Riches, power, trade and religion: the Far East and the English imagination, 1600–1720

ROBERT MARKLEY

I

For many scholars, European relations with Asia in the seventeenth century remain an area of vague assumptions and misconceptions. Although there are obvious political differences between traditionalists, who celebrate the spreading of ‘civilization’ to the non-European world, and their revisionist critics, who decry the violence and ecological devastation of European imperialism, both camps share a fundamentally Eurocentric perception of early modern history. Both employ analytical models – colonialist or post-colonialist – which assume that the technological inferiority, economic backwardness, and political conservatism of oriental cultures spelled their inevitable defeat by European colonizers. This default view of European–Asian relations has been challenged vigorously in recent years by K.-N. Chaudhuri, J. M. Blaut, Frank Perlin, Paul Bairoch, R. Bin Wong, Andre Gunder Frank, and Kenneth Pomeranz, who argue – in different ways – that until 1800 an integrated world economy was dominated by India and China, and that our recognition of this domination requires a fundamental reassessment of both neoclassical and Marxian accounts of the economic ‘rise’ of the West.1 In this essay, I draw on the work of these historians to challenge the theoretical values and historical assumptions that underlie Eurocentric accounts of global relations in the early modern period. In focusing on Peter Heylyn’s *Cosmographie* (1652; eight editions before 1700), I argue that seventeenth-century writers in England did not automatically assume the cultural, economic,

or even religious superiority of Christendom.\(^2\) Travel narratives, diplomatic correspondence, and geographies typically employed a compensatory rhetoric for what their authors feared was England’s and Europe’s marginalization within a world dominated economically by Asia. In short, influential but all too often ignored texts – such as Heylyn’s massive historical atlas – tell a far more complicated tale about Europe, the Far East, and the course of world history than most traditional accounts of ‘mercantilism’ suggest.

The prospect for trade to the Far East between 1600 and 1750 became a crucial element in European economic thinking because it allowed writers to displace domestic problems – ranging from high tax rates, to environmental degradation, to lagging productivity in some sectors and unmarketable surpluses in others – onto the vision of a theologically sanctioned and enormously profitable commerce. For England, largely excluded from trade east of India, the Far East – China, Japan, and the Spice Islands – fulfilled two crucial and imaginary roles: as both an insatiable market for European goods and a vast, inexhaustible storehouse of spices, luxury goods (from tea to textiles), and raw materials. If China and India represented the apex of civilization – idealized embodiments of the sociopolitical order and cultural sophistication necessary to carry on an ever-expanding trade – the islands of the Indonesian archipelago and the imaginary continent, Terra Australis Incognita, offered visions of exotic realms where the East India Company could either gather commodities with little effort or strike good deals with co-operative natives.\(^3\)

I begin my analysis with the first diplomatic letter that Elizabeth I sent to the king of Aceh (Achen) in western Sumatra in 1600 in order to examine the ideological presuppositions that structure a widespread faith in the benefits of trade. As Josiah Child, director of the English East India Company, put it later in the century, ‘Foreign Trade produceth Riches, Riches Power, Power preserves our Trade and Religion; they mutually work one upon and for the preservation of each other’.\(^4\) The crucial term in this logic is ‘produceth’; like many of his contemporaries, Child assumes that trade itself can generate wealth in excess of the expenditures of labour and capital required to man and provision ships for multi-year voyages, that it can be both mutually

\(^2\) According to his preface, Heylyn began *Cosmographie* as an updating of his popular *Microcosmos: or, A Little Description of the Great World* (Oxford, 1621; eight editions by 1639). The project grew, however, so that the later work greatly expands into an 1100-page folio what had been a short quarto volume.

\(^3\) I have examined this ideology as it operates in different writers’ perceptions of the Far East in Markley, ‘“So inexhaustible a treasure of gold”: Defoe, credit, and the romance of the South Seas’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 18 (1994), 148–67; *idem.*, ‘The destin’d walls of Cambalu: Milton, China, and the ambiguities of the Far East’, in Balachandra Rajan and Elizabeth Sauer (eds), *Milton and the Imperial Vision* (Pittsburgh, 1999), 191–213; and *idem.*, ‘Civility, ceremony, and desire at Beijing: sensibility and the European quest for “free trade” with China in the late seventeenth century’, in Maximilian E. Novak and Anne Mellor (eds), *Passionate Encounters in a Time of Sensibility* (Newark, 2000), 60–88. Additional primary and secondary sources on Europe and Asia in the early modern period are cited in notes in these articles.

\(^4\) Sir Josiah Child, *A Treatise Wherein is Demonstrated . . . that the East-India Trade is the Most National of All Trades* (London, 1681), 29.
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beneficial for all (civilized) parties concerned and yet always work to the economic advantage of England. This assumption of mutual enrichment dominates European defenses of trade in the seventeenth century. Elizabeth’s diplomatic correspondence with Aceh, in this respect, reveals the promise that the Far East holds as both a producer of desirable commodities and an insatiable consumer of English goods, especially textiles. But Asian markets were also perceived as the sites of rags-or-riches competition with rival European powers, and chroniclers such as Samuel Purchas and Heylyn qualify this panglossian model. These writers follow Elizabeth’s lead in trying to enlist various Asian nations as allies against commercial rivals, whether the Portuguese, Spanish, or Dutch; consequently, they employ exclusionary, triangular models of communication and trade to isolate these antagonists and to reassert and protect their ideological investment in the self-perpetuating logic of infinite riches, unchallenged power, expanding trade, and true religion.

The fantasy of infinite productivity and profit, however, requires a concomitant (and profoundly anti-ecological) faith in the existence of inexhaustible resources that can be endlessly exploited. In an important sense, the ideology of trade – reiterated throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries – is a response to crises of intensification. The widespread perception in the first half of the seventeenth century that England’s resources were inadequate to support its population, or that nature itself had been corrupted by humankind’s sins, placed the burden on international trade to solve complex ecological, demographic, and economic crises. Recent work in historical ecology and related disciplines offers an ecocultural approach to this ‘general crisis’ of the seventeenth century, calling into question the economistic premises of Eurocentric conceptions of modernity. Historians from Karl Marx on have read seventeenth-century European accounts selectively – if not ahistorically – in their quest to define an ‘origin’ for a ‘modern’ capitalist system and to contrast it to a ‘primitive’, Asiatic mode of production. The revisionist project of Jack Goldstone, Anne Osborne, and others, has profound implications for ecological, economic, and social history of Sino-European relations by challenging some fundamental assumptions about agricultural and proto-industrial productivity in the world economy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If, as Frank and Pomeranz argue, there is no empirical evidence for the technological

superiority and economic domination by western Europe before 1800, then seventeenth-century texts do not foreshadow an inevitable rise of modern notions of history, economics, and social theory, but register instead complex and often competing assessments of European relations with the Far East.

In this context, Heylyn’s *Cosmographie*, arguably the most influential work of its kind published in English in the second half of the seventeenth century, transmutes first-hand accounts of voyages to the East into truisms about race, wealth, and civilization in the Orient. Instead of imposing orientalist assumptions on the Far East, Heylyn registers the complications of shifting alliances among European and Asian powers, internal conflicts within Asian and Pacific countries, and the changing patterns of trade that fascinated many of his sources. But in reworking first-hand descriptions of Asia by East India Company merchants and Jesuit missionaries into encyclopedic overviews, Heylyn translates these complex interactions into a hierarchy of nations and peoples, an evaluative travelogue of non-Western cultures based on their perceived willingness to engage in a trade beneficial to England. In this respect, his attack on the Moluccans and Russians, his praise of upper-class Indians, and his ambivalence in describing the Japanese reveal the economic determinism that underwrites Renaissance perceptions of the Orient. Ultimately, then, the *Cosmographie* complicates conventional readings of travel literature and economic discourse before 1750 by forcing us to question the Eurocentric narratives of progress and power that underlie traditional notions of modernity. In its place, Heylyn describes global patterns of trade, cultural contact, and international rivalry that register England’s comparatively marginal position in the seventeenth-century world.

II

In 1600, the first venture of the East India Company, under the command of Sir James Lancaster, carried a letter from Queen Elizabeth to the king of Aceh in Sumatra, England’s first attempt to gain a foothold in the lucrative trade in Southeast Asia then dominated by Portugal. The letter, a small masterpiece of diplomacy, testifies to Elizabeth’s sensitivity to a range of interrelated issues – political, theological, economic, and ecological – that structure European perceptions of Asia in the following century and a half. It begins with a ceremonious, and symbolically significant, greeting to a brother monarch, then immediately offers a theological justification for international trade:

ELIZABETH by the Grace of God, Queene of England, France, and Ireland, defendresse of the Christian Faith and Religion. To his great and

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mightie King of Achem, &c. in the Iland of Sumatra, our loving Brother, greeting. The Eternall God, of his divine knowledge and providence, hath so disposed his blessings, and good things of his Creation, for the use and nourishment of Mankind, in such sort: that notwithstanding they growe in divers Kingdomes and Regions of the World: yet, by the Industrie of Man (stirred up by the inspiration of the said omnipotent Creator) they are dispersed into the most remote places of the universall World. To the end, that even therein may appeare unto all Nations, his marvellous workes, hee having so ordained, that the one land may have need of the other. And thereby, not only breed intercourse and exchange of their Merchandise and Fruits, which doe superabound in some Countries, and want in others: but also ingender love and friendship betwixt all men, a thing naturally divine.  

Elizabeth invokes a shared monotheistic religion to establish common cultural and philosophical grounds with an Islamic monarch thousands of miles away. This opening promotes a mutually profitable trade, ‘a thing naturally divine’, as both a means to ensure ‘love and friendship’ between England and Aceh and an end for fulfilling God’s plan for humankind. By exchanging goods ‘which doe superabound’ in their own realms for others they lack, both nations can compensate for their limited resources. Trade, at least in theory, can overcome the entwined evils of sin and scarcity that have plagued humankind since the expulsion from Eden. Materially as well as theologically, this ‘exchange of . . . Merchandise and Fruits’ can redeem a fallen world.

After staking out of a common religious ground, Elizabeth proceeds to the business of forging political and economic links between the two nations. To entice the king into allowing the East India Company to trade in Aceh, Elizabeth must construct for herself an authority that mirrors his. She employs the rhetoric of absolute monarchy – of regal brotherhood – to appeal to him, describing the Company’s merchants as her ‘subjects’ and implying that she wields the same kind of power over them that he claims over his traders. But Elizabeth knew that this was not the case; the very articles which she was seeking to negotiate were intended to guarantee that English merchants in Aceh would retain control over their property, goods, and persons as guaranteed by English common law rather than being subject to an absolute monarch. In the Indonesian archipelago in the seventeenth century, as Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells has demonstrated, control of trade and capital lay entirely in the hands of monarchs: strict controls existed on the sale and ownership of property, and there was no independent class of merchants or administrators, except for palace favourites. Consequently, foreign merchants – whether Chinese, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese,

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or English – were essential to the region’s international trade. In effect, then, Elizabeth required the king of Aceh to decree, with his absolute power, favourable trading conditions for her subjects, while downplaying the independence of the merchants of the East India Company, their de facto freedom at the end of lengthy chains of supply and communication, from her or her government’s authority.

Elizabeth’s chief rhetorical strategy in her letter, though, is to exploit the complicated structures of communication – and power – that exist among the English, the Portuguese and Spanish, and Indonesians. Religious differences between Christian and Muslim are elided to allow the queen to emphasize the theological, political, and economic enmity between Protestant England and Catholic Iberia, and to promote the common interests that she and the king share in frustrating Spanish and Portuguese designs in the East Indies:

your Highnesse shall be very well served, and better contented, then you have heretofore beene with the Portugals and Spaniards, our Enemies: who only, and none else, of these Regions, have frequented those your, and the other Kingdomes of the East. Not suffering that the other Nations should doe it, pretending themselves to be Monarchs, and absolute Lords of all those Kingdomes and Provinces: as their owne Conquest and Inheritance, as appeareth by their lofite Title in their writings. The contrarie whereof, hath very lately appeared unto us, and that your Highnesse, and your royall Familie, Fathers, and Grandfathers, have (by the grace of GOD, and their Valour) knowne, not onely to defend your owne Kingdomes: but also to give Warres unto the Portugals, in the Lands which they possesse: as namely in Malaca, in the yeeere of the Humane Redemption 1575 under the condoot of your valiant Captaine, Ragamacota, with their great losse, and the perpetuall honour of your Highnesse Crowne and Kingdome.10

Rather than an oppositional model that posits enmity between a European ‘self’ and non-European ‘other’, Elizabeth describes the discourse of trade in terms of triangular relationships – efforts to forge alliances with ‘others’ against a third disruptive or threatening force. Michel Serres argues that because the ‘other’ is a projection of the negative qualities of a solipsistic identity, no communication can take place without the presence of a ‘third man’ or parasite who creates the noise against which – and only against which – meaning can emerge.11 In this respect, the crucial dynamic

10 Purchas, Haklytus Posthumus, Book ii, 154.
in relations between England and Aceh may be understood, not as the clash of antagonistic cultures, but as efforts to exclude the ‘third man’, in this case, the Spanish and Portuguese, who are essential to English–Sumatran relations: they must be excluded as the basis for Elizabeth’s overtures of friendship for her ‘brother’ monarch and her vision of a mutually profitable trade between the two countries.

This triangular (or Serrean) model of communication and politics was well understood by the king, who, according to Lancaster, ‘seemed to be very well pleased’ with the queen’s letter. In his reply to Elizabeth (translated from the Arabic by William Bedwell, the foremost English translator of that language at the time), the king granted the East India Company merchants free entry and trade into Aceh; absolute control over their own property, including the ownership, sale, and inheriting of land, chattels, and inventories; ‘stability of bargains and orders of payment by [his] subjects’; and legal jurisdiction over all English citizens in his country. ‘Our joy [is] increased and our societie confirmed’, in this agreement, the king wrote to Elizabeth, because the English provide a bulwark against Portuguese and Spanish encroachment on Aceh’s trade: the Iberians ‘are our enemies in this world, and in the world to come: so that we shall cause them to die, in what place soever we shall meete them, a publicke death’.12 Like the English queen, the king employs a tranhistorical rhetoric: his nation’s conflict with Spain and Portugal over the strategic port of Maleka (Malacca) will continue indefinitely, even into a monotheistic afterlife. Elizabeth’s claim ‘that this beginning shall be a perpetuall confirmation, of love betwixt our Subjects on both parts’13 also suspends the mutability of historical time by envisioning unending cargoes from the East and an untroubled future of domestic production to supply the presumptive demands of Southeast Asian markets. Because it is constituted by bodily metaphors of integration, circulation, and order, this ongoing commerce can fail to produce the benefits that Elizabeth and the king describe only if it is disrupted by the machinations of malicious rivals.

In yoking theology and economics, Elizabeth assumes a shared perception of the moral and material world in England and Aceh, a shared conceptual vocabulary. Balance sheets, price increases, exchange rates, credit, money-lending, and the negotiating and honouring of contracts are embedded within a language of political values as well as theological imperatives. Their mutual distrust of the Spanish and Portuguese allows Elizabeth to play shrewdly on the king’s fears that her European rivals represent threats to the king’s political position as well as to Aceh’s trade; she flatters him with her knowledge of his victories, and appeals to the primal fear of absolute rulers – usurpation. Elizabeth tars the Spanish and Portuguese with illegitimacy. Her indictment of their false claims to sovereignty in Southeast Asia seems

12 Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus, Book ii, 160.
15 Ibid. 154.
intended to resonate with a monarch who must remain constantly vigilant against foreign incursions and the intrigues of his own court. By emphasizing the Catholic threat, the queen can gloss over the fact that the newly formed East India Company is trying to insinuate itself into an established trade in Southeast Asia that will compete with Sumatran as well as European shipping: English bullion and (she hopes) woollens to India; Indian goods to Sumatra and the Moluccas; and, in return, pepper, nutmeg, mace, and cloves from the Spice Islands that can be resold in Europe at a substantial profit. While her protestations of friendship may be sincere, that sincerity can be measured only as an expression of her country’s desire for a ‘perpetual trade’, for mutually amicable relations that never deteriorate into the self-interest, suspicion, and single-minded pursuit of profit that attend England’s commercial relations in Europe.

III

Trade between Europe and Asia throughout the seventeenth century was defined by shipments of New World silver from Amsterdam, Lisbon, and London to India and China in exchange for finished goods and luxury items, often for textiles that competed directly with European products. The slave trade between Africa, America, and western Europe, with its genocidal horrors, functioned as a cog in larger economic networks. To simplify: African slaves mined precious metals in South America and produced cash crops (tobacco, sugar) in the Caribbean and Carolinas that were sent to Europe in exchange for manufactured goods of all sorts; gold and silver were shipped from South and Central America to Spain to finance the cost of maintaining a colonial empire, and then from Iberia to northern Europe to purchase cloth, manufactured goods, raw materials, and more African slaves from Dutch, French, and English traders. Silver also went west from Acapulco to the Philippines to allow the Spanish and Portuguese to trade with mainland China and Japan. Bullion from the Netherlands and England went east, usually through the Ottoman empire and Persia, to India, where it allowed the Europeans to enter the long-established and complex Asian market. Indian cloth and manufactured goods were traded to Southeast Asia for cloves, nutmeg, mace, and pepper; spices were shipped throughout Asia, according to local and international surges in demand; Chinese commodities (porcelain, tea, and silk) attracted much of the region’s silver and copper; and spices were imported to Europe, in large measure to finance the Dutch seaborne empire. The propaganda of Child and other supporters of the East India Company notwithstanding, England and the Netherlands paid hard cash for what many considered luxury goods.

Seventeenth-century accounts of a world dominated by Chinese demands for silver provide an important context for discussions of European ventures to the Pacific, particularly the ascendancy of the Dutch East India Company
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(Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC). Child maintained that the preservation of the East India Company’s trade was essential to England’s economy. ‘All other Foreign Trade in Europe’, he declared, ‘doth greatly depend upon East-India Commodities; and if we lose the Importation of them into Europe, we shall soon abate in all our other Foreign Trade and Navigation: and the Dutch will more then proportionally increase theirs.’ Were the Dutch to monopolize this trade, ‘the excess of price which they would make the European World pay for East-India Commodities more than they do now, would cause a disproportional and greater increase of their Riches. The augmentation whereof would further enable them to over-ballance us and all others, in Trade, as well as in Naval strength.’ Child’s characterization of the Dutch threat to English economic stability, especially its re-export trade to the Americas, is the product of a long-standing rivalry between the East India companies of the two nations. During the first two decades of the seventeenth century, the Dutch consolidated their near-monopoly of the spice trade to Europe. They forced the Portuguese out of Ternate and Tidore, fought off incursions by Spanish vessels operating from the Philippines, and between 1619 and 1623 drove the English out of the lucrative market in cloves and nutmeg. The execution of English merchants on the island of Ambon in 1623 became a focus for English anxieties about national identity well into the eighteenth century. In a crucial image in Book Two of Paradise Lost, John Milton compares Satan’s ‘solitary flight’ from Hell to a Dutch merchant fleet ‘Close sailing from Bengal, or the Isles/ Of Ternate and Tidore’, laden with ‘spicy Drugs’. The VOC imaged as ‘the flying Fiend’ traces a course of both conspicuous consumption identified with


Dutch economic power and of frustrated English desires for a share of that trade.

The Dutch role in Southeast Asia, however, was not that of a colonial power dictating terms to vanquished indigenes. Before 1600, nutmeg and mace were grown solely on the Banda Islands, six islands south of Seram that total only seventeen square miles. Ternate and Tidore, ‘minuscule volcanic islands’ off the west coast of Halmahera, were the principal commercial source of cloves in Asia, and the rival sultanates on each of these islands used their strategic control of these commodities to extend their influence in the sixteenth century across the widely dispersed islands in the region. The Dutch seized Banda in 1621, turning the islands into slave plantations; they then used the profits from their control of nutmeg and mace to increase their naval presence in the region. In 1656, the VOC destroyed the clove crop on Ternate and Tidore in order to monopolize production in areas that they controlled directly on Ambon. In both cases, the Dutch reaped significant economic benefits by strategic military actions on small islands that could not muster large-scale defensive forces. While the Dutch fleet in Southeast Asia significantly outnumbered English ships, the VOC comprised only a small fraction of the regional carrying trade: all European vessels in Southeast Asia were outnumbered ten-to-one by Chinese junks with roughly similar cargo capacities; the eight Dutch ships that docked in Japan every year after 1638 were far less significant than the eighty Chinese junks which regularly plied the waters between China and Japan.

Rather than employing hierarchical models of imperial conquest, seventeenth-century English accounts of the Spice Islands emphasize the uncertain and multi-dimensional nature of conflicts (and alliances) among Europeans and indigenous peoples. John Saris, the captain of an East India Company trading voyage in 1611–12, notes in his narrative that Ternate and Tidore – the linchpin of the Dutch monopoly of the spice trade – had been wasted by decades of civil war prior to the arrival of Europeans:

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22 Frank, *ReOrient*, 165.
The Portugall at his first discoverie of [these islands in the sixteenth century], found fierce warres betwixt the King of Ternate and Tydore, under which two Kings all the other Ilands are either subiected or confederated with one of them. The Portugall for the better settling of himselfe, took part with neither of them, but politikely carrying himselfe kept both to bee his friends, and so fortified upon the Ilands of Ternate and Tydore, where, to the Portugals great advantage, having the whole Trade of Cloves in their owne hands, they domineered and bore chiepest sway untill the yeare 1605 wherein the Flemming by force displaced them, and planted himselfe: but so weakly and unprovided for future danger, that the next yeere the Spaniard, (who whilst the Portugall remayned there, was ordered both by the Pope and the King of Spaine not to meddle with them) came from the Philippinas, beat the Flemmings out of both Ilands, tooke the King of Ternate Prisoner, sent him to the Philippinas, and kept Ternate and Tydore under their command. The Flemming since that time hath gotten footing there againe, and at my being there had built him [several] Forts. . . . These Civill Warres have so wasted the Nationals, that a great quantitie of Cloves perish, and rot upon the ground for want of gathering.23

Saris’s account reveals the limitations of European power in the region and the strategies that the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch employed in contending for the clove trade. Expeditions of a ship or two with approximately 100 or 150 men each are enough to constitute beach-head forces on small islands where the Europeans’ overriding goal was to insinuate themselves ‘politikely’ in order to play one side off against the other in a dynastic dispute and civil conflict. The forts that the Europeans erected could not withstand blockade or bombardment. The communities of merchants, administrators, and soldiers in the Spice Islands during the early seventeenth century usually numbered in the dozens, although larger forces, such as the Spanish expeditionary force, could be mustered for one-shot naval operations. What European powers could do was to intervene strategically, currying favour by paying higher prices for cloves on Ternate and Tidore, or, as Saris did when he arrived at Bantam (Banten), paying ‘thrice the value [for seven hundred sacks of pepper] of what they were bought for’.24 Even though he was well aware of this ‘great (though sudden) alteration in the prices of commodities’ and was warned by the Dutch against trading in the Moluccas, Saris willingly paid a steep price to try to buy England’s way into the lucrative markets of the Far East.

The Europeans’ strategic intervention, both economic and military, in Southeast Asia, in this respect, should not be interpreted as ironclad evidence of technological superiority in shipbuilding, cannon, or trading practices.

24 Ibid. 353.
Frequently in the seventeenth century, the Dutch gained entry into markets by providing currency or its equivalent to cash-strapped parties in internal conflicts. It is significant, in this regard, that Saris paid for pepper in Bantam with silver coins; he did not offload the pepper in Ternate where cloves lay rotting on the ground because he lacked the military and financial resources to insinuate himself into a Dutch-dominated trade or to challenge the VOC. The Dutch in 1612 could not compel outgunned natives to harvest the cloves; they were not (yet) an imperial power that governed Ternate and Tidore, but a trading monopoly enforcing its 'perpetual contract with [the Moluccans] for all their Cloves' at a fixed price. Backed by huge investments of men and ships from the Netherlands, the VOC was intent on maximizing profits and had already begun to develop the strategies that led to its *de facto* and finally colonial control of much of the Indonesian archipelago by the late eighteenth century: it used force when necessary, often hiring local mercenaries; intervened in dynastic conflicts to secure alliances favourable to their shipping; and attacked their European rivals to ensure their control of production, price, and shipping. Even at the height of their commercial empire in 1688 the Dutch had fewer than 5000 troops stationed in their principal possessions in Southeast Asia and another 1900 seamen, artisans, merchants, and traders; the garrisons on Ternate and Tidore were manned by fewer than 300 soldiers. Dutch successes in the Far East, as Saris recognizes, result from picking their fights, and their trading alliances, very carefully.

IV

As the most popular historical geography of the second half of the seventeenth century, Heylyn’s *Cosmographie* offers a compendium of English attitudes toward other cultures, a measure of the complex tensions and desires that characterize descriptions of the Far East. It is hardly an original work; although Heylyn claims to have written it after Commonwealth officials had seized his library, whole pages are lifted from prior works such as Pierre d’Avity’s *Estates, Empires, & Principalities of the World* and Giovanni Botero’s *The Travelers Breviat*; sections from Hakluyt and Purchas are condensed and rephrased. This redactive, intertextual quality of the *Cosmographie* is characteristic of a genre – the universal geography – that recycles and recombines eyewitness accounts, such as the writings of the Jesuit Matteo Ricci on China (condensed and included by Purchas in his *Pilgrimes*), in order to provide snapshot views of a world potentially open to ever-expanding trade. A

significant market existed for such compendia, and the ideology of trade that motivated writers as radically different as John Milton (who planned a one-volume redaction of Purchas) and Peter Heylyn testifies to the ways in which the appeal of the Far East cut across the divisions of partisan politics in mid-seventeenth-century England.28

At first glance, Heylyn seems an unlikely author of a manifesto that places geographical knowledge firmly within an expansionist trade policy. A prominent royalist and Anglican clergyman, he served as Archbishop Laud’s right-hand man in the 1630s, and wrote a celebratory biography of his benefactor after Laud was executed. The author of controversial works, Heylyn was ejected from his living in 1642 and was – according to his own account – literally on the run for several years, hiding with various royalist families and churning out anti-Commonwealth propaganda. His decision in the late 1640s ‘to review my Geographie [Microcosmos]; to make it more complete and usefull to an English Reader’,29 may have been, in part, a financial one, but Heylyn thoroughly transforms what had been a pocket guide into a full-fledged historical geography, enlarging and updating entries to reflect three decades of English dealings with the peoples of the world.

Heylyn’s preface is tub-thumpingly patriotic, asserting that as an Englishman and a divine he has ‘apprehended every modest occasion, of recording the heroic Acts of my native Soil, and filing on the Registers of perpetual Fame the Gallantry and brave atchievements of the People of England’ (A3r). Elizabeth’s image of a fallen world that can be redeemed through trade is one which Heylyn seizes on as a crucial principle to reaffirm a heroic national identity that transcends the ‘Tragedies of blood and death’ (B1r) which have disfigured recent English politics. While barely concealing his ardent royalism, Heylyn reasserts a familiar theological argument for prosperity through trade: ‘Nothing more sets forth the Power and Wisdome of Almighty God’, he declares, ‘than that most admirable intermixture of Want with Plenty, whereby he hath united all the Parts of the World in a continuall Traffique and Commerce with one another’ (4). For Heylyn, as for Elizabeth, such ‘continuall Traffique’ is essential if humankind is to overcome the defects of poslapsarian nature. An inclusive ideology of trade, moreover, offers the hope in 1652, on the eve of the first Anglo-Dutch war, of putting aside (or papering over) the antagonisms of the Civil War by unifying the English against the threats of the Dutch, French, and Spanish. The structure of the Cosmographie suggests where Heylyn’s interests lie in rendering his


29 Peter Heylyn, Cosmographie (2nd edn, London, 1657), A2r. All quotations are from this edition. For the circumstances of Heylyn’s revision, see the rival biographies of Heylyn, by George Vernon, The Life of the Learned and Reverend Dr. Peter Heylyn (London, 1682), and John Barnard, Theologico-Historicus, or the True Life of the Most Reverend Divine, and Excellent Historian Peter Heylyn (London, 1683).
efforts ‘usefull’ to this commercial project. In a one-volume work divided into four books (one each for Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa), the countries of Asia receive as many pages as those of Europe and three times as many as the Americas. While his entries on Asia testify to his and his readers’ fascination with the possibility of trade to the Far East, he must define the ‘brave atchievements of the People of England’ very carefully in a region of the world where trade has yet to make good on its promises of peace and prosperity.

Throughout the *Cosmographie*, Heylyn’s responses to the peoples he describes are governed not by skin colour, religion, or geographical proximity to England, but by an archaeology of European desire. He offers few original judgements on the major trading nations of the Far East, preferring instead to appeal to what he presumes his readers want to hear about the possibilities of trade to Asia. China, for example, was almost universally admired in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for the unprecedented opportunities that it would offer to European merchants; as the sink for New World and Japanese silver, it was the ultimate goal for generations of Dutch, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish, Persian, Turkish, French, and English merchants who realized that their silver bullion would purchase more in Chinese ports and boost their profit margins considerably. Echoing Jesuit accounts which had themselves been reprinted, translated, and redacted many times, Heylyn lavishes praise on the Chinese for ‘their natural industry, and their proficiencie in Manufactures and Mechanick Arts’, and reiterates the widespread view that, because China enjoys the ‘abundance of all things necessary to life’, it is a bastion of political stability and economic prosperity. Since English efforts to open trade to China had met with little success, Heylyn has no ‘brave atchievements’ to report, and no tragedies like the one in Amboyna to explain away. Consequently, his entry on China is measured, even pedestrian, a derivative encyclopedia piece on a land that remains an idealized manifestation of Europeans’ desire for trade.

The Dutch domination in the Spice Islands, in contrast, offers profound challenges to the *Cosmographie’s* mercantilist ideology. Although Heylyn praises the Dutch for their industry and navigation, he cannot bring himself to voice the logical conclusion that the VOC has bested England at its own game. He does not mention that in 1620 Dutch vessels in Southeast Asia had outnumbered English ships eight to one, and instead scapegoats the Moluccans for the English failure to crack the Dutch monopoly of the spice trade. Racial qualities, national identities, and moral fitness become functions of what Southeast Asians have to offer English merchants. Without their spices, the people of these islands are described as

Idolaters . . . [of] severall Originals, and different languages, but all in general fraudulent, perfidious, treacherous, inhumane, and of noted wickednesse. Few of them clothed, nor much caring to hide their shame. Not civilized by cohabitation of more modest and civill Nations.\(^{31}\)

Heylyn’s terse, almost telegraphic style lends a journalistic authority to what is at best a second-hand account. No sources are cited. The history of triangular rivalries, civil war, and European competition offered by Saris is subsumed into essentialist judgements of national character. The same islanders who had been visited by Sir Francis Drake in 1579 and who had petitioned James I to come to their aid against the Portuguese are denigrated by a logic that registers their subservience to the VOC as an intrinsic moral failure. The Moluccans seem beyond the pale of morality and civilization because, in Heylyn’s eyes, they have allowed themselves to be dominated by the Dutch.

Another Asian country with a population of ‘Idolaters’ ruled by Muslims receives much more favourable treatment. Heylyn carefully includes the East India Company’s chief trading partner – the Mughal empire – within the circuits of civilization. South Asians accordingly are described as
tall of stature, strong of body, and of complexion inclining to that of the Negroes: of manners Civill, and ingenuous, free from fraud in their dealings, and exact keepers of their words. The Common sort but meanly clad, for the most part naked, content with no more covering than to hide their shame. But those of greater estates, and fortunes (as they have amongst them many antient and Noble families) observe a majesty in both Sexes, both in their Attendants and Apparel; sweetning the last with oils, and perfumes, and adorning themselves with Jewels, Petals, and other Ornaments befitting. They eat no flesh, but live on Barley, Rice, Milk, Honey, and other things without life. . . . Originally descended from the Sons of Noah, before they left these Eastern parts to go towards the unfortunate valley of Shinaart.\(^{32}\)

Indians are spared the calumny directed at the Moluccans because the English have crucial trading interests in the Mughal empire; India supplies the bulk of the goods that are re-exported from England to markets in Europe and the Americas. As significantly, South Asians can be assimilated within a biblical history that works in their favour: the Indians are descended from those virtuous sons of Noah who remained in the East when their wicked brethren journeyed to Shinaar to build the Tower of Babel. Heylyn, in this instance, follows Sir Walter Ralegh in implying that India was resettled after

\(^{31}\) Heylyn, Cosmographie, 918.

\(^{32}\) Ibid. 881.
the Flood by those who preserve a Noachian virtue. If nakedness is *de facto* evidence of depravity in the Moluccas, it is simply a characteristic of the lower classes in India that can be passed over quickly in order to praise the ‘majesty’ of the elite orders. Skin colour, religious differences, and seemingly odd customs such as vegetarianism can be encompassed by a class-specific notion of transcultural civilization: upper-class Indians (both Hindu and Muslim, as Heylyn makes clear elsewhere) exhibit the civility, honesty, and even aesthetic sensibilities that mirror an idealized self-image of English virtues. This identification of Indian and English sensibilities enacts the civilizing function that Heylyn attributes to the activity of trade itself. Trade civilizes: it both produces and reaffirms a like-minded compatibility between English desires and South Asian interests.

In identifying trade with civilized morality, Heylyn’s *Cosmographie* breaks down as many distinctions between Europe and the Far East as it establishes. While Heylyn invokes racial hierarchies, defends European technology, rails against the impediments to trade enforced by Chinese and Indian bureaucracies, and repeatedly denounces ‘heathen’ religious practices, his most vitriolic attacks are aimed at other Europeans who either compete with English trade or frustrate English ambitions to access the markets of Japan and China. In this regard, he follows his sources, notably Botero and d’Avity, by abusing the Russians at length. By the mid-seventeenth century, efforts to use Russia as a conduit to the riches of the Orient had proved fruitless. Trade between England and the tsar was particularly vexed, and Heylyn includes a litany of complaints: the Russians competed with English merchants in the Baltic; they repeatedly sought to drive prices for their timber and fur exports as high as they could, demanding silver in return; and they persisted in trying to open an overland trade route to China. The result is a third- or fourth-hand account of Russian perfidy that marks the tsar’s subjects – though ‘white’ and Christian – as thoroughly ‘other’:

[They] are very perfidious, crafty, and deceitful in all their bargains, false-dealers with all they have to do with, making no reckoning of their promises, and studying nothing more than ways to evade their Contracts. Vices so generally known, and noted in them, that when they are to deal with strangers, they dissemble their Country, and pretend to be of other Nations, for fear lest no body should trust them. Destitute of humane


34 See d’Avity, *Estates, Empires, & Principalities of the World*, 699–1. In *Microcosmos*, Heylyn’s description of Russia (183) is glossed in the margins as derived from Botero’s *Travelers Breviat*. As a rule, Heylyn modifies passages in which Botero and d’Avity highlight the successes of Italy and France respectively in order to emphasize the ‘glory’ of England.

Heylyn borrows from Botero and d’Avity the example of neighbours staging robberies and then charging each other with theft; he generalizes this story into ethnic characteristics of dishonesty and malice. Familial disorder and – horror of horrors – dishonesty in trade define a violent and tyrannical state. Heylyn’s condemnation of the Russians, in one respect, harks back to the misunderstandings and distrust which accompanied the decline of the Muscovy Company’s fortunes in the late sixteenth century, when merchants began to encounter the difficulties of trading to a country that demanded silver for raw materials and provided no easy access to the Far East. Renaissance commentators were explicit about what they expected from the forays of the Muscovy Company. Purchas, for example, describes the ‘intent’ of the Company’s first voyage in 1553 as ‘the discouerie of Cathay, and diuers other Regions, Dominions, Ilands, and places vnknowne’;37 Robert Parke, the translator of González de Mendoza’s Historie of China, notes in his dedication that the Muscovy Company’s attempt at ‘the discouerie of Cathaia and China’ was motivated ‘partly of desire that the good young king [Edward VI] had to enlarge the Christian faith, and partlie to finde out some where in those regions ample vent of the cloth of England.’38 Heylyn’s description of the Russians is redolent of the disappointments that a century later confronted English merchants who had to compete with German, Dutch, Hungarian, Swedish, Danish, Polish, Turkish, Persian, and Central Asian traders in Russia, as well as trying to placate a court that tried to keep strict control over much of the country’s international trade. For Heylyn, as for Botero and d’Avity, civilization is defined by a language of ‘promises’ and ‘contracts’, by the ties of nation, family, friendship, and profit. The Russians fall beyond the pale of civilized behaviour because their deceit in trade is emblematic of a lack of moral self-consciousness and industry. They are the antithesis of the Indians, even as they reinforce the same values and assumptions that inform the ideology of trade: skin colour, clothing, customs, and even religion are not the ultimate markers of civilized behaviour – trade is.

Ternate, Tidore, India, and Russia present comparatively few problems for a mid-seventeenth-century cosmographer because European views of these

56 Heylyn, Cosmographie, 511.
57 Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus, Book iii, 212.
nations had remained more or less static since the late sixteenth century: eyewitness accounts were reprinted and summarized, and all could be situated within the narrative structures of a divinely sanctioned trade. In writing about Japan, however, Heylyn confronted a recent history of failure — the expulsion of Catholic missionaries and the restrictions placed on European trade — that challenged his vision of nations unified by ‘a continuall Traffique and commerce with one another’. In the late sixteenth century, missionaries had converted hundreds of thousands of Japanese of all social classes and established dozens of churches across Japan. Beginning in 1587, however, the shogunate issued edict after edict to control the activities of Christians; intensifying repression followed, and the missionaries were finally expelled and the indigenous Christian population massacred during an unsuccessful rebellion in 1637–8 in Shimabara. A once burgeoning trade with the Spanish and Portuguese was curtailed; after 1638 only the Dutch and Chinese were allowed to do business in restricted ports.39 Because Heylyn cannot simply summarize the views of earlier commentators who celebrated the inroads of Christianity and the opportunities for trade, his description of Japan testifies to the ambiguities of European responses to the Far East when ideological expectations meet brutal experience: the dream of an infinitely profitable commerce remains, but history cannot be ignored.

After John Saris left the Spice Islands with his cargo of pepper, he sailed northward to Japan, both ‘for a triall there’ of trading possibilities and in response to letters from William Adams that had arrived at the VOC factory in Batavia, a port then open to English ships.40 Adams, the English pilot of a Dutch ship, had been detained in Japan for several years. His letters, reprinted by Purchas, both endorse and counter Jesuit descriptions of Japan by downplaying the significance of the Catholic missions and emphasizing the possibility that the English East India Company might extend its trading ventures to Hirado. Distrusted by the Jesuits, who urged the shogunate to imprison or execute Adams and his Dutch shipmates, the Englishman presents himself in his letters as a spokesman for English trade: ‘We were a People’, he tells the emperor, ‘that sought all friendship with all Nations, and to have trade of Merchandize in all Countries . . . through which our Coun-treys on both side[s] were inriched’.41 His portrait of Japan, intended for East India Company officials who might stop in Batavia, is equally encouraging. According to Adams,

The People of this Iland of Japan are good of nature, curteous above measure, and valiant in warre: their Justice is severely executed without any partialitie upon transgressors of the Law. They are governed in

40 Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus, Book ii, 353.
41 Ibid. 127.
great Civilitie, I thinke, no Land better governed in the world by civill Policie.\textsuperscript{42}

Adams’s letter is clearly designed to hasten his rescue by idealizing the Japanese as potential trading partners. The Japanese, though militaristic, are ‘curteous’, ‘civill’, and rigorous in the impartial application of the law. The government functions both efficiently and with ‘Civilitie’; in effect, the people of Japan, like the Indian elite in Heylyn’s description, embody the characteristics that the English see in themselves and identify with civilized behaviour. Adams is explicit about his conflicts with Catholic missionaries at court, and the opportunities that the shogunate’s suspicion of the Spanish and Portuguese offer the English. The emperor, he tells us, ‘asked much concerning the warres betwene the Spaniards and Portugals, and us, and the reasons: the particulars of all which I gave him to understand, who seemed to be very glad to heare it’.\textsuperscript{43} In Adams’s account, both English seaman and the Japanese emperor are seeking a ‘third man’ to counter the influence of the Spanish and Portuguese. For Saris and the East India Company, then, the lure of a well-governed nation, lying far enough north to offer a prospective market for English woollens, and apparently willing to entertain a potential trading partner at odds with Catholic Iberia, proved irresistible.

After arriving in Hirado, Saris gave permission for a group of Japanese women to come aboard his ship, then realized that his cabin featured an immodest painting of Venus and Cupid that he feared might scandalize his visitors. The scene that he describes discloses the complex problems of cultural translation that the ideology of trade glosses over in its eagerness to project Western ideas of commerce and religion onto potential trading partners:

\begin{quote}
I gave leave to divers women of the better sort to come into my Cabbin, where the Picture of \textit{Venus}, with her sonne \textit{Cupid}, did hang somewhat wantonly set out in a large frame, they thinking it to bee our Ladie and her Sonne, fell downe, and worshipped it, with shewes of great devotion, telling men in a whispering manner (that some of their owne companions which were not so, might not heare) that they were \textit{Christians}: whereby we perceived them to be \textit{Christians}, converted by the \textit{Portugall Iesuits}.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

This passage suggests that religious conversion has political and socio-economic implications as well as spiritual significance. The Japanese women translate a Christian conception of divinity into their own semiotic systems

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid. 128.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. 127.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. 367.
and moral codes: the wantonness of Venus and Cupid (both presumably nude) does not signify for them as it does for the English captain. The brazen lack of ‘shame’ that Heylyn attributes to scantily clad Moluccans is not inconsistent with these Japanese women’s religious beliefs: the proximity of mother and child – whatever the setting, boudoir or manger, and whatever their postures – represents a spiritual authority that transcends the obligations of patriarchal and feudal obedience.

While many commentators have assumed that Christianity posed a significant threat to the Tokugawa shogunate as ‘a type of fifth column’, a potential wedge for Spanish and Portuguese military intervention, such an interpretation exaggerates both European naval capabilities and the ability of Christian ritual and institutions to transform Japanese society.\(^{45}\) The persecution of Christians in Japan, such as the martyrdom of twenty-three Franciscans and three Jesuits in Nagasaki in 1597, seems best understood as a response to anxieties – even the paranoid obsession of subversion from within – about peasant rebellion, the unruliness of disaffected ronin (masterless samurai), and the threat that a rhetoric of obedience to a higher authority posed to a feudal system of loyalty.\(^{46}\) The Christian women on Saris’s ship worship an image of fair-haired divinity, but their kneeling to Venus and Cupid reveals two threats to Western conceptions of religious belief – from external persecution and from the destabilizing nature of accommodation itself. If the Jesuits, led by Matteo Ricci, actively promulgated a policy of accommodation that sought to recast Chinese Confucianism in the image of Western theology, Saris’s account of the women’s shipboard visit suggests that Christianity itself was accommodated reciprocally to a cultural semiotics that redefined cultural systems of belief.\(^{47}\) The women whisper not because Christianity poses a spiritual threat to indigenous beliefs but because signs of obedience or deference to any authority besides one’s master was politically dangerous in Tokugawa Japan.

While Saris’s account is emblematic of the complex history of European contact with Japan, it is also indicative of the problems that face Heylyn in writing about a nation that is characterized in his sources by its civilized morality, good government, and rigorous adherence to the rule of law, and yet that has recently rejected Christianity and cut off trade to all foreigners except the Dutch and Chinese. If the extirpation of Catholicism can be rendered comprehensible by implicit appeals to his readers’ Protestant loyalties, the frightening prospect of a Dutch–Japanese alliance has to be dealt with carefully. Although the Shimabara rebellion halted plans for a joint

\(^{45}\) Cooper, Rodrigues the Interpreter, 160; Boxer, Christian Century in Japan, 338.


\(^{47}\) See Lionel M. Jensen, Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization (Durham, NC, 1997).
Dutch–Japanese invasion of the Philippines, the Dutch had sent a ship to help crush the Christian-inspired uprising in 1638; consequently the VOC was allowed, with restrictions, to trade for Japanese silver, a crucial privilege at a time when silver mining had declined in South America. The Dutch monopoly on European trade to Japan rankled with the English, who, as always, were seeking a market for their cloth. Child complained that the Dutch East India Company ‘industriously avoid[s] introducing our English Cloth [to Japan]. Which Country being exceeding large, rich and populous, and lying in such a Northern Latitude, might vent as much of our English Manufactures, as Spain or Portugal, if we could gain a footing into that Trade: in the endeavor whereof the Company have [sic] already lost above Fifty thousand pounds Sterling.’ An investment of this magnitude, the desperate effort to sell English woollens to a country north of the tropical islands of Southeast Asia, can be justified only if trade in Japan is perceived as essential to the nation’s prosperity as well as the East India Company’s financial well-being. The prospect of the Japanese trading silver to the VOC, then, poses as many difficulties for Heylyn as the persecution of the Christians.

Japan, quite simply, is too enticing a potential trading partner to be condemned outright, and has too rocky a history with Western merchants and missionaries to be idealized as a nation of like-minded merchants. As an object of intense speculation and desire, Japan cannot be easily located on a hierarchy of civilized (commercial) nations, and Heylyn therefore must find a rhetorical strategy to convey the ambiguity of European perceptions of a people who resist being pigeonholed. The Japanese, he tells his readers, are

of good understanding, apt to learn, and of able memories; cunning and subtile in their dealings. Of body vigorous and strong, accustomed to bear Arms untill 60 years old. Their complexion of an Olive-Colour, their beards thin, and the half of the hair of their heads shaved off. Patient they are of Pain, ambitious of glory, incapable of suffering wrong, but can withall dissemble their resentments of it till opportunity of revenge. They reproach no man for his poverty, so it come not by his own untruthfulness, for which cause they detest all kinds of gaming, as the ways of ill-husbandry and generally abhor Slandering, Theft, and Swearing. . . . The very Antipodes of our world in customs, though not in site: and the true type or Figure of the old English Puritan, opposite the Papists in things fit and decent, though made ridiculous many times by that opposition.

48 See Conrad Totman, Early Modern Japan (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993), 114–16.  
49 Child, A Treatise, 9.  
50 Heylyn, Cosmographie, 915.
Heylyn’s description rests on two modes of triangulation: the Japanese are opposed to ‘Papists’ and identified with ‘the old English Puritan’, not the regicide of the 1640s but a ‘ridiculous’ figure closer to the stage-caricatures of the Jacobean theatre, such as Ben Jonson’s Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. These images allow the non-puritan reader to judge ‘objectively’ the strengths and weaknesses of the Japanese – identifying with them against Catholics, and holding them at arm’s length when they are identified with the pride, rigidity, moralistic self-denial, and economic aggrandizement of the puritans. But these two triangular comparisons fail to resolve the problem of a people who offer a radical alternative to Western ideas of a mutually profitable trade. If the Japanese are ‘cunning and subtile in their dealings’, they are also ‘ambitious of glory’ in a manner that resonates with Heylyn’s praise of the ‘heroic Acts’ of the English. In both respects, they are motivated by a self-interest that mirrors and opposes the self-image of the nation. The Emperor’s questions to Adams, in this regard, indicate that his subjects are not passive counters in the religious and political conflicts between England and Iberia but active constructors of their own modes of triangulation that play Protestants against Catholics, Dutch against Portuguese, silver miners against pepper merchants. Like the woman worshipping Venus and Cupid, Heylyn’s Japanese translate into their own terms English desires for a ‘mutual’ trade; rather than conforming to European theocentrism, ‘their dealings’ serve their own ends in ‘cunning and subtile’ ways. If they are ‘the very Antipodes of [Europe] in customs’, their rejection of gambling, swearing, and prodigality (the venal sins of a profligate European aristocracy) mark them as worthy antagonists, policing conceptual boundaries that European merchants, and readers, cannot easily cross. Heylyn’s analogies, then, ultimately confront the limitations of a world-view that cannot force into signification the prospect of a wealthy and virtuous nation that has rejected the commercial and religious bases of European self-definition.

VI

In Act IV of William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1674), Horner and Lady Fidget exit to his China closet to rut among the porcelain wares he has collected, while her husband remains oblivious to his cuckolding. No critic has asked why Horner has a room devoted to China; most assume that this collection is a mark of his gentlemanly status, an indication of his good taste and disposable income. Seen in this light, Horner’s China closet can be treated as an early example of *chinoiserie*, a fad for things Chinese in the long eighteenth century that marks, for most scholars, the advent of European imperialism in the Far East. The sexual pun on China, however, has another dimension. China itself is precisely what the English went whoring after in their largely unsuccessful efforts to open trade to the Far East. The English exported silver and brought back in return earthenware and porcelain that
was produced specifically for export. Horner does not own the seventeenth-century porcelain equivalent of the Elgin Marbles pillaged by unequal treaties from oriental ‘others’; the collection in his closet may be the stuff of a knock-off trade: cheaply produced and marked up for red-haired barbarians. His escapade with Lady Fidget assumes different connotations if it takes place among tacky souvenirs rather than among priceless foreign treasures.

At the margins of such canonical works as The Country Wife and Paradise Lost, then, lie brief references to the economic ties between Europe and Asia, subtle indications perhaps of a cultural awareness that Eurocentrism could be subject to qualification – Christianity rejected, overtures of friendship ignored. Pronouncements about the glories of English trade served a variety of rhetorical purposes for seventeenth-century writers, but behind the promises of infinite wealth generated by the East Asian trade lies the recognition that no market of consequence in the Far East existed for European goods. In his final novel, A New Voyage Round the World (1724), Daniel Defoe sums up more than a century of opposition to the Far Eastern trade, reiterating an argument that he makes almost obsessively in his economic writings. The ‘necessary or useful things’ brought back to England by the East India trade (‘pepper, salt-petre, dyeing-woods and dyeing-earths, drugs, . . . shellac, . . . diamonds, . . . some pearl, and raw silk’) are much less important than such ‘trifling and unnecessary’ imports as ‘china ware, coffee, tea, japan works, pictures, fans, screens, &c.’ and ‘returns that are injurious to [Britain’s] manufactures: ‘printed calicoes, chintz, wrought silks, stuffs of herbs and barks, block tin, cotton, arrack, copper, indigo’. ‘For all these’, he declares, ‘we carry nothing or very little but money, the innumerable nations of the Indies, China, &c., despising our manufactures and filling us with their own.’

Long before Defoe, Elizabeth I, Saris, Heylyn, and Child deal with the prospect of nations that ‘despis[e]’ European goods by projecting onto their peoples the ideological values that inform the ventures of the Dutch and English East India Companies. But this fascination – a middleman’s eagerness for a share of the carriage trade – cannot contain the fear of an alterity that threatens to remind readers of England’s marginalization in a worldwide economy dominated by the markets of the Far East. To move beyond the seventeenth century and to explain the decline of Asia after 1800 is to recast a familiar narrative of imperialism, to explore the implications of our self-congratulatory fictions of Eurocentrism. This new cosmography has only begun to take shape.

University of Illinois