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Trepang and wangkang

The China trade of eighteenth-century Makassar c. 1720s-1840s

The sources are unanimous: trepang are repulsive.[1] Alfred Russel Wallace (1869:329), in one of the kinder descriptions, likened them to 'sausages which have been rolled in mud and then thrown up the chimney', while John Crawfurd (1820, III:441) found that 'the trepang is an unseemly looking substance'. The more scientific dr. J.C. Koningsberger (1904) catalogued their habits when disturbed: evacuation of long tendrils of slime, or indeed the entire gut, culminating in some sub-species with the dissolution of the skin, leaving the animal a mere puddle of sludge. A relatively neutral account depicts trepang as being 'usually a span in length, round, dark brown on top, reddish underneath, covered in small warts, and with eight coarse feelers on the snout' (*Tripang* 1869:1124), while the *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* observed that they came in all sorts of colours (yellowish white, black, blueish, spotted, reddish) and sizes (from 5 cm to 2 meters long) (*Encyclopaedie* 1917-39, IV:437-40).[2]

But trepang (*bêche-de-mer*, sea-slugs, sea cucumbers) were not sought after for their looks, but for their very considerable commercial value. For these unprepossessing animals were a Chinese culinary delicacy, and in the course of the eighteenth century trepang became the major product the eastern archipelago offered in exchange for imports from Amoy (modern Xiamen) and Canton. Makassar was the Indonesian centre for this valuable trade, and the history of her economy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century is closely linked to the fortunes of the trepang fleets. Moreover, since trepang were gathered or purchased along the coasts of many apparently isolated islands, the trade greatly intensified the commercial possibilities of outlying

1 I am indebted to David Bree and Ankie de Jonge for their central work in developing the database on Makasar's eighteenth century trade, and to Greg Acciaioli and Gerrit Knaap for their valuable suggestions.

2 J.N. Vosmaer (1839:148-84) contains a wealth of material on trepang and the fishery.

regions. Bajau (sea nomad) and beach populations added trepang catching to turtle hunting and the preparation of agar-agar as a means of obtaining goods to exchange for the coarse textiles and odds-and-ends offered by seasonal visiting traders or established broker communities. The seafaring peoples of South Sulawesi – Makassarese, Bugis, and Mandar – were traders par excellence, tapping the many small tributaries of commerce, and channelling them into the broad stream of international trade. Local rulers, who often invested heavily themselves, were well aware of the importance of such exchanges for the prosperity of their peoples, so the protection of economic networks and interests was a matter of state policy as well as local concern.

The central role of seaborne commerce for Makassar is well known. Lying on the southwest peninsular of Sulawesi, the port-town was ideally located to participate in various levels of trade. These ranged from the local coastal movement of goods, through the busy inter-insular traffic among Java, Kalimantan (Borneo), Maluku (the Moluccas), Nusa Tenggara (the lesser Sundas), and the Philippines, to long range commerce connecting Europe, India, and China. Conquered by the VOC (Dutch East Indies Company) in the late seventeenth century in order to secure its spice monopoly, Makassar functioned as the main Dutch watch dog guarding the eastern sea routes (Sutherland 1987).

Despite Company attempts to force trade into channels profitable for the VOC, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries two sorts of exchange remained typical of Makassar's economy. Indian goods, mainly textiles, but increasingly also opium, were brought to the archipelago by West Asian merchants, and later by British country (intra-Asian) traders. They would rendezvous at ports like Banjarmasin and Riau with Makassarese, Mandar, Wajorese and other Bugis, who offered slaves (particularly before 1820), sea- and forest-products, local textiles, or Spanish dollars. This 'western' link formed one major axis of Makassar's commerce; the other was the 'northern' trade, reaching up to Amoy and Canton. In this paper we will consider the China trade of Makassar in general, before turning to a more detailed description of the trepang business and its implications.

The China trade

In 1814 A.J. van Schinne, the *syahbandar* or harbourmaster of Makassar, wrote to Richard Phillips (Raffles' resident there) reviewing the commercial situation. Despite the semi-literate Dutch, the memorandum is worth quoting at considerable length, since it so clearly describes both the centrality of the junk trade for Makassar, and wider economic patterns which had their roots in the early eighteenth century.

Van Schinne notes that the annual Amoy junk usually brought goods worth about 600,000 *rijksdaalders* (rds), and exported commodities to the same value. This generated a customs farm income of about 56,000 rds: a dramatic increase on the mid-eighteenth century amounts of circa 6,000 rds.[3]

> 'But', he continues 'then no *wangkang* [small junk] was admitted, and the number of traders and Chinese – which has greatly increased with this yearly arrival – was in those days very small in comparison with now'.

The harbourmaster goes on to describe, in glowing terms, the commercial hub that was Makassar:

> From all this it is possible to get some idea of how important the arrival of the Chinese junks has been for Makassar [...]. There is no-one who is not more or less involved and who does not in a direct or indirect manner participate in the [resulting] prosperity; after [the junk's] arrival animation and happiness are visible everywhere, creating general cheerfulness and activity. The large number of petty traders as well as the far fewer considerable merchants, including the moneylenders [*renteniers*], are all equally determined to make their profit now; every one – from the smallest to the greatest – has prospective plans and expectations, which he hopes to realize within four or five months. There are even those who only dare to speculate on a capital of no more than 2 to 300 *rijksdaalders*, or even less, [but this is no problem] because not only does the junk provide goods for such small or even smaller sums, but it also provides petty amounts of cash which enable lesser natives and Chinese to undertake journeys to such places where various goods can be obtained in which the junk has an interest, to their mutual benefit, so that towards the time of her departure, always early in July, many small craft arrive with goods which they expect to dispose of, by exchanging them with commodities from the junk. And, finally, many inhabitants of the far inland districts come and sell things for ready money which they and their families need for the coming year, so that the cargo of the junk is completely sold within a very short time. But it requires much time for the loading, and only after several months can the debts be liquidated with the multitude of the junk's debtors, who mostly return from their journeys in May and June.
>
> In this way the junk, having divided its cargo into a hundred and more parts, after a stay of more than five months, obtains [a cargo in exchange] for the goods it brought as well as for the credit it provided, and having set to work the money it has attracted from distant native places, and having provided capital of several hundred thousand *rijksdaalders*, it finally departs, leaving behind powerful assets for those with whom it has a connection, so that they can profitably continue their business in the rest of the year. Her [return] cargo consists of various articles of

[3] Sutherland (1987:113) describes the tax-farms of Makassar. The *rijksdaalder* (rixdollar) was the usual 'money of account', while the common currency in use were Spanish '*matten*', '*realen*' or '*rijksdaalder spaans*' known also since the British interregnum (1811-1816) as Spanish dollars; in the late eighteenth century a '*spaanse mat*' was made up of 64 *stuivers*, and was worth approximately 3 guilders, or circa 1:16-1:12 *rijksdaalders* (*Encyclopaedie* 1917-39, II:680-2).

which the trepang, which will be described below, are the foremost, and which taken together are equal to the value of the cargo she brought.

Van Schinne proceeds to describe the boats involved:

Trade here is generally carried on with *paduakang* loading from nine to thirty or forty, and occasionally but very seldom, sixty or seventy *koyang*,[4] in such a cheap and economical manner that I am assured that it is the use of these which is the strongest reason that any trade of consequence can still be carried out here [...]. And it must be readily acknowledged that foreign or European merchants coming here with their ships or vessels cannot easily dispose of their cargoes or major parts thereof [...]. In the usual course of events everything adjusts to the nature and character of the lands and peoples [...]. Makassar is a place where the inhabitants are averse to agriculture but very fond of seafaring (I speak of the natives), and I believe that this same genius for seafaring in combination with the industry and profit-seeking of the Chinese (who have been here since the earliest days) are the fundamental causes of the current trade situation.

If two *wangkang* instead of one should come here, then the supply of trepang, birdsnests, tortoise-shell, wax and other articles would increase in proportion. Having mentioned trepang above, it is necessary to consider them briefly. Trepang are a sea-crop, and can justifiably be called the most important fishery for Makassar.[5] Every year in December a large number of small *paduakang* sail forth, some of them – equipped by Chinese and natives – go as far as the coasts of New Holland [Australia] [...] provided with the necessities for the fishing and preparation of the sea-product; others buy it from the Torijene [Bajau] in the Gulf of Boné, Bonérate and around the islands, partly for small change, and partly for Chinese knick-knacks and coarse textiles. When the trepang for which they have fished arrives here [Makassar], they are sorted into various classes and sold to the *wangkang* for the market price which is established by a meeting of the most prominent traders and the Chinese junk captain, as well as those others having a share in the junk cargo, according to the sorts, the prices of which differ considerably, and of which the so-called *trepang Marégéq* [Australian trepang] is the most prominent, and in China the most sought after, and sold there for a very high price.

The natives of this coast are said to excel in the method of drying and preparing these goods, which together with the great quantity which are brought from there, makes this trade special to Makassar, more than other places, and brings

4 These seem unusually large *paduakang* – perhaps Van Schinne was carried away here, Vosmaer notes *paduakang* were usually 10 to 15 *koyang*, which is the typical size range in eighteenth-century harbourmaster's register. On *paduakang* see *Encyclopaedie* 1917-39, V:422-46 and Horridge (1985:19-20). An incomplete series of these registers is to be found in the Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA), The Hague; a detailed analysis has been under way for some time (Sutherland and Bree 1987). One *koyang* equals one *'last'*, or two tons.

5 Vosmaer (1839:154-6) goes further: 'up to the present day [1835] this has remained a business which is carried out only by one of the peoples in our territories, namely the Makassarese, to the exclusion of all others [...]. This trepang fishery may be regarded as one of the most daring enterprises that has ever been achieved by "Indians" [Indonesians]: [...] ambitious and admirable in conception and scale, bearing witness to Makassar's former greatness.'

> more profit than all others. Generally, it can be concluded that Makassar's trade is that of a staple-place; the trepang and some native woven-goods are all imported from foreign parts, without undergoing any change of substance during their circulation, while the articles of consumption, such as Javanese tobacco and a little opium, drink and other goods are not counterbalanced by the export of local products or native manufactures. Raw silk, among others, is exported in the same form as it is received; finally about a hundred *pikul* of old iron are reworked into *parang* [machete] and exported with good profit.[6]

So, Van Schinne felt that the essential character of Makassar's trade lay in the combination of indigenous maritime expertise, exemplified in the economical *paduakang*, with Chinese commercial skills. What is striking in his account is the centrality of the junk and the diversity of its functions. The *wangkang* did not merely provide a market for the products collected in Makassar, thereby generating a demand with spin-off throughout the eastern islands, but it was also the hub of a complex of financial and commercial relationships.

The junk was more than a ship, it was a travelling mercantile community. A detailed description of a *wangkang* anchored in Makassar in the 1780s describes how the hold was divided into many compartments, so that each merchant travelling in the vessel had individual storage space for his wares (Stavorinus 1797-98, I:221-3; Blussé 1986:107-13). Merchants themselves might come from China, with their own goods, as well as acting as agents for those who stayed behind, travelling under the authority of the *nakhoda* or captain of the junk. They would also form *kongsi* or business associations with leading Chinese in Batavia and Makassar, who would help with the collection of local products and the distribution of Chinese imports. As well as buying goods offered by locals, the *wangkang* merchants provided both commodities and cash advances to a range of traders, while they also invested local money attracted from 'the far inland'. In this way capital was provided for commercial ventures, ranging from short-term voyages to gather commodities while the vessel was in port, to longer term partnerships running over a period of years.

How did this situation develop, and what were its implications? Chinese trade with the archipelago had ancient roots, but the more modern wave dates back to the late sixteenth century, with the Batavia junk trade enjoying its heyday between 1690 and 1740, followed by decline in the next half century (Blussé 1986:121-4). The direct Makassar link, however, developed from small beginnings to flourish in the latter part of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

6 ANRI (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, Jakarta), Makassar 291/7. The translation here is fairly free, as the document required some editing.

Just before the Dutch conquest in 1670, the independent Goan port of Makassar seems to have been drawing 'Chinese' products, notably porcelain and silk, from Macau, Manila, Cambodia, and Siam, providing in return forest products such as wax, sappanwood, sandalwood, rotan, and ivory (Noorduyn 1983; Villiers 1990; Souza 1986:88-111). Somewhat later, after Makassar's bloody incorporation into the Company's trading system, the exchange of commodities with China tended to take place either in Banjarmasin (which was also frequented by English merchants, drawn, like the Chinese, by pepper), or in the VOC capital of Batavia.

Although the Company designated Makassar the easternmost legal port of call for junks in 1731,[7] the first account we have of a junk from China trading there is in 1736. The governor of Makassar wrote to his superiors in Batavia to explain that, although the ship had arrived without a pass, he had not followed the rules and confiscated the cargo, but had yielded to the pleas of local merchants and allowed it to trade.[8] This may have been a trial voyage, and was probably followed by others. The Company, attempting to capture this lucrative commerce, vacillated between trying to establish an impossible Batavia monopoly of the China connection, when Makassar would be officially closed (as in 1746-1752, and 1762-1768) (Blussé 1986:264),[9] and an alternative policy of opening Makassar and harassing her competitors in the eastern seas. The result was no doubt that when Makassar was closed, her merchants turned again to rendezvous with the junks in various 'native' ports, thereby evading Company restrictions. When junks were allowed to come to Makassar, the VOC there doubled export dues on 'Chinese products' (trepang, wax, birdsnests, etcetera) leaving the port for Banjarmasin, Pasir, and Kaili, in an attempt to centralize the China trade in her harbour. But in 1765 this regulation was repealed, as Makassar was then closed and local traders needed their traditional alternatives.[10]

Despite the fluctuations caused by Batavia's whims, the trade of Makassar in the eighteenth century was increasingly China-oriented. The second closing of Makassar caused such economic problems that a major investigation

7 ARA, VOC Archive, no. 2192, ff.28-29.

8 ARA, VOC no. 2674 ff.30, 108.

9 Indications that the trade quickly re-established itself are accounts of a conflict in 1754 between a group of Batavian Chinese merchants who had invested in the junk and the Makassar custom's farmer, over allegedly excess duty on a tobacco cargo; there is also a reference in 1759 to the 'annual custom' of the junk's arrival; see ARA VOC no. 2859 ff.181-2 and no. 2964 ff.23, 152. A.J.A.F. Eerdmans (n.d.:368-9) notes that a license for an annual junk was granted in 1757. Since local practice deviated from official rules, with the Makassar governor keen to promote local prosperity despite Batavia's policies, there are clear instances of direct China trade continuing even when prohibited; this may account for discrepancies in the sources on the years in which trade was allowed or prohibited.

10 ARA, VOC no. 3181 ff.12-13.

was made into the port's commerce, which resulted in the formal re-admission of junks in 1768 (Sutherland and Bree 1987). From then on, the China trade flourished, generating profits for the VOC and inhabitants alike. At first the Company sold licenses in Batavia, with the highest bidder winning the right to bring in one junk from Amoy; later (certainly by 1778) the license was given to the Batavia Captain of Chinese, who pocketed the profits from the sale (Blussé 1986:148).[11] One source claimed in 1833 that the junk used to bring goods to the annual value of two million guilders, so that the monopoly pass could be sold for *f* 100,000.[12]

The economic importance of the junk gave the Chinese a certain power, as the Makassar government was anxious not to offend them. When in the 1780s conflicts arose between the Company legal official or *fiskaal* and the junk captain over bad debts, the governor tried to smooth things over, stressing Makassar's dependence on the *wangkang*. But a few months later he had to assert VOC jurisdiction over the visiting Chinese, commenting:

> The Chinese merchants come here with the junk, do business with Christians and natives, and make various money loans that they use to purchase trepang and other trade goods, and it can happen very easily that our inhabitants are ruined [...]. This is a matter that has to be settled here, not in China, bearing in mind that even if the Chinese do not stay here, they leave behind wives or concubines who buy up commodities for them or dispose of their Chinese goods.[13]

The growth of Makassar's exports to China can be seen in Table 1, based on the Harbourmaster's Register of Makassar. The imports from China were diverse, including porcelain and earthenware, metal utensils, textiles, tobacco, umbrellas, silk clothing and gold thread.[14]

But the days of Makassar's direct trade with China, and hence of her pivotal role in the region, were numbered. By 1820 the proceeds from the sale of the pass had dwindled to almost nothing, and the duties farm was abolished. The government took over the collection of customs in Makassar, and freed coastal traffic (a vital source of sea products) from duty.

Although these measures produced a temporary revival in trade (customs received rose from circa *f* 40-50,000 to circa *f* 150,000),[15] it was not enough to save Makassar's direct link with China. There were various reasons for this.

11 ARA, VOC no. 3493, Voorjaarsmissieve (n.p.).

12 ANRI, Makassar 3/2; Algemeen Verslag 1833. This cargo value seems excessive, given that Eerdmans (n.d.:369) estimates the worth of commodities at *f* 800,000 to *f* 1,000,000; see also the estimate of Van Schinne in the text above.

13 ARA, VOC no. 3760 ff.87-90, Bijlagen ff.85-88.

14 For this table see ARA VOC nos 2373, 3441, 3465, 3493, 3760, 3809, 3858. One *pikul* (pkl) equals circa 62.5 kg., one *corg* is made up of twenty pieces.

15 ANRI, Makassar 3/1, Algemeen Verslag 1828.

Table 1. Amoy junk cargoes, out of Makassar, eighteenth century

Product	1768-69	1774-75	1775-76	1776-'77	1786-77	1787-88	1788-89
Trepang (pkl)	1000	3000	3500	3000	5000	7000	6000
Rotan (bundle)		400	200	2000	3000	2000	4000
Wax (pkl)		100	100	200			
Agar-agar (pkl)		1000	200	500	1000	300	200
Sharksfin (pkl)				100	100		70
Hide (pieces)						1500	
Dried meat (pkl)					100	120	700
Tortoiseshell (pkl)					50	20	20
Birds nests (pkl)					10	10	15
Rotan mats (corg)						120	

Singapore, founded in 1819, had soon made its presence felt, and many commodities destined for China went via Singapore rather than Makassar (Wong Lin Ken 1960), particularly as the former offered attractive imports (opium and English textiles) free of duty, whereas the same goods in Makassar were taxed 41%.[16] Moreover, Makassar had lost its east Indonesian monopoly of the junks: Ambon, Surabaya, and Semarang were opened.

Under the new dispensation junks were to come freely to Makassar, subject only to import and export duties. A few years later, in 1824, a senior Dutch official sent to review Makassar's situation observed that this relaxation had contributed considerably to the revival of the trepang trade and the distribution of China goods throughout the eastern archipelago. But G.A.G.P. van der Capellen (1855:375-6) also noted that the collection of customs duties had always been problematic, and he therefore decided to replace them with a flat charge according to the sort of junk. An Amoy junk of the second sort, a *wangkang*, would pay *f* 15,000 in dues: However, there are indications that this plan to free the junk from cargo duty completely may not have been implemented, as a report from 1828 complains that the Makassar *wangkang* had to pay much higher duties than those using the newly opened ports in Java and Ambon: 6% for exports, as opposed to their 2%. So despite reforms, Makassar remained relatively expensive.

It was easy for traders to avoid ports with high tolls and seek out less expensive harbours, so the lucrative gambier trade, for example, bypassed Makassar completely, linking Riau to the native states. Increasing direct European traffic between China and the major Indies ports was also a factor in Makassar's decline.[17] From 1821 on the *wangkang* became progressively

16 ANRI, Makassar 3/1, Algemeen Verslag 1828.

17 ANRI, Makassar 3/1, Algemeen Verslag 1828, ANRI, Makassar 3/2 Algemeen Verslag 1833. William Milburn (1813:410) notes that the junk then paid 3000 dollars (circa 4000 rds),

smaller, with lesser cargoes, and the 1828 ship was the last. This was a great blow to Makassar, and the results were soon apparent. In 1833, when the trepang fleet sailed out, there were only seventeen boats, instead of the usual fifty or sixty.[18] This apparently dramatic decline reflected a diversion of trepang exports to other ports, rather than a decline in the industry in general, and Makassar seems to have recovered much of her role in the trepang trade in the mid-nineteenth century (Macknight 1976:145).[19]

Lamentation about Makassar's declining trade forms a constant thread through the archival sources. From the end of the seventeenth century Dutch officials complained that their textile sales were undercut by 'smugglers', that duty was avoided, that English and Chinese traders were in league with locals, and that poverty was endemic within Makassar's administration and among her people. It seems probable that this deterioration was more characteristic of official income and certain population groups (notably the European '*burgers*') than of the town as a whole, as both the general volume of trade, and the amount of the customs farm increased. But this prosperity was, as we have seen, largely dependent upon Makassar's Amoy trade, which was vulnerable to competition from either new entrepôts or direct European contact with China. By the 1820s those threats had been realized, and for the rest of the nineteenth century Makassar's government was busy seeking a formula for her economic revival.

Having outlined the significance and chronology of Makassar's China connection, we will now discuss how this trade orientation affected the commerce of Makassar and its connections with neighbouring ports. We will take as our case study the most important of the commercial activities which provided return cargoes for the junks, the exploitation of trepang.

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while the established duties were 6%; he adds, 'The Shubundar [*syahbandar*] sometimes trades, if the commanding officer and he are upon good terms; in that case no duties are levied, but presents are necessary, under the plea of obtaining permission to procure supplies'.

18 ANRI, Makassar 3/2 Algemeen Verslag 1833. Vosmaer (1839:181-4) reviews causes of Makassar's decline.

19 On the nineteenth-century development of Makassar's direct China trade, and alternating protectionist and faltering free trade initiatives, see Poelinggomang 1991. In appendix 5, table 3b3, Poelinggomang gives the value of Makassar's exports to China and Macao between 1840 and 1870, where a dramatic rise is apparent between 1846 (*f* 41,065) and 1847 (*f* 162,695); imports in 1846 were worth *f* 31,179 and in 1847 *f* 10,575; these figures reflect the start of Makassar's uncertain career as a free port in 1847. Such values are still far below the estimates given for the eighteenth-century junk trade, and remind us of the problems in reconciling estimates of value and volume, and of the commerce of the port itself as distinct from the overall activities of its trading communities.

Economics of the trepang trade

Here we will consider the probable origins and volume of the traffic in trepang, before turning to exploitation areas, the sorts traded, their prices, the organization of the business, and changes in the exchange pattern between trepang-providing ports and Makassar.[20]

In his definitive study of the trepang trade in Australia, Macknight (1976:6-8) concludes that although the medicinal use of trepang in China was known in the 1500s, it was during the seventeenth century that their consumption became more widespread, beginning in northern China and Japan, with island Southeast Asia emerging as a source of supply towards the end of the century.[21] Sources from Makassar support a late seventeenth-century beginning of the trade. Trepang do not appear in Speelman's exhaustive memorandum from 1670 (Noorduyn 1983),[22] but the earliest reference we find (from the official diary or *Daghregister* of 23 June 1710) notes, with no explanation, the routine granting of a license to the 'free Bugis' Toissa to go to Buton to look for 'taripans'.[23] The Makassar harbourmaster's shipping list for 1717-1718 indicates an established, if modest, trade with 7 pikul of trepang coming in from Buton and Tambora (Sumbawa), while 225 pikul were exported, almost all to Batavia.[24] In 1720 the general report from Batavia to Holland notes the activities of trepang fishermen from Manggarai (Flores) around the Southwest Islands (Babar, Wetar, etcetera), and in the mid 1720s trepang fleets are recorded without comment (Coolhaas 1979:487, 553, 1985: 70).

It seems that the trepang fishery began late in the seventeenth century, but was of no real interest to the VOC, which therefore paid little attention to it,

20 Methods of fishing and processing are not considered here; see Vosmaer (1839:152-72), *Encyclopaedie* 1917-39, IV:437-40 and the literature cited therein.

21 Macknight's conclusions are borne out by my own research: Chinese sources on the trade between South Fujian and the South Seas confirm the 18th-century importance of trepang. See, for example, 'Fujian Zǫngdu Gao Qi-zhuo Zouzhe' ('A memorial to the throne from Gao Qi-zhuo, the governor general of Fujian'), in *Gongzhong Dang Yong-zheng Chao Zouzhe* (*Secret Palace Memorials of the Yong-zheng Period – Ch'ing Documents at the National Palace Museum*) (*Gongzhong* 1978-80, VIII:524, XI:73-74, XII:748-749). A 1660 source, the *Ming-Qing Shiliao* (1972:247-9), notes the arrival of nine Chinese merchants bringing approximately 1,975 kilograms (39.5 *dan*) of trepang from Japan to Fujian. I am grateful to Ms. Song Ping of Xiamen University for this information. Dr Mukhlis Paeni (personal communication, 1999) reports that recently excavated bricks from Somba Opu fort (constructed mid 16th to early 17th centuries) bear pictures of trepang, a possible indication of earlier trade. The trade in birds' nests, another classic China commodity, was about a century older (Blussé 1991).

22 John Villiers (1990:150-1) also records no trepang trade.

23 ARA, VOC no. 1794 ff.60.

24 ARA, VOC no. 1894 ff.63-109, 135. The usual cautionary note must be sounded: this is the registered trade, and probably does not represent the total trade of the port, let alone its traders!

recording only passing references or complaints about possible smuggling activities in Maluku by so-called trepang fishers. In fact, as we will see below, the development of the trepang industry provides a useful caution against overestimating the role of the Dutch in East Indonesia, and provides telling if incidental glimpses of the extent of VOC accomodation to local interests and regional rulers.

As early as 1732 a delegation of ten Chinese *nakhoda* complained that their buying up of trepang for export was hampered by the refusal of local suppliers, particularly Wajorese but also other Bugis and Makassarese, to submit their trepang cargoes to the official Dutch weigh-house, a prerequisite for export. The local traders claimed for their part that negotiations between the VOC and the Bugis court of Boné had freed them of the obligation to weigh their goods, and as long as the Company officials tried to impose this condition, the traders would decline to sell their goods to the Chinese. In order to protect their revenues, the VOC agreed to exempt the trepang traders from compulsory weighing, accepting the assurance of the Chinese that they would give an honest accounting of the cargoes to the harbour-master.[25] So VOC rules were waived to placate visiting Asian merchants in tacit recognition of a political deal with a local king.

Research on Indian ocean history in the last two decades has increased recognition of the sophistication and capacity for innovation within intra-Asian economic networks. Placed in this context, anecdotes such as the above underline the limits of Dutch control, by reasserting the significance of a vigorous and multi-stranded Asian commercial environment (Ptak and Rothermund 1991; Sutherland 1995). Similarly, they also reinforce our qualification of another historiographical simplification: the image of 'the Bugis' as sea-farers defending indigenous maritime traditions against the encroachments of European and Chinese interlopers. In fact, the trepang trade is a good example of how commercial expansion offered new opportunities, knitting local and overseas interest groups together to their mutual advantage.

Such nuances can emerge from a reading 'against the grain' of colonial archives, but we remain largely dependent on what the Dutch knew and regarded as appropriate entries for offical records. Consequently, our material remains partial in every sense. Dutch insights were limited, and so while they enable us to piece together a picture of the Makassar trepang business, it remains uncertain how that fitted into intra-Asian trade or was influenced by internal Sulawesian priorities. Information on independent Asian ports is lacking, while we can only guess, for example, to what extent the industry was influenced by political or economic calculations of which the Dutch saw nothing. We may know that Sulawesi traders, at various times, boycotted

25 ARA, VOC no. 2238 ff.282-285.

Makassar in favour of other foreign ports. But assessing the extent, timing, motivation, and impact of such trends is extremely difficult.

Makassar's trade records provide valuable but uncertain indicators of the state of regional commerce, the role of the port, and of the activities of the merchants who lived there. There is no doubt that many ship movements were not listed, and that local merchants invested in voyages between other ports. But, limited though they may be, the VOC sources do provide unique material, even for those sectors which were of marginal interest to the European powers. This includes the trepang business, on indirect concern to the Dutch, but central to the commercial integration of the South China Sea.

While the development of trepang as a commodity was a direct product of the China trade, not all Makassar's trepang exports went straight to Amoy. In the early eighteenth century, as we noted above, Batavia was the exchange point for Makassar's trade goods, including trepang. Looking at our five sample years,[26] we see Table 2.

Table 2. Trepang exports from Makassar (in *pikul*), selected years.

Port	1722-23	1733-34	1766-67	1776-77	1786-87
Amoy				3000	5000
Batavia	477	1147	4900	820	1490
Unknown	70				
Total	547	1147	4900	3820	6490

At the beginning of the nineteenth century trepang exports probably maintained comparable levels: John Crawfurd (1820:433) estimated approximately 7,000 *pikul*, while Macknight (1976:14-5), reviewing the evidence, estimated production in the 1800s as fluctuating around 5,000 *pikul*.[27] This relative stability contrasts with depictions of decline, such as that given by Vosmaer (1839:180-4), noting exports from Makassar of circa 4,900 *pikul* in 1832, decreasing to less than 2,500 in 1833 and 1834.[28] It could well be, however, that these accounts of decay are similar to those of the eighteenth century, where the relative decline of commerce in Dutch-controlled centres was seen as gen-

26 Information from the Harbourmaster's Specification is not available for all years; the five chosen here represent the best available distribution of years; ARA, VOC nos. 1995, 2314, 3210, 3493, and 3760.

27 See note 21 above.

28 The mid-nineteenth-century article on trepang in the *Aardrijkskundig en statistisch woordenboek* (*Tripang* 1869:1125) notes that Makassar's trepang exports were approximately 8000 lb., which probably should be 8000 pikul, which would agree with the estimate in the *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsche Indië* article on trepang (1917-39, IV:537-40), probably taken from the late nineteenth century.

eral, whereas, in fact, local Indonesian trade was flourishing, albeit in foreign ports.

China was always, directly or indirectly, the market for trepang, but, of course, not all China's trepang came from Makassar, nor was all Makassar trepang registered by the *syahbandar*. Sulawesi traders could always seek out other ports for this exchange, moving directly from the dispersed collection areas to Timor, Banjarmasin, or Kaili, or, in the nineteenth century, to the merchants of Singapore or, to a lesser extent, Java. Trepangers from Boné, for example, might sell their catch in Kupang before returning home (Lion 1855:5). Moreover, other areas of Southeast Asia were also trepang producers: Warren (1981) estimates, for example, that the Sulu archipelago could have been exporting up to 10,000 *pikul* of trepang in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.[29] An estimate in 1854 placed China's trepang imports at circa 90,000 *pikul*, of which circa 6,000 came from Java and 8,000-9,000 from Makassar (Lion 1855:2).[30]

Registered imports only provided a part of Makassar's official exports, the proportion being round 45% in the second half of the eighteenth century, as calculated on the basis of shipping lists. The remainder of the exported trepang probably arrived in unregistered ships, which may have been illegal or simply small coastal craft exempt from registration. These could have been those which had been fishing in the rich trepang grounds along parts of the Sulawesi coast, such as the Spermonde archipelago close to Makassar, and probably included boats of Bajau (sea-nomads) and island-dwellers, population groups notoriously difficult to constrain.

We see in Table 3 that most trepang were brought in from areas around Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara, and that the most important places given as points of departure for the trepang fleets were Buton, Sumbawa, Bugis regions in South Sulawesi (including the Gulf of Boné), and Bonérate. This does not, of course, necessarily mean that these were the fishing grounds, but rather that they were recognized, and officially accepted, points of reference or rendezvous for the boats.

The seafarers of Sulawesi had close ties with parts of Nusa Tenggara, and traded regularly with Bima, Sumbawa, Ende, and Manggarai, as well as Timor, Solor, and Buton. But Batavia was unhappy with these contacts, which offered too many 'smuggling' opportunities, and so it constantly nagged the Makassar government to restrict trade to these areas. Hence, the 'eastern

29 James Frances Warren (1981:65, 69-70) gives an estimate of 1,000-10,000 pikul for 1761 and 10,000 in 1835. It should be emphasized that whereas these figures might be inflated, traders tended to under-report to the harbourmaster. A Chinese source, the *Gazetteer of Xiamen* (Zhou-Kai 1839:33-4) notes cargoes of trepang arriving in Amoy from Sulu and Manila in 1735, 1755, 1782, and 1783. This information was provided by Ms. Song Ping.

30 See also note 21 above.

Table 3. Trepang imports into Makassar (in pikul), selected years.

Port	1722-23	1733-34	1766-67	1776-77	1786-87
Ambon		15			
Banda		68.5			250
Barru		20			
Belitung	15				
Bima				69	
Bonérate			478	291	141
Bugis			200	587	485
Buton	10	276	631	1071	1077
Cénrana Boné		30			
Komodo			40	55	
Manggarai		29			
Pasir		10			
Pulau Laut		8			
Selayar			11		
Sumbawa			50	493	662
Ternate					10
Total	25	456.5	1410	2566	2625

quarters' were regularly closed and opened to commercial traffic, causing the same dislocations as did the China restrictions. But the trepang fleet had to sail to those parts, and it seems that the Makassar government was as flexible as possible, and on several occasions felt called upon to assure Batavia that its officials were not conniving in illicit voyages. During 1768 and 1769, for example, when Batavia was preoccupied with the risks attached to the re-admitting of the junk, there are several references to the smuggling potential of the trepang fleet. The governor of Makassar promised to write the passes (giving permission to sail) in the Makassarese language and script so that ignorance could be no excuse for straying beyond the geographic limits set by the VOC, which went up to and included the Postillion and Paternoster islands, and Bonérate, but no further east or south.[31] Such restrictions were probably ignored, and in 1772 the Makassar governor complained about clear pass violations by 'Boniers and other Celebes peoples' sailing to Ceram.[32] By the 1780s, with the VOCs control crumbling, the trepang fleets were permitted to range further, to Banda, Ternate, and Ambon, as well as Timor and Sumba, where good profits were to be made, particularly with junk commodities.[33]

Makassar's trepang seems to have come mainly from the north coast of

31 ARA, VOC no. 3273 ff.3, 46-47.
32 ARA, VOC no. 3358 f.24.
33 ARA, VOC no. 3648 ff.36-37, 64; no. 3760 para. 52.

Table 4. Trepang prices by sort.[34]

Sort	1730 Rds.	1740 Rds.	1789 Rds.Sps.	1818 Dol.Sps.	1823 *f*
batu	4	15.25	17 (sml)	14 (sml)	90 (no.2)
			26 (med)	22 (med)	176 (no.1)
			45	54 (lge)	
hitam	6	21 (sml)	38	8 (sml)	
				15 (med)	50 (no.2)
		27 (lge)	11	30 (lge)	96 (no.1)
gamma		4	17	12.5	60
pandang	4		23		92
japon			12	12	44
pasir		32	63		200
putih	2	5			24 (no.2)
					60 (no.1)
					20
					90 (lge)
marégéq		13 (no.1)	56		
			12 (no.2)		
			11 (no.3)		

Australia (Marégéq and Kai Jawa),[35] from the Sulawesi coast and neighbouring islands, such as the Spermonde archipelago and Tanakeke, as well as the far off Geelvink Bay (New Guinea), Tanimbar, and Aru. But the sea-cucumbers were found over a wide area, and the catchment areas probably fluctuated according to the types of trepang sought and the ease of fishing. In 1882 sources of supply for Makassar were New Guinea, Marégéq, Ambon, Banda, Ternate, Menado, Timor, Sumbawa, Flores, Kutei, Palu, Mandar, Boné, Luwuq, Buton, Kendari, Selayar, and Aru, and it was estimated elsewhere that Bajau from Sulawesi brought back circa 4000 pikul from Sulu fishing grounds.[36]

34 The 1730 figures derive from a list of 'Weighhouse and toll fees for May and June 1730' ARA, VOC no. 2163 ff.132-139; 1740, no. 2501; for 1789, see 'Prices of trepang', no. 3858 ff.2-7; for 1818, Crawfurd (1820:442-3) and 1823, ARA, Collectie Schneither no. 127, pp. 29-30, 'List of imported trepangs...'. Earl (1837:432) notes an 1836 Singapore price of 2.5 to 50 dollars per *pikul*. In 1789 the Rds. Spns. ('*rijksdaalder Spaans*' or 'Spanish matten'), known also as 'Spanish dollars', were made up of 64 *stuivers*, while a Dutch *rijksdaalder* was 48 *stuivers*. In 1818 the Spanish dollar had risen in value to 66 *stuivers*, the *rijksdaalder* remained 48, and the *gulden* was worth 30.8. Conversion of the amounts shows that, despite some fluctuations, the apparent striking price rise was real. The small *trepang batu*, for example, were worth 22,67 rds in 1730, 19.25 rds (or *f* 30,8) in 1818, and 56.25 rds in 1823. The large *batu* went from 74.25 rds (*f* 118,8) in 1818 to 110 rds (*f* 176) five years later. I am grateful to Peter Boomgaard for exchange rate information.

35 Vosmaer (1839:154-61) and Macknight (1976) discuss the Australian trade in detail.

36 *Zeevisscherijen* (1882:73-146, 257-303) reports on the trepang trade in general, and (1882:

Different areas harboured different types of trepang; some preferred sandy bottoms, some stone, mud or coral, and they varied considerably in value. The following tables give an impression of the main sorts and their prices; it must be stressed that the taxonomy was exceedingly complex and shifting, baffling scientists and guaranteeing that the sorting and dealing of trepang remained almost exclusively in the hands of specialist Chinese.[37]

Table 5. Trepang imports to Makassar, 1823: main sorts.[38]

sort	no. of pikul	% of total	value *gulden*	% of total
bangkoe troe	693	22	38,806	17
marégéq	610	19	34,186	15
gamma and *taykongkong*				
kodingaring	330	10	19,807	9
batu kodingaring	256	8	45,117	20
kayujawa	190	6	18,196	8
Total main sorts	2,079	65	156,112	69
Total	3,171	100	226,289	100

This list for 1823 provides considerable detail, of which only some is given in the preceding tables. It is clear that those from 'Kodingaring'[39] tended to be the most valuable; the same sort of trepang from other areas, such as Bugis, were somewhat cheaper. The most expensive of all, 'pasir Kodingaring', were worth *f* 200 per *pikul*, while the cheapest sort, 'Tjampasadoe', brought a mere *f* 12. Since a *pikul* could contain up to 2,000 small trepang, it is clear that some must have been hardly worthwhile catching and preparing.

Writing circa 1835, J.N. Vosmaer (1839), who was very familiar with Sulawesi trade, presents a detailed description of the trepang industry. After listing nineteen main sorts (giving Makassarese, Malay, Chinese, and Dutch names), he notes that this was only a rough classification, as the Chinese distinguished many sub-categories, and prices varied considerably. Cheaper sorts would go for approximately *f* 20-*f* 80 per *pikul*, while the top quality *batu* or *koro*, primarily provided by Bajau from Kodingaring or Mandar, or brought by local traders from Irian or Aru natives, could easily exceed *f* 100 per *pikul*. Elsewhere in the same article (Vosmaer 1839:162-3, 176, 179-80), he

273ff.) on Sulawesi, (1882:295-300) deals with trepang, including lists of imports and exports, 1868-1878. On Sulu, see *Encyclopaedie* 1917-39, IV:437-40).

37 Koningsberger (1904:30) gives a glimpse of his classificatory frustrations, as well as a list of local names (1904:31-4), as does Vosmaer (1839:162-72). On the role of the Chinese, see Vosmaer (1839:163, 173) and *Zeevisscherijen* (1882:296).

38 Collectie Schneither no. 127, pp. 29-30, 'List of imported trepangs ...'

39 These were presumably from the Bajau-inhabited island Kodingaring off the west Sulawesi coast in the Spermonde archipelago.

gives further details, noting price differences between Makassar and Aru (see Table 6).

Table 6. Trepang prices per *pikul*, c. 1835

Trepang sort	Makassar	Aru
batu	150-160	80-100
pandang	70-80	40-50
gama [*gamma*]	30-35	25-30
kawasa	10-12	10-12

The Bajau would sell their catch for 10, 15, or 25 realen (Spanish dollars) of 24 silver '*dubbeltjes*' per *pikul*.[40]

In the mid-nineteenth century it was said that the best trepang were from Tanimbar, but the most delicious and highly valued were still the Kodingaring *trepang pasir*, worth in Makassar circa *f* 160 per *pikul* (4,928 *stuivers*), and sold in China for 120 Spanish dollars (7,920 *stuivers*). The same source noted:

> The Alfuren sell the unsorted trepang to Malays, Makassarese, and Chinese [...] for *f* 20 to *f* 25 per pikul, or exchange articles of little value for a certain number. The Chinese and Malays bring it to Makassar, where it is divided into thirty sorts and sold with enormous profit (*Tripang* 1869).[41]

The article on trepang in the *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch Indië* (*Encyclopaedie* 1917-39, IV:437-40), probably referring to the late nineteenth century, also notes that the trepangers sold their unsorted catch to Chinese merchants at markets like Makassar, Ternate, Dobo, and Singapore for very low prices: *f* 2.50 to *f* 170 at Makassar, and at Ternate for *f* 3 - *f* 120 per *pikul*. The price was even lower at Karimun Jawa (an island group northwest of Jepara) where the Chinese and Malays came to collect the catch themselves: circa *f* 25 per *pikul*. In China prices ranged between *f* 50 and *f* 275 per *pikul*.

Organization of the trepang trade

Given its crucial importance, it is not surprising that the trepang trade was highly organized. It was a seasonal activity, carried out by considerable fleets, and at least by the late eighteenth century it was integrated into complex credit and marketing arrangements. We do not know for sure if Chinese

40 See note 37 for Table 4 on exchange rates.

41 'Alfuren' was a generic name for non-Muslim or non- Christian inhabitants of eastern Indonesia; see chapters 30 and 31 in Wallace (1869) for a classic description of contacts between traders and 'Alfuren' at Dobbo (Dobo in Aru) in which trepang were a major item of exchange.

capital was basic to the expansion of the trepang trade from the beginning, but given the universal practice of obtaining trade goods on credit, and the junk's virtual monopoly of the market, it is likely that many or most traders were tied into some arrangement.

Advances could, however, be of various kinds, depending on the ways in which the trepang were obtained. If the sailors themselves gathered and processed the trepang, then they required outfitting with provisions and equipment, but not with trade goods. This seems to have been the case for Australia in the nineteenth century (Macknight 1976:17-47; Vosmaer 1839: 156-8). If the trepang were obtained by barter, the required exchange goods could range from cheap knick-knacks to valuable commodities or even *rijksdaalders*, and these in turn demanded more starting capital for the trepang-seeking trader. It would seem logical that as the business grew, and supplying populations became more sophisticated, more investment was needed.[42] And it was obviously convenient to obtain the necessary supplies on credit from the eventual purchaser, the Chinese junk, thus fitting into the common Indonesian pattern of creditor/buyers having rights over an as yet unharvested crop (for example, *ijon*).

Some time in the eighteenth century it became customary for the trepang purchase price to be fixed before the fleet returned, being established in a meeting between the VOC harbourmaster and the captain of the Chinese community, apparently in consultation with the junk captain and the farmer of customs (and, at least by 1814, 'prominent traders'). The governor of Makassar emphasized that the price must be established by May at the latest, that is before the volume and quality of the catch was known, presumably to prevent excessive profiteering.[43] In this way some sort of stability could be maintained in what was, after all, a crucial economic sector in which the junk had a virtual market monopoly. If trepang boats were late returning and missed the junk, they had to try and export via Batavia, receiving a much lower price, and when the junk failed to arrive (as in 1770), the trepang price sank to less than half that of the preceding year (Van der Capellen 1855: 375).[44]

There was also considerable formalization of relations between the three

42 When discussing reasons for the decline of Makassar's trade in 1768 (prior to the re-admission of the junk), the *syahbandar* noted that whereas previously suppliers had been naive about such things as weights and measures, they had now become too clever, so profits were down; ARA, VOC no. 3243.

43 For price fixing in 1789 see ARA, VOC 3858 ff.2-7. H.J. Lion (1855:3) cites George Windsor Earl (1846) to the effect that provisions and other necessities were advanced by Chinese and Dutch merchants at Makassar, who thereby obtained the right to buy the entire catch at a predetermined price, which was, of course, always below the real value. See also the extended quotation from the harbourmaster Schinne above.

44 ARA, VOC no. 3302 ff.20-21.

main groups involved in the voyages: the outfitter, who provided the capital (provisions, equipment, and where relevant trade goods or money); the captain; and the crew. Here our sources are mostly from the nineteenth century, and it could be suggested that the use of individual standard contracts between these three parties only reflects the situation after the junk stopped coming to Makassar. However, given the long regional tradition of formal agreements underpinning trading ventures (witness the famous code of Amanna Gappa from circa 1676 (Tobing 1961; Zainal Abidin and Alam 1976)),[45] it seems likely that individual trepanging contracts existed much earlier. The market prices would have been fixed at a high level, while shares in costs and profits were established by personal agreement, and registered with the harbourmaster.[46]

Production areas of the trepang fleet

The trepang fleet was the largest collection of craft sailing in and out of Makassar. Generally speaking, the boats left Makassar in December and January, returning in May and June. During the eighteenth century the number of registered boats bringing trepang into Makassar increased, from 30 in 1722-1723, to 53 in 1776-1777 to 80 in 1786-1787, while exports tended to concentrate in fewer vessels, including the junk. (In 1723 148 boats carried trepang out of Makassar, compared to 15 in 1786-1787).[47] Lion (1855:5) commented:

> In former times fifty to sixty *perahu*, belonging to the king of Boné, and manned by a thousand men, sailed annually to the coast (of New Holland) and the Elliots and Northumberland islands. They brought their catch, after proper treatment at the fishing site, to Timor Kupang, where they sold it to Chinese, and then returned to Celebes. The remaining perahu, those of Makassar and other parts of Celebes, a total of 120 to 140, which went to the coasts of New Holland, sailed there usually in January, and returned to Makassar in May, where the cargo was bought up by merchants for forwarding to China.'[48]

While Australia was mentioned most frequently in these later sources, perhaps because it was also such a long voyage, other fishing grounds remained important. One estimate was that about 30 *perahu* were fishing around Aru in

45 See Michael Southon (1995) for information on the *perahu* economy in modern Buton.

46 For such contracts see *Adatrechtbundels* (1933:245-9); *Zeevisscherijen* (1882:298-300); Macknight (1976:19-22).

47 Numbers here are calculated from the harbourmaster's registers, see note 21 for sources.

48 See also Macknight (1976:17-37). Lion (1855) cites Earl (1846) to the effect that (circa 1845) 30 to 40 perahu and 1,200 men fished around the Australian coast.

the mid 1820s (Macknight 1976:13). The capacity of most trepanging *perahu* (*pangkor* and *gonting* in the early 1700s, later almost exclusively *paduakang*) was between ten and forty tons. Vosmaer (1839:156), writing circa 1835, noted that trepang boats were *paduakang* of twenty to thirty tons, carrying twenty to forty men each, as well as supplies and the iron trepang boiling pans.

An interesting but complex problem, which can only be briefly discussed here, is that of the impact of the demand for trepang on the producing areas.[49] One way of gaining insight into this is to consider the exchange cargoes carried out of Makassar by the trepang fleet. A quick glance at the eighteenth-century trade pattern of four of Makassar's largest suppliers of trepang (Sumbawa, Bonérate, Buton, and Bugis) must suffice here. It should be remembered that each port served as a nodal point for a much wider catchment and distribution area, extending southeast in an arc from the Flores Sea to the Sulawesi coast, with connections out to the coasts of Australia and New Guinea.

Beginning with Sumbawa, and making a simple frequency count of the registrations of certain products on ships, we see an interesting trend towards more sophisticated exchange cargoes. Summarizing broadly, it can be said that in the early 1720s between a third and a half of the ships trading between Sumbawa and Makassar made one leg of the journey empty; by the 1770s and 1780s this had shrunk to between two and four percent. Slaves were an important early Sumbawa export, but soon trepang, rice, and cotton were being sent instead. The change in the packet sent from Makassar to Sumbawa was also clear: in the beginning agricultural produce such as coconuts and brown sugar, by the 1770s and 1780s an interesting combination of high quality textiles and money. In 1776-1777 12% of ships carried *pici*, small value Chinese cash, totalling more than one and a half million coins, while 10% carried *rijksdaalders* to a value of 5530 rds. In 1786-1787 18% carried 12,890 rijksdaalders. Whereas the average amount carried per ship was not very high (460 rds in 1776-1777, 230 rds in 1786-1787), several boats carried one to two thousand *rijksdaalders*, a considerable amount when the annual salary of a VOC soldier was circa 170 rds.

Sumbawa was a less-trepang dependent port than Bonérate or Buton, but we see a rather similar import trend there. In Bonérate the proportion of empty ships sailing to and from Makassar fell from between half and three quarters to less than five percent, and the growth in its imports was primarily due to increased demand for textiles, metal and china goods, tobacco, and rijksdaalders. Its main exports to Makassar were trepang and wax. Similarly, Buton exported trepang, slaves, wax, and tortoiseshell to Makassar, and this

[49] For a wider consideration of some implications of increasing economic integration, with additional information on Makassar's relations with Buton, see Sutherland (1988).

remained much the same throughout the eighteenth century, whereas the packet of goods imported showed a striking increase in complexity, covering a wide range of textiles, china, and metal goods. Bugis trade showed a broadly similar trend, although tobacco was a particularly important import there.[50]

Conclusion

The gathering of sea-cucumbers seems in itself a simple, even primitive activity, but it was the foundation of a complex of relationships extending over most of maritime Southeast Asia, integrating scattered seafaring populations into long distance trade. Within this commerce there was both considerable specialization and inter-dependence, as various groups exploited specific economic niches. The Makassarese and Bugis were involved in two major ways: as traders purchasing trepang from groups throughout eastern Indonesia, and as gatherers and processors. Both roles demanded considerable skill.

As Van Schinne observed, the efficiency of the *paduakang* traders was essential to their survival, just as the expertise of the trepang processors protected their role. But, as he also noted, these skills were complemented by those of the Chinese, who acted as knowledgeable wholesalers, grading and pricing the trepang, and who dominated marketing and financing. They overshadowed those other merchants, both Indonesian and Dutch, who invested in the trepang industry by providing credit. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Chinese – *peranakan* or assimilated Chinese in particular – were also playing an increasingly active role as traders, sailing their *paduakang* to trepang producing areas,[51] Much of the collecting niche was filled by the 'Alfuren', who sold or bartered their trepang to visiting traders or resident brokers, and by the Bajau, some of whom disposed of their catch near the fishing grounds, while others brought it to Makassar or other entrepots.

The trepang business of Makassar grew rapidly during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, both in volume and value. The VOC establishment there was well aware of its importance to the town's welfare, and – by way of the custom's farm – to local revenues. In the correspondence with

50 See note 28 for sources.

51 In the harbourmaster's list for 1796-1797 (ARA, Comite Oost Indisch Handel, no. 96 f.209), 25 of the 26 captains bringing trepang into Makassar were Chinese, in contrast to earlier lists where incoming captains tended to be Sulawesians, while outgoing captains were Chinese. We should not overemphasize this apparent shift, as the volume of trepang registered as entering Makassar was only 1,391 *pikul*, with exports totaling 2,551 *pikul*, with 2,000 going to Amoy and 551 to Batavia. This may indicate that Indonesian traders were taking their trepang elsewhere.

Batavia the governor regularly argued for more freedom of commerce, but Batavia was more concerned with its own trade in textiles. In Makassar, as elsewhere in Indonesia, official VOC business encompassed only a small part of the economy. Indeed, in many cases the joint activities of Company officials and local merchants undermined VOC interests; in particular, an extensive Chinese shadow economy existed, often in symbiosis, and sometimes in competition, with that of the Company. In the case of the trepang industry, however, the role of the VOC was marginal, being mainly that of an irritant, disrupting the play of market forces with incomprehensible restrictions.

The chain of transactions worked both ways. The China trade, of course, predated the eighteenth-century popularity of trepang, and the eastern islands had been exporting commodities such as tortoise-shell, slaves, and wax for hundreds of years. But these contacts intensified as the European demand for tea and the Chinese appetite for trepang fed upon each other. Porcelain, earthenware, metalgoods, textiles, and knick-knacks from China, textiles and later opium from India, were exchanged for trepang and other sea and forest products, flowing back to increase both supply and demand in maritime communities. The points of connection and supply were not fixed; Makassar enjoyed a long period of centrality, but later lost business to Singapore and Sulu. Despite such shifts, however, the movement of commodities continued, and the long-term effects of trade lay more in the structural development of new relationships and needs than in localized prosperity or decline.