 510–3.
Expanding Possibilities

At the southern end of the Jing-Hang Grand Canal, by the early eighteenth century, there were already some ten thousand Quan-Zhang people engaged in the rice trade in the commercial section of the city by the Chang Gate in the vicinity of Fengqiao, the major rice market of Soochow. It was an important node in the Quan-Zhang business networks in the Lower Yangzi region. It can safely be assumed that Fujian merchants owned the junks embarking from Soochow. There were two possible routes to reach the sea; one headed north to enter the Yangzi River, and the other turned to the south to the port Zhapu. No information is available about the route the junks took to enter the sea, but it seems more likely the vessels headed southward.

Turning to the cargoes of the Sino-Vietnamese trade, John Crawfurd informs us that the most valuable items were “imported from Amoy, consisting principally of wrought silks and teas; and the least valuable, from Hainan”. Exports from Vietnam consisted of cardamoms, areca-nuts, sugar, luxury woods, eagle-wood, ebony, cotton, rice, stic-lac, ivory, furs, hides, horns, deer sinews, ornamental items particularly those obtained from a species of king-fisher, cinnamon, salt-fish, salt, varnish, dyes, gold and silver bullion. The Chinese junks were in fact prohibited from entering the ports of the country without a special license, but they anchored off the coast and smuggled their cargoes on board. The bulk of the trade between the minor ports of both Hainan and Vietnam can be described as “peddlers’ trade” in nature, carried out by a multitude of seafaring adventurers.

Despite its lively trade with China, the total amount was said to have been less than one-half of that between Siam and China. When compiling his information, John Crawfurd’s main interest was in fact not so much in the volume of trade, but the penetrating power of the Chinese junk trade on the basis of what he had seen in Siam and Vietnam. He therefore suggested that the British might well benefit from conducting

105. Ng Chin-keong, Trade and Society, pp. 97–8, 122.
106. Regarding the shipping routes, see ibid., pp. 118, 122–3, including maps; also John Phipps, Practical Treatise on the China and Eastern Trade, p. li. Akira Matsuura furnishes us in his Qingdai neihe shuiyun shi yanjiu, Ch. 4, with a meticulous description of the inland-waterway shipping in Soochow during Qing times. He also accounts for the Min-Yue merchants in Zhapu, as well as the linkages between Zhapu and the coastal and overseas trade. See also Akira Matsuura, Shindai hansen engan kounshi no kenkyu, p. 53, and Section 3, Ch. 3.
108. Ibid., p. 513.
their trade through the Chinese networks, at the very least facilitating British access to China’s richest Lower Yangzi region.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 306, 515‒6.}

As John Crawfurd recorded in the 1820s, the Chinese ports trading with Siam included Canton, Jiangmen, Changlim, Amoy, Ningbo, Shanghai, Soochow and several ports in Hainan. Assorted cargoes were imported from China, including such items as coarse earthenware, tea, dried fruits, raw silk, nankeens, umbrellas and other minor articles. The Siamese exports also consisted of a multitude of goods including black pepper, sugar, tin, cardamoms, sappanwood, rosewood, ivory, various animal hides and skins, and rice, all of higher value than those from China.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 408‒9.}

At this time, there were more Siamese than Chinese junks involved in the trade. Three large junks of 600 to 900 tons each and 50—each of 120 to 300 tons—made their voyages to Canton, two of 420 tons each to Changlim, two of 360 tons each to Amoy, eight of 300 to 480 tons each to Ningbo, one of 300 tons to Soochow, and 15 of 300 to 480 tons each to Shanghai, totaling 24,560 tons. A large number of smaller junks from China also traded to Siam, including five junks of 180 to 300 tons each from Jiangmen, one of 300 tons from Changlim, and two of 180 tons each from Amoy. They carried a considerable amount of Siamese goods, but of less value. The various ports in Hainan also sent more than 50 junks of about 120 to 200 tons each. The total number of junks engaged in Sino-Siamese trade was 140, with a total tonnage of around 35,100 tons and carrying cargoes of about 10,530 tons. It is apparent that the more valuable part of the trade was conducted on the Siamese side on larger junks. The most profitable part of the trade was with Shanghai, Ningbo and Soochow; the least was with Canton and Amoy. The Siamese junks were all constructed in Siam under the direction of the Chinese. “With the [major] ports of Canton, Nimpo [Ningbo], and Siang-hai [Shanghai], there is no trade to Siam under the Chinese flag,” as John Crawfurd puts it.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 410–1, 413.}

In the meantime, there is no doubt that the rapid development of Changlim shipping allowed it to take over the dominant position of the Fujian merchants in the Sino-Siamese trade. John Crawfurd noticed that the trading junks from this port had gained a position of prominence in the Indian Archipelago in the early nineteenth century. They were highly competitive in Vietnam, Siam, Singapore and the Indian Archipelago. In Vietnam, the local authorities favored the Chaozhou junks, allowing them to pay lower duties than the others.\footnote{Ibid., p. 518.} The red-prow Changlim junks
also took over from those owned by the Fujianese to become the most numerous in Siam.\textsuperscript{113}

Junks from Zhejiang and Jiangnan (Jiangsu and Anhui) in the Lower-Yangzi subregion were also fitted out in the 1820s. This area produced large quantities of raw silk, teas and nankeens. It had a flourishing trade with the Philippines, the Vietnam coast, Cambodia and Siam. There were 24 junks of considerable size sailing to Siam, 16, likewise of large tonnage, to the Vietnam coast and five to the Philippines. The total number of junks in this branch of trade was 45, and their average total burden did not fall short of 17,000 tons.\textsuperscript{114}

Many small junks from Hainan, presumably of Cantonese ownership, made their voyages to the Nanyang in the 1820s. Among them, 50 traded to Siam, and 43 to the Vietnam coast.\textsuperscript{115} A note of caution is needed in any discussions about ownership. There is every possibility that the actual investors were originally either residents of Quan-Zhang or Chaozhou, or both. The 50 junks of 120 to 200 tons each sailed for Siam when the northeast monsoon winds began. From Qiongzhou or Haiko in Hainan, they reached the southern Siamese ports earlier than those larger vessels from other places. With this advantage, they were the early birds arriving in Bangkok in January, in advance of the large junks from Fujian and Zhejiang. The latter two would usually show up one to two months later, in late February or early April.\textsuperscript{116}

Commenting on the impressive scope of the Chinese junk trade in the Nanyang around the 1820s, T’ien Ju-k’ang has the following to say:

If 1820 (the 25th years of the Jiaqing Emperor) is taken as the year for the tabulation, there were 295 junks sailing to Southeast Asia, with a total tonnage of 85,200 tons around the time. The total tonnage of the British East Indian Company ships sailing between Britain and China during the sixteen years from 1805 to 1820 was 29,572 in 1816, the highest figure, and 16,073, the lowest. The annual average was 21,432 tons. Therefore, the number of Chinese junks engaging in overseas trade was more than four times the British ships coming to trade in China.

\textsuperscript{114} John Phipps was citing the submission by John Crawfurd to the Select Committee of the House of Commons on 25 March 1830. See Practical treatise on the China and Eastern Trade, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{116} Sarasin Viraphol, \textit{Tribute and Profit}, p. 188.
From the viewpoint of the trade value, in a single voyage every 500 ton junk could carry an amount of cargo worth 20,300 Spanish dollars, based on the lowest estimate at this point in time. The total cargo value of a round trip was therefore 40,600 dollars. Going on this calculation, the total trade value of the Chinese junks at this time amounted to 6,918,240 dollars. In 1818 (the 23rd year of the Jiaqing reign), the import value of all the foreign firms [foreign-owned yang hang] in Canton was 4,333,750 dollars, and the export value was 5,945,603 dollars. The lowest estimate of the trade value for the Chinese trading junks would reach a figure of only slightly below 70 per cent of the total import-export value of all the foreign firms.\textsuperscript{117}

Combining the sources of information derived from works by John Crawfurd and others, Sarasin Viraphol concludes:

In the early 1820s there were about 222 Chinese junks, averaging 200 tons each, from Fukien [Fujian], Kwangtung [Guangdong], and Chekiang [Zhejiang] trading in the Eastern Seas, and 89 of these, or about 40 per cent of the total force, involving over 2,000 crewmen, traded annually to Siam, making it the most important junk port of the period. The remaining junks traded elsewhere were: 8 to Singapore, 20 to Japan, 13 to the Philippines, 4 to Sulu Seas Island, 2 to the Celebes, 13 to Borneo, 7 to Java, 10 to Sumatra, 1 to Rhio [Riau], 6 to the east coastal of the Malay peninsula, 20 to Annam [Vietnam], 9 to Cambodia, and 20 to Tonkin.\textsuperscript{118}

A new destination of the Chinese junks in the early nineteenth century was Singapore, which had adopted a free-trade policy after the arrival of the British in 1819. The favorable trading environment attracted the arrival of many merchant ships. In 1820, 20 Chinese junks anchored off the pier. “Three came from China, two from Cochin China [the Vietnam coast], and the remaining fifteen from Siam.”\textsuperscript{119} In the following years, four large junks, excluding those from Hainan that were usually smaller,

\textsuperscript{117} T’ien Ju-k’ang, “Shiqi shiji zhi shijiu shiji zhongye zhongguo fanchuan”, pp. 16‒7.
\textsuperscript{118} Sarasin Viraphol, \textit{Tribute and Profit}, p. 188. The information concerning the number of Chinese junks cited by Sarasin Viraphol originates from John Crawfurd’s testimony delivered before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on March 25, 1830, p. 452.
arrived from China. The number increased to five in 1822, six in 1823, seven in 1824, seven again in 1825 and ten in 1826.\textsuperscript{120} To lure the Chinese junks, in their town plans of 1822, the colonial authorities set aside a block of land as the residential area for the Quan-Zhang people from Amoy.\textsuperscript{121} In its early founding years, Singapore reaped the benefits of the Chinese presence. The contribution of the Canton and Amoy junks to the Singapore trade was second only to that of their European counterparts.\textsuperscript{122} Because of their contribution to trade, especially that of Amoy, it was not surprising that Singapore’s trade surpassed that of Batavia in 1823.\textsuperscript{123} In his book, Akira Matsuura recounts the story of a rich merchant from Amoy, Lin Xing, who came to Singapore in 1828 with a capital of 3,000 \textit{taels}. He bought pepper, birds’ nests, nutmeg and cloves and, in three months, had made a profit of 800 \textit{taels}.\textsuperscript{124} This story highlights how quickly a profit could be made by merchants involved in the Amoy-Singapore trade.

John Crawfurd describes the Sino-Singapore trade as follows:

\begin{quote}

The most valuable, but not the largest, of the Chinese junks come from the port of Amoy...; the largest come from several ports of ... [Guangdong], —such as Canton, Changlim, and Ampo [Huangpu?]; and the smallest and least valuable from the island of Hainan.... The articles imported ... are coarse earthenware, flooring-tiles, umbrellas, shoes, paper, incense rods, dried fruits, confectionary, sugar-candy, medicines, nankins [nankeen], gold thread-lace, tea, and a great number of minor articles. The cargo of a Fokien [Fujian] junk is sometimes worth one hundred thousand Spanish dollars: that of a Canton junk will vary from twenty thousand to eighty thousand.... The exports consist of a great variety of articles,—such as the bark of two species of Rhizophora, or mangrove; a species of Alga, ... eagle-wood, ebony, and some ordinary woods; esculent swallows’ nests; the holothurion, or tripang; sharks’ fins, tortoise-shell, tin, pepper, areca-nut, cloves and nutmegs, hides and horns, opium, British iron, cottons, and woolens.\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

The great variety of items reflects the nature of junk trade that involved not just substantial players but also a multitude of small investors, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} John Crawfurd, \textit{Journal of the Embassy}, p. 540.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Lim How Seng, \textit{Xingjiapo huashe yu huashang}, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{122} John Phipps, \textit{Practical treatise on the China and Eastern Trade}, pp. 263, 281.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Sarasin Viraphol, \textit{Tribute and Profit}, p. 205.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Akira Matsuura, \textit{Dongya haiyu yu Taiwan de haidao}, pp. 46–7.
\item \textsuperscript{125} John Crawfurd, \textit{Journal of the Embassy}, pp. 539–40.
\end{itemize}
peddlers. The former might invest in the more expensive cargoes such as cassia, camphor, nankeen and raw silk, for which Singapore had become a depot.\textsuperscript{126} Although the import of tea increased by more than 18 times from 1823 to 1826, the entire quantity was for local consumption.\textsuperscript{127}

In 1823, the value of exports carried by six junks was about 928,700 Spanish dollars, in which opium, British piece-goods and woolens amounted to 230,000 dollars. The trade greatly increased in the following years.\textsuperscript{128} During the 1833‒34 trading season, the Chinese junks brought six to seven thousand chests of teas, including the famous Wuyi and Anxi brands. The bulk of the cargo came from Canton, a portion of it from Amoy.\textsuperscript{129} In comparison to the 1820s, more branded teas were being imported, probably more with an eye for re-export than for the local market. In 1835, the total trade between Singapore and China was worth as much as 1,344,236 dollars, nearly half of which was contributed by the junk trade. The rest of the trade was carried in western square-rigged vessels.\textsuperscript{130} In 1829‒30, 23 junks arrived in Singapore, and this number jumped to 247 in 1841‒42.\textsuperscript{131} Singapore had an import value of 2,073,232 dollars in its trade with China in 1844, and its exports to China were worth 3,256,260 dollars. Ten years earlier these figures had been respectively 766,955 dollars and 1,213,695 dollars.\textsuperscript{132}

John Crawfurd updated his information when he testified before the Select Committee of the House of Commons. He said that the native foreign trade was run by Canton (including Changlim and Hainan), Amoy, Zhejiang (including Ningbo and Shanghai) and Soochow. There were also a great number of small junks from Hainan. Junks embarking from Ningbo, Shanghai and Soochow sailed to the Philippines, the Vietnam coast, Cambodia and Siam, but some visited the western part of the Indian Archipelago. About 80 to 90 junks traded to Siam. He mentioned that Bangkok was the second largest Asiatic trading place in the East after Canton. The average tonnage of the junks was 300 per junk and the total in the native foreign trade of China was 60,000 to 70,000 tons, exclusive

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{126} Ibid., p. 546.
\footnotetext{127} Ibid., p. 541.
\footnotetext{128} Ibid., p. 540.
\footnotetext{129} John Phipps, \textit{Practical treatise on the China and Eastern Trade}, p. 78.
\footnotetext{131} Ibid., p. 123.
\footnotetext{132} Rutherford Alcock “Report on Maritime Trade of China” (1848), in FO 17/142, no. 16, Enclosure; \textit{BPP}; and \textit{NCH}.
\end{footnotes}
of Hainan. The smaller junks from Hainan were estimated at 150 tons each, making all in all around 80,000 tons.\textsuperscript{133} The Canton junk trade continued to operate in the Nanyang in the 1830s and 1840s. In 1835, John Phipps reported the arrival in Canton of Fujian junks from the Indonesian Archipelago, Cochin China, Siam and other overseas ports.\textsuperscript{134} In his 1837 work another author, Edmund Roberts, also indicates that "[m]erchandise was brought here [Canton] from Tongquin [Tonkin],... Cochin China [the southern and central parts of Vietnam], Camboja, Siam, Malacca, or the Malay peninsula, and the eastern Archipelago".\textsuperscript{135} In other words, the merchants and factors in Canton, including those from other provinces, were heavily involved in the foreign trade.\textsuperscript{136} According to a 1838 account, four to five junks from Canton made their annual voyages to Tonkin, largely for smuggling, eight to 12 junks of considerable size set course to Cochin China, 20 to 30 junks to Siam, two to four large junks of 500 to 700 tons each to Borneo, visited the gold-producing areas in Pontianak, Bandjarmasin and Sambas, four to six large vessels to Singapore, as well as several junks headed to Semarang, Riau, Bangka and Palembang. In total, about 40 to 50 junks of 200 to 700 tons each visited these Southeast Asian ports. The total trading capital probably reached five million Spanish dollars.\textsuperscript{137} Edmund Roberts gives a much higher estimate of around 100 junks going overseas. Ports visited by these junks included Penang, as well as harbors in Celebes and the Philippines. He mentions that many junks from Fujian and other northern ports visited Canton before embarking on their overseas voyages. Returning from the Nanyang, the junks anchored in Canton before heading back to their coastal home ports.\textsuperscript{138}

**Whither the Chinese Junk Trade?**

*State of the Chinese Junk Trade in the Early Years of the Treaty Port*

*The Coastal Trade.* In the early years of the Treaty Ports, the coastal trade remained brisk. There was still a large junk trade in Amoy. The

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133. John Crawfurd's testimony, 1830, pp. 452–3, 472.
136. Ibid., p. 121.
straits-crossing trade with Taiwan was “very considerable indeed”, as John Bowring put it.\textsuperscript{139}

In Canton, the junk trade continued to flourish. According to the investigation conducted by British consular officials in 1852, the annual number of arrivals of trading junks was estimated to be 850.\textsuperscript{140} In addition, some three to four hundred salt junks traded with Canton.\textsuperscript{141} The smaller junks were 50 to 60 tons each, while the largest were not less than 900 to 1,000 tons. The average tonnage of the junks connected with Canton was estimated to be 150.\textsuperscript{142}

The Canton junks continued to be fitted out to sail the entire length of the coast of China. The trade consisted of the exchange of Guangdong products for those of the other regions. In aggregate, it was not of high value. For instance, junks sailing to Tianjin and Liaodong carried bulky articles, including lacquerware, manufactured metals, furniture, earthenware, plus a few foreign goods. The returning junks brought back almost entirely low-value dried fruits and vegetables. The more expensive teas and raw and manufactured silks were taken via the overland routes. Although there was no direct trade between Canton and Taiwan, Zhangzhou junks provided the linkage by bringing in camphor from the island. Chaozhou also had a bustling trade with Taiwan on account of the large numbers of its migrants there.\textsuperscript{143}

Hainan, in the vicinity of Canton, contributed to the trade with its specialties such as rattans, timber, pigs, bêche-de-mer, shark’s fins, betel-nut and seaweed. The Hainanese fishermen were engaged in the collection of maritime delicacies that yielded considerable returns. They left their homes for a month or longer and visited many of the distant shoals in the South China Sea. Because of its cheaper prices, Hainan sugar competed well against the Taiwan product. It was shipped to Shanghai by 30 Canton vessels, and a larger number of Fujian junks. Even foreign imports such as spices and ivory were transshipped to Canton and other coastal ports as Hainan products to avoid heavier customs duties. The chief ports in the island were Qiongshan on the northern side and Yazhou in the southeast. There were also many other smaller depots. Junks from Hainan to Canton varied from 70 to 150 tons. About 200 of them entered via Jiangmen in the vicinity of Canton. The relatively short distance

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{139} FO 228/136, no. 151, John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, November 2, 1852, p. 6b.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Adam W. Elmslie in John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 9, p. 75a.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p. 34b.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Ibid., pp. 39a, 40a–42a, 49b–50b; also FO 228/136, no. 151, Harry Parkes in John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 10, pp. 75b–76a.
\end{itemize}
between the island and Jiangmen or Canton allowed the junks to make several voyages annually.\textsuperscript{144}

The development of Shanghai escalated after 1843, when it was declared one of the five Treaty Ports after the Opium War. The Min-Yue merchants became even keener to establish themselves in this boom town. Among the keenest of all were the Fujianese merchants who had long set up their operations for the coastal and foreign shipping there. The Fujianese numbered between 50 to 60 thousand and could be “generally classified into four classes, namely, officials, gentry, merchants and laborers, the last of whom were made up of hired hands and seamen on board the ships”\textsuperscript{145} Those arriving from Guangdong were even more numerous. One source suggests a figure of 80 thousand.\textsuperscript{146} Among the different merchant groups in Shanghai, the Fujianese were the most financially solid, thanks to their ability to provide effective linkages between the two major networks of the north- and the south-bound coastal trade, not to mention the Nanyang trade.\textsuperscript{147}

In his investigation Rutherford Alcock, the British Consul in Shanghai, supported the observation that the junk trade in Shanghai in the early 1850s remained robust. There were more than 3,000 vessels of between 25 to 100 tons to be found in the harbor. Some 1,300 had arrived from the northern ports. They conducted two return trips each year and their cargoes were worth 1,330,000 dollars in total. Around a thousand junks were making two to three trips between the south and Shanghai, carrying sugar and some 12,000 tons of rice. The majority were from Fujian. Taking both the coastal and foreign junk trade into consideration, the imports of the native junk trade in Shanghai for the year 1851 amounted to 9,680,000, while the figure for exports was 4,053,499 dollars, the import being two to three times more than the export trade.\textsuperscript{148}

No fewer than 1,500 trading junks of different tonnage were involved in the busy shipping routes between Shanghai and Shandong. The

\textsuperscript{144} FO 228/136, no. 151, Harry Parkes in John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 10, pp. 73b–74h.
\textsuperscript{145} Gao Hongxia 高红霞, Shanghai Fujian ren yanjiu (1843‒1953) 上海福建人研究 (1843‒1953) [A study of the Fujianese in Shanghai, 1843–1953] (Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2008), pp. 50–1, 59; and Song Zuanyou, Guangdong ren zai Shanghai, pp. 37, 43, 47.
\textsuperscript{146} Gao Hongxia, Shanghai Fujian ren yanjiu, p. 47; and Song Zuanyou, Guangdong ren zai Shanghai, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{147} Gao Hongxia, Shanghai Fujian ren yanjiu, p. 108.
\textsuperscript{148} FO 228/136, no. 151, Rutherford Alcock in John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 5, p. 19a, and Encl. 6, p. 31.
majority of these vessels were owned by those who had their residence in Shanghai or the neighboring ports. The junks coming from the south numbered 1,000. Most of them had set sail from Fujian and made two to three return trips each year. The value of their cargoes amounted to 1,664,996 dollars.\footnote{149}

Overall, the coastal junk trade was sizable and lively. T’ien Ju-k’ang reckons that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, there were more than 1,200 junks active on the Guangdong coast and 850 of them were trading vessels. The tonnage of these ships averaged 150 tons each, or a total of 180,000 tons. On the Fujian coast, straits-crossing junks bound for Taiwan numbered about a thousand. The average tonnage was 150 tons each and the total was 150,000 tons. There were some 2,000 to 3,600 vessels of all sorts, with an average tonnage of 50 to 150 tons each, in the region of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. The total tonnage could be as high as 350,000. A number of them traded to Fujian, but many of them were local boats. Therefore it is difficult to make an exact calculation of the total number of junks operated by the Min-Yue people. On the basis of T’ien’s figures, there could have been more than 5,800 trading junks present along the China coast around 1850, with a carrying capacity of roughly 680 thousand tons. The total value of trade could have been around 26,390,576 Spanish dollars.\footnote{150}

The Nanyang Trade. Despite the declining fortunes and eventual collapse of the Hong system in the early nineteenth century, the junk trade in and around Canton managed to maintain its presence in the Nanyang for some years after the Opium War. Large numbers of these vessels were junks from Chaozhou. They traded to Vietnam and Cambodia. The large junks set sail from Chaozhou, but not from Canton.\footnote{151} This group of junks probably also made voyages to Siam. The branch of foreign trade with Siam was considered by the Chinese to be the most valuable of all their maritime commerce, considering the variety of goods and costs of the imports. Almost the whole of the trade was conducted with Bangkok.

Junks arriving at Canton from Siam numbered some 15 large vessels of 350 to 600 tons each. Two-thirds of them were owned by investors on the Siamese side. Exports to Siam were much fewer than the imports

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\footnote{149. As reported in "Maritime Junk Trade", in \textit{NCH}, I: 30 (30.2.1851), p. 119; and FO 228/136, no. 151, Rutherford Alcock in John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 5, p. 19b.}

\footnote{150. Tien Ju-kang, "Zailun shiqi zhi shijiu shiji zhongye zhongguo fanchuan de fazhan", pp. 6–7.}

\footnote{151. FO 228/136, no. 151, Harry Parkes in John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 10, p. 75a.}
from there. One reason for the imbalance of trade was an increasingly large amount of opium being shipped to Canton. Since the balance of trade was in favor of the Siamese, Mexican dollars were usually taken to Siam by the outbound junks from Canton to offset the trade deficit. In its turn, this bullion formed a good remittance to Singapore.\textsuperscript{152}

Some 15 to 20 small junks of about 100 tons each were fitted out from Canton at the beginning of the 1850s. They were in the hands of small-scale traders or adventurers rather than the Hong merchants, and collected cargoes from port to port. The ports they visited included Kelantan, Trengganu, and Penang in the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, Palembang in Sumatra, Batavia and Semarang in Java, and Banjarmasin, Pontianak and Sambas in Borneo. Their ports of call were uncertain. Their choice was often determined by circumstances. About two-thirds or three-quarters of their voyages seldom went beyond the Malay Peninsula.\textsuperscript{153}

No fewer than 57 trading junks also sailed between Canton and many other ports in Vietnam and Cambodia, including Tonkin (five junks), Tsing hwa (one junk), Nge han (one junk), Fai-fo (three junks), Quang Ngai (three to five junks), Sinchew (ten junks), Phu Yen (two junks), Binh Dinh (three junks), Saigon (ten junks), Ha Tien (three to four junks) and Kampot (two junks). Some 60 junks, many of which might have come from the Straits Settlements, were spotted off the Cambodian coast by a European visitor. At Tik Seak in the same area, 40 other junks were seen at anchor loading rice for the various ports of China. Undoubtedly, there was a large trade being conducted between Vietnam and Canton via Hainan, in what was known as “the West Coast boats”. Among the junks that set sail from Canton, about 25 to 30 of 250 tons each belonged to the Canton merchants. The Hainan junks might have formed a category of their own. The number of them involved in the trade between Canton and the two destinations of Vietnam and Siam could be as large as the total of the junks in other ports.\textsuperscript{154}

Alongside the voyages to the main ports on the Vietnam coast, many junks made their voyages to other smaller harbors to smuggle rice and salt out of the country, or for what was called locally “an outside trade”. They usually exchanged ceramics, pottery and coarse chinaware for the contraband goods. These maritime traders were small investors, with the cargo value for two-way voyages amounting to less than ten thousand dollars. These junks sometimes discharged and loaded in one port, but

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., p. 67.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., pp. 75a–86a.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., pp. 68–70.
more often carried on a coasting trade. Although their trade involved mostly coarse produce, its aggregate value equaled or perhaps exceeded that of the exports from Siam, as Rutherford Alcock noted.\textsuperscript{155}

One 1846 source says that, excluding the Hainan junks, the trading capital of the Guangdong junks was five million Spanish dollars, amounting to one-sixth of the total value of the junk trade along the coast. One-half of the Guangdong junks were trading to Siam.\textsuperscript{156}

In the first few years after Shanghai became a Treaty Port, every year it received a large number of ocean junks returning from overseas voyages. Their operators were mostly the Min-Yue people. The Shanghai shippers made up only 10 to 20 per cent of those participating in the trade.\textsuperscript{157} Around 1850, there were 12 to 20 junks involved in the trade, importing chiefly Straits produce, bêche-de-mer, birds’ nests, medicines, red and black woods, joss and incense, shirting, glass, opium, deer horn, coconuts, rattan, tobacco and gold. Three of them were large junks of 940 tons that traded to Siam. The kingdom imported goods from Shanghai worth 210,000 dollars. Another three junks of the same tonnage returned from Singapore with an import value of 417,000 dollars. Two small junks, both 75 tons, shipped back goods from Burma worth 112,000 dollars each. Two junks of the same tonnage were back from Batavia and the east coast of the Malay Peninsula carrying cargoes worth 112,000 dollars and 83,000 dollars respectively. Two junks of 75 tons each visited Riau once every two years, shipping back a cargo of 41,000 dollars. Returning from the Vietnam coast was one junk of the same tonnage carrying a cargo worth 112,000 dollars.\textsuperscript{158} Rutherford Alcock estimated the total value of this branch of so-called “southern trade” at 8,350,600 dollars. He also put the total value of the import maritime trade in Shanghai at 9,680,000 dollars, and the value of the exports north and south of the native and foreign ports at 4,053,499 dollars.\textsuperscript{159}

In short, the Chinese junk trade remained resilient after 1843. At a time in which the number of junks visiting the Dutch and Spanish colonies in Southeast Asia was declining, the volume of trade with Siam and Vietnam seems to have made up for the losses in the Archipelago to some extent.

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155. Ibid.
156. Sarasin Viraphol, \textit{Tribute and Profit}, p. 197
158. FO 228/136, no. 151, Rutherford Alcock in John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 5, p. 20a; and Encl. 7, pp. 31a–b.
159. FO 228/136, no. 151, Rutherford Alcock in John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 5, p. 21a.
\end{flushright}
The Beginning of the End?

As this essay has shown, the decades up to the early 1840s represent a time in which the Min-Yue junk trade was in its heyday. Commenting on the state of Chinese junk trade in 1852, British consular officials in the Treaty Ports were still highly appreciative of the strength of the junk trade in some parts of Southeast Asia. However, its rapid development was not without its problems in the three major trading ports, namely Canton, Amoy and Shanghai, even in the few decades before they were made Treaty Ports in 1843, as the British consular officials had already detected.

In Canton, the weaknesses in the trading system were exposed when the Bengang Hang ended its operations in 1801. As already mentioned, this group had been assigned the task of supervising and managing the local junks of the port. Its downfall was partly caused by the debts it owed the Siamese and other foreigners, leading to its bankruptcy. The supervision of this branch of the trade was transferred to the Hong merchants until the abolition of the Hong system as stipulated in the Treaty of Nanking.\(^{160}\)

After 1843, the worrying condition of the junk trade emerged even more conspicuously. In what he wrote in 1852 Harry Parkes indicated that the introduction of the treaty system had opened the way to changes and subsequent decline in the junk trade in Canton. With the opening of the northern ports, namely Amoy, Ningbo and Shanghai, the business of the Canton junks was adversely affected. They could no longer collect Straits produce from the markets at low prices as before on account of the competition offered by western shipping. Neither could they dispose of the goods at a profit, except in the ports in the Gulf of Beizhili and the Liaodong Peninsula in north China where western vessels had not yet made their appearance. The profits of the 20 junks that continued to sail to Tianjin and its neighborhood were principally derived from opium and the English piece-goods that they had introduced.\(^{161}\)

Aware of the superiority of the western vessels sailing under the flags of different European nations, the Chinese merchants chartered them to convey Straits produce to the five Treaty Ports. The transfer to western vessels amounted to more than one-half of the whole trade. Consequently, half of the 14 principal Hongs serving their Straits constituents and two other Hongs conducting business with Manila ceased to employ the native junks. The remaining five Hongs and other smaller establishments were

\(^{160}\) Harry Parkes in FO 228/136, no. 151, John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 10, 53a–54a.

\(^{161}\) Ibid., pp. 56a–59b.
still engaged in the junk trade, but their main interest was in conducting
voyages to Vietnam and Siam.\footnote{162}{Ibid., pp. 56a‒57b.}

All along the thriving overseas junk trade had been in the hands of the
Fujian men. With the reduction in trade, they often chose to retreat to
their native towns in Fujian where those who had become rich could live
a luxurious life among their fellow townsmen. For those who were not so
well-off, the cost of living in Fujian was just one-third of that in Canton.\footnote{163}{Ibid., p. 59.}

Harry Parkes also discovered other reasons for the decline in the
junk trade. He points out that Canton society was no longer as thriving
as it had been in the past and consequently the consumption of imported
goods had shrunk. Formerly, the junk traders had the possibility to
make a profit of 200 to 400 per cent, but around 1850 this had shrunk
to only one-tenth of the earlier figures because of the competition from
foreign shipping. The interest rate on money advancement on bottomry
in Canton was about 20 to 25 per cent, just a fraction of the past amount.
Owing to the absence of insurance, the returns on investments were
insufficient to cover the potential losses of the junk or cargoes during
the voyage. As Harry Parkes was informed by one of the largest of the
old Hongs continuing in the trade, the transactions had decreased by at
least one-half during the preceding ten years. While the business of the
five principal Hongs was now worth just above one million dollars, the
profits of the small establishments were even lower. In the estimate of
Parkes' informant, the total value of trade of all the investors was just
above two million dollars. This amount seems to cover only the overseas
junk trade, and was quite close to Harry Parkes' own estimate. Writing
about the overseas junk trade, Harry Parkes reckoned that, around 1850,
the junks entering Canton from Vietnam numbered 30, contributing to
a trade value of 240,000 dollars. There were 15 junks from Siam with
a value of 300,000 dollars. Twenty junks had come from the Straits
with a total value of 120,000 dollars each. In other words, this branch
of trade was worth 660,000 dollars. The situation was exacerbated by
the fact that the export trade from Canton to foreign countries was one-
half of the value of the imports. Therefore, the total value of the import
and export trade for Canton amounted to 990,000 dollars. If combined
with the Hainan trade, the amount would double the sum given above.\footnote{164}{Ibid., pp. 59b‒61a, 85a.}

On the basis of the consular reports that he had received, John Bowring
put the overall capital of the Canton junk trade at between 14,000,000 and 18,800,000 dollars.165

With their income depleted, the merchants felt the pinch of having to meet the government demand for public contributions and other forms of exaction. The richer echelons among the merchants withdrew their investments and kept their capital or property hidden from public view. Trade had also been hard hit by the prevalent attacks by pirates on the coast. After the destruction of the water force during the Opium War, the government was left without adequate means for the suppression of the marauders.166

The general deterioration in the junk trade was not confined to Canton. In Amoy, the battle to persist in the junk trade also lingered on. In fact, there had been signs of problems brewing since around the turn of the nineteenth century. As recorded in the 1832 edition of the Amoy Gazetteer, the junk trade of this port city had suffered from a decline in profits, if not in the amount of business. Having been the foremost shipping center for both the coastal and overseas junk trades in the eighteenth century, its loss of the leading position in native shipping is often seen as the epitome of overall decline in the Chinese junk trade.

A multitude of problems confronted Amoy. First and foremost, it was facing stiff competition from growing numbers of merchant junks that were transgressing the designated spheres of trade. Under the guise of being engaged in the coastal trade, the latter transported their cargoes to Canton so as to enjoy the much lower levies, but actually sneaked out from there to the Nanyang. Their tactics dealt the Ocean Firms in Amoy a heavy blow and led to the closing down of their businesses in the early nineteenth century. The consequence was a void in the management of ocean junks. In 1821, the authorities found it necessary to appoint Merchant Firms to take over the responsibility of the defunct Ocean Firms.

Several new developments occurred concurrently after that. Firstly, the merchant junks were at last officially allowed to engage in the Nanyang trade. Therefore, the demise of the ocean junks did not denote the end of the Nanyang-bound voyages. Secondly, ocean junks from other provinces conducted direct trade with the Nanyang and bypassed the designated port of Amoy, but the decreasing number of ocean junks being fitted out from Amoy was probably the result of their loss of the edge in competitiveness to the merchant junks. Thirdly, the trading junks avoided the port of Amoy and set sail for overseas trade from the less-supervised

165. FO 228/136, no. 151, John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, 11b.
166. Harry Parkes in ibid., Encl. 10, p. 60.
minor ports in the vicinity. Eventually, these shipping irregularities even threatened the survival of the merchant firms.

The problems of the merchant firms in Amoy were aggravated by the loss of their authorized position in the lucrative straits-crossing trade with Taiwan after the opening of five rival ports on the Fujian coast between 1784 and 1824. The logical consequence was that merchant junks bound for Amoy for the straits-crossing trade decreased in number during this period. Equally fateful were the disastrous shipwrecks in 1831 that seemed to spell the end to the good fortune of the merchant junks. In that tragic incident, more than 70 merchant junks from Amoy were sunk in a typhoon near Putuoshan on the Zhejiang coast, resulting in the destruction of half of the strength of the merchant junks in the port in one fell swoop. It also caused the loss of more than a million taels of trading capital. By this time, the business of the merchant firms had almost come to an end.  

Amoy lost its competitiveness as a leading trading port to other harbors in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Maladministration was the principal reason for its deterioration. It poured far more than was wise of its mercantile capital into non-productive areas and the consequence was the loss of confidence among traders in doing business in Amoy.

One early example of government impositions on the mercantile community in Amoy occurred during the prosperous era of the Qianlong reign. In 1764, the Ocean Firms were invited to make contributions to fund war-junk construction. Subsequently, each Ocean Firm was said to have “voluntarily” donated 7,000 Mexican dollars to the project.  

Other impositions were likewise implemented in different years and it had become a common practice for the authorities in search of funds to tap the resources of the shipping community. Commencing in 1746, for example, the merchant junks in the straits-crossing shipping were each instructed to transport 6 to 18 tons (100–300 piculs) of government rice from Taiwan for relief purposes in Fujian. In 1811, 20 large merchant junks were requisitioned to transport six thousand tons (100,000 piculs) of government rice. The meager amount of government compensation offered for these transportations was never enough to cover expenses and the hang merchants had to find money to make up for the great losses on the shipments.

167. The interpretations are based on the information from Zhou Kai, Xiamen zhi, juan 5, sections on “shang chuan” and “yang chuan”.
168. Ibid., juan 5, p. 154.
During the prosperous years, the government impositions were considered tolerable, and might even be seen as a service to win the goodwill of the officials. However, as said, the trading environment deteriorated after the turn of the century. The non-business costs had become a burden on the business community. In their straits-crossing shipping the merchants used every means they could find to bypass the customs checkpoint in Amoy. They even built smaller junks to meet the lower quota set for the government shipments.

Equally damaging was the banning of the shipment of Fujian teas to Canton on merchant junks, following the request of the Liang-Guang Governor-General in 1817, despite a strong appeal to lift the ban made by the only surviving Ocean-Firm merchant Jiang Yuanheng. Such non-conventional transportation by sea instead of the traditional overland route had harmed the interests of the other merchants and inland customs officials in the interior. This move by the Amoy merchants, if successful, would certainly have had negative consequences for the Canton Hoppo. The whole incident casts illumination on the infighting between different provincial authorities who had great interests in protecting the “clients” on their own turfs. Be that as it may, the ban effectively killed the business initiative of shipping a valuable Fujian product in the foreign trade from Amoy. The compiler of the *Amoy Gazetteer* lamented that as a result of the ban, “the ocean junks [from Amoy] trading to foreign countries carried only the coarse goods like bowls and umbrellas”.¹⁶⁹

What the *Amoy Gazetteer* has recorded is a gloomy picture of Amoy’s maritime trade. Government mismanagement had created a disruptive and chaotic business environment in which the Amoy junk trade had to struggle to stay afloat.

To what extent had the business conditions in Amoy affected the junk trade in general and the fortune of the maritime merchants in the port city in particular? First and foremost, Charles Gutzlaff’s eyewitness account mentioned earlier seems to give a contrasting picture of the fortunes of the Amoy merchants. His journal entry written on 7 April 1832 says that, “a large amount of Chinese shipping belongs to Amoy merchants, and that the greater part of capital employed in the coasting trade is their Property”.¹⁷⁰ He happened to be present in Amoy about eight months after the fateful typhoon that had sunk half of its merchant fleet. From the overall context of this account, it would seem that the

¹⁶⁹. The comments in this paragraph are based on the information derived from ibid., *juan* 5, pp. 185, 190–1 and the quote from p. 181.
Amoy merchants had made their fortunes in the extended shipping networks or business operations outside Amoy. The losses in Amoy itself had not significantly depleted their fortunes or jeopardized their leading position in the junk trade enterprise. Indeed, the highly fragmentary and disjointed information collected in the Amoy Gazetteer makes painful reading. As said before, Amoy continued to fit out junks to trade to other coastal cities and the Nanyang. Until the 1840s, its junks were arriving in Singapore in increasing numbers and they remained active in the coastal trade. Nevertheless, after the turn of the century Amoy gradually passed its peak as a shipping center. In 1853, the native maritime trade in Amoy came to a standstill during the Small-Sword rebellion, during which Amoy suffered nine months of destructive occupation. Leaving this aside, as a Treaty Port, its role in shipping had inevitably undergone changes that linked it to international trade with the coming of foreign vessels. In the ensuing one hundred years, it was also a favorite port of call for the Nanyang Fujianese, above all the Straits Chinese.

As Amoy battled, what had happened to the junk trade of the prosperous port of Shanghai? It had also been showing signs of difficulties in the latter part of the 1840s. Rutherford Alcock noted, "(t)he junk trade by all account(s) appears to be on the decrease". He listed a few serious obstacles to the healthy development of the trade. The worst grievance was that very frequently the authorities took up the whole of the tonnage to convey the government’s tribute rice to Tianjin. Secondly, the shippers were incurring great losses from piracy on the high seas and from fresh-water thieves in the interior. Thirdly, when the Treaty Ports were the destinations of their shipments the merchants opted for

171. Commenting on conditions in Amoy in the early 1830s, Murakami Ei rightly observes that, “the decline of Amoy does not necessarily reflect the decline of the South Fujianese trading activities”. See Murakami Ei 村上衛, "Binetsu engaimin no katsudō to shintyō: zyūkyū seiki zenhan no ahen bōeki katsudō wo tyūshin ni" 閩粵沿海民の活動と清朝—一九世紀前半のアヘソ貿易活動を中心に [The Coastal Activities of the Min-Yue people and the Qing Dynasty as Seen from the Opium Trade before the Opium War], Tōhō gakuhō 東方學報 (Journal of Oriental Studies), no. 75 (Kyoto, 2003): 209. A rewritten Chinese version of his essay was published in Zhongguo haiyang fazhan shi lunwen ji, Vol. 10, ed. Shi-yeoung Tang (2008), pp. 361–417.


173. Compare the different readings of the Amoy Gazetteer offered by Sarasin Viraphol, Tribute and Profit, pp. 108–9; Chen Kuo-tung, “Qing tai zhongye xiamen de haishang maoyi”, pp. 500–1; and Ng Chin-leong, Trade and Society, pp. 59–61.
foreign vessels that offered greater protection. Fourthly, the Shanghai Daotai (Circuit Intendant), being a Cantonese, allowed teas and silks to find their way into the hands of the Canton brokers. The monopoly and the excessive duties raised on transporting foreign goods to the northern ports hampered the business of the local traders. Ironically, while the export trade conducted by foreign vessels increased, the junk trade was languishing.\(^{174}\)

Toward the mid-point of the nineteenth century, China's coastal and overseas trades were both in a state of flux. At this point in time, as shown earlier, at first glance the Chinese carrying trade along the coast seems to have remained robust. In 1848, Rutherford Alcock reports that the junk trade along the coast “is very great”. Turning to China's overseas junk trade, he observes that, “there is also a large though decreasing trade”.\(^{175}\)

By and large, Alcock thought that the maritime trade of China was on the decline, although it did remain substantial. The foreign trade carried in Chinese junks was clearly heavily affected, especially in the Straits, as a consequence of the diversion of the Chinese carrying trade to foreign vessels. In the Archipelago and the Philippines, the decline was caused by the restrictions and monopolies imposed by the respective colonial authorities. Rutherford Alcock also seems to be suggesting another more damaging factor for the decline: the risk and losses incurred by the rampant piracy on the coast. There was a notorious incident in which for several weeks the fleet of the piratical junks blockaded the free passage of Chinese vessels near Shanghai in broad daylight. Alcock also reports two other cases, namely the capture of a large Siamese junk and of a Fujian junk from Taiwan by pirates.\(^{176}\)

For a lengthy period of time, the long-haul interregional carrying trade to the Nanyang had been within the purview of the Chinese junks. Nevertheless, since the late 1760s, the British country traders who made their appearance in Canton around this time, had had their eyes fixed on the lucrative carrying trade between Southeast Asia and China. As a result, the growth of British private trade “increasingly and directly competed with the Chinese junk trade”.\(^{177}\)

\(^{174}\) Rutherford Alcock in FO 228/136, no. 151, John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, Encl. 6, pp. 25a–29a.

\(^{175}\) Rutherford Alcock, “Report on Maritime Trade of China” (1848), in FO 17/142, no. 16, End.; BPP; and NCH.

\(^{176}\) Ibid.

The deteriorating native shipping on the China coast provided an opportunity for the British vessels to take over the lucrative carrying trade from the Chinese. They had begun to lay their hands on the inter-treaty-port shipping ever since the opening of the five Treaty Ports. The British were dissatisfied with a situation in which their carrying trade between the China coast and the British Straits Settlements was merely an auxiliary to the direct European and Indian trade.

In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the British officials in Asia as well as the House of Commons continued to show an interest in the prosperous carrying trade operated by the Chinese junks. Rutherford Alcock had been particularly keen on the matter, as revealed in his 1848 report to Governor Bonham in Hong Kong. John Bowring in Canton was so excited about the potential of the British involvement in the carrying trade that in 1852 he ordered the officials in the five consular ports to investigate the state of the Chinese junk trade. In his response, Rutherford Alcock repeated his earlier observations and confidently foresaw the substitution of advanced British vessels for the Chinese junks of a “primitive character”. John Bowring was very pleased with Alcock’s remarks and took the view that “the foreign civilization” that was pressing upon the China coast would soon work to change the shipping modes in this part of the world. He said, “[T]he time is probably not distant when the whole of the foreign trade and a large portion of the coasting trade now carried on by the junks, will be transferred to ships of European or American construction.”

Although John Bowring’s euphoric vision that modern shipping would soon transform the Chinese carrying trade might have been premature, he and Alcock were right about the great challenge posed to traditional Chinese shipping by western shipping since the opening of the Treaty Ports. The predominant position of Amoy, Changlim and Canton in the longer-haul coastal trade, for instance, was disrupted by western inter-Treaty Port shipping. Nevertheless, modern shipping had never been able to replace fully the low-cost labor-intensive junk trade, as in the case of the Chinese coastal shipping that was still in great demand in China’s traditional commercial sector. Although the junk trade was losing ground in the inter-treaty-port shipping, it did survive in the arena beyond the Treaty Ports. The junks also continued to provide the crucial

178. FO 228/136, no. 151, Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, pp. 7a, 8a.
linkage between the Treaty Ports and the non-Treaty Ports. These were the spheres that western shipping had never been able to penetrate.

Nevertheless, unquestionably the Chinese outbound overseas junk trade lost its shine around 1850, compared to its earlier state of predominance and omnipresence in the Southeast Asian waters as described by John Crawfurd, John Phipps, Edmund Roberts and other contemporary observers only two or three decades earlier. The decline in the long-distance junk trade to Batavia, Manila or more generally in the Indian Archipelago was especially obvious. Facing the severe competition posed by the western vessels in this sector, the Chinese junks arriving from their Chinese home ports were reduced to a mere 87. This number of vessels was only one-third of those during the earlier peak. The total number of junks arriving in Singapore, which had emerged as one of the major destinations of the Chinese junks from China, fluctuated greatly from the late 1840s and indeed the junks were soon to disappear from the scene after 1863. In the Sino-Siamese trade, as mentioned earlier, only the outbound junks from Bangkok were involved in the trade.

Although the time around 1850 was a turning point, the declining native junk trade of China should not be seen as a defeat for its main players, the Min-Yue merchants, who were not pushed out of the picture immediately. Despite the challenges, interest in the junk trade remained large. Adam W. Elmslie observes, “Notwithstanding that the Canton junk trade has fallen off considerably within the last few years, it is still of importance.” The uncertainties in their hometown Amoy did not seem to have depleted the fortunes of the Fujianese thus far. As Harry Parkes notes, the junk trade of Canton was developed by Fujian merchants in the first instance and it remained for the most part “in their hands at the present day”. He went on to comment that many cargoes, although imported in the foreign vessels, were still shipped on account of Chinese consignees, who again were “for the most part Fukien men”. The Fujian and Chaozhou junk merchants, who were engrossed in the trade to the Nanyang and who were put under the management and supervision of

182. FO 228/136, no. 151, John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, p. 6b.
185. Ibid., p. 59.
the Fu Chao Hang in Canton, had “always continued [to be] a wealthy class”.

As shown in a declaration issued by the Liang-Guang Governor-General, Ye Minchen, in 1856, the Fu Chao Hang, originally representing the Fujian and Chaozhou Hongs engaged in the coastal and Nanyang trade in Canton, had assumed the role of the former Thirteen Hongs that supervised the European trade in Canton. Therefore there are many reasons that the word “decline” is inadequate to reflect the actual development of affairs around 1850.

Viewing the Min-Yue maritime enterprise in a broader perspective, the reduction or stoppage in fitting out trading junks from the Chinese home ports did not necessarily mean the end of the junk shipping they organized. One salient feature of their junk trade was its state of fluidity and elasticity, reflected in the multi-port and border-crossing nature of their activities. Its *modus operandi* was characterized by the continuous movement to wherever there were new business opportunities. Keeping pace with the development of the junk trade, the Min-Yue merchants had created multi-centered enterprises on the China coast and in the Nanyang. The growing Chinese migrant communities abroad facilitated the branching out of their activities into new areas. Successful Chinese settlers or local-born Chinese merchants were able to play a decisive role, independent of their native home ports, in the local and regional trade on the China coast and in Southeast Asia. As for the Southeast Asian region, with several centuries of their presence under their belts, it was a familiar ground for trade. In that time, the merchant-settlers had built up well-connected networks in the local and regional trade. The fact that the Min-Yue merchants had established themselves so well in Siam and Singapore, for example, can be attributed to the conducive trading environment offered by the local regimes. All this led to their being ready to step into the breach after the withdrawal of the Chinese junks from the centuries-old playing field of the Nanyang-bound carrying trade. The junk traders simply established their operational headquarters overseas, and junk shipping embarkations from Siam to trade in China were in full swing. Concurrently, the intraregional junk trade of the Nanyang region was expanding.

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186. Ibid., p. 54b.
187. Enclosure in FO 228/198, Bowring to Lord Clarendon, no. 50, February 5, 1856.
188. In Murakami Ei’s words, it became clear that, by the early 1830s, the South Fujianese merchants had left Amoy for other port cities. See Murakami Ei, “Binetsu engaimin no katsudō to shintyō”, p. 208.
In a nutshell, the power of sustainability and adaptability greatly enabled Chinese junk traders to overcome the various challenges, as the following sections will elaborate in more detail.

**Fluidity and Adaptability of the Min-Yue Enterprise**

**Irregularities as a Form of Sustainability**

Fluidity and irregularities went in tandem with maritime activities as a means of ensuring survival. A trader would always attempt to create a favorable trade environment and accommodate especially to the wishes of the law enforcers. Even while doing so, he would also instinctively evade restrictive regulations, or circumnavigate constraints. Evasion might also be used simply as an additional means of enhancing his profit margins and often co-existed with accommodation.

Given the existence of numerous customs houses or checkpoints along the coast, evasions were common. The customs duties and trading environment differed between the checkpoints and between provinces. They were highest in Amoy and lowest in Hainan. John Crawfurd was informed by the Chinese traders in Siam that they were subject to the fewest restrictions at the ports of Ningbo, Shanghai, and Soochow. To protect their profits, the maritime merchants would exercise great dexterity in evading duties. Since the duties for native coastal junks were low, it is little wonder that merchants took advantage of the duty disparities by clearing their junks out for the west coast of Guangdong or Hainan, when in reality they planned to proceed overseas to Vietnam or Siam. When a junk returned from abroad, it would anchor off the port of Hainan for a few days, allowing the captain time to strike a deal with the customs officials. If they did not comply, he would threaten to leave for another port, thereby depriving the officials of their usual perquisites.¹⁸⁹

Another such illustration is provided by Harry Parkes. Counting only the smaller towns or depots along the coast, he says:

[There were] no less than seventy customs house stations, through which cargoes can be smuggled, or rather passed, at a lower rate of compromise than that which is required to satisfy the larger staff of employees at the Canton headquarters.... [F]oreign-going junks often discharge the more valuable portion of their cargo outside, and enter only with coarse goods, shipped as they state, at Haenan [Hainan] or some southern harbour of the province, at which they

¹⁸⁹. John Crawfurd’s testimony, 1830, p. 455.
have probably called, on their way up, for the purpose of obtaining a port clearance.\textsuperscript{190}

Call it “irregularities” or by any other name, their survival tactics do have to be admired.

\textit{Migrating to Greener Pastures}

When the Nanyang-bound junk trade was running out of steam around the mid-nineteenth century, intra-regional junk trade in Southeast Asia was at its prime. This regionalized trading mode did not arise at a certain turning point. It was the outcome of a gradual development in tandem with the Chinese overseas junk trade and large-scale migration over several centuries. John Crawfurd aptly describes the creation of the Chinese regional junk trade as follows:

\begin{quote}
[T]here is another numerous class, which may be denominated the colonial shipping of the Chinese. Wherever the Chinese are settled in any number, junks of this description are to be found, such as Java, Sumatra, the Straits of Malacca &c., but the largest commerce of this description is conducted from the Cochin China dominions ... [and] especially from Siam....\textsuperscript{191}
\end{quote}

The trading ports in Southeast Asia were closely connected with the junk trade that in turn contributed to regionalization of the trade. The transfer of business from home ports to those abroad testified to the merchants’ continuous search for greener pastures, especially when the trading conditions at home had become uncertain in comparison to those abroad. Siam is a case in point. For a couple of centuries, it had been a major destination of the Chinese junks sailing from China and had attracted Chinese migrants. A considerable number of Chinese settlers not only participated in the China trade, but also branched out to invest in the local shipbuilding industry. The strong support of the Siamese Court and the availability of abundant construction materials meant that an increasing number of junks were being constructed in Bangkok. It was a cost-effective measure for the junk investors, as John Crawfurd’s investigation revealed. The costs of building per ton in the early 1820s in Siam, Cochin China, Canton and Fujian were respectively 15 dollars, 16.66 dollars and 30.58 dollars.\textsuperscript{192} John Phipps also observed that the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[190] FO 228/136, no. 151, Harry Parkes in John Bowring to the Earl of Malmesbury, End. 10, pp. 61b–62a.
\item[191] John Crawfurd’s testimony, 1830, p. 453.
\item[192] John Crawfurd, \textit{Journal of the Embassy to the Courts}, p. 49.
\end{footnotes}
cost of ship construction was highest at the port of Amoy and lowest in Siam. A 476-ton junk built in Amoy, Changlim or in Siam cost 21,000 dollars, 16,000 dollars and 7,400 dollars respectively. Moreover, “[t]he junks built in Siam are a superior class of vessels, the planks and upper works being invariably of teak”. As a matter of course, not only did the shipping industry of Siam beat its competitors in China, it also triggered the migration to Siam of the Chinese junk construction industry, bringing with it its skilled workers. As early as the late eighteenth century, “[v]irtually all the ships in the [Sino-Siamese] trade including a large number of vessels engaged in China’s external trade were built in Siam”.

On shipbuilding in Siam, T’ien Ju-k’ang makes the following remarks:

> Around 1821, there were already one hundred and thirty-six junks being constructed with capital put up by the overseas Chinese in Siam. Eighty-two of these junks engaged in trade between Siam and China, and another fifty-four traded between Siam and other Southeast Asian ports in Vietnam, Malaya and Java.... The eighty-two vessels trading to China were nearly all manned by overseas Chinese sailors. With the exception of a few ships that employed both the Chinese and Siamese seamen, the crews of the rest of the fifty-four junks trading in the Malay waters were all overseas Chinese seamen.

Of the Bangkok junks around 1820, the Siamese king and local dignitaries owned about 20 of them. The Siamese kings also possessed junks of their own in the southern ports. In Bangkok, at this moment the Teochiu (Chaozhou) people were already in a controlling position in trade and shipping, although the Fujianese still had a role to play in the southern ports outside Bangkok, such as Songkla and Ligor. The majority of the latter merchant group traded to Amoy.

The rapid development of the regionalized shipping can be attributed to the Fujianese and Chaozhou settlers. By the early nineteenth century, trading junks, especially those in the Sino-Siamese trade, increasingly set sail from the home ports in the region rather than in China. Among the 20 junks anchored in Singapore harbor in 1820, two

194. Ibid., p. 205.
hailed from Cochin China and 15 from Siam, indicating the increasing strength of the regionalized Chinese shipping. The largest portion of this shipping category, or what John Crawfurd terms “the colonial shipping”, was operated from the Siamese and Cochin China ports. In the former case, about 200 junks were fitted out from there. Several of them, with a tonnage of 300 to 400 tons each, sailed to Singapore annually. At least 81 of the 89 junks trading to China from Siam were constructed in the local shipyards and were owned by the Chinese settlers. In the trading season of 1830‒32, approximately 35 junks arrived in Singapore from Cochin China. These junks were owned by Guangdong migrants.

Nevertheless, the presence of western vessels in the region had introduced a new mode of shipping operation by the mid-nineteenth century, one that gave the European shippers a seemingly unbeatable advantage. The wooden junks with structural limitations simply could not compete with the well-constructed and well-navigated European or American vessels. John Crawfurd particularly mentions the vulnerability of the Chinese junks that were prone to frequent shipwrecks. To compare the two, a western ship could perform three voyages a year between Batavia and China, whereas a Chinese junk could make the round trip only once a year. Western vessels had the advantage of modern machinery, but Chinese junks, relying on favorable monsoon winds, were operated manually and by a crew ten times larger than that on a western vessel. When more advantages, such as maritime insurance, sailing security, prevention of pirate attacks, speed and protection offered by the western vessels in the Chinese Treaty Ports are taken into account, it is not hard to explain why an increasing number of Chinese shippers, for purely rational business calculations, opted for western vessels.

Although Chinese junks seemed to be losing their competitive edge against the western vessels in the long-distance shipping between Southeast Asia and China, these “primitive” wooden junks were still playing an important role in intraregional shipping, in a scenario similar to what had happened on the China coast after 1843. Their presence in the smaller ports that were beyond the westerners’ purview was irreplaceable. They provided the indispensable feeder shipping services

199. Lim How Seng, Xinjiapo huashe yu huashang, p. 6.
201. John Crawfurd, History of the Indian Archipelago, Vol. 3, pp. 176, 178. However, Crawfurd contradicted himself when he was describing the features of Chinese junks in 1830. He says that, notwithstanding their weaknesses, “their pilots are expert... During the thirteen year acquaintance with this branch of trade, I can recollect hearing of but four shipwrecks; and in all these instances the crew were saved.” See John Crawfurd’s testimony, 1830, p. 454.
in the broader commercial networks. The westerners needed them to connect to the local networks for the procurement of local produce and the distribution of imported goods. That is to say, the two modes of shipping coexisted, playing their roles separately yet inter-connectedly.

In creating new business opportunities, the Chinese shippers also had the advantage of their familiarity with the commercial environment. John Crawfurd reckoned that “[t]he Chinese have an intimate knowledge of the markets, and a skill in assorting and laying in their cargoes, which no European ... can acquire”.²⁰² The Europeans, in comparison, were virtually outsiders in the region. They were no match for the Chinese merchants who could penetrate local markets. This disparity offers an explanation of why the Chinese junk traders not only took on the challenge, but also expanded their operations in regional shipping. Moreover, providing the numerous Chinese migrants in Siam, Cochin China, the Straits Settlements and the Indian Archipelago with their daily necessities, and procuring local produce from the Chinese merchants spread all over the region, gave them great business opportunities that were beyond the reach of the western traders.²⁰³ John Bowring agreed and went on to comment that the numerous Chinese migrants were very likely to have boosted the rapid development of the Chinese “colonial shipping” so as to meet their demands.²⁰⁴

The Min-Yue shippers continued to be involved in the long-distance shipping between the Nanyang and China, by adopting a different mode of operation and jumping on the bandwagon of modern vessels. A glimpse of the maritime trade in Singapore is sufficient to appreciate the preference of Chinese shippers for the western vessels. Those who were engaged in the consignment trade opted for western ships whenever they dispatched their cargoes to China. From 1850, the Chinese shippers in the Straits Settlements also consigned most of their cargoes from Amoy to Spanish-registered steamships.²⁰⁵ The Fujianese Straits Chinese were the pioneers among the local Chinese in adopting the new shipping mode. In a few cases, the Straits Chinese (Anglo-Chinese) even owned some western vessels flying European flags. Their identity as British protected subjects also cut down the extent of harassment by the Chinese customs officials in the Treaty Ports.

²⁰⁴. FO 228/136, no. 151, John Bowring to The Earl of Malmesbury, pp. 7b–8a.
In sum, the resident Chinese merchants found it more fruitful to operate from their bases overseas. They gained from the growth of the regional trade and from playing a role in connecting the intraregional junk trade with the long-distance carrying trade conducted by western vessels.

**Integrating into Local Societies**

The southeastern coast of China and Southeast Asia formed parts of the interlocking networks of a trans-regional maritime trade that was simultaneously in the process of establishing linkages to the greater maritime world. The Min-Yue people injected an enterprising spirit into their trade activities and developed lively, bustling trading communities in the port cities on the China coast and in the Nanyang.

In the port cities at home and abroad the Min-Yue merchants endeavored to create a favorable trade environment and accumulate their social capital. They were not just sojourners looking for quick profit in the port city, but were making an effort to build social networks and integrate themselves into the local community to facilitate their trade activities.

Amoy provides an example to illustrate the workings of such social networks. Like other port cities, it was a developing migrant society. It had a population of “several tens of thousands” on the eve of the Qing conquest of Taiwan. Owing to the influx of migrants from the interior, the population had increased to 144,893 by 1830.206 In the port city, commercial wealth was the basis for the establishment of social status. The wealthy merchants undertook the financial sponsorship of public works and local events. They built close relationships with the officials and members of the gentry. The latter two groups did not shy away from making clandestine investments in businesses through the merchants, even though Confucian ethics despised profit making. The merchant involvement in community affairs could be seen in the temple activities that represented one salient feature of local popular culture. As organizers of religious processions during temple festivals, the merchants would invite the officials and the gentry members to the events. Such occasions provided them with the opportunity to build a tripartite relationship. For the officials, participation in these social events demonstrated their care for the subjects and helped to suppress any potential public ill-feeling toward the local authorities. Undoubtedly, their wealth enhanced the merchants’ social influence, attained through their role as social

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206. Ng Chin-keong, *Trade and Society*, p. 84.
facilitators. They even acted as mediators between the officials and the common people in the local community.\(^{207}\)

In Canton, the Hong merchants could trace their connection with the Fujianese merchants back to at least around 1700, when the Amoy and other Quan-Zhang merchants began to establish themselves in the city. The South Fujianese merchants built a functional coastal network of commerce in major seaports such as Canton, Amoy, Hangzhou, Dinghai and others. By the early eighteenth century, they had also established themselves as the most influential Hong merchants in Canton, whose business activities spanned Canton, Macao and Amoy. Their successful integration into the Canton mercantile community did not weaken their Fujian identity. The first generation merchant migrants would eventually opt to retire to their native town. In their business expansion, their double identities as both Fujian and Canton men were extremely helpful in their commercial undertakings.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the resident status of the Fujian merchants in Canton had begun to evolve from that of sojourners to settlers as more Fujianese merchants chose to settle in Canton and become Canton men.\(^{208}\) The decision made by the prominent Hong merchant Phuankhequa (Pan Qiguan, 1714‒88), who was also the leading merchant of the Thirteen Hong, is illustrative. Pan was born into a poor family in the Tong’an district of South Fujian and at a young age took up manual work as a boatman. He arrived in Guangdong when he was nearly 30 years of age and had thrice traveled to Luzon to trade. After these ventures, he had been able to accumulate enough capital to commence his own merchant firm, the Tongwen Hong. Initially, he made annual visits to his ancestral homeland, but later decided to take up permanent residence in Canton in order to manage his expanding transactions with the British East India Company. His eldest son, You Neng, was born in Canton in 1742.\(^{209}\) At that time, the Hong merchants most likely also assumed the leadership positions at the Quan-Zhang Guild Hall (the Quan-Zhang Hui Guan), a clear indication of their multiple identities. They were Canton men, Quan-Zhang men, Fujian men and even more at the same time when, for instance, their native-district identity was taken into consideration. The multiple identities allowed them to move freely

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207. Ibid., pp. 88–94.
between the Canton community and the broader regional commercial networks along the coast.

The Fujianese merchants had also been active in Shanghai prior to the eighteenth century and they had founded the Quan-Zhang Guild Hall there in the late Ming period. The native-place-based association functioned as an umbrella organization that strengthened the cohesiveness among the merchants from the different districts of the two prefectures. The organization broadened its membership by combining the strength of two subregions and drawing together the sea merchants from the districts of Longxi, Tong’an and Haicheng. A public burial ground was established for deceased fellow residents from the districts of Quan-Zhang prefectures.\(^\text{210}\) Those hailing from Guangdong were mainly Chaozhou and Canton people. The former founded the Chaozhou Guild Hall in 1759. After the Opium War, the presence of the compradors from the district of Xiangshan in the neighborhood of Canton became a very conspicuous feature of Shanghai and hence enhanced the position of the Canton merchants.\(^\text{211}\) As has been noted earlier, the Canton natives did not actively involve themselves in maritime trade. Therefore, the “Canton men” were mostly of Fujian or Chaozhou origins.

Whenever deemed necessary, merchants would cast their net wider to form a united association by breaking down the geographical boundaries even farther. One such example was the Min-Yue Guild Hall in Tianjin.\(^\text{212}\) It was an alliance of the merchants from Quan-Zhang and Chaozhou, crossing the provincial lines. With enhanced strength and influence, the united guild hall enjoyed a stronger voice and greater mediating power in the local community. The sojourners and settlers took the flexibility in organization for granted since they were accustomed to forming alliances in their native villages as a survival strategy. The Min-Yue Guild Hall was founded during the prosperous Qianlong reign, at which time there was an upsurge in coastal trade. The guild hall leadership rotated between the three merchant groups. As was the common practice in Chinese migrant communities at home or abroad, the guild hall owned a common burial ground, known as the “Min-Yue Shanzhuang” (literally, the Mountain Villa of the Min-Yue People) for their compatriots from the two provinces.\(^\text{213}\) The Min-Yue merchants were active members in the local community.

\(^\text{211}\) Liu Zhenggang, *Guangdong huiguan lun gao*, p. 77.
\(^\text{212}\) The Min-Yue Guild Hall in Tianjin was founded in 1739 by the sugar merchants from Amoy and Chaozhou. See Murakami Ei, “Binetsu engaimin no katsudō to shintyō”, p. 261fn110, citing *Chong xiu Tianjin fuzhi* 重修天津府志 [Revised Edition of the Gazetteer of Tianjin Prefecture], juan 24 (1899, 1900).
\(^\text{213}\) Pang Yujie, *Kaiwu tongshang yu jindai Tianjin shangren*, p. 45.
They held temple festivals to celebrate the birthdays of the Protectress of the Sea, Mazu (or Tian Hou, the Heavenly Queen) and the God of Fortune, enlivened by processions and banquets. Besides strengthening the comradeship among the members, these social functions provided good occasions for building close-knit tripartite relationships, as in Amoy and other cities, among the merchants, officials and members of the gentry.\footnote{Ng Chin-keong, \textit{Trade and Society}, pp. 178‒83.}

In the Nanyang, the Chinese migrant population had been increasing throughout several centuries of contacts. John Crawfurd estimated the Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia around 1830 to be 800,000. Some 7,000 came to Siam annually while he was there.\footnote{John Crawfurd’s testimony, 1830, pp. 448, 451.} Although there is no way to verify the accuracy of the figures, the numbers must have been large. In Bangkok, the population composition resembled that of Manila and Batavia, all three having a large Chinese community. The Chinese population in Bangkok was 31,000 in 1822. In 1849, it had increased to 81,000 out of a total population of 160,000.\footnote{Sarasin Viraphol, \textit{Tribute and Profit}, p. 213.} By the early nineteenth century, the Chinese of Chaozhou origins had formed the majority among their Chinese compatriots. In the economic arena, the Chinese were granted preferential treatment by the Siamese authorities. John Crawfurd acknowledged his envy of the privileged position of the Chinese:

[The Chinese] were allowed to buy and sell without any inconvenient restriction. However, [an] American ship sailed about this time, after being detained near six weeks; and the commander, although he required but a small quantity of sugar to make up his cargo, and had paid for it in ready money, was subjected to much vexation, and imposition. The English vessel from Calcutta was treated in the same manner.\footnote{John Crawfurd, \textit{Journal of the Embassy}, p. 175.}

John Crawfurd also remarked that the Siamese shipping amounted to about 24,562 tons and employed 4,912 Chinese. It was an average of 20 hands to each hundred ton.\footnote{Cited in Sarasin Viraphoy, \textit{Tribute and Profit}, p. 187.} In their capacity as investors, executives or managers, the Chinese were also the business partners of royalty and the nobility. The reason for the Chinese success in often being trusted by the local regime could be ascribed to what Crawfurd depicts, just like elsewhere in the region, that "[t]he peaceful, unambitious, and supple character of the Chinese, and the conviction of their exclusive devotion to commercial pursuits" had disarmed the native governments of their
jealousy. Not surprisingly, they were accepted as welcome guests. In the case of Siam, the Chinese and the nobility formed a symbiotic relationship that, in its turn, greatly encouraged the Chinese to integrate themselves willingly into local society.

The localization of the Min-Yue merchants can also be seen elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Immediately after its opening to trade by the British, Singapore, a port city with a large concentration of Chinese population, had attracted the arrival of the business-smart Amoy merchants from China as well as the Quan-Zhang merchants from Malacca. There were also Teochiu (Chaozhou), Canton, Hainan and Hakka (Kejia) migrants arriving in this colonial outpost. The Chinese population in Singapore between 1821 and 1830 increased from 1,159 to 6,555. Four years later it was 10,767. The Quan-Zhang people built a common burial ground, known as the Hengshan Ting (the Hengshan Pavilion) in 1827 and founded the Thian Hok Kiong (Tian Fu Gong) Temple devoted to the worship of Goddess Mazu in 1850. The latter was also the location of the principal organization of the Quan-Zhang community, the predecessor of the Hokkien Huay Kuay (Fujian Hui Guan, The Fujian/Hokkien Guild Hall). The organization was financially solid and therefore influential in local Chinese society thanks partly to the contributions of funds from the rich Amoy junks visiting the port. Naturally, the colonial government also attached great importance to it and saw it as the leading organization for the whole Chinese community. It was in the colonial government’s interest to have the community leaders play a role in assisting the government to maintain social order and help manage the restless and often violent labor migrants.

Each of the other same-dialect-based communities, whether they were Cantonese, Teochiu, Hainan or Hakka, had its own temple and community organization, the guild hall (hui guan). This does not mean that native-place ties formed the only basis for organizations. The smaller, less powerful native-place associations might bind themselves together to form an umbrella organization. This allowed them to be more effective in vying with the stronger, more powerful associations. Competing for economic or social space could have been another factor in the

formation of associations. There were also same-surname associations representing a form of alliance in early Singapore, whose organizing principle was similar to that of the fictitious lineage organizations in the native villages.

It was not all plain sailing. Clashes might occur now and then between the local authorities and the Chinese communities. In the fallout from the “Batavia Fury” in 1740, for example, when most of the Chinese population of Batavia had either been killed by the Dutch authorities or had fled, the junk trade to Batavia was in jeopardy. Neither party thought the situation desirable. To remedy the situation, in 1742 the Dutch government ordered the setting up of the Chinese Council of Batavia to manage Chinese affairs and mediate between the authorities and the Chinese community. The Chinese leadership of the Council was made up mainly of the local Hokkien (South Fujianese) commercial elite who were major tax-farmers. Despite the Dutch monopoly on trade, the government still found it expedient to work with the Chinese merchants for their mutual benefit, as both sides needed to find ways to accommodate each other’s economic interests. Consequently, as pointed out by Leonard Blussé, Amoy did not stop dispatching its junks to Batavia. Blussé also mentions the faraway Ocean Firm (yanghang) in Amoy that continued to send friendly letters to and exchange gifts with the Batavian authorities in the early nineteenth century. Obviously, close relationships established through mutual accommodation would better serve their respective business interests.

The Chinese merchants in the Nanyang did exactly what their counterparts on the China coast had been doing all along. The situation in the Spanish Philippines was similar. The expulsion of migrant Chinese by the Spanish colonial government in 1755 and 1766, for instance, did not result in the withdrawal of Chinese


involvement in local commerce. The Spanish authorities chose to work with the assimilated Chinese, known as the Chinese mestizos. The expelled migrant Chinese soon found sanctuaries from which to continue doing their business on the more remote islands. In other words, accommodation, localization and integration became potent weapons adopted by the Nanyang Chinese merchants to avoid potential trading difficulties.

**Retrospective Observations**

The prosperous age of the eighteenth century had set in train two effects in Qing China: population growth and a maturing commodity economy. The changing socioeconomic conditions contributed to the waves of outward mobility that in their turn led to the expansion of marketing networks conducive to the rapid development of the coastal and overseas junk trades. The trading ports were hives of activity and witnessed the emergence of an entrepreneurial mercantile community. Each domestic or foreign port functioned as the commercial node of a subregional centre for the distribution of imported commodities and the collection of local specialties for export. By means of inter-port shipping, the trading junks linked up the nodes along the China coast and in the Nanyang to form a vast, vibrant interregional market during a lengthy period of nearly 150 years.

Undoubtedly, it was the spirited and untiring Min-Yue seafarers who had created the panorama of the coastal and overseas junk trade during the period in question. The South Fujianese and the Chaozhou people represented the major contributors to the boundary-transcending trade expansion. The third group of players from the region, namely the Hainanese, fitted out the majority of their junks to sail to the coasts of Vietnam and Siam.

Throughout the period, the Min-Yue junk trade retained the salient feature of being "people's trade", involving both substantial merchants and numerous peddlers from the Min-Yue subregions. The narrative would be incomplete if the numerous migrants who joined the voyages of the trading junks were left out of the picture. This category of seafarers would themselves become traders, procurers or simply consumers of imported items from China. Therefore, the strength of the maritime enterprise can be attributed to the collective contributions made by the investors from the home ports, traveling traders and peddlers on board the ships, resident merchants or agents in the trading locations and

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multitudes of migrant settlers. Together they created the functional multi-layered and the multiport enterprise that was born from the junk trade.

This boundary-transcending perspective broadens our horizons by viewing the interconnected regional networks as integral parts of the trade and allows us to appreciate better the *modus operandi* of the Min-Yue businesses. Speaking of Fujian and Guangdong, G. William Skinner posits that the southeastern region, that extended from the southern portion of Zhejiang to Chaozhou in eastern Guangdong with the port city Quanzhou at the center, experienced a more than two-centuries-long maritime “dark age” between the turbulent Ming-Qing transition in the 1600s and the 1840s when five Treaty Ports were opened to trade after the Opium War. He suggests that the economy and coastal trade entered a cycle of decline between these two points in time. In contrast to his claim, this chapter has described an overall upward trend in economic and shipping developments. Although periodically fluctuations and depressions did occur, it was on the whole a period of unmistakable upward swing in the one and a half centuries from the lifting of the maritime ban in 1684 until the golden age of the seafaring trade that might be viewed as the long eighteenth century. The driving force behind the seaborne enterprise came from the southeastern coast covering the subregions of South Fujian, the Chaozhou-Shantou Plain and the Pearl River Delta, with Amoy, Changlim and Canton as the three major interconnected ports. Although G. William Skinner sees Fujian and Guangdong as two different geographical regions in his macro-regions analysis, the growth of domestic and overseas junk trade in the eighteenth through the first half of the nineteenth century had in fact integrated the two in their common pursuit of profit.

In each of the transaction centers, the presence of the Min-Yue merchants boosted the development of a prosperous mercantile culture. By nature the community of a port city was pluralistic and competitive. The lack of social cohesion often led to conflicts among the different interest groups. The mercantile community too often encountered jealousy and oppression on the part of the government, but the local authorities had a stake in maintaining social harmony and avoiding disorder. In this respect, they shared with the mercantile community a strong desire to maintain peace and harmony, and this provided a conducive environment for the economic growth and social stability.

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229. Also refer to Sucheta Mazumdar, *Sugar and Society in China*, p. 113, for similar comments on the issue.
of the locality. The administrators welcomed the participatory and mediating roles of the influential merchants in creating wealth and pacifying the contesting parties in the port city. The Chinese merchants fitted in well in the complex plural society in their role as mediators.\(^{230}\) Similar in nature to the role of their gentry counterparts in Chinese rural society, the Chinese merchants were facilitators in the building of a functional business and social institution.

Discussing the penetrating power of Chinese junk traders and their extensive trading networks in Southeast Asia during the eighteenth century, Leonard Blussé has coined the term “the Chinese century” to describe the predominant position of the Chinese in maritime trade in the region.\(^{231}\) In comparatively plain language, T’ien Ju-k’ang had earlier painted a picture of the Chinese seafarers’ outstanding achievements. He adopted a long view that covered the period of the seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries to illustrate the trajectory of the Chinese junk trade, although the period might also be extended to include the beginning of the Haicheng-Manila trade in the late sixteenth century. The purpose of the present chapter has been to highlight the golden age of the trade and specifically the "Min-Yue" people, rather than the more generic term, “the Chinese”, in the narrative. Only then can the actual contributors to this maritime achievement regain their rightful place in history.

The Min-Yue people’s enterprise was unprecedented in human history in terms of its extensive scope, mass participation and socioeconomic impact on local societies in the regions. The time period in question can justifiably be called an era of the Min-Yue seafarers on the China coast and in the South China Sea region. Although the Nanyang-bound junk trade of the Min-Yue people had lost its past glories by the mid-nineteenth century, their maritime legacy that was born from the junk trade still remains conspicuous in Southeast Asia even today.
