

From Pepper to the Philippines: American Experiences in Southeast Asia, 1784 - 1898

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Since Americans were a minority among the outsiders in Southeast Asia before the twentieth century, a legitimate question is: Why write about them there? There are three sides to the answer. For one, there has been no general account of Americans in nineteenth-century Southeast Asia.¹ In addition, the mistakes of the early American contacts, in my view, relate to the later intrusions into the region, most notably in the Philippines and Vietnam. Notwithstanding the early American rhetoric of no colonial ambitions, assertiveness has been a hallmark of Americans in Asia for over two hundred years, from warfare to commerce to religion. Lastly, if one can exclude such self-interested considerations, the cultural contacts between Americans and Southeast Asians from the nineteenth century onward served to enrich maritime, economic, and scientific knowledge, as well as contributing to the arts and humanities at home.² Although long forgotten, even the American love affair with the tin can had its blossoming in the rich tin-mining industry of Southeast Asia.³

Considering the topic of this essay on a broader scale, Thomas Bender recently pointed out that American history is ineluctably part of global history, whether considering Asia or any other region.⁴ That is, since national histories are inseparable from each other, the encapsulated nation is not the natural setting for understanding our existing world. Southeast Asia provides a laboratory to study the effects of the early American nation in its broad context.

Commerce and consuls first, then the missionaries

Once the Revolutionary War was over in 1783 and independence declared, American ships were free to sail the world without British dominion. In 1784 the Empress of China was the first American ship to visit Java and then Macao and Canton.⁵ Soon thereafter, an American merchant ship learned about the “pepper coast” of northwestern Sumatra, outside of colonial Dutch control. It was a schooner out of Salem, Massachusetts captained by Jonathan Carnes. In Bencoolen (Bengkulu) Carnes heard about pepper villages somewhere to the north but only managed to purchase a cargo of pepper in the port of Padang. The schooner was wrecked on the way home on a West Indies reef, but the Salem ship owners, privy to Carnes’ unique information, ordered the 150-ton vessel *Rajah* to be built.⁶ They sent it directly to Sumatra under Carnes in 1795.⁷ This time the pepper cargo reached Salem, and the profit was enormous. It was reportedly 700 percent. Pepper was black gold and the race for cheap pepper was on.

Other American vessels also sailed for Sumatra to find pepper. The Dutch and English competitors in the region kept quiet about the productive areas and, as a result, these vessels remained uninformed. But by the 1800s the secret was out, and American ships were trading in pepper areas, as well as in nearby Aceh, Java (Batavia, now Jakarta), Bali, Manila, and other parts of Southeast Asia. To cite some early examples, the Massachusetts had already reached Jolo in 1790, and several other American ships also visited the Philippines before 1795. In 1793 the Salem ship Astrea was “borrowed” by the Sultan of Pegu to take him upriver from Rangoon to Mandalay, holding its officers hostage to navigate it, but when the ship was returned later it was badly damaged.⁸ In

1796 the Astrea reached Manila Bay and was the first ship to do direct trade between the Philippines and the U. S. Some pepper was obtained in the Philippines: a “Malay” (possibly Bugi) trading prau from Borneo sold 7000 piculs (over 93,000 lbs.) of pepper in Manila to the Astrea there in 1796.⁹ The first American ships reached Batavia in 1797, thirty one of them in all. In 1802, thirty American vessels visited the towns and villages of the pepper coast, most of them out of Salem.¹⁰ Americans soon had a near monopoly on the pepper trade. In fact, Salem ships were the main world suppliers of pepper, nutmeg, and cloves from the East Indies for decades, up to mid-century.¹¹

In those early days, the United States produced little that Southeast Asians would buy so Yankees often paid for Asian products in silver coinage.¹² Otherwise, they exchanged opium for pepper, rum or muskets for coffee, and anything else opportunity offered, except slaves. Yankee captains, coming from “free-state” areas, regarded the slave trade as infamous.¹³ As to munitions, the Salem brig Quill carried 290 barrels of gunpowder, 144 shotguns, and 150 pounds of shot to Southeast Asia in 1829.¹⁴ Ironically, the profitable sale of muskets and other armaments, mainly by Americans, often resulted in their use against their countries’ own trade ships. The Yankees also collected curiosities of the areas they visited, especially sea shells, and charted passages awash in reefs and beset by complex currents.¹⁵ But in 1831 a day of reckoning came for the Americans visiting the pepper coast.

The factors in this 1831 clash are not far to seek. Sumatran social relations between Achenese rajas and peasants became strained by the booming pepper-export economy.¹⁶ Cheating in pepper transactions was common on both the American and Sumatran sides.¹⁷ Then, as supplies increased on the world market, the prices paid by Americans to Sumatrans plummeted. At the same time, the Yankees demanded of their European cousins, of Sumatrans, and of everyone else, the right to be free to trade wherever they went and the right to defend this position as was fitting. Since the Americans were wealthy in the eyes of most Asians, including Sumatran villagers, this “right” was not a factor in local behavior. What was in American interest was not in the interest of Sumatrans.¹⁸ In short, the Sumatrans took what they could when given a chance. By chicanery they got a ship-load of cargo and silver from the American trading vessel Friendship in January, 1831, after killing five crew members, but to their surprise a destructive naval assault in retaliation in 1832 by the Potomac.¹⁹ This was the first U. S. military attack in Southeast Asia, indeed in all of Asia, but the devastation was too soon forgotten and the fatal sequence was repeated. In 1838 the American ship Eclipse trading on the pepper coast was raided, the crew attacked, and the cargo seized. American naval vessels, this time the frigate Columbia and the corvette John Adams, again redressed the situation, bombarding and burning down offending settlements in 1839.²⁰

In the 1832 attack, the Potomac’s captain, John Downes, had Navy orders to negotiate first about restitution and punishment for the guilty individuals. Instead, he had a contingent of over 200 sailors and marines shoot immediately; it was a massacre. But in the 1838 case, Commodore George Read did have his officers talk first, which was more effective in sparing many lives, because the villagers fled before the ensuing bombardment. Once back in the U. S., Downes was dishonored but Read’s havoc was accepted. However, these military actions raised the question in Washington of the war-making powers of the president, rather than by an act of Congress, a question that is still with us today.²¹

Throughout the nineteenth century, the U. S. Navy guarded lucrative American commerce overseas, in addition to its many duties in home waters. In Southeast Asia, even before the pepper-coast problems, President John Adams had sent the frigate Essex to Batavia in 1800 to protect U. S. trade ships there from piratical interference on their route back home.²² Such “frigate-boat defense” of American trades marked the concerted beginning of official American involvement in the region, which was initially an open-ports policy. Already in 1819 the U. S. under President James Monroe had sent a trade mission of two square-riggers to Vietnam, headed by Navy lieutenant John White of Marblehead, Massachusetts. In Vietnam White had no Vietnamese interpreter so he sailed to Manila, found a Catholic Vietnamese there, and promptly returned to southern Vietnam (Cochin China), but difficulties of diplomacy were protracted, exhausting, and eventually futile. Moreover, White contracted elephantiasis in one leg from a filarial infection. His subsequent report called Cochin China “the least desirable” for U. S. traders.²³ Despite this assessment, President Andrew Jackson sent Edmund Roberts there 13 years later.

In late 1831 President Jackson, calling the attack on the Friendship in Sumatra “a daring outrage,” encouraged attempts to obtain treaties that offered safe havens for U. S. vessels in Southeast Asian ports. Jackson’s envoy, the Portsmouth, New Hampshire merchant and ship owner, Edmund Roberts, traveled on the sloop of war Peacock. He made the first commercial treaty by Americans with Siam in 1833, which was ratified by the U. S. Senate in 1834.²⁴ The Roberts’ entourage was given great hospitality in Bangkok, including a free, well-staffed house with ample provender.²⁵ But Roberts failed two separate times to achieve a treaty in Cochin China, being told a treaty was unnecessary there as their ports were already open. In addition, he refused to kowtow to the Vietnamese court. He died thereafter of cholera at Macao on his way to Japan in 1836.²⁶

Several important factors gave rise to Roberts’ mission to Southeast Asia. Before the nineteenth century trade across the Pacific was mainly Spanish, between Acapulco and Manila, which was then a staging area for the China trade with Mexico. Other Europeans generally reached eastern Asia via the Indian Ocean. In 1788 the first two American trade ships, the Columbia and Lady Washington, reached Asia via Cape Horn and the Pacific, rather than via India.²⁷ This route permitted Americans to sidestep Britain’s control of ports-of-call from Africa to East Asia. With the expansion of U. S. territory westward during the nineteenth century, let alone American maritime ventures worldwide, trans-Pacific trade soon became dominated by Americans.

Nevertheless, all of Southeast Asia except for independent Thailand quickly became politically controlled by Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain (the Philippines), and Portugal (Timor). Even Thailand was economically subservient to foreigners. Despite these changes, American traders pushed into most Southeast Asian areas, except Indochina. They interacted little with the newly-acquired French colonies (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), in part because they were not focused on global trade.

Despite lacking any colony in Asia, by the early nineteenth century American shipping was commonplace in Asian waters, and the United States was as attentive as the European imperialists in facilitating Asian trade. Moreover, American-Asian trade strengthened during the Napoleonic era (1799 - 1815) when Europeans, especially the Dutch, had troubles at home. Already in March, 1817 President James Madison had

appointed Andrew Stuart, who had lived in Manila since 1812, as the American consul there, although the Spanish authorities refused to recognize him officially for several years. Also, the Navy lieutenant John White visited the Southeast Asian ports of Batavia, Banka, Cochin China, Annam, and Cavite and Manila in the Philippines in 1819 - 1820.²⁸ Notably, the United States already had approximately 460 vessels in the Pacific in the year 1837, a tenth of its global shipping.²⁹ This free-trader success thwarted the monopolistic trading practices of European colonial powers in Asian waters.

Consular and naval efforts generally initiated peaceful encounters between the American government and Southeast Asians. But while the East India Squadron of the U. S. Navy, at that time consisting of the Constitution under Commodore Kearney and the sloop of war Boston under Captain Long, visited Singapore peacefully in 1842, matters went otherwise in Vietnam. In 1845, the Constitution, then under Commander Percival, tried to extract an unwanted French priest in Tourane (Da Nang) from the Buddhist government there. This failed and according to Vietnamese sources, but not all of the American ones, Percival fired on the town, killing 17 people and destroying several local ships.³⁰ For this high-handed act, the first by the U. S. in Vietnam, Percival was censured in Washington. Over a century later, Americans were again belligerents in Da Nang, in what the Vietnamese call the American war.

Following the mission of Edmund Roberts to Southeast Asia in 1833, the next U. S. diplomatic attempt was with Brunei, where the warship Constitution called in 1845, offering a commercial treaty and coastal protection from pirates. The Sultan of Brunei declined the offer at the time but signed a treaty five years later that included a reciprocal trade agreement and safe harbor for the Americans.³¹ Following years of trade-ship business in Bangkok, Charles Lee Moses became the first American consul in Brunei in 1865, despite the fact that he had been a seaman booted from the U. S. Navy. Moses favorably impressed the Sultan who granted him a ten-year lease of a huge territory that became the “American Trading Company of Borneo” but was a conspicuous failure.³² The Sultan, who had had a consulate built for Moses, later had the building burned down because Moses failed to pay the annual rent on his lease. Moses was ousted and O. F. Bradford, a better choice, became consul until the U. S. consulate was withdrawn in 1868. The tract leased by Moses eventually became the core of British North Borneo, now known as the state of Sabah in Malaysia.

The Brunei treaty of 1850 had come about due to the efforts of Joseph Balestier, an American businessman who had bought Singapore land in the 1830s for a sugarcane and cotton plantation staffed by immigrant Chinese labor.³³ Thereafter, Balestier became the first American consul in Singapore.³⁴ In 1850, acting on direction from Washington, he became the special envoy to Vietnam, Siam, Sarawak, and Brunei. Balestier first went to Tourane where he offered the Vietnamese an apology for Commander Percival’s hostile act in 1845, but this garnered no favorable outcome for American interests.³⁵ Then Balestier went to Bangkok, to improve on Edmund Roberts’ treaty with the Thai government, but this too was a failure.³⁶ On his third stop, in Sarawak, he finally achieved a victory. He presented a letter from President Zachary Taylor to James Brooke, the “White Rajah,” that described Brooke as “Sovereign Prince of Sarawak.” Balestier thanked Brooke in the name of the American people for his efforts in suppressing piracy and complimented him on his noble endeavors “to bring his subjects and the neighboring tribes of Malays into a condition of civilization.”³⁷ The outcome of

this visit was an agreement of peace, friendship, and commerce.³⁸ Brooke, in turn, used the American recognition of Sarawak's independence to badger the British for the same formal recognition of his state and his status as a ruler, but without success. Within a month of his Sarawak visit, Balesier obtained a similarly successful treaty with Brunei, along with a "royal reception" there.³⁹ But Siam was not to be left to its own devices for very long.

In 1856 Townsend Harris, with a popular U. S. Navy band in his entourage of 42 men, got a more satisfactory treaty than Roberts had obtained with Siam, one which ensured an American consul in Bangkok and reduced the fees paid on trade goods in port. The Thais were amenable to U. S. involvement for two reasons. One was that Harris assured them that the American government had no imperialistic designs, and, two, although they had agreed to a treaty with Britain, they were apprehensive of the British, who had taken over Burma on their western border. Harris' visit occurred on the heels of the British treaty success there in 1855, but even with this momentum Harris thought the slow negotiations in Bangkok would have been expedited if "two or three men-of-war" had arrived at the city and fired off their salutes.⁴⁰

Even more than foreign officials, missionaries were obvious symbols of foreign interference in local affairs. In the early nineteenth century, American protestant missionaries, largely Baptist, followed the Yankee traders to Southeast Asia, especially to Buddhist Burma and Siam, but without much success or much insight on the region.⁴¹ Missionaries who saw Burma and Siam as countries of heathen idol-worshipers were not helpful to American understanding of Asia, or to Asian understanding of America. The term heathen, in particular, defamed and dehumanized the local people, reducing them to inferior status and fostering misunderstanding, even hostility, but at the same time pandering to missionary sentiment and financial backing in the U. S. In contrast to this view, at least one American missionary in Southeast Asia came to regard Buddhism as being "in almost every respect the best religion which man has ever invented."⁴² Traders, particularly those merchants who established their headquarters on shore, accomplished more in terms of American-Southeast Asian relations.⁴³ While a few commercially-minded Americans behaved badly in Asian eyes, others succeeded not only in business but in studying the culture and natural history of their host country.⁴⁴ Not a few also doubled as U. S. government representatives, as did several missionaries. Sundry Americans soon arrived for other reasons.

Exploration and science later

Naval vessels of the Wilkes United States Exploring Expedition reached Southeast Asia in early 1842 and conducted their diplomatic and marine-charting duties from Manila through the calm Sulu Sea to Singapore without engaging in hostilities.⁴⁵ A safe route via Sulu was needed for voyages between Singapore, Manila, and Canton during the "contrary" monsoon tempests. Wilkes, incidentally, secured a commercial treaty with the Sultan of Sulu on this voyage. He was helped in Sulu by an American, Gamaliel Ward, who captained a Spanish brig doing inter-island trade in the Philippines.⁴⁶ The expedition was also notable for being the first American government commitment to scientific work overseas. For example, the biologist Charles Pickering and the geologist James D. Dana explored the interior of Luzon. In all, the expedition's scientific members made large collections of plant and animal materials that soon

benefited the nascent Smithsonian Institution and the National Botanic Garden in Washington, D. C., thereby contributing to science in American life.⁴⁷ Likewise, the 1853 visit of Commodore Matthew C. Perry's Mississippi to Singapore, on Perry's way to Japan, simply showed the flag in a peaceful manner. The U. S. had had its eye on Japan for some time, in large part because it was noticeably not a European colony. After the American Civil War, in 1879, the former president Ulysses S. Grant visited Southeast Asia ports on his trip around the world and in Bangkok and elsewhere functioned as a goodwill ambassador for American interests.⁴⁸ Both Perry and Grant promoted free trade.

Compared to British and other empire builders, American explorers, scientists, and adventurers were rare in Southeast Asia until the twentieth century. Nineteenth century records of such journeys are scarce, but Americans were not unknown in the region.⁴⁹ Five of the known Americans did not leave personal accounts. One of these was Thomas Horsfield, an American employee of the British, who tripled the production of the Banka Island tin mines in 1812 - 1813.⁵⁰ A naturalist, Horsfield also wrote reports on his scientific work in Java and Sumatra.⁵¹ A second American was the physician William L. Abbott who cruised Southeast Asian waters off and on for eight years, starting in 1895. He found and collected dozens of new species of mammals for science and also collected ethnographic information in Sumatra, Kalimantan, and elsewhere, all of which went to American museums.⁵² The three other Americans in this category were associated with scientific expeditions to the Philippines. The 1887 - 1888 expedition there was led by Joseph Steere.⁵³ It included Dean Worcester and Frank Bourns, who also comprised the two-man Menage Expedition there in 1890-1893.⁵⁴ Both expeditions collected a large number of bird and other animal specimens for American science.

Although American science was underdeveloped at mid-century, compared to that of Europe, it soon strengthened, even overseas.⁵⁵ Three American scientific travelers who recorded their experiences are Albert Bickmore who visited much of Indonesia in 1865 - 1866, William Hornaday who visited Malaya and Sarawak in 1870, and the physician William Furness, who was in Sarawak in the 1890s.⁵⁶ All three made collections that ended up in American museums. Hornaday, for example, collected 26 species of corals and 43 orangutan specimens, among other items of Borneo natural history; he later became the first director of the Bronx zoo. As a follow-up to Bickmore's work in zoological collecting, he later promoted the founding of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, which soon exhibited a group of five stuffed orangutans derived from skins collected by Hornaday.⁵⁷ Furness' collections were largely anthropological, and he later got himself entangled in an Anglo-American rubber-processing company in Borneo that failed ignominiously.⁵⁸

Overview

In terms of a general view of overseas Americans in early-modern times, it is noteworthy that their writings on Southeast Asia differed from those of Europeans in several respects. One difference was that the Americans did not dwell on the "unhealthy" tropical climate unless sickness brought it to mind, although the climate was an anxiety to many Europeans in lowland Southeast Asia. Batavia town was the most feared by nineteenth century seafarers, as it was swampy and thus malaria-prone. When the American ship Potomac reached Batavia in March, 1832 the commodore's ten-year-old

son contracted “Batavia fever” in port while the ship’s sick list grew to 40, with two deaths. Most of the sick had dysentery and did survive, as did the boy.⁵⁹ In 1865 Albert Bickmore also came down with malarial fever in Batavia.⁶⁰ In 1883, Manila was called the port of desolation because American seamen of the bark William H. Besse died there of cholera; this bark later found cholera in Batavia and then experienced the 1883 Krakatoa eruption and tsunami in the Straits of Sunda.⁶¹

Most Americans visitors to Southeast Asia of this era wrote on everyday matters. Few wrote in a subjective mood, but two naturalists and three travel writers did so. While the Americans were less given to romantic prose about Southeast Asia than the Europeans, Bickmore thought the colorful parrot of Ceram “a dream of Paradise.”⁶² Hornaday rhapsodized about the Bornean argus pheasant despite his “constitutional objection to emotional description.”⁶³ Americans also wrote about the aesthetics of Southeast Asian temple ruins: Frank Vincent on Angkor Wat and Eliza Scidmore on Borobudur.⁶⁴ Another travel writer, Bayard Taylor, thought Penang the most beautiful island in the world, although he loathed the Chinese in Singapore and elsewhere.⁶⁵

Furthermore, while many Europeans tended to regard all Southeast Asians as lazy, American writers rarely made this judgment.⁶⁶ In 1796 the American Nathaniel Bowditch found Spaniards in Manila to be “dronish” but not the Filipinos.⁶⁷ Americans tended to be business-minded, whether the business they were pursuing was trade, naval action, religious conversion, or exploration. In this entrepreneurial mode, they were more like the Chinese than the Europeans in Southeast Asia.⁶⁸ Americans did regard Southeast Asian as less “civilized,” as they understood it, or as uncivilized, echoing Europeans’ views. At a minimum, to be civilized was to be Christian in the eyes of many. Unlike class-conscious Europeans, however, Americans were more egalitarian among themselves, making for a greater spirit of cooperation in producing trade-ship navigational and financial success.⁶⁹ Versatility was the norm: some ships’ cooks even functioned as navigators at times.

In other matters, few Americans were seriously interested in plantation agriculture and its associated land leasing, jungle clearing, soil quality, and cheap farm labor, but the British and Dutch certainly were interested and wrote extensively on these subjects, especially the difficulties they encountered.⁷⁰ In this, however, these colonial powers differed from the French in Indochina and the Spanish in the Philippines where little export agriculture was practiced. The major Spanish-run business in the Philippines was tobacco growing and cigar manufacture for the Luzon market, although providing indigo and Manila hemp for export did increase in the nineteenth century.⁷¹ Towards the end of the century, however, the French spurred rice production for export in the Mekong delta and plantations run by French colonists did come to exist.⁷²

Finally, since the Americans had more officials and un-officials on the water than were located on shore in Southeast Asia during the nineteenth century, they avoided the expense and bother of a large bureaucracy, police force, daily communication with rajahs and peasants, and all the other paraphernalia of colonial dominance.⁷³ Another advantage of being on the water was that it reinforced the Asian belief in America’s anti-colonialism. A disadvantage of being water-based was that it provided few opportunities to comprehend Asians on their own terms.

Broadly, while both Europeans and Americans exercised domination of Southeast Asians by one means or another in the nineteenth century, the American advantage over

the Europeans was that they were considered not to have territorial ambitions in Southeast Asia—that is, before the largely forgotten military events that brutally destroyed the Filipino independence movement after the U. S. launched its colonial career with the Spanish-American war.⁷⁴

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- ¹ However, David F. Long, Gold Braid and Foreign Relations (Annapolis, 1988) reviewed the naval action in Southeast Asia and Charles Paullin, American Voyages to the Orient, 1690–1865 (Annapolis, 1971) wrote on American ships in eastern Asia. Only narrowly-focused accounts exist on consuls, missionaries, explorers, and scientists.
- ² Nathaniel Bowditch, for example, provided a detailed description of Manila in 1796 and also a best-selling book on navigation as a result of his travels (T. R. McHale and M. C. McHale, Early American – Philippine Trade: the Journal of Nathaniel Bowditch in Manila, 1796 (New Haven, 1962, 16 - 17). An American artist and adventurer, James Wilder, visited Borneo in 1896, accompanying William Furness, mentioned in the text (George Appell, “The Journal of James Austin Wilder during his Visit to Sarawak in 1896—I,” Sarawak Museum Journal 16 (1968), 407 - 437. Thomas Knox described Southeast Asia in a children’s book based on his visit there in the 1870s (Thomas Knox, The Boy Travellers in the Far East (New York, 1881).
- ³ Charles G. Lock, Mining in Malaya for Gold and Tin, (London, 1907). Rich alluvial tin deposits from Phuket southward to Negri Sembilan in Malaya were intensively mined from the 1870s onward. The U. S. is still the largest importer of tin in the world.
- ⁴ Thomas Bender, A Nation among Nations (New York, 2006).
- ⁵ Prior to 1784 two Americans, John Ledyard of Connecticut and John Gore of Virginia, were marines on James Cook’s voyage of 1776 that skirted Asian waters (Larzar Ziff, Return Passages, (New Haven, 2000).
- ⁶ It was not large for its day, having only four guns and ten men; see Ralph D. Paine, The Old Merchant Marine, (New Haven, 1921).
- ⁷ J. N. Reynolds, Voyage of the United States Frigate Potomac, (New York, 1835), 201. Carnes got his Sumatran pepper cargo for “a few boxes of trinkets and hardware” (George Putnam, Salem Vessels and Their Voyages, Series I, (Salem, Mass., 1924), 5). Variant accounts exist of the inception of the pepper trade (J. Phillips, Salem and the Indies, (Boston, 1947); Putnam, Salem Vessels, 4 - 10, also discusses conflicting reports of the Rajah voyage. The first American ship to visit pepper ports in Sumatra was the Grand Turk, in 1786 or 1787 (*ibid.*, vii). In 1790 Captain Carnes, then in the Cadet, brought cassia (cinnamon) and benzoin resin from Sumatra to the United States (James W. Gould, Americans in Sumatra, (The Hague, 1961), 15, 19).
- ⁸ McHale and McHale, Early American, 8.
- ⁹ Ibid., 39, 63.
- ¹⁰ J. N. Reynolds, Voyage, 214, 273. Pepper, native to south-coastal India, was grown in Sumatra by 1500 CE; see Anthony Reid, Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, (New Haven, 1993), 7 - 10; pepper was the first important export farm crop in Southeast Asia.
- ¹¹ Paine, Old Merchant, 57.
- ¹² The requirement for silver lessened when the American oil industry began producing cheap kerosene; in the 1860s it became a favorite Southeast Asian import for illumination, but Europeans soon competed for this kerosene market (Gould, Americans, 42 – 45).
- ¹³ See Tyler Dennett, Americans in Eastern Asia, (New York, 1922), 9, on the slavery issue. On the gun trade, according to an American missionary, certain rajahs on Celebes (Sulawesi) who obtained American-trade gunpowder smuggled from Java suffered from

immoral practices; “Such is the miserable quality sold by the Americans, who employ samples of a good quality to deceive them, [that for the rajah’s muskets] you are said to be nearly as safe in being shot at, as in firing them” (D. Abeel, Journal of a Residence in China and the Neighboring Countries, (New York, 1836), 334). See also James F. Warren, Iranun and Balangingi, (Singapore, 2002), 190 – 191, on arms.

¹⁴ Warren, Iranun, 193.

¹⁵ The collections of the Salem ships were later the basis for the Peabody Academy of Science in Salem, started in 1867. Jonathan Carnes, for instance, gave a Batak (Sumatran) pipe and an elephant tooth to the Academy collection, but sea shells were usually favored because they were free, small, and durable souvenirs (Paine, Old Merchant). Exotic sea shells have a related Salem connection since the museum’s director from 1880 to 1916, Edward S. Morse, had become interested in nature through collecting shells as a boy; he later visited Asia as a zoologist and became an expert on mollusks (Dorothy Wayman, E. S. Morse, A Biography. (Cambridge, Mass., 1942).

¹⁶ Barbara W. Andaya, “Women and Economic Change: The Pepper Trade in Pre-modern Southeast Asia,” Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, 38 (1995), 165-190.

¹⁷ David F. Long, “Martial Thunder,” Pacific Historical Review 42 (1973), 143-163. According to a hearsay report from a ship captain, foreign vessels visiting the pepper coast employed “the most deplorable and dishonest means...in defrauding the natives” (Abeel, Journal, 200).

¹⁸ Trouble began brewing between Sumatrans and foreign traders in the 1820s, including the plundering of a wrecked Salem ship in 1827; after loading pepper, unscrupulous traders were known to sail away without paying for it; see Putnam, Salem Vessels, 64, 67, 71.

¹⁹ Reynolds, Voyage, 88 - 95, 104 - 131, 217 – 233.

²⁰ Putnam, Salem Vessels, 123 - 126; Paullin, American Voyages, 79 - 83; Owen Rutter, The Pirate Wind, (New York, 1986). Rutter attributed Asian piracy to European invasions and monopolization of trade, to the detriment of regional trading traditions. In other words, after the Portuguese captured Malacca in 1511 Southeast Asian remembered history was “just one damn foreigner after another.” The pepper-coast attacks by Asians were not the first on American, or for that matter European, shipping in the region. In 1796 an American ship on its way from China to Bengal was unsuccessfully attacked in the Straits of Malacca (McHale and McHale, Early American, 38). A Salem trading ship was captured at anchor at Riau, Bintang Island, in 1805 and several crewmen were killed (Putnam, Salem Vessels, 22 - 25). American pirates of the era such as William Henry “Bully” Hayes and Captain Ben Pease, well known in Oceania, also visited ports such as Singapore. While they were slave and gun runners, they evidently sold severed heads in Sarawak (George Appell, “The Journal of James Austin Wilder During his Visit to Sarawak in 1896—II,” Sarawak Museum Journal 17 (1969), 315 – 335), contradicting the assertion elsewhere that there was no market for chopped-off heads (James A. Michener and A. G. Day, Rascals in Paradise, (New York, 1957) 231).

²¹ See Long, Gold Braid, for details of the 1832 and 1838 cases,

²² Paullin, American Voyages, 12 - 17. In 1805 the American ship Putnam was taken by Iranun pirates near Bintan Island off southeastern Sumatra while her master, John

Carlton, was on shore; he and others escaped to Malacca on another vessel (Warren, Iranun, 279). The sloop of war Vincennes called at Manila in 1830 and on a subsequent voyage visited Singapore and the pepper coast (Kuala Batu) in 1836; she was later the flagship of the Wilkes Expedition, which also visited Southeast Asia: Navy Department, Dictionary of American Fighting Ships, (Washington, D. C., 1981).

²³ Walter J. Sheldon, Tigers in the Rice (London, 1969), 42.

²⁴ Before 1833 Siam had high port charges and import-export duties and also favored its own commercial agents (Dennett, Americans, 31).

²⁵ Paullin, American Voyages, 55-56.

²⁶ W. Griffis, America in the East, (New York, 1899), 160-161; Edmund Roberts, Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin China, Siam, and Muscat in the U. S. Sloop-of-War Peacock during the Years 1832-1834, (New York, 1837).

²⁷ Paullin, American Voyages, 33.

²⁸ John White, History of a Voyage to the China Sea, (Boston, 1823); White met Stuart in Manila and expressed hope for Philippine independence from Spain (J. M. Callahan, American Relations in the Pacific and Far East, (Baltimore, 1901), 150). In 1820 White was the first to bring abaca (Manila hemp), which makes superior cordage, to Salem, Massachusetts. He also wrote a Vietnamese lexicon: David Shavit, The United States in Asia, (New York, 1990), 522.

²⁹ Callahan, American Relations, 10, 53.

³⁰ Nicholas Tarling, Imperial Britain in Southeast Asia, (Kuala Lumpur, 1975), 103, 130 note; Long, Gold Braid, 264 - 267).

³¹ G. Irwin. Nineteenth-century Borneo: A Study in Diplomatic Rivalry, ('s-Gravenhage, 1955), 162.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ahmad Sharom, "Joseph B. Balestier: The First American Consul in Singapore (1833-1852)," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malaysian Branch, 39 (1966), 108 - 122.

³⁴ Balestier wrote on tropical agriculture in Malaya (Joseph Balestier, "View of the State of Agriculture in the British Possessions in the Straits of Malacca," Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia, 2 (1848), 139 - 150). His wife, a daughter of Paul Revere, obtained a bell from the Revere foundry for a church in Singapore, now St. Andrews Cathedral.

³⁵ Long, Gold Braid, 276.

³⁶ Although Balestier may not have known it, the Thai king was dying and any new treaty had to await his successor (Michael Smithies, Two Yankee Diplomats in 1830s Siam, (Bangkok, 2002), 10).

³⁷ S. Baring-Gould and C. A. Bampfylde, A History of Sarawak Under its Two White Rajahs 1839-1908, (Singapore, 1989).

³⁸ Nicholas Tarling, The Burthen, The Risk, and the Glory, (Kuala Lumpur, 1982), 157.

³⁹ Irwin, Nineteenth-century, 102.

⁴⁰ Mario Cosenza, The Complete Journal of Townsend Harris, (Garden City, New York, 1930), 153. In the early 1850s Harris had visited Asia as a merchant on his own ship, trading in China, the Philippines, Singapore, Penang, Ceylon, and India (ibid., 6).

⁴¹ This has been unevenly reported in William Strobridge and Anita Hibler, Elephants for Mr. Lincoln, (Lanham, Maryland, 2006), a book which overemphasizes missionaries.

American Baptists first went to Burma in 1813 and to Siam in 1833. The first mission of the Congregational Church of Boston went to Bangkok in 1831 (Gould, Americans, 112). In 1836 it had about a hundred Sunday church attendees in the city (Smithies, Two Yankee, 189); however, one of these missionaries, Dr. Dan Bradley, did initiate smallpox vaccination there. At one point the American missionaries in Bangkok who acted as interpreters between Europeans and Thai officials were in disgrace with the Thai court due to a customs dispute and certain Singapore newspaper articles attributed to them (Tarling, Imperial Britain, 179). According to Albert Bickmore, Travels in the East Indian Archipelago, (New York, 1869), 445 - 446, two Americans from Massachusetts, Henry Lyman and Samuel Munsen, voyaged to western Sumatra to travel up to Lake Toba and become missionaries to the Batak there but were killed in the interior in 1835. In 1838 two American missionaries, Elihu Doty and William Pohlman, visited West Borneo and a mission struggled to survive there from 1839 to 1849 (F. A. Smith, "Missionaries, Marines, and Merchants," Borneo Research Bulletin 33 (2002), 45 – 61). During this time, a Dr. Dickenson of the American Mission in Singapore visited Dayaks in Borneo who, he reported, said they eat their grandfathers when they are very old (Charles Pickering, The Races of Man, (London, 1854), 126).

⁴² John W. Palmer, The Golden Dagon, (New York, 1856), 155.

⁴³ See Charles Wilkes, The United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842, Vol. 5, (Philadelphia, 1845), 276, on American merchant knowledge of Manila and rural environs. In 1842 Wilkes was aided in Manila by two American trading firms: Sturgis and Company and T. N. Peele and Company. Thomas Russell, a New England ship owner, had been a pioneer in the Asian trade and his grandson helped establish Russell and Sturgis in the 1820s as the first major trading house located in Manila (McHale and McHale, Early American, 50). The Philippines then produced some rice, indigo, and later Manila hemp for world trade.

⁴⁴ Joseph Balestier helped Wilkes' scientific contingent gather plant specimens in Singapore (Wilkes, Exploring Expedition, 373).

⁴⁵ Nathan Philbrick, Sea of Glory, (New York, 2003); Herman Viola and Carolyn Margolis, Magnificent Voyager, (Washington, D. C., 1985). The idea for the expedition was initiated by J. N. Reynolds and backed by New England mariners, especially to survey sea lanes. In 1854 Lt. Commander John Rogers, with three U. S. naval vessels, surveyed the straits between Banka and Billiton islands to chart a short passage for commercial shipping; some of the crew went hunting on Banka and got lost but were found by villagers and returned by them to their ships (Gould, Americans, 138). Even with better charts, the American ship Samuel Russel sank in Banka waters in 1870 (Eric Tagliacozzo, Secret Trades, (New Haven, 2005), 41).

⁴⁶ Warren, Iranun, 192.

⁴⁷ For the resolution of these large collections in government hands, see William Stanton, The Great United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842, (Berkeley, 1975); Stanton concluded that the expedition put science into American government and the government into science (ibid., 335).

⁴⁸ He visited Rangoon, Penang, Johore, Bangkok, and Saigon on his way to Japan (John R. Young, Around the World with General Grant, (New York, 1879).

⁴⁹ Perry refused to have civilian scientists on his Japan trip but did expect his officers to collect any scientific information in their ken during the voyage (Ziff, Return Passages).

⁵⁰ Gould, Americans, 19.

⁵¹ T. Horsfield, Zoological Researches in Java and the Neighboring Islands, (London, 1824); and Papers on the Flora of Java (ms. in the Botanical Library, British Museum, according to Gould, Americans, 161).

⁵² Ibid., 142 – 143; P. M. Taylor and R. W. Hamilton, “The Borneo Collections of W. L. Abbott (1860-1936) at the Smithsonian,” in: Change and Development in Borneo, edited by V. Sutlive, (Williamsburg, Virg., 1980), 311-342.

⁵³ Joseph Steere, “The Island of Mindoro,” American Naturalist, 25 (1891), 1041 - 1054.. On Mindoro he collected the tamarou (a small, wild bovid), among other specimens. During the Menage Expedition Bourns went to Sarawak where he obtained 40 orangutan specimens, more than the 27 Alfred Wallace got there in 1855 and almost as many as the 43 that William Hornaday obtained in the 1870s (R. Tills and E. Birney, “Mammals Collected by the Menage Scientific Expedition to the Philippine Islands and Borneo,” Journal of Mammalogy 61 (1980), 566 – 571). Dead orangutans were a scientific prize in the nineteenth century.

⁵⁴ Worcester was in the Philippines for most of 1890 to 1913; see Dean Worcester, The Philippine Islands and their People, (New York, 1899). Carlos P. Romulo, Mother America, (Garden City, N. Y., 1943) denounced both Spanish and American imperialism in the Philippines.

⁵⁵ Southeast Asia, for example, became more accessible after steamships appeared on trade routes.

⁵⁶ Albert Bickmore, Travels; W. Hornaday, Two Years in the Jungle, (New York, 1929); W. Furness, “Glimpses of Borneo,” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 35 (1896), 309-320, and The Home Life of Borneo Head Hunters, (Philadelphia, 1902).

⁵⁷ W. Hornaday, Taxidermy and Zoological Collecting, (New York, 1912), 231.

⁵⁸ Ooi Keat Gin, The Brookes and the Economic Development of Sarawak, 1841-1941, (Kuala Lumpur, 1997), 300.

⁵⁹ Reynolds, Voyages, 323 – 324.

⁶⁰ Bickmore, Travels, 39 - 40.

⁶¹ B. C. Baker, “Reminiscences of a Voyage in the bark William H. Besse,” in: Thirty Years of The American Neptune, edited by Ernest S. Dodge, (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 23 – 33.

⁶² Bickmore, Travels, 256.

⁶³ W. Hornaday, Two Years, 412, 422 - 423. However, Hornaday wrote somewhat emotionally about “the ignorant and maladroit” servants and the “abominations of Chinese cookery” in Southeast Asia (ibid., v, 25).

⁶⁴ Vincent was a travel writer who visited Cambodia, Burma, Siam, and Cochin China in 1871 - 1872: see Frank Vincent, “The Wonderful Ruins of Cambodia,” Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York 10 (1878), 229 - 252. Scidmore traveled in Java in the 1890s, see Eliza Scidmore, Java the Garden of the East, (New York, 1898).

⁶⁵ Ziff, Return Passages, 144.

⁶⁶ European remarks on laziness are discussed in V. Savage, Western Impressions of Natural Landscapes in Southeast Asia, (Singapore, 1984), 116 - 121.

⁶⁷ McHale and McHale, Early American, 40 – 41.

⁶⁸ However, while the Chinese were essential people in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century, dominating commercial activity, Americans were supernumeraries (see D. Chirot and A. Reid, Essential Outsiders, (Seattle, 1997).

⁶⁹ McHale and McHale, Early American, 15 - 16.

⁷⁰ A rare American agriculturalist was Balestier, see Balestier, “View of the State.”

⁷¹ N. Owen, “Abaca in Kabikolan,” in: Philippine Social History, edited by A. McCoy and E. de Jesus, (Honolulu, 1982), 191 - 216.

⁷² R. Elson. “International Commerce, the State, and Society,” in: The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Vol. 2, edited by N. Tarling, (Cambridge, England, 1992), 131 - 195.

⁷³ An American adventurer named Wilson has been reported as attempting to become a petty ruler in Jambi, Sumatra in 1851 (Tagliacozzo, Secret Trades, 10); I have been unable to find any other mention of this episode.

⁷⁴ However, Americans like Commodore Perry favored acquiring other Asian areas in the nineteenth century, such as Okinawa and Formosa. Americans also had a toehold then in China, in both Canton and Shanghai, and Korea was briefly invaded by Americans in 1871 (Long, Gold Braid).