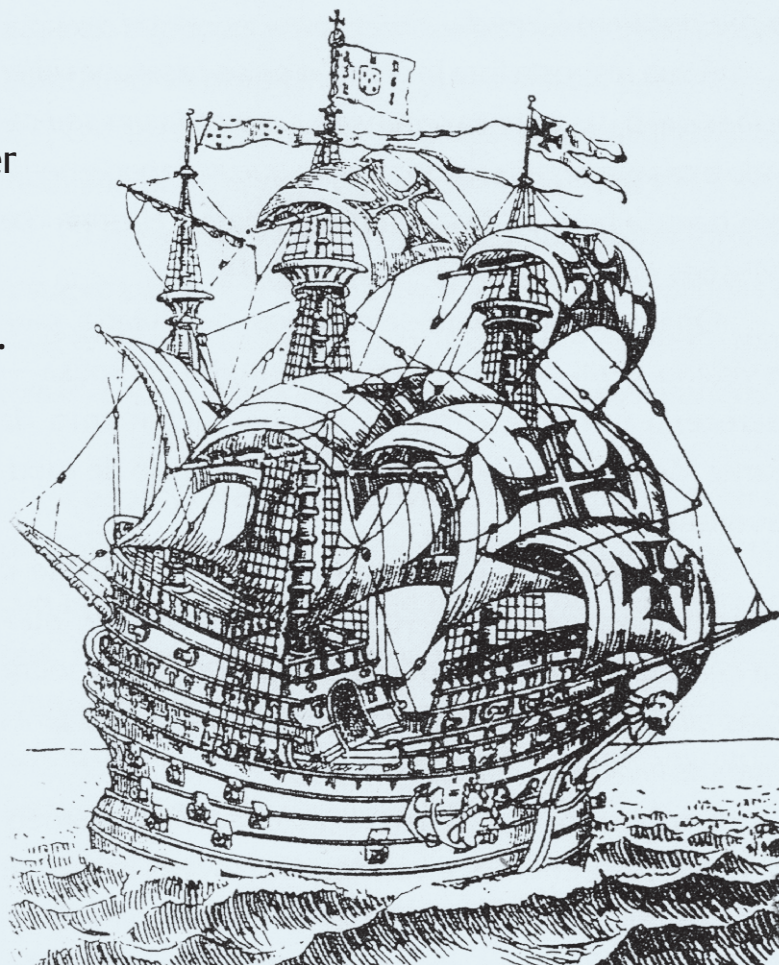


Melaka revisited

Based on a wide range of unexplored contemporary Portuguese sources, this ambitious study aims to reconsider and to expound the Portuguese expansion at the heart of political, social and economic structures in Asia. In doing so, it expects to open new paths in the study of contact between civilisations that began at the end of the 15th century. This is all the more promising as the fog of ideologies and of the nagging aftermath of colonialism has, according to Pinto, been dispelled (xxii).

Niels Mulder



substantive chapter expands upon the city of Melaka itself, tracing its population and society, its centres of power in the persons of its captains, bishops and resident Portuguese (*casados*), and its fortifications and resources. It is also the sad story of Melaka's metamorphosis from a cosmopolitan city to a ghetto-city during the period in question.

The substantive chapters are rounded off with Annexes that dwell on the genealogical questions and problems raised by the historical sources – local and Portuguese – on Johor and Aceh. To me, the interest of this query lies in the conflict between the occidental and the local (Malay) ideas of the writing of history to which I was introduced by my mentor, the Javanist C. C. Berg, who liked to talk about 'projective' or 'predictive history'. The purpose of the local histories (*babad, silsilah, sejarah, hikayat*) are not to provide the reader-reciter with 'objective' facts, but such works were commissioned to legitimate rulers with respectable genealogies, with prosperous realms, while seeking to praise them with noble character and great deeds. Whereas verifiable data occur in the stories, it will take the skill of a seasoned historian to skim the narratives of 'facts'.

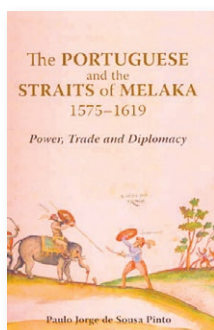
Following addenda list the Captains of Melaka (1567-1620), the Viceroys and Governors of India (1564-1622), present relevant maps, an appendix of documents and a glossary, of which the 60 pages of translated letters to the king, reports, opinions, advices and suchlike give us fascinating insights in the mentality and preoccupations of the age and the writers concerned.

The read

Even as this is a translation of an original text, the narrative would have been enhanced through competent, professional editing. The text as it stands is jumpy – painlessly going up and down historical sequences; we are presented with trees and more trees, but the integration of the forest often remains nebulous. This may have to do with what the author calls his analysis in concentric circles – an idea that I failed to grasp. Things would have been much clearer had an extensive synchronical table visualised and summarised the data on the main players, i.e., Johor, Melaka, Aceh, and some peripheral others who at least traded with these three. Because of the meticulous method of the author, the latter are often in separate foci, and so the same data are endlessly rehashed.

Whereas the reading is vexing, it is well worth doing it as we are presented with a treasure trove of documentary evidence. It opens the perspective on further explorations, and will hopefully stimulate the integration of Southeast Asian studies that has so far been missing.

Niels Mulder retired to the southern slope of the mystically potent Mt. Banàhaw, Philippines, where he concluded his swan song, *Situating Filipino Civilisation in Southeast Asia: Reflections and observations*. Saarbruecken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2012 (print-to-order ed., ISBN 9783659130830) (niels_mulder201935@yahoo.com.ph)



Reviewed publication:
Paulo Jorge de Sousa Pinto. 2012.
The Portuguese and the Straits of Melaka 1575-1619; Power, Trade and Diplomacy. Singapore: NUS Press. xxx + 375 pages. ISBN: 9789971695705 (paperback)

IN VIEW OF THE WORKS OF HISTORIANS of Southeast Asia, we are in dire need of integrating the scattered studies and source materials, as up to now, Portuguese historiography appears to be ignorant of Malay, Dutch and other regional sources (Chinese, Japanese, Acehnese, Gujarati, Thai, etc.), at the same time that most historians are equally ignorant of Portuguese sources. Consequently, the history of the area prior to the arrival of northern Europeans is lacunary at best and basically remains *terra incognita*. As a researcher and lecturer of Oriental Studies at the Catholic University of Portugal, the author hopes that his effort at integrating important historiography as well as a wide range of published and unpublished Portuguese sources will result in a more cosmopolitan historical view of the area; the current translation of his work is expected to be a major step in that direction.

The author approaches his subject through the analysis of the geopolitics of Melaka since it fell into the orbit of the Portuguese Estado da Índia and the local structures, especially Johor and Aceh, with which it interacted. The period in focus spans the half century from the lifting of the siege by Aceh and the loss of Ternate as the centre of the spice trade in 1575, and the founding of Dutch Batavia that spelled the rupture of Portuguese influence in the Straits. The analysis concentrates upon the political and geopolitical aspect to the detriment of an economic approach, even as trade, monopoly and profit were the driving force behind Portuguese and competing explorations, conquests and subsequent exploits.

Contents

The historical survey proper is divided into five substantive chapters that deal with (1) the economy of Melaka in its global context as part of the Estado da Índia, and its gradual decline, or exhaustion of the Portuguese imperial ambitions. (2) Then, in the same context, the political and military frameworks, their tensions, changes and erosion, are described. (3) Follows the relation of the regional context of the western part of the Archipelago, which is subsequently (4) deepened by the dynamics of the precarious equilibrium between the rival powers Aceh, Johor and Portuguese Melaka. (5) The last

Under Afonso de Albuquerque's orders, the Flor do Mar supported the conquest of Malacca in 1511.

Shaping Indonesia

This well-researched and cogently presented study shows how images of an idealized China came to occupy a central place in Indonesia's post-independence political discourse. Indonesian leaders during the Sukarno era, Liu contends, admired Mao's China and sought from it "conceptual and practical inspiration" for their nation-building efforts.

Lee Kam Hing



Reviewed publication:
Hong Liu, *China and the shaping of Indonesia, 1949-1965*, Singapore: NUS Press / Kyoto Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 2011

TO BE SURE, China did not lend itself easily to favourable representation. Even with expanding Sino-Indonesia ties in the period of study, unease remained among Indonesians towards a rising

Chinese power set against historical memory of past invasion of Java by Mongol-ruled China. This was compounded by the presence of an economically strong Chinese minority in their midst. It was a wariness arising also out of the scars of the communist-led 1948 Madiun rebellion and of a resurgent Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). There was also a struggle for power among political forces, including the PKI and anti-communists. And, in an Indonesia which was a functional democracy there were intellectuals critical of China's authoritarian system and the lack of freedom in Chinese society.

Nation building

Liu argues that to Indonesians during the Sukarno years, China became more than just another nation-state. China, through multiple and sometimes conflicting images, featured in their many intense nation-building debates. Although Indonesia and China emerged as modern states at the same time in 1949, Indonesian intellectuals asked how China could achieve so much in such a short time while their country continued to be plagued by economic stagnation and internal political

problems. Liu suggests that the China image when considered by Indonesian leaders alongside their competing visions and aspirations was transformed into what he called 'the China metaphor'. The metaphor in reflecting the disappointments of Indonesians also served as a model to realize what they aspired for in their country.

To capture Indonesia's China images, Liu who is one of China's leading scholars on Southeast Asia and presently Professor at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, went through what had been written about China by some sixty prominent Indonesians of the period. Some of the leaders were members of the PKI who, not surprisingly, viewed China favourably. Others were non-communists, among whom Sutan Sjahrir, a former Prime Minister, and Mohd Hatta who served as Vice-president. It was Indonesia's founding President Sukarno and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, its best-known novelist, who among all seemed most impressed by developments taking place in China.

For such a study, some may ask whether a sufficiently broad spectrum of views representative of important segments of society had been obtained and if these were drawn evenly from across the time period looked at. In this book, Indonesian writings cited came mainly from the 1950s with few references from Indonesia's Guided Democracy period when China featured strongly in Indonesian political consciousness and was itself encountering internal stresses. There is also no reference to the powerful Indonesian military whose views on China particularly those leading up to the 1965 PKI-linked Coup must have been pertinent to the China metaphor.