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The Maritime Silk Road and Migration from Fujian Province

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Abstract

The Maritime Silk Road (MSR) is the channel connecting China and countries overseas as far as Europe. It is also a road for movements of people along MSR into and out of China. Over time, the scale of emigration from China has been substantial. There are now about 60 million ethnic Chinese living overseas. The resultant mutual interactions between Chinese migrants and local inhabitants in their religions, cultures, the arts, technologies and materials have created impacts that far exceed those arising from trading activities. The Chinese overseas and their financial strength, outstanding capability and familiarity with local cultures are important partners in the promotion of the Twenty-First Century MSR that is initiated by China. Fujian was the province that contributed most to the expansion of the ancient Silk Road between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its inhabitants will similarly play an important role in the development of the new MSR.

In October 2013, President Xi Jinping of China proposed in the Indonesian Parliament the idea of the "Twenty-First Century MSR" by which China will widen its collaboration with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in various areas, such as mutual exchange to overcome respective deficiencies, complementing strengths, sharing opportunities, and facing common challenges for mutual development and prosperity (习近平/Xi Jinping, 2013). Since then, a maritime strategic plan has been formally initiated. Many provincial towns have formulated their own action plans focusing largely on expanding trade and investment with nations along the MSR. These plans include creating the platforms for the trading of products, setting up trading interchange centres, trading bases and towns, technology and industrial parks, and tax-free zones. In the Twenty-First Century MSR development plan, Fujian Province is designated as a "core zone".[1] Nevertheless, the MSR is not only a business trading route, but more importantly also a route for the interaction of civilizations and peoples. Focusing on the past and contemporary history of the Chinese abroad, this study will examine the MSR as a route of trade and migration and the role of the Chinese in the cultural interactions between China and the world. It will emphasizes the key role of Fujian in the emigration and expansion processes of the Silk Road during the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries, as a prelude to the making of the province as the core region for China's maritime development.

Key words: The Maritime Silk Road, South Fujian maritime traders, China and the World

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Introduction

The Maritime Silk Road (MSR) refers to the channel of communication and trade between the East and West. During and after the eighteenth century, tea replaced silk as the most valuable commodity of trade from China to the rest of the world (庄国土/Zhuang Guotu, 1996). This trade route was also known variously as the "spice route", "porcelain route", "tea route" and others in different countries. The name "Silk Route", now more commonly dubbed the "Silk Road", was widely accepted probably because Chinese silk was the major trading commodity from around the beginning of the first millennium to the early eighteenth century. However the concept of the "Maritime Silk Route" was introduced during the early twentieth century.[2]

The MSR probably started during the Han Dynasty.[3] China's maritime trade began to expand during the Tang Dynasty and reached its apogee during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The prosperity of China's foreign trade was closely related to the opening and expansion of maritime routes, of which silk, for long periods the major export of China, occupied a central role. Before the Song and Yuan Dynasties, Chinese silk was sent overseas largely by foreign merchants in their ships which called on the coastal ports of China. Chinese traders ventured into farther corners from the close of the Tang Dynasty. By the Song and Yuan Dynasties, Chinese merchants traded actively along the MSR and the ports of East Asia and the Indian Ocean. From the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries, the fortunes of China's external trade began to change. European explorations and colonial expansion crept along the coastal areas of Africa, the Americas, and East Asia. Subjugated states were incorporated into the network of world trade with Europe as its centre. European colonial activities that were driven by the search for trade in East Asia stimulated greater trade relations between the East and West. It is precisely because of the formation of the global trading network that China's exports, especially Chinese silk, became global commodities.

This major trade route between China and the world was even more significant as a channel of civilizational interactions. Moving along this route was an endless stream of emigration from China and the spread of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam into China, while China's Confucianism, Taoism, and local beliefs diffused overseas. The various skills and technologies in shipbuilding and navigation from Persia and the Middle East, and in glass manufacturing, medicine and textiles from Europe were gradually brought into China. More importantly was the introduction of food crops such as corn, sweet potato, tobacco, groundnut, and potato into China. These new food crops greatly stimulated the agricultural development of China and increased its population carrying capacity. In return, China's skills and technologies were introduced to the world through its four great inventions, the rearing of silk worms, the making of porcelain and various other products.

Chinese Emigration before the Twentieth Century

The formation of the MSR for the conduct of trade also saw the beginning of Chinese emigration. From the beginning of the first millennium, traders from the Leizhou peninsula (opposite Hainan Island) had sailed along the coast of Indo-China to the Gulf of Siam and as far as the Indian Ocean. This was not direct trade but one extending over several years and involving stopovers at selected points and by riding different native trading crafts. Due to technical limitations in navigation, a long journey had to be broken into several short ones. The coastline facilitated trading and to the replenishment of food and water supplies. By the Song Dynasty, advancements in agriculture, handicrafts, and in navigational technology and shipbuilding enabled the Chinese to dominate the maritime trade in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. This resulted in a massive outflow of Chinese emigrants and maritime traders. In the early fifteenth century, Surabaya in Java and Palembang in Sumatra each had communities with several thousand Chinese who were engaged in trading activities (马欢/Ma Huan (Ming Dynasty-reprinted), 1983, 624: 17-20, 26). Following the reopening of maritime trade at the tail end of the Ming Dynasty, Chinese traders became active again in the various ports of Southeast Asia.

China's first large-scale emigration followed upon European colonial expansion in South-east Asia at the end of the sixteenth century. The Europeans extended their trade network to East and Southeast Asia, which in turn enabled the traditional silk route to stretch into Europe and America (庄国土/Zhuang Guotu, 1991). The formation of a global trading network led to the prosperity of various ports that traded in silk which in turn stimulated the trade in many other commodities and attracted greater flows of labour supply. Prior to the seventeenth century, Chinese communities of varying sizes had settled in the ports along the Silk Road and surrounding areas. These communities were found in Manila in the Philippines, Nagasaki in Japan, Jakarta, Surabaya, and Banten in Java, Patani, Malacca, and Kelantan in Malaya, Ayutthaya in Thailand, and Bhamo in north Burma, with numbers ranging from a few thousands to tens of thousands. Manila in the Philippines during Spanish rule boasted a large concentration of Chinese settlers. It was here that Chinese traders brought in their silk in exchange for silver from the Americas. When Spain conquered Manila in 1571, there were only about 150 Chinese emigrants; by 1588, this number had exceeded 10,000 and increasing further to more than 25,000 by 1603 (Blair and Robertson, 1903-1907). Nagasaki was another popular destination for Chinese traders. Chinese maritime traders brought silk to Nagasaki in exchange for silver, of which Japan was a major exporter between the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. From a community of two to three thousand settlers, the Chinese settlement in Nagasaki grew to 10,000 later, while the total Chinese community in Japan was estimated to be 20 to 30 thousand persons (朱国桢/Zhu Guozhen (Ming Dynasty-reprinted), 1959: 716). In 1625, the Fujian Governor, Nan Yuyi stated that Chinese traders had privately travelled to Japan, among them a few thousand families were from Fujian and Canton. Some

had married Japanese and left behind descendants known as "*Tang Shi*" (沈德符/Shen Defu and 张燮/Zhang Xie (Ming Dynasty), 154: 20). By the seventeenth century, there were more than 100,000 Chinese emigrants in Japan.

After the early eighteenth century when silk was no longer China's major export commodity, Chinese traders continued to play an important role in the maritime trade of East and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the formation of the global trading network in the colonial territories of Southeast Asia ushered in a period of rapid Chinese emigration, especially into the ports along the Silk Road, to engage in trade and related activities (庄国土/Zhuang Guotu, 2008). The mid-eighteenth century saw major changes in the economic activities and distribution of Chinese emigrants. The development of the colonial economy in Southeast Asia during the eighteenth century attracted Chinese emigrants into the mining, agriculture, and other sectors, and in the process allowing them to shift inland. In the early nineteenth century, the mining of gold, silver, copper and tin ores in Kalimantan, the Malay Peninsula, north Burma and north Vietnam, and the engagement in commercial agriculture in south Vietnam, Malaya, West Java, and inland Thailand gave rise to numerous Chinese communities of varying sizes.

Before the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese emigrants headed largely to Southeast Asia and few ventured into the North America, Africa or India. My own estimate is that about 1.5 million entered Southeast Asia, with the largest number of 700,000 heading towards Siam, 140,000-150,000 to Java, 150,000 to Borneo, about 50,000 to the Malay States, 100,000 to Vietnam, 110,000-130,000 to Burma, about 10,000 to the Philippine islands, coupled with lesser numbers elsewhere (庄国土/Zhuang Guotu, 2001: 168-178).

Between the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the MSR became the route for the large-scale outflow of Chinese labour. This was a time when the hardships of labouring overseas was far better than starving at home. In the 23 years between 1876 and 1898, 2.85 million emigrants left the ports of Xiamen and Shantou for Southeast Asia (陈翰笙/Chen Hansheng, 1980: 184-185). By the early twentieth century, there were four to five million Chinese distributed in Asia, America, Africa and Australia, of whom about 90 per cent had settled in Southeast Asia. The vast majority of these emigrants were from the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian (庄国土/Zhuang Guotu, 2014: 83).

The end of the First World War saw the beginning of the third wave of Chinese migration directed largely to Southeast Asia and stimulated by the rising economic prosperity of the region. The production of primary commodities driven by the needs of the industrial revolution in the West was beginning to transform the colonial economies of Southeast Asia and exerted a great demand for cheap labour from China. Between 1922 and 1939, an estimated 5.5 million emigrants embarked from Xiamen, Xiantou and Hong Kong (游仲勋/Yu Chung-hsun, 1987: 10-11), mainly destined for Southeast Asia enterprises. From 1918 to 1931, emigrants from Shantou and Hong Kong alone totaled 3.8 million (福田省三/Fukuda Shozo, 1939: 70-74). Local official statistics of 1931 showed that 68.8 per cent of the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore belonged to the first generation (傅无闷/Fu Wumen, 1939: 29-30),

while the corresponding figure for Siam in 1932 was 45.7 per cent (施坚雅/Skinner, 1957: 182). The Chinese population in Southeast Asia was at least 7 million when the Pacific War broke out (施坚雅/Skinner, 1957). In the 1950s, of 12-13 million Chinese overseas, 90 per cent were found in Southeast Asia, with more than 3.5 million in Dutch Netherlands Indies, about 3 million in Siam, about 3.1 million in British Malaya (including Singapore), about a million in Vietnam, 350,000 each in the Philippines and Burma, 420,000 in Cambodia, 50,000 in Laos, and 10,000 in Brunei. There were 60,000 in Japan and Korea together, 20,000 elsewhere in Asia, 150,000 in the United States, 32,000 in Canada, 100,000 or so in Latin America, 70,000 to 80,000 in Europe, less than 50,000 in Africa, and about 40,000 in Oceania.[4]

From the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the late 1970s, the migration wave that had lasted for 300 years came to a sudden halt. China itself placed strict control on overseas migration, and the newly independent countries of Southeast Asia too prohibited the entry of immigrants from communist China. Henceforth, the growth of the Chinese population depended principally on natural increase. By the 1980s, the number had reached 20 million.[5]

China's economic reform and open-door policy after 1978 revived the fostering of its ties with foreign countries. The age of globalization and the more effective use of capital, technology, production and human resources on a global scale once again ushered in another wave of overseas migration. Between the 1970s and 2007-2008, more than 10 million Chinese, of whom about 1.6-1.7 million were from Hong Kong and Taiwan, had moved to various parts of the world. The new wave of migration and natural growth have boosted overseas Chinese population to 45.8 million by 2007-2008, of whom about 34 million or 74 per cent were in Southeast Asia (庄国土/Zhuang Guotu, 2011: 121-122). In 2014, the Overseas Chinese Department of China estimated that Chinese overseas population could have exceeded 60 million.[6]

The Minnans: Pioneers and Dominant Force along the MSR and Overseas Migration

China is the classic example of a society with a culture anchored on its continental tradition. However, China has a long coastline and a fairly strong maritime awareness and trading activities along its seaboard. Its maritime tradition was especially prominent during the Song Dynasty (庄国土/Zhuang Guotu, 2000).

The people especially of South Fujian province or the Minnan people, more popularly known as Hokkiens in Malaysia, had the strongest maritime tradition among the Chinese. The ancestors of the Minnans began to migrate southwards from the core Chinese domain in the north after the Tang Dynasty. Over the years they have intermarried with the more maritime-oriented "Bai Yue" tribes. The strong will to survive inherent among the migrants, coupled with their increasing reliance on the seas for a living, induced a bold and enterprising spirit among the people, to the extent that they would ignore traditional thinking and challenge taboos and the impossible. The remoteness of South Fujian from the capital city and major towns, and its

coastal location favoured the nurturing of close ties between the people and the sea, and encouraged the spirit of risk-taking and adventure. During the Song and Yuan Dynasties, daring Fujian maritime merchants had ventured abroad to trade. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties the prohibition to engage in maritime trade was disregarded as the Minnans turned to smuggling along the coast and began to migrate overseas.

Apart from the coastal plains of Fuzhou and Zhangzhou, Fujian is largely mountainous. Limited arable land had forced nine-tenths of its inhabitants to rely on the sea for a living (顾炎武/Gu Yanwu (Qing Dynasty), 93: 12). As early as the Northern Song Dynasty, Xie Fu from Quanzhou, in his *South Quanzhou Song*, portrays the scarcity of land which compelled the locals to depend on the sea for a living and to build boats each year to sail to foreign land (谢履/Xie Lü (Song Dynasty), 130: 3,753). The dependence on the sea grew further during the Ming Dynasty when the preoccupation with maritime trade led local people to turn away from farming. The bold and adventurous spirit of the Minnans was in stark contrast to the conservative peasants of North China who lived all their lives bonded to the land and never leaving their ancestral villages. The rich engaged in trading goods and the poor contributed their labour (张燮/Zhang Xie (Ming Dynasty-reprinted), 1981, 7: 131). Long accustomed to relying on the sea rather than the land, the local inhabitants, whether rich or poor, were ever willing to face the risks of carrying out trade in foreign land. Spurred on by this seaborne culture, these traders brought the products of China to the world in exchange for foreign goods that were sold for manifold profits (梁兆阳/Liang Zhaoyang (Ming Dynasty), 11: 435). Such was the attraction of overseas trade that in Quanzhou, the people of Anping would carry out seaborne trade rather than attend school (李光缙/Li Guangjin (Ming Dynasty-reprinted), 1966: 14). In Haicheng in the county of Zhangzhou, rich merchants rented their ships to maritime merchants to help thousands of rich and poor to engage in overseas trade (《海澄县志》/*Haicheng County Gazette* (Ming Dynasty), 5: 366). In consequence, the rich possessed many ships and the poor had few. The rich became richer and were able to build more ships to enable more people to sail, even the pirates opted to become sailors (薛凝度/Xue Ningdu (Qing Dynasty), 5: 4).

Like the people of the Mediterranean, the Minnans engaged in commerce and trade as a principal means of living, and these were treated as proper occupations. The Jinjiang county gazette during the reign of Emperor Daoguang listed commerce on par with farming. Although commerce was ranked below the literati, it was considered as one of the four social classes with the farmers and artisans (周学曾等/Zhou Xuezeng *et al*. (Qing Dynasty)). The scholars too would not look down on the traders and merchants. The famed scholar of Quanzhou, Li Guangjin, paid due respect to traders and merchants by observing that scholars who do not serve the government but roam in the market are not disgraceful or immoral but have their needs and ambitions to fulfill (周钟瑄/Zhou Zhongxuan, Qing Dynasty). The Minnans were keen on commerce, and seven out of ten earned a living in the market in search of modest profits, or transferred goods to domestic and foreign destinations. Farmers, scholars, children, and women were all proud of the merchants.

The Minnan community is tolerant and open-minded. Contact with foreign traders in the post-Tang Dynasty had helped the Minnans to accommodate the settlements and descendants of foreign traders and to adapt to the new environment. As early as the Song Dynasty, Quanzhou was already a centre for "foreign natives" (蕃客). Located at the southern section of Quanzhou was a "native market" (蕃坊) where communities of Arabs, Persians, Indians, and emigrants from Southeast Asia were found and practised their own religions, cultures, and education. While some stayed for several years, many settled down permanently and became known as "*Zhu Tang*" (住唐) (桑原骘藏/Kuwabara, 1954: 51). During the Song and Yuan Dynasties, many Quanzhou maritime merchants intermarried with the "foreign natives" and their children were identified as "local foreign natives" (土生蕃客). Considerable numbers of Minnans migrated to Southeast Asia from the seventeenth century onward and many maintained in close contact with their hometowns. Foreign goods, customs, trading practices and religions entered South Fujian through maritime traders from overseas. Profiteering by nature, the Minnans could "abandon tombs of ancestors and unity of family, cross the dangerous rough oceans, and settle at remote places" (周学曾等/ Zhou Xuezeng *et al*., Qing Dynasty). They adhered to trading rules and contract, and were influenced by the West's motto of "in the battleground of trade, there are no father and son".

Seizing the opportunities of maritime trading during the Song Dynasty had helped China to emerge as the largest producer and exporter of merchandise in East Asia. Another factor was China's possession of the world's best shipbuilding technology and navigational skills. As the centre of China's overseas trade, Quanzhou accounted for numerous maritime trading organizations established by local and "foreign native" merchants and their descendants (张燮/Zhang Xie (Ming Dynasty-reprinted), 1981). Among the leading maritime traders during the Southern Song Dynasty was Bao Shougeng. Having engaged in foreign native trading ships for 30 years, he had accumulated a huge fortune with thousands of servants, and eventually becoming a successful government officer-cum-businessman. Later on, Zheng Zhilong was another similar successful case. The Southern Song court utilized the wealth and manpower of Bao Shougeng to resist the Yuan (Mongolian), and appointed him as the Fujian-Canton Director and Head of Fujian maritime trade in charge of navigational affairs. When he surrendered to the Yuan court, he was made the minister of Fujian and ran its maritime affairs with supreme power.

Quanzhou grew to be the largest trading port that attracted foreign and local trading ships. Local maritime merchants increased considerably in number. Besides the court's tribute trade, private maritime trade was mainly handled by local small traders. Traders in possession of large vessels and capital were able to trade on their own, while small and medium traders had to pool their resources or obtain loans to hire vessels to ply their trade. As Chu Yu said: "Big vessels can accommodate hundreds of people while small ones take around a hundred, and merchants shared storage space for their goods, leaving a few feet of space for each person to sleep on top of the goods" (朱彧/Zhu Yu (Song Dynasty)). The risk of maritime trading was very great and those who suffered total loss might become pirates as a last resort to earn a living

(洪适/Hong Shi (Song Dynasty)). The booming maritime trade of Quanzhou during the Song and Yuan Dynasties enriched many of the local small traders. For instance, Wang Yuanmao, a local temple worker, travelled overseas to trade and married the chieftain's daughter. He subsequently returned to Quanzhou to emerge as leading maritime merchant (洪迈/Hong Mai (Song Dynasty-reprinted), 1981, 6: 1,345). Some of the famous local maritime merchants at that time included Chen Ying, Wu Bing, Zhu Fang, Li Chong, and Lin Zhaoqing (李玉昆/Li Yukun, not dated: 46-47).

The localization of "foreign native" traders and their descendants had enabled them to integrate with the local and other foreign traders in Quanzhou to form maritime trading conglomerates. These conglomerates played a leading role in China's overseas trade and dominated the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean and East Asia. The Song and Yuan Dynasties witnessed the earliest apogee of development in China's maritime trade prior to European expansion. Overseas Chinese settlements too began to emerge to form part of the Chinese trading network pioneered by Minnan maritime traders.

When the weak Chinese court lost its grip on its Southeastern territorial waters from mid-sixteenth century, large numbers of merchants resumed their maritime trading activities. Settlements and trade that were built up by Chinese traders in the Indian Ocean during the Song and Yuan Dynasties were being brought into the orbit of European colonial rule. Chinese merchants faced unprecedented challenges as they encountered fully armed European trading vessels in the East Asian waters. The decline of imperial control over the southeast coast at the later stage of the Ming Dynasty forced Chinese maritime traders to organize into maritime trading groups, among which the major ones were led by Wang Zhi, Zhen Yiben, Li Guanglong, Hong Dizhen, Zheng Zhilong, Zheng Daoqian and Lin Feng. The Ming Dynasty implemented a policy of using "pirates to counter pirates" by endorsing the powerful Zheng Zhilong group for support. Without the worry of being raided by the imperial forces, Zheng's group swiftly disintegrated other maritime groups and took control over them to emerge as the leader of China's maritime traders.

Born in Nan Aun district in Fujian, the young Zheng Zhilong had followed his uncle Wang Cheng to Macao and had become familiar with the business practices of the Portuguese and other Europeans. Upon leaving Macao, he arrived at Japan to serve under a Chinese merchant, Li Dan. In early seventeenth century, Li Dan's family possessed the official license, "*Zhu Yin Zhu*" (朱印状) to trade (岩生成一/Iwao Seiichi, 1958: 184-185) and had reaped enormous profits to enable him to expand his influence to Taiwan and the coastal areas of the mainland. The British business association head at that time, Richard Cocks, regarded Li Dan as the Chinese trading leader in Nagasaki and other regions in Japan (科克斯/Cocks, 1980, 2: 309). Zheng Zhilong was dispatched by Li Dan to act as an interpreter in the Dutch East India Company in 1623-1624 (包乐史/Blusse, 1990: 253-254). This had allowed him to acquire and improve his skills in trading, and to become familiar with the business strategies of the Dutch

East India Company. At the same time, he attempted to learn Western navigation and shipping skills and the operation of the cannon which was then the most powerful weapon of the fleet (白蒂/Carioti, 1997: 25). By then, Zheng Zhilong was already proficient in the Nanjing official language, Fujian and Cantonese dialects, Portuguese, and Dutch, and acquiring knowledge in international trading, navigation, and the ship and the cannon. He was then well-prepared to emerge as the dominant Chinese maritime trader when he inherited Li Dan's enterprise.

Zheng Zhilong soon subdued other pirate groups and established himself as the leader of the Chinese maritime traders. In 1633, following their defeat in the battle of Jin Men, the Dutch retreated from the Fujian coastal regions and Chinese maritime trade organizations gained more effective control of the East Asian waters (包乐史/Blusse, 1989: 49). The Straits of Taiwan which controlled the trade routes between Southeast and East Asia became the inland waters of Zheng Zhilong's fleet. The Dutch had colonized Taiwan as a base to trade with Japan and China's coastal regions, and to turn it into an entrepot for East and Southeast Asia. With the Dutch retreat and subjugation of the pirates, Zheng Zhilong was elevated to the position of Army General and Governor of Fujian. His armed maritime trading organization became China's *de facto* navy. For the first time, China had strong military backing to promote its maritime trade and overseas migration. Acting on his official capacity, Zheng Zhilong was in effective control of the majority of Chinese maritime merchants and the issuance of permits to undertake overseas trade.

Zheng's trading organization developed into an integrated trading network comprising domestic and overseas trading departments. The five domestic trading departments were identified according to the five elements of *Jin* (metal), *Mu* (wood), *Shui* (water), *Huo* (fire) and *Tu* (earth), while the five overseas trading departments were tagged with the core moral values of *Ren* (benevolence), *Yi* (righteousness), *Li* (propriety), *Zhi* (wisdom), and *Xin* (trust). The domestic trading departments were located at Hangzhou and nearby areas, and were charged with the purchase of goods with funds advanced by the local authorities. The goods were forwarded to the overseas trading departments based in Xiamen and its vicinity. The goods would be exported and payments to be reimbursed by the local authorities. The East Asian waters served as the major platform for Zheng's control of maritime trade which combined functions in administration, military, and trading activities. His son and successor, Zheng Chenggong, who eventually drove the Dutch out of Taiwan, brought the development of the enterprise to its apogee. Before Zheng invaded Taiwan, a Manila priest, T. M. Gentle, had remarked that Zheng was the king of a maritime empire that possessed a fleet of ships exceeding 13,000 vessels stationed at Xiamen. Zheng too was able to command thousands of ships that plied the coast of China. This giant navy was like an iron curtain that prevented the Tartars from approaching the coastal towns and villages, and at the same time paralyzed the trade between the Tartars and the Europeans and their colonies (白蒂/Carioti, 1997: 70-71).

The economic contest between Zheng's regime and the Dutch was played out at the ports stretching from the archipelagoes of the South Sea to Japan. The Dutch would seize opportunities

to attack and plunder Zheng's trading ships. In return, Zheng never relented on his demands for compensations from the Dutch or in taking retaliatory measures.

On 8 June 1658, the Governor of the Dutch Indian Company in Jakarta, John Maetzuyker, in a letter to Zheng concerning the compensation for the plundering of Chinese ships by the Dutch, in a tone that reflected the strength of Zheng. It read:

> In the past, Your Highness had raised similar demands, but all the demands were not that important, and we agreed, not because it is our obligations, but because we do not wish to offend Your Highness… Somehow, Your Highness has closed the ports, and prevented our people from trading with Taiwan, and adopted other measures that had led to great losses on our part. As a consequence, we have reasons to become suspicious and, before we are clear as to Your Highness's attitude to us, have so instructed our leaders to confiscate any ships belonging to Your Highness, and detained them in Taiwan or Jakarta until we are clear that Your Highness is willing to comply with the agreement signed or whether to raise new disputes. It is under such circumstances that we cannot be faulted for our action. Now, we have to apologize to Your Highness because we do not know that the ports have been reopened and that your ships are still detained by us… Therefore, let us eradicate the sources of dispute for our mutual benefits (Campbell, 1951: 67-69).

Zheng Chenggong's ambition was to overthrow the Qing Dynasty and to revive the Ming Dynasty. He was not particularly keen to deploy his forces to gain control of the East Asia waters. The resources from his maritime empire were utilized largely subvert the Qing Dynasty rather than to seek dominance overseas. Upon occupying China proper, the Manchu regime prohibited movements across rivers and seas in an attempt to sever Zheng's connection with China. In 1661 and much harassed by the Qing army, Zheng Chenggong moved swiftly to attack the Dutch in Taiwan and drove them out of the island. In 1622, Zheng dispatched the Catholic priest, F. C. Riccio, who had served in Xiamen, to the Philippines with an official letter to demand the Spanish in Manila to pay an annual tribute, failing which he would launch a naval attack to overthrow them (Zaide and Zaide, 1990: 453-456). There were then only 600 Spanish soldiers in Manila, while Zheng had a million fighting men, assisted by 15,000 warships of various sizes and armed with 40 cannons (Blair and Robertson, 1903-1907, 36: 250-251). In the midst of great fear among the Spaniards, Zheng had passed away and the intended attack was aborted. His successor, Zheng Jing, continued the battle against the Qing army, and at the same time contested the Dutch for control of the southern part of the Taiwan Strait.

From his stronghold in Taiwan, Zheng's regime deployed all its overseas resources to overthrow the Qing empire but in a fruitless struggle lasting many years. The Qing court applied its strict navigation ban to combat the Zheng regime to great effect, depriving it access to the resources, market and manpower of the mainland. Eventually, it was the severe strains

on financial and manpower resources that brought down the Zheng regime. The Qing Dynasty took over Taiwan, lifted the ban on navigation, but intensified its control on maritime trade and clammed down hard on emigration. Once again, unprotected and unarmed Chinese maritime traders became merchants without an empire (Wang, 1992: 79).

Southern Fujian maritime trading groups first emerged during the Song Dynasty, languished during the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, revived during the end of the Ming, only to be suppressed again during the early Qing Dynasty. The Qing court designated Xiamen as the port of trade with Southeast Asia. The monopoly of trade with and migration to Taiwan allowed Fujian province and its inhabitants to reap unique opportunities from maritime trade and overseas migration. Like the Dutch in Europe, the people of Fujian became known as "the coachmen of the sea", and China's most "cosmopolitan" population in the seventeenth century (包乐史/Blusse, 1989). Despite the loss of the monopoly of overseas trade after the collapse of the Zheng regime, Fujian maritime merchants were able to take advantage of Xiamen port and the network of Southeast Asian Chinese traders to maintain a firm grip on China's overseas trade.

A year after the takeover of Taiwan in 1684, the Qing court decreed the opening of Xiamen, Guangzhou, Ningbo and Yuntai Shan ports to maritime trade. As the only "open" port in Fujian province, Xiamen was the port of choice for overseas trade. Between the early Qing Dynasty and up to the opium war, Xiamen's maritime trade exceeded that of Guangzhou and other cities. A foreigner at that time commended on south Fujian merchants in the ports of north and south China and Southeast Asia that:

> No other city in China is similar to Xiamen in the number of wealthy and capable merchants and who have also established trading houses in various parts of Southeast Asia. Chinese junks called "green-head ships" are mostly owned by Xiamen merchants (Lindsay, 1833: 13-15).

As stated in a *Xiamen Gazette*:

> Merchants seek profits across the sea, treat the ocean like a bed sheet to sail north to Ningbo, Shanghai, Tianjin, Jinzhou, and east Guangdong, and across the sea to Taiwan several times a year. They also travel overseas to Luzon, Sulu, and other places, departing in winter and returning in summer. The initial profits could be as much as ten times. Some invest their entire fortune on building ships, which could lead to instant wealth or poverty. Despite the vicissitudes of maritime trade, thousands of sailors are driven into it to earn a living (周凯/Zhou Kai (Qing Dynasty-reprinted), 1996).

Three factors enabled the Fujian merchants based in Xiamen to dominate Chinese overseas trading network up to the beginning of the opium war. The first was Xiamen's status as the port

of departure to Southeast Asia before the Qing Dynasty. The second was the reliance on the network of Fujian emigrants in ports of China and Southeast Asia. The last was the long-term monopoly of the migration traffic between Taiwan and the mainland.

The Qing court reopened maritime trade after taking over control of Taiwan. Xiamen was designated as the official port of departure for Southeast Asia trade while Canton and Macao were ports of call for foreign trading ships (周凯/Zhou Kai (Qing Dynasty)). The government allowed Spanish ships to call at Xiamen probably because they brought in silver dollars that were lacking in China. The presence of other foreign ships in Xiamen was also tolerated and British East India Company ships had indeed called at Xiamen during the early Qing. By the mid-Qing period, maritime merchants too departed from Guangdong to foreign ports, which thus undermined the special status of Xiamen as the port of embarkation to Southeast Asia.

As the centre of Southeast Asian trade, Xiamen contributed significantly to the domination of Fujian merchants in the Chinese commercial network overseas. Densely populated and suffering from a shortage of arable land, few export commodities and poor transport, Fujian was over-shadowed by such provinces as Shandong, Zhejiang, and Guangdong in commerce and trade. It was due to Xiamen's special status as a trading port at the time when China resumed its trade with foreign countries that Fujian merchants seized the opportunity to take the lead in maritime trade and overseas migration. The various ports in Southeast Asia such as Cemarang, Banjarmasin, Siam, Johor, Terengganu, Cebu, Sulu, Cambodia, Annam, Luzon and others were packed with Minnan traders (周凯/Zhou Kai (Qing Dynasty)). After the eighteenth century, Guangdong, especially the Chaozhou maritime merchants, operated out of Chenghai to engage actively in overseas trade in various parts of Southeast Asia. Both the Chaozhou and Minnan communities were known as "*Fu Lao*" (福佬), and were skillful shipbuilders. They brought these skills to Vietnam and Siam. By the mid-eighteenth century, Chaozhou merchants undercut their Fujian rivals by slashing prices to take control of the rice trade in central Thailand (Ng, 1983: 16). In 1757, the Qing government directed all foreign ships to Guangzhou. Cut off from foreign trade, Xiamen merchants incurred substantial losses as they could not lay their hands on the silver brought in by European ships. While more ships were departing from Xiamen than from Guangzhou (陈国栋/Chen Guodong, 1991: 71-72), the latter was far superior in terms of the volume of trade, population size, as well as economic and political importance.

The earlier status of Xiamen as the sole port of embarkation of China, coupled with the scarcity of land and dense population, migration from Fujian to Southeast Asia was far greater than that of other coastal provinces. The demand for labour in the European colonies of Southeast Asia and the need for workers to man the expanding Chinese trading network were factors that boosted the southbound migration of the Chinese. Indeed, in the days before the Opium War, Chinese junks were the principal means of travel to Southeast Asia.

Large-scale migration among the Minnan people started during the early Qing rule. Until the mid-Qing period, Fujian sent out the largest number of emigrants to Southeast Asia. In 1727, Gao Qizhuo, Governor of Fujian and Zhejiang, stated in his memoir:

> It was found that each merchant ship carried 60-80 sailors and merchants when in actual fact every ship unlawfully carried 200-300 persons. Most never returned from where they have landed. Some greedy ship owners brought cargo as well as up to 400-500 persons, each paying 8-10 ounces of silver. Up to 70 per cent of the passengers were from Fujian, and the rest from Guangzhou and Zhejiang (郝玉麟/Hao Yulin, 1887, 46: 27).

Massive overseas migration from Guangzhou started after the mid-Qing period. Chinese emigration to Southeast until the mid-nineteenth century was mainly from South Fujian,[7] the only exception being Siam.[8] The expansion of the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, the development of towns, and the supplies of manpower and supporting services benefited the Chinese overseas trading network immensely. These communities were embedded in the trading network and consumer markets of the Chinese merchants, and at the same time acted as the base for the supply of goods, manufacturing and processing industries. Some merchants began to shift from trading to production, and from coastal to inland locations to look for fresh business opportunities. By the early nineteenth century, the Chinese trading network had expanded, its foundation was firmer and economy stronger. The stronghold and pillar for overseas Chinese trading network gradually shifted from China's coastal areas to overseas Chinese communities.

The initial advantage in maritime trade that was built up by Minnan merchants since the late Ming Dynasty stimulated migratory outflows from South Fujian. Despite the more advanced development of Guangdong province during the Qing Dynasty, and the port of Guangzhou and its maritime trade were larger than those of Xiamen, Minnan merchants could still rely on their overseas counterparts to dominate overseas Chinese trade. In the Dutch colonial centre of trade of Jakarta, past Chinese Kapitans and leading traders were mostly from Fujian, so were those in the important commercial town of Hoi An, Vietnam. The coastal road of Hoi An was known as Da Tang Street (大唐街) and along its entire stretch of 3-4 miles was lined with shops owned by Fujian merchants (大汕和尚/Monk Dasan, 1984, 4: 80). Although the Teochews (Chaozhou) were the largest Chinese community in Thailand, they were active in farming while the Fujian merchants were engaged in shipping and trading (布赛尔/Purcell, 1958: 24 and 28). Similarly, Fujian merchants dominated commerce and trade especially in the ports and coastal towns of British Malaya. From the end of the sixteenth century, the Chinese in the Philippines, predominantly from Fujian, were the only ones in Southeast Asia who were involved almost entirely in commerce and trade. The Chinese in Southeast Asia had reached 1.5 million in number

by the mid-nineteenth century, of whom about 900 thousand were from Guangdong. With the West forcing open the China market after the Opium War and ended the monopoly of native Chinese traders, it was the overseas Chinese trading networks that made possible the gradual shift of the Chinese maritime traders to operate overseas. Again, it was largely due to the Fujian merchants that Chinese trading networks overseas could survive and develop to play a major role until today.

From the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, Fujian merchants took the lead in maritime trade and overseas migration. On the basis of the five trading networks set up during Zheng's era, Fujian maritime merchants remained active along the coast of China especially south of the Yangtze River (《清高宗实录》/ *True Records* (Qing Dynasty), 336: 13). They made their presence felt in Wenzhou city of Zhejiang Province, where the Minnan dialect is still popular today. The nearby cities of Ningbo and Zhoushan were the hubs of transshipment trade with Japan that was largely conducted by Fujian merchants and sailors (陈希育/Chen Xiyu, 1988, 4: 75-81). The port of Shanghai that was established during the reign of Emperor Kangxi, was also a gathering point for Fujian merchant ships, of which 12 from Fujian and Taiwan were sail from Shanghai with raw silk to Japan. The *Shanghai Etching Materials* published in 1980 stated:

> The Quanzhang Hall in Shanghai, built during the reign of Emperor Qianlong, was very grand and luxurious, comparable to halls built by other clans. There were many rich Fujian merchants in Suzhou, each with luxurious mansion. During festive seasons, these mansions were decorated with lights, staged performances and organized feasts. They displayed elaborate costumes to parade their wealth (朱仕绣/Zhu Shixiu, not dated: 372).

The people of Zhangzhou in southern Fujian engaged in smuggling from mid-Ming Dynasty and maintained close relations with the Portuguese. Fujian merchants congregated at Macao when the Portuguese opened a port here. In his dispatch to the Ming emperor, Zhong Luzhao reported that 20-30 thousand disloyal Fujians were gathered at Macao, causing troubles and cheating people (《崇祯长编》/ *The Full Account of Emperor Chongzhen* (Ming Dynasty)). Fujian merchants were indeed active in Macao from late Ming Dynasty to the mid-nineteenth century. Xie Dongyu, one of the 13 big merchants in the Macao-Guangzhou region, was originally from Fujian. Fujian merchants were even more prominent in Guangzhou. When Guangzhou was made the only port of call for foreign ships, inflows of Fujian capital and business were directed to Guangzhou. During the reigns of Emperors Qianlong and Jiaqing, six of the 13 prominent trading companies in Guangdong belonged to Fujian's Zhangzhou and Quanzhou merchants, compared with five controlled by Cantonese (See 梁嘉彬/Liang Jiabin, 1937). With the emergence of Shanghai as the largest trading port after the Opium War, some Fujian traders too shifted to Shanghai to continue their foreign trading business.

The wide coverage of the Fujian trade network in China was intensified by its often monopolistic position. In the case of the tea trade, eighteenth century Fujian traders combined production, processing, transportation, and retailing or wholesaling into an integrated operation. They were consequently dominant in the most profitable international trade in tea during the early eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. The most popular tea in Europe during the early eighteenth century was from the Wuyi mountains in north Fujian. This brand accounted for almost half of the tea export of China in the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries.[9] It was the southern Fujian traders who organized the production and processing of Wuyi tea. They rented land from local farmers, recruited tea masters from southern Fujian and operated tea processing factories. The processed tea was forwarded to Guangzhou and sold to merchants from Europe and America through the 13 prominent trading companies which monopolized the Guangzhou export trade. Almost half of the leading trading companies were owned by Fujian merchants. Some merchants exported tea to Fujian merchants in Jakarta from where the product was exported to Europe by the Dutch.[10]

The Minnan monopoly of transport and migration to Taiwan was not without benefit to Fujian maritime trading activities. As the only port of contact with Taiwan as well as one of the important ports in East Asia in the eighteenth century, Xiamen was in effect the transshipment port that handled Taiwan's foreign trade. Taiwan's economic mainstay of rice and sugar were major commodities in East Asian traded. The re-export of these commodities had contributed to the commercialization of Taiwanese agriculture and to the expansion of maritime trade among south Fujian merchants. Xiamen's role in the entrepot trade of mainland China, Taiwan, Japan and Southeast Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had furthered its maritime trade. The development of Taiwan in turn attracted migrants from Fujian. Prior to the late nineteenth century, the Qing court had imposed strict regulations on migration to Taiwan such as the need to obtain permits from the local authorities and immigration offices. Emigrants were not allowed to bring family members with them. Due to rampant piracy in the Guangdong waters, Cantonese were prohibited from migrating to Taiwan (this regulation was later abolished). Before the creation of the migration office in 1789, scores of Fujian people had flocked to Taiwan illegally. By the early nineteenth century, the population of Taiwan had reached two million. Before 1884, Taiwan was administered by Fujian Province, and the residents were mostly Fujian whose culture diffused rapidly throughout Taiwan to form an extension of southern Fujian culture across the strait.

Fujian maritime merchants were skillful in managing their wealth, willing to learn and to imitate. Li Jin of Zhangzhou and Zheng Zhilong of Quanzhou were probably the early examples of maritime merchants who learned to speak European languages and became familiar with Eastern business traditions. When the Europeans arrived in Asia, Fujian inhabitants were the first to come into contact with them and took advantage of business opportunities. Faithful to their traditional religions, cultures and local ties, Fujian maritime merchants learned to overcome the risks and problems in maritime trade and forged strong ties with fellow traders.

Ties of shared origins based on locality and consanguinity compensated for their loose trading networks in Southeast Asia (Ng, 1983: 83). From the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, it was these ties that allowed Fujian merchants to dominate Southeast Asia Chinese business.

Concluding Remarks

MSR was a channel of different types of interactions between China and the world of which trade was only one of many components. Apart from trade, the impact of culture, religion, the arts and technology were equally if not greater. Some foreign traders living along the MSR had also migrated to and settled down in China. However, the outflow of Chinese migrants to the outside world was much bigger than the inflow of foreigners to China. There are now an estimated 60 million Chinese overseas who help to disseminate elements of Chinese culture and foster friendly relations with the world.

Making the Twenty-first Century MSR work depends on the co-operation among all countries on an equal basis. Of particular significance are Southeast Asian countries whose nearly 40 million Chinese residents possess strong economic power, understand Chinese and foreign cultures, have outstanding soft skills, and are familiar with local situations. Among them, Fujian communities have done well financially and are largely settled down in urban areas. With their close trading networks and high level of education, the community will almost certainly play the same historical role to promote the development of the Twenty-first Century MSR.

Notes

1 In 28 Mac 2015, China Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance jointly issued the *Promote the Joint Development of the Silk Road Economic Belt and Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road: Vision and Actions*, designated Fujian as the only core centre for Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Route.

2 French Sinologist Édouard Émmannuel Chavannes (1903) referred to "Maritime Silk Road" for the first time but did not receive much notice until 1980 when Chinese scholars began to use this term more regularly.

3 The earliest recorded reference of the Chinese introducing silk in overseas trade is found in the *Book of Han: Geographical Account*.

4 On more accurate estimates of the Chinese population of Southeast Asia, see 庄国土/Zhuang Guotu and 刘文正/Liu Wenzheng, 2009: Chapter 12; 潘翎/Pan Lynn, 1998: Chapter 5.

5 According to China's United Overseas Chinese History Association, of the 20 million ethnic Chinese, about 20 per cent were "Overseas Chinese" (Hong, 1983).

6 Based on a conversation between the author and Qiu Yuanping (裘援平) on 14 September 2014, on the occasion of the establishment of the Maritime Silk Research Institute of Huaqiao University.

7 On Chinese migration to Southeast Asia and dialect composition of migrants from the early Qing to the Opium War (see 庄国土/Zhuang Guotu, 1992).

8 Large-scale emigration from Guangdong from the middle of the Qing Dynasty was undertaken by the Hakkas who left for West Borneo goldfields and the Teochew (Chaozhou) migration to Siam. In 1768, the descendant of a Teochew migrant Zheng Chao ascended the Siamese throne and actively encouraged migration of his clansmen. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Teochew community had formed the largest component of the Chinese population with a number reaching as much as 700,000 (see 郡司喜一/Kiichi, 1934: 239).

9 On the importance of tea in the eighteenth century trade between Chinese and Europe and America, (see Zhuang, 1993).

10 On the role of Fujian merchants in the production and distribution of Wuyi tea (see Zhuang, 1998).

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