

Review Essay Of “Jacques de Coutre’s And Matelieff’s Singapore and Johor”: Exploring Sources On Pre-Modern History of Singapore

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Brief survey of the field

The education and awareness of the pre-Rafflesian Singapore history has seen much progress since the turn of the millennium. First, there is the publication of *Early Singapore 1300-1819: evidence in maps, text and artefacts* and *Iberians in the Singapore-Melaka area and adjacent regions: 16th to 18th century* in 2004. In 2009, the publication of *Singapore: a 700-year history, Sino-Malay trade and diplomacy from the tenth through the fourteenth century* and *Singapore and Melaka Straits: violence, security and diplomacy in the 17th century* provide the general public and the specialists alike a chance to explore the subject comprehensively or delve into the China-Malay Archipelago relations in the post Classical period as well as the relations between European empires and native powers in the Western Malay Archipelago in the early modern period. In between, there is the appearance of the *Maritime heritage of Singapore* which adds on to the list that the general readers can delve into. In 2013, the publication of *Singapore and the Silk Road of the sea* summarizes years of painstaking archaeological work done by J. Miksic in Singapore. The appearance of the *Memoirs and memorials of Jacques de Coutre* and *Journal, memorials and letters of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge* as well as their abridged versions in quick

succession enrich the narrative of the European empire-Malay native power interaction across a spectrum of audience immeasurably. To top it off, the CPDD-produced textbook for Singapore in 2014 has incorporated the pre-1819 developments of the island substantially compared to previous versions of the text.

Works by J. Miksic (2013) and Derek Heng (2010) have been urging for the pre-1819 history of Singapore to be seen from the large perspective of the trade passing through the region as well as from the intimate angle of activities occurring on the island. The broad phases of pre-1819 Singapore developments can be seen in the context of the chronology of Southeast Asian history: 1. post-Classical kingdom period (600-1400 C.E.), 2. early modern period (1450-1750 C.E.). Focusing on the latter half of the early modern period (17th and 18th centuries), this essay is written with three objectives: 1. as a brief review to the abridged version of P. Borschberg’s *Jacques de Coutre’s Singapore and Johor and Matelieff’s Singapore and Johor*; 2. to connect the coverage of Borschberg’s works to other primary sources and archaeological findings so as to delve into certain aspects of the subject and period in question; 3. as an in-service orientation of Borschberg’s 2015 works for Ministry of Education (MOE) teachers.

English works on Southeast Asia either in terms of the relationship to Iberia or using Iberian sources are very limited. The publication of the translated primary sources can facilitate further interpretation and analysis to be made on Southeast Asia. Whether in their unabridged form and especially in their abridged form, the publications can permit students and young historians to delve into a period and region cries out for a greater understanding by a wider audience. To get students and the wider audience to acquaint more with the pre-British Singapore history is not an easy task. Brazil is one of the most dynamic developing countries that has just joined China, India and Russia to form the new world development fund. Singapore's / Asean's trade with the largest Portuguese-speaking country has been growing rapidly since the turn of the millennium (Abdenur, 2013). However, Singapore and Malaysia, and being located in the Anglophile world, having embraced the British colonial heritage does not facilitate a ready understanding of Southeast Asia in relation to Iberia.

Since 2000, the general school history curriculum is steadily moving toward focusing on a more contemporary period (Sim & Chelva, 2014). Hence, a whole generation of students (apart from their self and interest readings) might not have a chance to connect to the medieval / early modern period of Southeast Asia and the wider world.ⁱ There appears to be an exception in the development of the curriculum (especially in 2014) on pre-Rafflesian Singapore history; championed hand-in-hand by the voice of scholars such as Chongguan Kwa, John Miksic and Peter Borschberg. Part of the problem might have arisen from the overly utilitarian approach in conceptualising history. An informal check with the instructor coaching Singapore history at the Humanities and Social Studies academic

group (at NIE) reveals that one of the difficulties in familiarising student-teachers (teacher trainees) with the pre-Rafflesian history of Singapore lay in providing the appropriate contexts for the audience (whether student-teachers or students). This paper hopes to address part of this problem.

Review of de Coudre's and Matelieff's Singapore and Johor

The publication of the *Journal, memorials and letters of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge* post-dates the publication of the *Memoirs and Memorials of Jacque de Coudre* and its abridged version focusing more intently on materials related to the history of early Singapore and its immediate vicinity. An abridged version with a new introduction is made available by the National Library Board as a downloadable electronic book that again focuses on Singapore's history. The publication of the Jacques de Coudre manuscript is not new but the latest rendition by P. Borschberg provides the first accurate English translation with an exhaustive glossary. The latter helps readers negotiate the documents (even in English translation). The publication of the *Journal, memorials and letters of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge* achieves an equally important task for English readers of Southeast Asian history since few Dutch source materials touching on the history of Singapore and the region have been translated into English. The choice of the chapters featured in the abridged version of the *Memorials of Jacque de Coudre* aimed at schools reflects an obvious focus on Singapore and its vicinity. The memorials approximate that in the original volume save for the one discussing the "commerce in India." The appendices relating mainly to the affidavits have been trimmed. The glossary is also reduced in line with the reduction of the associated

chapters. Personally, this author feels that some terms from the unabridged version are still useful to consult even if they are explicitly not featured in the main chapters. A general introduction and chronology of the Portuguese in the East might be helpful to students and teachers alike. The bibliography does a good job in introducing the audience to a number of relevant secondary sources on the subject. The choice of the chapters in the abridged version of the *Journal, memorials and letters of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge* entitled *Admiral Matelieff's Singapore and Johor* includes materials focusing on Singapore and Johor that are not found in the unabridged version. Documents 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 11 are simplified and abridged versions that have taken partially or in full from main edition. As with *Jacques de Coutre's Singapore and Johor*, *Admiral Matelieff's Singapore and Johor* features a helpful list with a glossary and bibliographic updates to the field.

The reasonably comprehensive background provided in the *Memorials of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge* certainly fills the gap on the developments of Iberian history in Europe before the exportation of their conflict and competition to the East Indies. In brief, the Dutch had rebelled against the rising hegemonic Habsburg Iberian power in Europe (Spain and Portugal during the period 1581-1640 came together in a union under the Habsburg monarchy). The Dutch East India Company (VOC), a trading company authorised with quasi-governmental powers, was consecrated as a platform to organize trading fleets to the East as well as hit at Portugal, the weaker partner of the Habsburg Union. Jacques de Coutre and Matelieff's voyage to Asia therefore represented the perspectives of high functionary on the Habsburg and Dutch side respectively in a worldwide struggle that took place before the modern era

(Borschberg, 2015c).

Two further considerations can help to raise awareness of the larger region of Archipelagic Southeast Asia in the early modern period in relation to the Iberian presence. The Portuguese network in Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries stretched along a licensed route from Goa to Melaka, and from there to Macau or to Solor (near Timor). Up north in mainland Southeast Asia, the Portuguese sailed to Ayutthaya (Siam), Champa (Vietnam), Cochinchina (Vietnam) and Pegu (Burma). In the period of the Union, the two or three carracks also "went to Manila." Other ports in the Malay Archipelago that at some time had been frequented by Portuguese ships included for example Palembang, Banten, Jayakarta, Banjarmasin and Makassar, as well as Siak and Kampar (in Sumatra) (Borschberg, 2015a, pp. 70-73). Over the course of the 17th century, the Portuguese began to lose their factories and influence in Southeast Asia. In order to better appreciate the continuity of trade and other activities between the different phases of European colonial empires in Southeast Asia, there is a need to consider social-cultural history at the frontier. Beyond the "glory of the 16th century" associated with Alfonso Albuquerque and the conquest of Melaka, the lingua franca of the Indian Ocean and indeed for many places in the East Indies continued to be Portuguese or at least a form of Creole Portuguese (Furber, 1976, p. 60). The influence of Portuguese on the Malay language can be seen in *The Portuguese in Malay Land: a glossary of Portuguese words in the Malay language* (Muzzi, 2002). Second, while semblance of the formal entities and structures of the Portuguese empire might have disappeared, its "citizens" continued to trade and conduct a variety of activities in the Indian Ocean and the East Indies seas under a variety of guises. The surviving Portuguese, without the protection of the

state, appeared to have taken to assimilation and miscegenation to prolong their own survival. Portuguese private traders operating in the Straits of Melaka have been described by Radin Fernando to be darker or of a mixed complexion. A person of Portuguese or mixed Portuguese heritage could also be labelled “Portuguese”, “black” or “burgher” on different occasions; this was especially so when assimilation and miscegenation became “more complete” by the middle of the 18th century (Fernando, 2004, pp. 166 & 172). Hence, we can still find Portuguese-affiliated or mestizo-related communities across the region in the contemporary period.

How can the “Journal, memorials and letters” contribute to a better understanding of Singapore’s pre-Rafflesian history? 1. They can provide the context of the wider region for Singapore in the 17th century. 2. They can provide some glimpse into affairs on Singapore Island. One can also use Borschberg’s materials to point students to old maps and place names related to Singapore and the immediate/wider region.

References to the powers in the region in Jacques de Coutre’s documents can be seen in: 1. successors to the Melaka Kingdom, 2. Aceh and Siam, 3. the Portuguese and Dutch. On Johor, the king at one time was “called Raja Ali (Jalla bin Abdul Jalil) who titled himself [as the] Emperor of the Malays [and whose] grandfather was the king of Melaka.” The place in which the Johor court resided was destroyed a few times (one round of this was experienced when the Iberians attempted to build a fort in the Johor River estuary. The walls of the settlement at Batu Sawar were wooden but armed with artillery. Johor had a “river and port with many large and small ships, and it was a place where merchants did vast volumes of

trade and there were abundant provisions” (Borschberg, 2015a, p. 54). The Malays of Johor and Pahang were related by blood. Pahang was mentioned as a kingdom which was a popular place for buying diamonds and bezoars (Borschberg, 2015a, p. 45). Borschberg clarifies in the glossary that it was a “vassal” state and political dependency of Johor. On the enemies of Johor, the king of Aceh was “the most important monarch in East Indies” then and was described as a threat and had once captured the royal settlements of Johor and Pahang. It also controlled Siak and its coastline in Sumatra. The king of Siam had the “reputation of a tyrant, fickle and deceitful” (Borschberg, 2015a, p. 57). At the time of Jacques de Coutre’s visit in 1595, the Siamese king had apparently attacked Cambodia and Pegu and returned with a lot of booty (precious stones). As a place of commerce, Siamese textiles were “worth a lot of money” (Borschberg, 2015a, p. 56).

Between the Portuguese and the Dutch, the Portuguese having arrived in the East Indies earlier (1513 in Sunda Kelapa in Jayakarta) was trying to prevent the Dutch ships from sailing and trading in the region (Cortêsão, 1944). The battle was being fought out at the level of philosophical and legal debates as well as cold steel and murderous firepower on the ground. The war of words were pitted between Hugo Grotius’ *Commentary on law of prize and booty* and Frei Serafim de Freitas’ *Of the just Asiatic empire of the Portuguese* (Grotius, 2006; Freitas, 1983). Reeling back on the defensive, Dutch predatory activities were causing the loss of many ships or vessels destined for Iberian ports.

From Matelieff’s documents, an assessment of the region’s political economy where there was stepped-up aggression is evident from two entries: 1. “discourse on the state of the East Indies”,

2. “discourse on trade possibilities for VOC in the East Indies.” In the first, Matelieff proposed supporting Johor against the Portuguese. Going by the same rationale as the Iberians of using it as a base (refer to Jacques de Coutre’s recommendations below), Matelieff’s suggestion was to fortify the royal settlement of the Johor Kingdom and use it as an interdicting base to interrupt the traffic going to Melaka (Borschberg, 2015c, p. 149). At the point of writing however, Matelieff did not think the trade activities (in for example, pepper) in Johor was profitable enough to sustain a base there in the long term even if the collaboration had made the trade “more safe.” The Dutch had a problem trusting the king of Johor, who was said to be “very greedy [and liable] to shear the sheep [himself] and let [the Dutch] shear the pigs” (Borschberg, 2015c, p. 152). Hence, as long as pepper could be obtained at Banten and Jeyakarta, the bases or factories in Aceh (supposedly allied against the Portuguese) and Patani (on the opposite coast of the Malay Peninsula) could be given up (Borschberg, 2015c, p. 150).

Jacques de Coutre’s assessment and recommendation to the Spanish king (Philip IV) reflected a real concern over the Dutch who had not only appropriated places where the Portuguese used to be but also setting themselves up in places nearby routes in which ships were carrying goods to Portuguese-affiliated ports (Borschberg, 2015a, pp. 72-73). He suggested the building of a fortress at the tip of Blakang Mati (now Sentosa) stationed with smaller ships (bantins) to patrol the waters nearby (Borschberg, 2015a, p. 91). The details of this, being so close geographically to the main Island of Singapore, will be discussed in the upcoming paragraph.

The most direct information from the

Iberian perspective comes from the Jacques de Coutre’s memorial on “building some fortresses in the Straits of Singapore and other region of the south.” Borschberg points out that the document “delves into the issues of geopolitics and security” as well as “lists a number of ports connected by the network centred at Melaka: [from Japan, China, ports along the Malay Coast, to the Bay of Bengal and beyond.” Jacques de Coutre’s advised to “step up security at a crucial nodal point in the eastern section of the trade network [can start with the construction of] three [fortifications] on and around Singapore Island” (Borschberg, 2015a, p. 76). It appeared that the Javanese traders had been going to Bintan and Johor instead of Melaka with the spices and other merchandise. The Portuguese were ‘forced’ to go from Melaka to Johor to buy spices and sell their cloth. Specifically, en route, the ships and goods passed through the old and new straits of Singapore between Singapore and the island of Surgidera as well as this island and “Blakang Mati” (Map). There were some description on the geographical and natural environ of Surgidera (availability of limestone and firewood. There were many saletes (orang laut) in the area; Borschberg presents a description from a chapter in book 1 to illuminate on the once powerful people; whose arms were lethal and could still kill in a blink of the eye. The advice for the fortifications was that 1. the one built on Surgidera should be strong and stationed with galleys so that it could deter enemy (especially Aceh) armadas coming through the straits as well as patrol the Straits of Kundur (between Sumatra and Karimun); 2. one should be built on the island of Sabandaria Vieja (Singapore) the forts should be able to support each other, (Borschberg, 2015a, p. 84); 3. a third could be built later at Muar River. Given the fact that Singapore and its vicinity was a strategic place in the 17th century and that

Jacques de Coutre was able to come up with such a concrete plan of far-reaching implications, the belief about Singapore importance should not be associated only with the British coming or Raffles' vision.

Matelieff's journal of his voyage and observations presents some information from the Dutch perspective on the *shahbandaria* in Singapore: the Shahbandar from Singapore commanded the fleet gathering representing the King of Johor. Borschberg launches a detailed discussion on the post and jurisdiction of the Shahbandaria and attempted to link it to other posts of the Johor Kingdom. 1. Although little or no information was available on Singapore's trade, it must "have been significant enough to warrant the presence of a Shahbandar" (Borschberg, 2015c, p. 18). The Shahbandar was also "known as Sri Raja Negara", who according to the *Tuhfat-al-Nafis* (The Precious Gift) and contemporary scholar Muhammad Yusof Hashim on the Melaka Sultanate, was deemed as the "head of the Orang Laut communities [or tribes] in the Straits region" (Borschberg, 2015c, p. 21). If the Orang Laut traditionally supplied the naval forces of major empires in the region, Borschberg, corroborating the *Commentaries of Alfonso de Albuquerque*, wonders aloud whether the Shahbandar was also the Laksamana or even holding the post of the Temenggong that Raffles came into contact with when he landed in Singapore. In this direction, Singapore was not just a port of some size but a "principal base of Johor's armada [or navy]" (Borschberg, 2015c, p. 25). If these posts did coincide in one or two persons, corroborating M. Godinho de Eredia's *Description of Malaca, Meridional India and Cathay* and Chongguan Kwa's examination of the Kallang Estuary shards (Eredia, 1997; Kwa, 2004), there is certainly preliminary reason to believe that

a possible harbor might have been located at the estuary of Kallang River and trade passing through the region had its goods unloaded there.

Other categories of sources

The shift of the Melakan Kingdom toward the southern end of the Malay Peninsula after Melaka's conquest by the Portuguese destined that Singapore would become an intimate part of the history of the Melakan sultanate and tradition; "from which all the other sultanates derived their ceremonial protocols and customs" (Hashim, 1992). Singapore was of course linked to this royal heritage from the beginning when Parameswara or Iskandar Shah (as the last of Sang Utama's line of rulers) was driven away by the Javanese and founded Melaka up north. The lineage and events of the Melaka rulers could be traced from the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) (Brown, 1970). We can turn to another 'legitimising' source (*The Precious Gift*) which traces the lineage of the Melaka (Johor) rulers after 1511 (Portuguese conquest). We can take a closer look at the *The Precious Gift* on two reigns which involved Singapore in some ways: 1. Sultan Jalla bin Abdul Jalil Shah II (1571-97) and his sons; 2. Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah IV, 1699-1720. The *Precious Gift* has a brief write-up on Sultan Abdul Jalil II and his sons (Matheson, 1994, pp. 18-19):

When Sultan Muzaffar died, he was succeeded by his son who was entitled Sultan Abd al-Jalil Syah. During his reign the Portuguese attacked Seluyut, but they were defeated and returned to Melaka. His Majesty moved from Seluyut and built a settlement on the upper reaches of the Damar River, a tributary of Batu Sawar River. He entitled the settlement Makam Tawhid, and there he remained. According to the

story, his Majesty had three sons by secondary wives. The first was Raja Hasan, the second Raja Husain, and the third Raja Mahmud. His Majesty made [the first] King of Siak, [the second] King of Kelantan, and [the third] King of Kampar, because during the Johor period all Malay kings were ranked below Johor. His sons of fully royal birth Raja Mansur and Raja Abdullah] both remained in Johor. When Sultan Abd al-Jalil died, he was succeeded by Raja Mansur, who was entitled Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah. However, his Majesty did not concern himself with government but occupied himself purely with amusements. Raja Abdullah, together with the Bendahara, was Regent in his Majesty's kingdom, as if he ruled Johor. [Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah later moved and] built a settlement on the Rayun River and [there he remained till the end of the reign]. Not long afterwards, Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah died, and Raja Abdullah ruled Johor, with the title Sultan Hemat Syah [or Sultan Ma'ayat Shah].

The background information links up to Borschberg's mention of the three persons (Sultan Abd al-Jalil Syah, Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah, Raja Bongsu or Raja Abdullah) in *Jacques de Coutre and Matelieff's Singapore and Johor* where the incidents involved Singapore and its overlord. Here, we may go back and refer to Borschberg's glossary entry in *Jacques de Coutre's Singapore and Johor* on Raja Bongsu where the title is explained and further leads are given pertaining to the possible controversies surrounding the figure (Borschberg, 2015a, p. 105). In this context, part of the reason why many matters of the state were relegated to Raja Bongsu at least becomes clearer from *The Precious Gift*.

The reign involving Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah IV marks a significant milestone in the history and lineage of the Melakan Sultanate. The narrative of the events is too extensive to quote directly but a couple of points merit a preliminary appreciation: 1. it was the change in the line of succession from Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah IV onwards which led to the two contending prince successors (Tenggu Hussein and Abdul Rahman) that Raffles and the Dutch had each hoped to set up in the tussle over Singapore in 1819. 2. The change in the line of succession invoked a series of interventions from outside Johor by Siak and the Bugis and was fought over an extensive area from Johor, Singapore (Matheson, 1994, p. 48), Riau-Lingga, to Kedah (p. 67). To briefly introduce the story, Sultan Mahmud (1685-99) inflicted a disproportionate punishment on the Bendahara's wife that caused the latter to usurp the throne (and ascended as Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah IV). There are many stories pertaining to the origins of Raja Kecik that link him as an 'unrecognised' son of Sultan Mahmud Shah II. Traveling as a young man, Tuan Bujang (later Raja Kecik) followed Sultan Lambayang (of Palembang) and later struck it out on his own and ruled the Minangkabau of Pasisir Laut. In the bid to regain the rulership of Johor, Raja Kecik arrived for a short time in Singapore after the Bugis had rejected supporting him to persuade the sea-people (Orang Laut) that he was "the true son of the Ruler." This showed that the Orang Laut still had some clout and indeed when Raja Kecik "came with several ships to attack Johor, the Johor (and Singapore) sea-people did not warn the capital or Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah IV" (Matheson, 1994, p. 49). 3. In a further saga of this episode, T. Barnard in tracing the disputes between the offspring of Raja Kecik (Raja Mahmud / Raja Ismail versus Raja Alam) brings attention to the different 'legitimising' sources of Malay sultanate

tradition; in this case, *The Precious Gift* as the Malay-Bugis version versus *Hikayat Siak* representing the Siak-Minangkabau version. Barnard highlights that Raja Ismail (son of Raja Mahmud) did “come to Singapore to assist the Malay nobility whose power was being usurped by Bugis mercenaries” and while raiding did take place from Singapore, “[the island] played a more prominent role in the collective memory of the Malay heritage” (Barnard, 2004, pp. 122-123). Beyond the flowery prose of the source, one can discount the exaggerations in the writing and use the *Malay Annals* or *The Precious Gift* in collaboration with other sources to arrive at some picture of pre-19th century Malay Archipelago and its connections with Singapore.

The context required for students to understand life and trade of Singapore and the commercial activities passing through the region, especially when the investigation and study involve archaeological sources and reports, is for them to be familiar with the dynamics and intricacies of the commodities or goods in transaction. This applies to the immediate post-Classical kingdom period or the early modern period under study. For the 17-18th centuries and focusing on ceramics of the period, one needs to indulge in a bit of background information before attempting to analyse archaeological findings and reports of the commodity / period in question: 1. who were the dominant traders and who were the ‘minor’ players? 2. what types of ceramics were exported and from where did it originate? 3. what were the characteristics of major types of ceramics? Once the prerequisite information has been explored, one can then proceed to look at a couple of archaeological or museum write-ups pertaining to ceramics of the period to make sense of these. The examination of 17-18th centuries archaeological sources also augers well collaboratively for

Borschberg’s sources. If one is able to discover something archaeological on the Shahbandar’s dwelling or involving a vessel which sank in the early 1600s, the picture would be more complete and intricate.

The ceramics trade undertaken by the Dutch from China in the 17th century could be divided into three periods: 1. 1602-44. This period marked the beginning of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) up until the disruption of trade associated with the fall of the Ming Dynasty. 2. 1645-83. The disruption and prohibition of trade by the Qing government in its struggle with the Zheng regime in Taiwan led to a stoppage of ceramics trade. 3. 1684-1700. This period marked the resumption of ceramics trade as well as the Dutch experimentation of trade via various ports in China. Although the Dutch continued to hold their own at the end of 17th and the beginning of 18th century, three defeats in Europe against the English in 1652, 1665 and 1672 set the limits of the Dutch colonial expansion and consequently commerce overseas (Deng, 1997, pp. 112-121; Lambert, 2000, p. 56). Dutch trade in ceramics was not only carried for the European but also for the Southeast Asian markets. In the 18th century, the Dutch was not only facing competition from the English East India Company (EIC) but other powers like France and Denmark. The VOC also did not always maintain direct trade relations with China but transacted through the middleman junk traders who called at Batavia. The competition was keen despite the fact that the Dutch were the first to export porcelain on a large scale in the course of the 17-18th centuries. In terms of the proportion of ceramics and the other commodities traded, tea, coffee and cocoa competed for freight space with ceramics as their demand and price in Europe rose (Deng, 1997, pp. 112-121). Although the

18th century was often dubbed as the 'Chinese century', increasing tariffs were being levied along ports of the coast of China and this culminated in the one-port policy in 1757. Specifically in terms of the network from China, while the Canton junks generally "carried large cargoes of tea, [it was the] Xiamen [ships which] "served settlements overseas by furnishing all sorts of ceramics and utensils, and more importantly, brought to the Batavian labor market large numbers of itinerant workers and settlers" (Blussé, 2011, p. 227).ⁱⁱ

This essay will not belabor to detail the developments and characteristics associated with each type of porcelain but make some overall observations on these. The Chinese ceramics could be named by their design characteristics or place-of-make. Most of the 'export' ware of China were produced from Jingdezhen in Jiangxi. A small number of the more exquisite wares came from Dehua in Fujian. Those produced during the Ming Dynasty were characteristically blue-white (qinghua). The period between the change of dynasties from Ming to Qing saw the appearance of a series of wares which experimented with a more diverse colour scheme. Collectively known as 'transitional wares', this series consisted of the 'famille rose', the 'famille verte' as well as the 'Canton enamel ware'(or wucai, also known as Guangcai because it was produced in Guangdong) which was "typified by strong, contrasting colours of scarlet, pink and green as its main pigments" (Ganse, 2008, p. 122). During periods of upheaval in China, production centres in Japan and Vietnam sometimes stepped up to meet the demand. Japanese substitutes came in two forms which resonated a nuanced Chinese style of porcelain. Vietnam, which technically speaking was not a country yet produced a coarse and characteristic blue-white which served the China export and Southeast

Asian markets. The evolution of European tastes resulted in the blue-white kraak ware with "specific designs (decorated panels) and a thinly molded ceramic body" (Ganse, 2008, p. 50).ⁱⁱⁱ Over the course of the 17th to 18th century, the Dutch also began to produce their own ceramics in Delft in the Netherlands. Other imitators of blue-white ceramics in different places made use of some type of local clay to make slightly differentiated wares that was able to attract enough demand. By the 18th century, Chinese suppliers adapted a kind of Imari style during periods of their re-bounce in porcelain production and keenly copied European imageries and functional designs (for example, dinner sets that included accessory items such as tureen, salt cellar and sugar caster) in order to sell their wares better in a highly competitive market (Ganse, 2008, p. 111). Whether a particular ceramics served a more functional or aesthetic use depended on the social strata of the person using it. During the period of the 'China mania' in the 17th and 18th century, a middle class person in Europe could purchase a mass-produced porcelain and used it as a decorative item in the house. Whether a particular ware was meant for the domestic use or export was a function of time period in question. While the Chinese still preferred monochromes and other Song-styled porcelain in the 14th century, much of the blue-white were made for the export market (Ganse, 2008, p. 18). The most exquisite blue-white "at the height of imperial porcelain quality" was designated for court use and display in the 15th century.

Next, the background information examined may be deployed to study photographed artefacts of the Stellingwerf Reef junk, a shipwreck which was salvaged of a vessel traveling between Batavia and Canton as well as the Geldermalsen, another shipwreck of a

vessel also traveling between Batavia and Canton and on its way back to Europe before it met with mishap. Cross consultations can also be made on similar wares at the Asian Civilisations and Lee Kong Chian Art museums for background appreciation. In this way, the findings pertaining to the Stellingwerf Reef junkwreck and the Geldermalsen shipwreck become more palatable. Observations of the Stellingwerf Reef junkwreck are: 1. in a period in which the Dutch did not have favourable relations with the Ming authorities, on top of the chaotic situation in the country,^{iv} the trading junk specializing in porcelain acted as the commercial and middleman link between the coast of China and Batavia in Java. 2. The porcelain find conforms to the evolving European taste for the art on Chinese porcelain in the 17th century. 3. The kraak ware conforms in style to the “decorated panels as well as scene of flowers and birds.” 4. The kraak style of ware was also adapted to different container wares with the characteristic “decorated panels.” 5. The blue-white ceramics were produced in a variety of containers such as teapots, vases and storage jars. 6. The beginning of a shift to transitional style was noticeable in the somewhat more ‘dazzling’ painting on jars. 7. The non-blue-white monochrome could be found in the form of a dish and various other containers and these might have constituted some part of the overall demand. On the Geldermalsen shipwreck, 1. while China in the 1750s was entering into a stable and prosperous period, the Dutch still found it increasingly difficult to undertake trade in view of European competition and abnormalities in Qing trade policy. Having the Geldermalsen sailed a trip to Canton and a number of other ports in Asia before embarking back to the Netherlands constituted as a seasonal routine voyage. 2. The porcelain find conforms to the shift in European

taste for functional Chinese porcelain in the 18th century. 3. European blue-white dinner sets, sauce boats, cups for tea and coffee as well as mugs affirms that the Chinese were aggressively adapting to functional European designs although C.J. Jorg in comparing the order list and the actual cargo (giving allowance for ‘permitted smuggling’) surmises that the Dutch were not able to estimate their order list well (with possible implication on profits). 4. Other than the usual blue-white ceramics, the find also reveals regular alternatives being offered for the same item in a Chinese Imari style. 5. Blue-white interior and brown-glaze exterior cups meant for coffee-drinking which were not of a typical Chinese design are also seen in the salvaged collection. 6. Dehua sculpted figurines (blanc de Chine) and Yixing teapots continued to fill part of the demand to Europe. 7. Since the ship was on its way back to Netherlands, a more coarse blue-white was carried for the market in Cape Town. However, one needs to caution that not everything can be fully known from the salvaged collection for the reasons that 1. the shards are mostly not recovered even though these can tell an equally important part of the story as the undamaged pieces (the latter are the ones that can be sold); 2. there is no time to perform any systematic archaeological work in a commercial diving expedition (Thorncroft, 1987; Jorg, 1986). In order to make sense of the commodities history of Singapore before 16th century, one needs to likewise be armed with the chronologies of major powers existing and trading in the region and if one is focusing on ceramics, s/he should also be acquainted with the characteristics of the export/import and indigenous ceramics types gleaned from archaeological and other specialized surveys of the region.

Some corroboration may be made with Chongguan Kwa’s examination of the porcelain shards: 1. the shards appear to be

parts of blue-white ceramics and the dating is established tagged to the period of the Wanli Emperor (1563-1620) of the Ming Dynasty in China. Some of the pieces have glaze that are severely degraded. 2. Kwa adds that the “landscape print first appeared in the 15th century developed to become the dominant decorative theme in transitional porcelain.” Kwa notes specifically that the Chinese imageries drew inspiration from classic novels and that earlier inspiration for transitional ceramics was more Daoist. 3. As a link to how far the porcelain might have been traded, Kwa alerts that Shah Abbas of Persia (r. 1588-1629) had “amassed a huge collection, which he donated to a dynastic shrine in 1611.” Connecting with the narrative made so far, other than the Geldermalsen, there is certainly good possibility that porcelain from China were carried by European and other ships from different regions in the trans-regional trade from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean (Kwa, 2004, pp. 86-94).

Sum-up

The pre-1819 history of Singapore has made great progress since 2000. As an attempt to review P. Borschberg’s abridged books on Jacques de Coutre and Matelieff’s documents in relation to Singapore and its vicinity, this paper hopes to add to the effort to promote greater awareness of the pre-Rafflesian history of Singapore. Jacques de Coutre and Matelieff’s documents can provide the context of the wider region for Singapore in the 17th century as well as some glimpse into developments on the Singapore Island. These included information on the power-holders in the Straits of Melaka during the early 17th century as well as the people that might have settled in Singapore during this period. The picture can be further corroborated with indigenous sources such

as *The Precious Gift* and archaeological findings to fill the picture of 17th or 18th-century Singapore. In September 2015, a Straits Times article featured a descendent of Tengku Hussein who expressed their desire for Singapore’s history to give greater recognition to the Istana Kampong Gelam (currently Malay Heritage Centre). Indeed, the understanding of the pre-modern history of Singapore is inextricably linked with the larger heritage of the Malay Sultanates and the wider region. Living and traveling in a predominantly Malay region necessitates us to better appreciate the history and culture of our environs.

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ⁱ In terms of public education, it might be of interest to note that early modern Singapore in relation to the Iberian presence is present in brief write-ups on panels at Fort Canning Park.

ⁱⁱ It should be noted that the Xiamen network continued to serve the needs of the overseas Southeast Asian markets after 1757 (Blussé, 2011, p. 230, table 2). One should also not forget about the intra-Southeast Asian network if indeed the Chinaware was a popular item of use in the region (Reid & Fernando, 1996).

ⁱⁱⁱ Another strand of 'imitation' ware could be detected in Puebla (near Mexico City) after blue and white porcelain were shipped there from Philippines (Ganse, 2008, p. 78).

^{iv} Although the Ming Dynasty was supposed to have fallen in 1644, it took at

least a decade or two more before sizeable remnant Ming forces in the south were completely quelled.