



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Pepper to sea cucumbers: Chinese gustatory revolution in global history, 900-1840

Xu, G.

Citation

Xu, G. (2021, November 10). *Pepper to sea cucumbers: Chinese gustatory revolution in global history, 900-1840*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3239180>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3239180>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

A World of Sea Cucumbers

From 1831 to 1836, Dutch entrepreneur J. N. Vosmaer explored the waters of the eastern Indonesian Archipelago and founded a small colony in an important bay (the Kendari Bay) on the east coast of Sulawesi.¹ In this colony, he became a patron of some fishing communities and a participant and observer of the world of sea cucumbers.² In 1835, one year before his early death, he submitted a 121-page article to *The Journal of the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences* (*Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*).³ Under the long title of “A short description of the Southeast Peninsula of Celebes (Sulawesi), in particular of the Vosmaer’s Bay or of Kendari, enriched with some reports concerning the ethnic group of Orang Bajau and more other notes”, it offers rich information about a booming sea cucumber economy in that region, including a table enumerating 19 types of commercially traded sea cucumbers in four languages (Makassarese, Malay, Hokkien Chinese, and Dutch) (Table 4.1).

Makassarese	Malay	Chinese (Hokkien)	Dutch	Chinese (Translated by the author from the Hokkien Chinese names, drawing on other Chinese sources)	English (Translated by the author from the Dutch names, drawing on Makassarese dictionaries)
Kassi	radja or passir	soa-djao	zand-tripang	沙縐 (烏縐參)	sand trepang (sand sea cucumber)
batoe	batoe	ouw-tsjo	zwater klip-tripang	烏礁 (黑石參)	black stone sea cucumber
koro	soesoe	pae-tsjo	witte klip-tripang	白礁 (白石參、豬婆參)	white stone sea cucumber
pandang	nanas	tsjie	ananas-tripang	刺 (梅花參)	spiky sea cucumbers

¹ Van Dissel, “Pioneering in Southeast Asia in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” 50-54; Velthoen, “Contested Coastlines,” 242-51; Gaynor, *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia*, 17-21.

² Gaynor, *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia*, 19-21; Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 131-133; Velthoen, “Contested Coastlines,” 199-248.

³ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 63-184. For the history of this learned society, see Groot, *Van Batavia naar Weltevreden*.

Chapter 4

kai-djawa	kai-djawa	lamhai-pae	kai-djawa	南海白	kayu jawa ⁴
loeleng	itam	ouw	zwarte tripang	烏	black sea cucumber
kassoet	kassoet	hiah or ouw-hiah	platte tripang	靴 烏靴	flat sea cucumber
boeang koeliet	gosok, or boeang koelit	thoet	ontvelde tripang	禿 (禿參)	skinned sea cucumber
marege	marege	lamhai	marege	南海	marege ⁵
gama batti	gama gomok	tsja-thang	gevekte gama	?	spotted slimy sea cucumber
gama	gama	tsja	gama	赭 (黃玉參)	slimy sea cucumber ⁶
taaikongkong	taaikongkong	ba	vuile tripang	厖 (黃玉參)	foul sea cucumber
djapoen	djapoen	jepoen	japan	日本 (綠刺參)	Japan sea cucumber
kebo	poeti	sau-pae	witte tripang	瘦白	white sea cucumber
koenngie	koening	jõe-poeë	gele tripang	橘皮	yellow sea cucumber
donga	donga	tsje-koe-oe	valsche ananas-tripang	?	bent sea cucumber
mossee	mossee	kian	mossee	?	burying sea cucumber ⁷
kawasa	kawas	tarik	kawasa	?	yellowish legume sea cucumber ⁸
katjang goreng	katjang goreng	sio-ba	gebrande tripang	燒厖	roasted-peanut sea cucumber ⁹

Table 4.1 The order of sea cucumbers in early nineteenth-century Makassar.

Source: Adapted from Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 162.

This perplexing table, while almost unintelligible to people outside the sea cucumber trade, is key to understanding how a world of sea cucumbers emerged and linked a place in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago with the change of taste in China. The table, by its nature, was a commercial assortment in Makassar made by dealers specialising the trade of sea cucumbers with China.¹⁰ It was ordered in accordance with the price of different types of tropical sea cucumbers in Makassar, which depended on a multitude of discernible features such as size, shape, colour, texture, flavour, and origin. These

⁴ From the Kayu Jawa coast of northern Australia (Kimberley).

⁵ From the Marege coast of northern Australia (Arnhem Land).

⁶ A sort of sea cucumber whose body has strings of slime. Matthes, *Makassaarsch-Hollandsch woordenboek*, 337.

⁷ A sort of sea cucumber that sometimes burrows under the surface of sand. Ibid, 697.

⁸ A sort of yellowish sea cucumber whose colour, perhaps also shape, is like the legume fruit of *kawasa*. Ibid, 337.

⁹ A sort of small sea cucumber whose shape is like roasted peanuts. Ibid.

¹⁰ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 161-162.

features were not only natural but also artificially controlled by Southeast Asian collectors. Vosmaer observed:

The trepang, called *haisom*, goes through such a shape change by their preparation, that all the original appearance features of the animal become almost completely lost, so that one, by comparison of it in its live and dried forms, can hardly discover any trace of commonality, and one will doubt that whether they belong to one and the same creature.¹¹

Why did these collectors offer such diverse types of sea cucumbers in Makassar? How were they received in China? How did these tropical varieties rise in the shadow of temperate sea cucumbers, which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, had perfect affinities with the kidneys in Chinese medicine? This chapter approaches these questions from the perspective of cross-cultural interactions in a world of sea cucumbers, which spanned from Hokkaido to northern Australia. It aims to understand how such a world took shape and how Chinese taste for sea cucumbers evolved amid interactions between different part of this world. In this chapter, sections one and two will first investigate how different regions across the China Seas joined an expanding world that supplied the Chinese consumer market with different types of sea cucumbers. Then, the remaining three sections will focus on the order of sea cucumbers in Makassar for understanding how cross-cultural interactions took place at the margins of this world and mattered to the change of taste in China.

1. In Search of Liao/Manchu Sea Cucumbers

Tracing the origin of this world of sea cucumbers, we can identify that a contested borderland in Northeast Asia, Liaodong (also known as the southern part of Manchuria), featured prominently in its initial stage. Sea cucumbers emerged as a product of Liaodong amid a border crisis of the late Ming

¹¹ Ibid, 164-165. Translated from Dutch.

Empire. Two of the earliest records about sea cucumbers in China point both to the corruption of the Ming military system in this region. One was a memorial dated 1591 by a regional inspector of the Ming Empire, Hu Kejian (fl. late 16th and early 17th c.), disclosing that for falsifying a battle report, the most privileged military family in Liaodong, the Li family (fl. 1570s-1610s), bribed a superior official with sea cucumbers.¹² Also in 1591, another memorial by a special inspector to Liaodong disclosed that commanders, who were in one way or another affiliated with the Li family, mobilised the soldiers of Liaodong to work in all sorts of business, including trading horses and sable fur in border markets, collecting ginseng, leather, and pine nuts from forested regions, and collecting sea cucumbers and abalones from coastal area.¹³

Whereas it has become well known that the Li family was a major patron behind a burgeoning border economy in Liaodong that ultimately facilitated the rise of the Manchus, their involvement in the first sea cucumber economy in China has yet to raise scholarly attention.¹⁴ The sea cucumbers used by the Li's as a bribe in 1591 were for covering a major military fiasco that would lead to a crisis for them.¹⁵ As the only gift highlighted by this memorial, they could not be insignificant. Elsewhere, there is also evidence indicating that sea cucumbers were by then rising as a delicacy in the banquet cuisine in the imperial capital of the Ming. A report by a magistrate in Beijing shows that for a banquet serving the provincial civil-service examination of 1591, the prefectural government of Beijing prepared,

¹² *Wanli dichao*, 562. For the background of the privileged Li family, see Wada, *Chūgoku kanryōsei no fubai kōzō ni kansuru jirei kenkyū*; Swope, "A Few Good Men."

¹³ Hou, "Anbian ershisi yishu," *juan* 428:5b-6a.

¹⁴ Mitamura, *Shinchō zenshi no kenkyū*, 167-181; Wada, *Chūgoku kanryōsei no fubai kōzō ni kansuru jirei kenkyū*. For the border economy of the Ming Empire's northern frontiers, see Iwai, "China's Frontier Society in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries"; Kishimoto, "Wan Ming de baiyin beiliu wenti"; Lin, "The Economy of Empire Building." I unfortunately have no access to Lin Sun's dissertation, as it is currently not available online. From its abstract, it seems that "wild ginseng and sable fur" are its main focus.

¹⁵ Fan, *Chongxie wan Ming shi*, 129-137.

among a long list of food ingredients, 1 catty (equal to 16 taels) of sea powder, 12 taels of edible bird's nests, 6 taels of shark fins, 4 taels of *tianhua* mushrooms, and 1 catty of sea cucumbers.¹⁶

On the basis of these pieces of evidence, we can see that by the time sea cucumbers emerged in Chinese written sources, a sea cucumber economy in Liaodong and Beijing must have already been in place for some time. We can deduce from the above-discussed examples that sea cucumbers were collected by the soldiers of Liaodong, redistributed by their commanders as a local rarity to elite consumers or perhaps also sold by merchants associated with their commanders as a commodity to the Chinese consumer market, and became a delicacy serving banquets in Beijing. Although there is no earlier source tracing the origin of this economy, we may contextualise it with the historical ties between Korea, Liaodong, and Beijing. As we have seen in the previous chapter, long before their advent in China, sea cucumbers had been collected in Korea as a tribute to the Korean court since at least the mid-fifteenth century. Most interestingly, also from the fifteenth century, the Ming court frequently requested marine products from the Korean court.¹⁷ A dynastic history of Korea, *The Veritable Records of King Yejong*, notes that in 1469 the Ming Emperor Chenghua (r. 1465-1487) personally praised the marine products from Korea and further requested more “exotic taste of water and land” from Korea.¹⁸ We may speculate that sea cucumbers, in the name of sea ginseng, could serve very well as such an exotic to impress the Ming Emperor.

Situated between Korea and Beijing, Liaodong was a critical contact zone. Before the rise of the Ming Empire, Jurchens (Manchus), Mongols, Chinese, and Koreans intermingled in this region.¹⁹ From the late fourteenth century, when the Ming controlled this region and established many garrisons,

¹⁶ Shen, comp., *Wanshu zaji*, juan 15, 154, 158.

¹⁷ *Sejong sillok*, juan 45:6a (1429), juan 46:19b (1429), juan 49:4b (1430), juan 49:11a (1430), juan 50:14b (1430), juan 66:20b (1434); *Yejong sillok*, juan 3:32b (1469).

¹⁸ *Yejong sillok*, juan 3:32b (1469).

¹⁹ Robinson, *Empire's Twilight*.

cross-border communications with Korea continued and this region served as a stop-over place for missions travelling between Korea and Beijing.²⁰ We may also speculate that as the collection of sea cucumbers became widespread along the Korean Coast from the mid-fifteenth through the early sixteenth centuries, it also had an impact on Liaodong's border area adjacent to Korea. There were furthermore political and economic incentives among the commanders of Liaodong military system, such as the Li family, to mobilise their own soldiers to collect local sea cucumbers as a substitute for a desirable marine product originally from Korea, catering to privileged consumers in Beijing.²¹



Map 4.1 The northern world of sea cucumbers.

While the role of Korea in the emergence of the first sea cucumber economy in China remains vague and waits for further evidence, what is well-documented is that in the seventeenth century Liaodong

²⁰ Robinson, "Chinese Border Garrisons in an International Context"; Ma, "Chaogong zhiwai," 137.

²¹ For a thorough study of the military system of Liaodong, see the recent monograph by Du Hongtao. Du, *Shugu fengyan*.

became the most renowned origin of sea cucumbers in China. Xie Zhaozhe's mid-1610s work acknowledged that although his native place Fujian had no shortage of seafood, most was too ordinary to rival two top sea delicacies from Liaodong, namely, sea cucumbers and abalones.²² In the late 1610s, an encyclopaedia noted that there were sea cucumbers in Liaodong with a spiky surface and their taste was most delicious.²³ Thereafter, as the origin of sea cucumbers became increasingly diverse, Chinese consumers came to think of Liaodong as the most authentic place producing the best sea cucumbers. For instance, the 1660s account by Zhou Lianggong compared sea cucumbers from the temperate and tropical waters and concluded that those "from the Sea of Liao(dong) are better".²⁴ Zhao Xuemin's late eighteenth-century *materia medica* cited a no longer extant herbal treatise to contend that those black and spiky sea cucumbers from Liaodong were the best.²⁵ In his early nineteenth-century dietary guidance, Zhang Mu even made the ranking, claiming Liaodong sea cucumbers as the best, the temperate sea cucumbers from Shandong as the second best, and the tropical sea cucumbers from Fujian and Guangdong as inferior.²⁶

However, the supply of Liaodong sea cucumbers was disturbed by the Manchu Conquest in the mid-seventeenth century. In 1634, a new Imperial Degree holder, Chen Hanhui (1590-1646), returned from Beijing to his homeland in the South along the Grand Canal. En route, he planned to buy sea cucumbers in Tianjin and found that the price was suddenly unaffordable. With this experience, he composed a poem, "Buying Sea Cucumbers in Tianjin and the Price Suddenly Soared".²⁷ This poem, as Feng Lijun has shown, demonstrates that domestic supply had become insufficient to meet

²² Xie, *Wuzha zhu*, *juan* 9, 258.

²³ Chen, comp., *Shiyan yaoxuan*, *wuji*, *juan* 3:37b.

²⁴ Zhou, *Min xiaoji*, *juan* 2:11b-12a.

²⁵ Zhao, *Bencao gangmu shiyi*, *juan* 10:37b.

²⁶ Zhang, *Tiaoji yinshi bian*, *juan* 6, 364-365.

²⁷ "Tianjin mai haishen jia hu tenggui" 天津買海參價忽騰貴. Chen, *Shancao*, 741.

demand.²⁸ Yet, whereas this analysis is valid for a long-term change, it still falls short of explaining why, in 1634, the balance of supply and demand was disturbed and why that disturbance deserved special attention from an Imperial Degree holder who merely passed through Tianjin.

These questions lead us to a deep crisis in contemporary Liaodong that would soon topple the Ming Empire. From the 1610s, Liaodong began to face aggressions from the Manchus led by Nurhaci (1559-1626), who was previously supported by the Li family. After a disastrous defeat at the hand of Nurhaci in 1619, the Li family lost power in Liaodong, and mainland Liaodong fell to the Manchus in 1621. From then until the early 1630s, what remained to the Ming Empire was offshore Liaodong, consisting of a chain of small islands along the Liaodong Peninsula and Korea (invisible on Map 4.1, apart from the most important island, Pidao), supported by military supplies from Tianjin via sea routes.²⁹ In these islands, Ming military officers behaved not much different from the Li family, assuming a dual role as military commanders and entrepreneurs.³⁰

When Chen Hanhui was taking the imperial civil-service examination in Beijing in early 1634, offshore Liaodong was collapsing.³¹ From the early 1630s, the Manchus began to extend coastal control.³² In 1633, guided by some surrendering Ming officers, the Manchus occupied a strategic tip of the Liaodong Peninsula, Lüshun, threatening coastal supply routes (Map 4.1). At the beginning of 1634, Shang Kexi (1604-1676), a general leading some remnant Ming forces on these islands, rebelled and joined the Manchus, leaving offshore Liaodong in disarray.³³ The archive of the rising Manchu regime records many surrendering cases, among which there is a case referring to sea cucumbers, showing that some Ming officers presented 100 bags of sea cucumbers as a gift to the Khan of the

²⁸ Feng, “Ren zhi, shi chang yu mao yi,” 51.

²⁹ Chen, “Jun liang gong xu yu Ming Qing Liaodong zhan zheng.”

³⁰ Zhao and Du, “Chong guan Dong jiang”; Yeh, “Ming Qing zhi ji liaodong de jun shi jia zu.”

³¹ Huang, “Liu Xing zhi xiong di yu Ming ji Dong jiang haishang fang xian de beng kui”; Huang, “Wu qiao bing bian.”

³² Gao, “Lun Hou jin shi qi de qian hai.”

³³ Huang, “Wu qiao bing bian,” 108.

emerging Manchu Empire.³⁴ The archive also shows that benefiting from the intensified control of offshore Liaodong from the mid-1630s, the Manchu Khan began to keep a store of sea cucumbers to be distributed as gifts.³⁵

This crisis may help us contextualise why the price of sea cucumbers suddenly soared in Tianjin in 1634. As we have seen, Tianjin was the base port that supplied offshore Liaodong via coastal routes. By following the same routes, sea cucumbers could also be circulated from offshore Liaodong to Tianjin. However, when Chen travelled through Tianjin in 1634, the coastal routes had been disturbed because of the collapse of offshore Liaodong earlier in that year. This crisis was most likely responsible for a shortage of sea cucumbers in the Tianjin market and led to their soaring price. Chen, as an elite Imperial Degree holder, was likely also bemoaning the loss of offshore Liaodong by using the unaffordable price of sea cucumbers as a metaphor. By the end, frustrated by this situation, Chen concluded in his poem that “critically studying cookery books, [I] urgently consider having [sea cucumbers] excised” (穎考庖經亟議刪).³⁶

Sea cucumbers would certainly not be deleted from Chinese cuisine. Instead, Chinese consumers looked for Liaodong-style temperate sea cucumbers from elsewhere. Opposite to Liaodong was the Shandong Peninsula, whose littoral society, as we have seen in the previous chapter, had been collecting abalones from shallow waters since at least the eleventh century. As the same technology could be used for collecting and processing sea cucumbers, it may not surprise us that as early as 1604, a local gazetteer had recorded that sea cucumbers and abalones were local products of a coastal place

³⁴ *Neige cangben Manwen laodang, Taizhu chao*, 264. The original archive is undated, but this event can be dated between the ninth month of 1632, when the Manchu Regime partly extended coastal control and fortified Gaizhou, and the seventh month of 1633, when Commander Huang Long died in the siege of Lüshun, because it mentioned that the gift was intercepted by Huang Long and two officers managed to escape to Gaizhou to join the Manchu Regime. *Neige cangben Manwen laodang, Taizong chao*, 658 (1632); Han, “Mingmo Lüshun zhiyi ji Huang Long qiren qishi.”

³⁵ *Neige cangben manwen laodang, Taizong chao*, 596 (1631), 668 (1636), 669 (1636), 671 (1636), 698 (1636).

³⁶ Chen, *Shancao*, 741.

in southeast Shandong, Jiaozhou.³⁷ Situated in present Qingdao, Jiaozhou was a maritime trading centre in the late Ming period, connecting the Shandong Peninsula to the market in the South via coastal routes.³⁸ Zhou Lianggong also noted in his 1660s work that Jiaozhou and Liaodong were the two major sources of temperate sea cucumbers.³⁹

The Ming-Manchu Qing dynastic transition impacted Liaodong and Shandong differently. Liaodong's coastal area was largely depopulated, as local people either fled from the invading Manchu force or joined them to conquer the rest of China.⁴⁰ Shandong, separated by a strait from Liaodong, was much less influenced. In the 1660s, when the Manchu Qing Empire had occupied mainland China and began to impose the infamous coastal evacuation and maritime prohibition policies for fighting against the Zheng Regime in Taiwan, Shandong, for its relatively north position, was only partially and briefly affected.⁴¹ As a result, Shandong's sea cucumber fisheries survived through this chaotic period and became more important in the Chinese consumer market. For instance, in the mid-1660s, Wu Weiye (1609-1672), a prominent scholar living in the Lower Yangzi region, composed a poem on sea cucumbers, indicating that “the prohibition is still lenient in the North Sea, whose food can assist the southern cuisine” (禁猶寬北海，饌可佐南烹). He annotated that the North Sea referred to the sea of Dengzhou and Laizhou, namely, the two principal prefectures of the Shandong Peninsula, which were “not subject to the maritime prohibitions” (Map 4.1).⁴²

Into the eighteenth century, Dengzhou and Laizhou remained important sea cucumber sources. Two accounts cited by Zhao Xuemin in the late eighteenth century show a bustling sea cucumber

³⁷ *Laizhou fuzhi*, juan 3:104b.

³⁸ Li, *Haiyou fengqian*, 28-29.

³⁹ Zhou, *Min xiaoji*, juan 2:11b.

⁴⁰ Isett, *State, Peasant, and Merchant in Qing Manchuria*, 38-39.

⁴¹ Gu, “Qingchu de qianhai,” 62-63.

⁴² The 1670 edition (preface 1669) records “Denglai” 登萊, but the manuscript in his family archive records “Donglai” 東萊. The latter, not a valid toponym in this context, is likely a typo. Wu, *Wu Meicun quanji*, juan 14, 377-378. See also Wang, “Ming Qing yilai Nanhai zhuyao yuchang de kaifa,” 89-80.

economy in this region. Li Jinshi, from the capital county of Dengzhou, Penglai, informed Zhao that “sea cucumbers are also from the sea of Dengzhou, which is adjacent to Liaodong and whose sea cucumbers are also good” (海參亦出登州海中，與遼東接壤，所產海參亦佳). Therefore, local people were attempting to appropriate the concept of Liao (used as an abbreviation for Liaodong) by claiming that Shandong sea cucumbers, for sharing the same waters with Liaodong, were of the same quality as Liao[dong] sea cucumbers. Li Jinshi also recounted how the locals hunted seals on sea ice, extracted their oil, and dripped it onto the sea to form a floating membrane that would immediately illuminate the underwater so that the sea cucumbers could be detected and caught. He attributed the high price of sea cucumbers to the high risk of these works. Many died of falling into the icy sea when hunting seals or were killed by sharks when diving for sea cucumbers.⁴³

Another Shandong informant, Chen Lianghan, who was from a county next to Penglai, Fushan, claimed that “sea cucumbers from the North Sea are good and are of the first grade in this world” (海參生北海者佳，為天下第一). He then explained how seasons mattered. Every springtime, when sea ice was thawing, sea cucumbers moved to the seashore for reproduction. It was then easy to catch them, but their body, because of bearing many eggs, was empty. “Their skin was thin, their body was sloppy, they did not taste good, and the price was also low” (皮薄體鬆，味不甚美，價亦廉。). They were called “spring skin” (*chunpi* 春皮) in the market. In summer, they shifted to deeper water and were difficult to catch, but their body became fat and thick, their spiky surface became lustrous, and the taste became delicious. They were then called “hot season skin” (*fupi* 伏皮), becoming much more valuable and better for medical use.⁴⁴

⁴³ Zhao, *Bencao gangmu shiyi*, *juan* 9:55, *juan* 10:38a.

⁴⁴ Ibid, *juan* 10:38.

These Shandong sea cucumbers had their own market in the South. The late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century Low Yangzi-based Huizhou merchant's handbook notes that "Shandong sea cucumbers" (*Shandong shen* 山東參) were from Dengzhou and Laizhou. They could be classified into four grades. Their meat was most sticky, but they could not be preserved for a long period and were sold to the upriver market around Nanjing.⁴⁵ That trade was likely controlled by a group of merchants self-styled as Dongqi (東齊, literally meaning East Shandong) merchants. Following the early coastal trading routes between Jiaozhou and the South, these merchants established themselves in Suzhou and Shanghai exactly during the reign period of Emperor Shunzhi (1644-1661), when the entire China Coast was in turmoil but Shandong was relatively secure.⁴⁶ Into the eighteenth century, they had a prominent role to play not only in the coastal trade between Shandong and the Lower Yangzi, but also in the maritime trade of Liaodong.⁴⁷ Given the massive cross-strait migration from the Shandong Peninsula to the depopulated coastal region of Liaodong after the Manchu Conquest,⁴⁸ we may even assume that the Sea of Liao[dong], while remaining a useful concept for labelling sea cucumbers, had become de facto a Sea of Shandong, as it was now dominated by Shandong merchants and migrants.

Meanwhile, Liaodong (known as Liao), as a geographic concept, was also shifting. After the Manchu Conquest, Liaodong became part of the broadly defined Manchu homeland, namely, Manchuria, which extended all the way from Liaodong to the west coast of the Japan Sea (Map 4.2). This change led to a confluence of two geographic concepts, namely, Liao and Manchu. Because of this confluence, sea cucumbers from both coasts of Manchuria, namely, the North China Sea coast

⁴⁵ *Huizhou minjian zhenxi wenxian*, vol. 15, 299.

⁴⁶ Fan Jinmin, "Ming Qing shiqi huoyue yu Suzhou de waidi shangren" 明清时期活跃于苏州的外地商人 [Nonlocal merchants active in Suzhou during the Ming and Qing periods], *Zhongguo shehui jingjishi yanjiu*, 4 (1989): 42; *Shanghai beike*, 194.

⁴⁷ Isett, *State, Peasant, and Merchant in Qing Manchuria*, 256-259.

⁴⁸ Wang, "Qingdai Shandong yimin 'chuang Guandong'."

and the Japan Sea coast, were all labelled as Liao or Manchu sea cucumbers, which I refer to here as Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers.

This shift further made the western coast of the Japan Sea a new source of Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers. This area, divided between present-day Russia, North Korea, and China, was historically a place occupied by various coastal Jurchen tribes known as Warka. In the early fifteenth century, many of them became subject to the king of Chosŏn and intermingled with Korean settlers in Hamgyŏng Province (Map 4.2).⁴⁹ Korean geographic records show that this Jurchen corner of Hamgyŏng had already become an important sea cucumber producing area by 1530.⁵⁰ The rise of the Manchu Empire brought these Warka people, as well as their sea cucumbers, into direct contact with Chinese consumers. Throughout the seventeenth century, Manchu rulers continuously incorporated Warka tribes into the Banner System.⁵¹ In this process, they compelled also the Warka population in Korea to “return” to Manchuria to join the Banner System.⁵² In Manchuria, these Warka people would soon meet some Chinese exiles. Banished because of a number of political persecutions from the 1650s through 1660s, these exiles consisted mostly of literati from the Lower Yangzi region, where eating Liaodong-style sea cucumbers was an expensive privilege.⁵³ Once in Manchuria, these Chinese literati delightedly found that this delicacy was easily accessible. A poem dating from approximately 1689-1690 even indicates that they became “tired of exchanging sea cucumbers as a gift” (人情厭海

⁴⁹ Robinson, “Residence and Foreign Relations in the Peninsular Northeast”; Bohnet, ““On Either Side the River”.”

⁵⁰ *Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*, juan 50:4a, 10b, 17a, 21a, 27b, 36a, 39b, 48a.

⁵¹ Liu, “Guanyu Qingdai “xin Manzhou””; Chen, “Qingdai Dongbei diqu Kuyala “xin Manzhou”.”

⁵² Bohnet, “On Either Side the River”; Cong, *Zhongguo dongbei shi*, vol. 3, 780-784.

⁵³ Cong, *Zhongguo dongbei shi*, vol. 4, 1793-1803.

參).⁵⁴ Thereafter, a 1721 local gazetteer identifies a coastal place adjacent to Korea, Hongqijie (紅旗街), as the source of the best sea cucumbers.⁵⁵



Map 4.2 The two coasts of Manchuria.

Hongqijie was Hunchun (Map 4.2).⁵⁶ Nie Youcai's pathbreaking dissertation about the "South Sea" (the Japan Sea) of Hunchun shows that this town, situated along the Tumen River's downstream, became a commercial centre of the Manchu coast of the Japan Sea from the early eighteenth century.⁵⁷ The 1736 provincial gazetteer of Shengjing, which covered all of Manchuria, noted that "those [sea

⁵⁴ The poem dates to circa 1689-1690, when its author visited Ningguta to see his father, who had been banished there since the early 1660s. Yang, *Yang Bin ji*, 56.

⁵⁵ Wu, *Ningguta jilie*, 714.

⁵⁶ Nie Youcai indicates that the Tumen River, as the border river of Manchuria and Korea, is also called as "Hongxi River" (紅溪河) or "Hongqi River" (紅旗河). Therefore, Hunchun as an important market town along this river was known as Hongqijie, literally meaning "the market street of the Hongqi River". Nie, "Qingdai Hunchun 'Nanhai' haijiang yanjiu," 33-34.

⁵⁷ Nie, "Qingdai Hunchun 'Nanhai' haijiang yanjiu"; Kim, *Ginseng and Borderland*, 90-92; Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur*, 64, 72-73.

cucumbers] from Hunchun are especially good” (渾春出者尤勝).⁵⁸ The Manchu archives of Hunchun also show that local officials sent sea cucumbers as a tribute to Beijing and many Han-Chinese merchants came to Hunchun to purchase sea cucumbers. For instance, in 1786, 39 merchant houses carried 1685 bags of sea cucumbers from Hunchun.⁵⁹ Because of this booming sea cucumber economy, a rocky place at the head of a bay outside the Tumen River was called by Chinese as Haishenwai, literally meaning “*wai* (巖 a place where mountains and waters bend) of sea cucumbers”, which would later become an important Russian port city in the Far East, Vladivostok.⁶⁰

From this maritime fringe of Manchuria, these sea cucumbers became renowned in the Chinese consumer market in the eighteenth century. Zhao Xuemin, in his late eighteenth-century *Supplement to Systematic Materia Medica*, noted that among sea cucumbers from the Sea of Liao, those from Hongqijie (Hunchun) were better than those from Lūqijie 綠旗街.⁶¹ He also learned from an informant in Manchuria (Guandong 關東) that sea cucumbers were from the East Sea.⁶² From a Manchu perspective, the East Sea could not be the North China Sea, which was to its south. Instead, it more likely referred to the Japan Sea situated to the east of Manchuria. In fact, the 1684 provincial gazetteer of Shengjing already noted that “those [sea cucumbers] from the East Sea are better than those from elsewhere” (東海出較他處者勝).⁶³ It also identified that the East Sea was to the east of Ningguta, clearly indicating that it referred to the Japan Sea (Map 4.2).⁶⁴

The late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century Huizhou merchant handbook also referred to Hongqijie (Hongqisuo) as an original place for two types of sea cucumbers. One was black and round

⁵⁸ *Shengjing tongzhi* (1736), *juan* 27:34b.

⁵⁹ Nie, “Qingdai Hunchun “Nanhai” haijiang yanjiu,” 26-28, 33-38.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 33.

⁶¹ Zhao, *Bencao gangmu shiyi*, *juan* 10:37a. Lūqijie’s location is yet to be identified.

⁶² *Ibid*, *juan* 10:37b.

⁶³ *Shengjing tongzhi* (1684), *juan* 21:25b.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, *juan* 8:12b.

sea cucumbers (*wuyuanshen* 烏園參), whose origins included the East Ocean (Dongyang), Manchuria (Guandong), Shandong, Hongqijie, Johor, Batavia (Kelapa), and Sulu.⁶⁵ This was likely the so-called “sea eggplant” (*haiqie* 海茄), a type of spike-less black sea cucumbers known as a local product of Hunchun (Hongqijie).⁶⁶ The other was Beijing sea cucumbers (*jingshen* 京參), which were only from Liaodong and Hongqijie (Hongqisuo).⁶⁷ I suspect that these Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers were named after Beijing because they were first carried from Manchuria to Beijing and then redistributed to the Chinese consumer market.

Crossing a vaguely defined border, Korea was also exporting Liaodong-style sea cucumbers to China via Manchuria. In the wake of the Manchu invasion of Korea (1636), Korea began to send sea cucumbers to the Manchus, initially as a payment to redeem war prisoners.⁶⁸ Thereafter, it became a regular trade either via border markets or via tribute missions to Beijing. In the eighteenth century, sea cucumbers were an important supplement to the traditional exports from Korea, silver and ginseng.⁶⁹ Chinese sea cucumber collectors also transgressed Korean coastal waters. A 1734 entry in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* of Korea notes that every year hundreds of Chinese fishing boats came to the west coast of Korea to collect sea cucumbers. This practice, according to this Korean source, had an origin in the 1697 cross-sea famine relief initiated by the Manchu Emperor, Kangxi (r. 1661-1722), through which many Chinese seafarers familiarised themselves with Korean coastal waters.⁷⁰ Chinese consumers, however, were uninformed of that Korean origin, which was not widely acknowledged as a source of sea cucumbers. Most likely, Korean sea cucumbers were sold as

⁶⁵ *Huizhou minjian zhenxi wenxian*, vol. 15, 299.

⁶⁶ Saying'e, comp., *Jilin waiji*, *juan* 7, 111.

⁶⁷ *Huizhou minjian zhenxi wenxian*, vol. 15, 297.

⁶⁸ Chang, *Qing Han zongfan maoyi*, 1637-1894, 116.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 75, 103, 122, 172, 191, 201.

⁷⁰ *Yeongjo sillok*, *juan* 38:13b. For this cross-sea famine relief, see Chang, *Qing Han zongfan maoyi*, 49.

Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers in the Chinese consumer market, because, after all, Korea, Liaodong, and Shandong all shared the same shallow waters of the North China Sea.

Meanwhile, another important origin of temperate Liaodong-style sea cucumbers was Japan. The Huizhou merchant handbook shows that there were thirteen grades of *zhan* sea cucumbers (占參 *zhanshen*) from the East Ocean, Japan, Shandong, and a place called Quetoushan (缺頭山).⁷¹ This grading system, mainly based on the density and shape of surface pricks, was likely borrowed from Japan, where sea cucumbers were divided into ten grades.⁷² Chinese import of Japanese sea cucumbers began from around the mid-seventeenth century amid the turbulent Ming-Manchu Qing transition.⁷³ It gained new momentum from the 1680s, when the Manchu Qing Empire lifted maritime prohibitions and encouraged Chinese traders to import Japanese copper from Nagasaki. That policy raised financial concerns from the Tokugawa shogunate. As a response, the latter encouraged the export of preserved marine products such as sea cucumbers, abalones, shark fins, and kombu as substitutes for copper.⁷⁴ For that purpose, domainal lords on the northern frontier of Japan mobilised indigenous people of Hokkaido to collect these sea delicacies for the China trade.⁷⁵

Therefore, we may conclude that in association with the rise of the Manchu Empire, the seventeenth century bears witness to the formation of the northern world of sea cucumbers. With the evidence we have examined, Liaodong played a crucial role in the initial stage, as sea cucumbers first emerged as an important commodity in Liaodong's burgeoning border economy from the late sixteenth century. Thereafter, at least since the early seventeenth century, the Shandong Peninsula also

⁷¹ *Huizhou minjian zhenxi wenxian*, vol. 15, 296.

⁷² Arai, *Kinsei kaisanbutsu boekishi no kenkyū*, 47.

⁷³ Dai Yifeng points out a smuggling case dated 1660, in which some Chinese traders imported over 40 piculs of sea cucumbers from Japan against the maritime prohibitions imposed by the Manchu Empire. Dai, "Yinshi wenhua yu haiwai shichang," 84.

⁷⁴ Arai, *Kinsei kaisanbutsu boekishi no kenkyū*, 19-135.

⁷⁵ Walker, *The Conquest of Ainu Lands*, 94-97.

became part of the Chinese sea cucumber frontier and would play an important role in the mid-seventeenth century, when Liaodong was temporarily devastated by the Manchu Conquest. Later, in the wake of the Manchu Conquest of China, as a new world order was established in Northeast Asia, this northern sea cucumber world also expanded and integrated other pre-existing sea cucumber cultures that were originally external to China with the Chinese consumer market. One after another, the Manchu coast of the Japan Sea, Korea, and Japan all joined this world and supplied black and spiky temperate sea cucumbers to China.

2. The Rise of the Southern World of Sea Cucumbers

The world of these black and spiky sea cucumbers, however, had an ecological boundary. Known as *Stichopus japonicus*, they inhabited temperate waters only.⁷⁶ To the South, there was another sea cucumber world. The expansion of this tropical sea cucumber world, as we will see, mainly took place in the eighteenth century. After over a century of expansion, its far-reaching influence began to be richly documented in European sources in the early nineteenth century amid intensified European colonisation of archipelagic Southeast Asia and northern Australia.

For instance, in 1824, as part of a recolonisation mission in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago after the devastating Napoleonic War, a Dutch naturalist, Adrianus Johannes Bik, visited Aru, an island between Papua and Australia.⁷⁷ To the east coast of Aru, he found an extensive intertidal zone, which was too shallow for the navigation of European large vessels but ecologically perfect for a sea cucumber economy linked to China.⁷⁸ Bik depicted the scene of capturing sea cucumbers in both

⁷⁶ For the difference between temperate and tropical species, see Akamine, *Namako o aruku*, 158-188.

⁷⁷ For a short biography of Bik, see Blok and Molhuysen, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek. Deel 8*, 108-110. For the local anti-Dutch revolts related to the control of sea cucumber trade in Aru, see Gordon, Djonler, and Hägerdal, “The Killing of *Postbouder* Scheerder and *Jifar Folfolun*.”

⁷⁸ Bik, *Dagverhaal eener reis*, 70.

image (Figure 4.1) and words. He noted that “the sandbanks (*droogten*), where the sea cucumbers (*tripang*) are found, consist of sandy fine clay, often grown with broad slimy seaweed, which will emerge by low water.”⁷⁹ On these sandbanks, “hundreds of Alfur women and children from Workai, by the low water, with a small basket on their backs and equipped with a stick with an iron point, wade to the mentioned islands through the waters. On two-to-four-foot-deep place, small canoes are used by the Alfurs; on further distant sandbanks where sea cucumbers are found, the Alfurs and their entire family fish with a bigger prahu.”⁸⁰



Figure 4.1 A view of a sea cucumber gathering village on Workai, next to the east shore of Aru (1824). Sea cucumber gathering dominated the dreamy, exotic tropical scene.

Source: Adrianus Johannes Bik, watercolour, 320 x 568 mm, RP-T-1999-173, Rijksmuseum.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 69. Translated from Dutch.

Chapter 4

These hundreds of indigenous children and women were from a small island next to the east shore of Aru, Workai, which had a population of no more than 4,000 (Figure 4.1).⁸¹ As a pillar economy of this community, sea cucumber collection was stimulated by a credit system controlled by overseas Chinese. On 24 April 1824, in a small village of Workai, Affara (Apara), Bik was visited by three Chinese who worked as agents for merchants based in Makassar. These Chinese informed Bik that they had been in this village for two months for collecting sea cucumbers. Normally the village could deliver 350 piculs of sea cucumbers, but that year it only delivered 180 piculs. These sea cucumbers were for redeeming debt, as the indigenes would not start collecting sea cucumbers until they received merchandise, such as textile, as credit from the visiting Chinese traders.⁸² The sea cucumbers collected by the locals would be carried to Makassar. There, they would be further assorted for China trade.⁸³

Makassar served as a sea cucumber trading centre for the entire eastern Indonesian Archipelago and northern Australia (Map 4.3).⁸⁴ This city was a Dutch colonial prize in the so-called Spice Wars (ca. 1600s-1660s), waged by the Dutch United East India Company (the VOC, 1602-1799) for monopolising the highly profitable trade of fine spices, including cloves, nutmegs, and mace, which were only produced in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago until the late eighteenth century. In a concluding battle of the Spice Wars, Makassar, a former spice trading centre, was conquered by an allied force of the VOC and the Bugis in 1669.⁸⁵ Thereafter, the entire region was deprived of spice trade, which became a pure monopoly by the VOC, and had to go through a thorough transformation

⁸¹ Ibid, 74.

⁸² Ibid, 63, 72.

⁸³ Ibid, 70-72.

⁸⁴ Two milestone publications in this field are Sutherland, “Trepang and Wangkang”; Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*.

⁸⁵ Andaya, *The Heritage of Arung Palakka*; Noorduyn, “De handelsrelaties van het Makassarse rijk”; Stapel, *Het Bongaais Verdrag*.

which, as Heather Sutherland's works have shown, ultimately led to a new economic system, in which the trade of sea cucumbers with China featured prominently.⁸⁶



Map 4.3 The southern world of sea cucumbers.

⁸⁶ Sutherland, "Trepang and Wangkang"; Knaap and Sutherland, *Monsoon Traders*; Sutherland, "Trade, Court and Company"; idem, "A Sino-Indonesian Commodity Chain"; idem, *Seaways and Gatekeepers*.

Chapter 4

The reorientation of Makassar from fine spices to sea cucumbers was accompanied by the rise of a locally based Chinese community. Different from other Asian and European merchants, Chinese traders managed to establish a collaborative relationship with the VOC in a critical early stage of the Spice Wars.⁸⁷ As a result, the Dutch, in general, tolerated the Chinese who settled down in their colonies in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago for provisioning garrison forces and for boosting the local economy.⁸⁸ The basic policy was that the trade of fine spices was strictly prohibited, but the Chinese were allowed to undertake other businesses that fell outside the VOC's primary interests. This collaborative relation was introduced to Makassar after the Dutch conquest in 1669. It opened new opportunities for Chinese merchants, helping them rise from a marginal position to economic ascendancy.⁸⁹

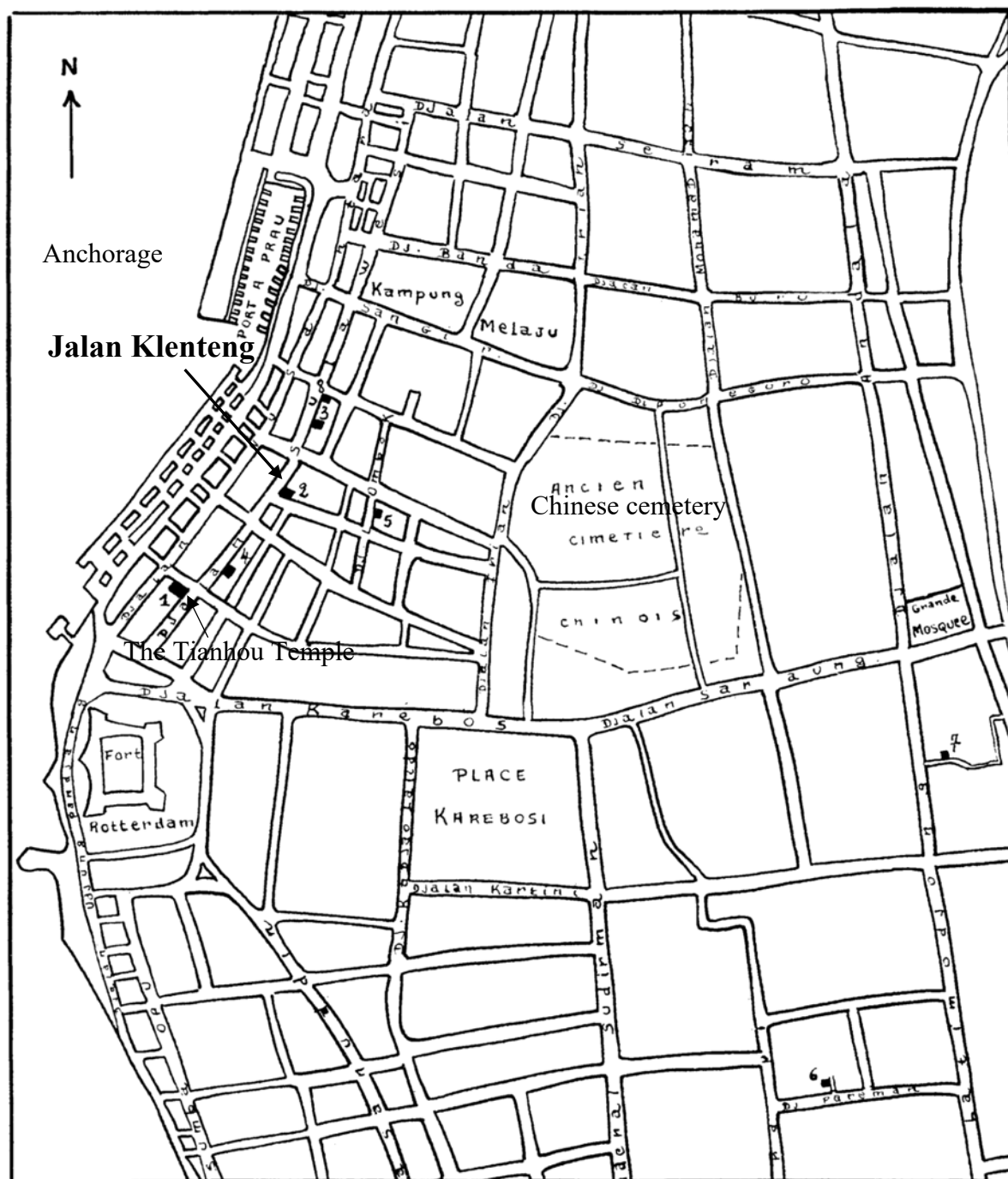
An important witness to the change is the first Chinese temple in Makassar, the Tianhou temple. It is situated on the Chinese Street of Makassar along the seaside. Present-day, the street is still a commercial centre and has many residents of Chinese descent (Map 4.4). It is known locally as Jalan Klenteng, namely, Chinese Temple Street.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Xu, "Junks to Mare Clausum".

⁸⁸ Iwao, "Anboina (Amboina) no shoki Shinamachi ni tsuite"; Knaap, "A City of Migrants."

⁸⁹ Sutherland, "Trade, Court and Company"; idem, "Trepang and Wangkang"; idem, "A Sino-Indonesian Commodity Chain".

⁹⁰ For the history of those temples on this street, see Salmon, "La communauté chinoise de Makasar."



Map 4.4 The Chinese Street (Jalan Sulawesi, or Jalan Klenteng) of Makassar.

Source: Adapted from Salmon, "La communauté chinoise de Makasar," 249.

Next to the entrance of this temple, there is a stele dated 1867, telling a history about this Chinese community (Figure 4.2). It shows that the temple was originally built by a Chinese Captain called Wang Yue (Ongwatko 王悅, in office 1679?-1700), to have a place of worship for incoming and outgoing

ships. Wang Yue (Ongwatko) was the second Chinese Captain in Makassar, leading this community from approximately 1679 to 1700.⁹¹ This period corresponds to the beginning of the open-sea policy of the Manchu Qing Empire. After the last resistance of the Ming-loyalists in Taiwan was crushed in 1683, the Manchu court in Beijing encouraged private Chinese junk traders to trade overseas.⁹² That policy would induce Chinese economic ascendancy in Southeast Asia, leading to the so-called Chinese century in Southeast Asia.⁹³ Exploiting the growth of the China trade via Batavia, Wang Yue and his family built a virtual monopoly of two important commodities coveted by Chinese consumers, namely, tortoise shell and edible bird's nests. In Makassar, they contracted local people to search for these rarities from surrounding waters and islands.⁹⁴ Moreover, as we will return to in the next section, with the same model, Wang Yue also pushed for the emergence of sea cucumbers as a new export from Makassar to China via Batavia in the 1690s.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Wirawan, *Sejarah Masyarakat Tionghoa Makassar*, 263.

⁹² For this critical policy shift in association with the Manchu Conquest of Taiwan, see Zhao, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean*; Cheung, "Admiral Shi Lang's Secret Proposal to Return Taiwan to the VOC"; Xu, "From the Atlantic to the Manchu."

⁹³ Blussé, "Chinese Century"; Blussé, *Strange Company*.

⁹⁴ Sutherland, "Trade, Court and Company," 102-5; Sutherland, "A Sino-Indonesian Commodity Chain," 177, 182-183.

⁹⁵ Wang Yue's personal involvement in sea cucumber trade is attested by a contract signed between him and an envoy of a local regime in Southeast Sulawesi, Buton, in 1695 for 156 piculs of sea cucumbers. Nolde, "Changing Tides," 157.



Figure 4.2 A stele on the entrance of Tianhou Temple.

Source: Photo by Ziqi Wu, 2020.

Chapter 4

Wang Yue's son, Ongkiego (Chinese characters unknown, in office ca. 1701-1731/2), succeeded his father's position in 1701.⁹⁶ In 1732, the position was in turn taken over by Ongkiego's son, Ongkingsai (Chinese characters unknown, in office ca. 1732-?).⁹⁷ After Ongkingsai, Ongkiego's nephew, Li Ruzhang (Lijauko 李如璋), became the Chinese Captain.⁹⁸ During Li Ruzhang's term (ca. 1738-1748/9), Chinese economic influence expanded enormously. The Tianhou Temple stele shows that in 1738 Li rebuilt this temple and changed its direction from facing the sea to facing the mountain. The local Chinese community might recall this change as an auspicious event, because within a few years, the first junk (called *wangkang* by the local community) from Amoy arrived at Makassar (1746), signalling the beginning of a new era in Makassar trade.⁹⁹ Also in 1746, Li Ruzhang obtained tax farming for incoming and outgoing ships, controlling the maritime traffic of this port city.¹⁰⁰ The third major renovation of this temple was by Captain Huang Ya (Oey Nyeeko 黃雅) in 1805. He rebuilt the temple and constructed a new praying pavilion (*baiting* 拜亭) and a new mediation hall (*chantang* 禪堂), making the temple "somehow spectacular" (似乎頗有可觀者).

By the time of the third renovation, Makassar's junk trade with China had been in full bloom. From the register of the Makassar Harbourmaster, we can find following Chinese junks visited Makassar from 1797-1809 (Table 4.2).

	The size of junk (<i>wangkang</i>)	Captain (<i>anachoda</i>)	Arrival	Departure	Sea cucumbers (<i>tripang</i>)
1797 ¹⁰¹	400 <i>last</i> ¹⁰²	Ong Kongien	4 February	28 June	2000 piculs
1798 ¹⁰³	300 <i>last</i>	Oei Hianko	2 February	26 June	Unknown
1799 ¹⁰⁴	250 <i>last</i>	Ong Kongien	14 February	29 June	4500 piculs

⁹⁶ Wirawan, *Sejarah Masyarakat Tionghoa Makassar*, 263.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Knaap and Sutherland, *Monsoon Traders*, 145.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 30.

¹⁰¹ ANRI, Makassar 140, "Dag Register 1 Oct 1796 - 28 Sep 1800".

¹⁰² 1 last was about 20 piculs.

¹⁰³ ANRI, Makassar 140, "Dag Register 1 Oct 1796 - 28 Sep 1800".

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

A World of Sea Cucumbers

1800 ¹⁰⁵	400 <i>last</i>	Oie Kiepko	7 February	3 July	4000 piculs
1801 ¹⁰⁶	400 <i>last</i>	Lie Ganko	22 February	12 July	Unknown
1802 ¹⁰⁷	400 <i>last</i>	Oie Kiepko	7 February	7 July	6000 piculs
1803 ¹⁰⁸	400 <i>last</i>	Thetio	7 February	6 July	Unknown
1804 ¹⁰⁹	400 <i>last</i>	Oie Tauko	20 March	8 July	6000 piculs
1805 ¹¹⁰	400 <i>last</i>	Oie Tauko	8 February	4 July	5000 piculs
1806 ¹¹¹	400 <i>last</i>	Oie Tauko	13 February	7 July	5000 piculs
1807 ¹¹²	Unknown	Kang Tiatlo ¹¹³	Shipwrecked near Makassar circa 17 February ¹¹⁴		
1808 ¹¹⁵	300 <i>last</i>	Koo Peauper	3 March	30 June	5000 piculs
1809 ¹¹⁶	Unknown	Unknown	8 March	Unknown	Unknown

Table 4.2 Junks (*wangkang*) to Makassar (1797-1809).

These records show an established pattern. Every year, a junk from Amoy appeared at the roadstead of Makassar in February, or March, in a few cases. The junk's capacity was between 250-400 last, or about 5,000-8,000 piculs, namely, among the largest oceangoing junks of Amoy.¹¹⁷ The commodities carried by the Amoy junk consisted of various Chinese goods, such as tobacco, textiles, porcelains, gold thread, etc. In Makassar, the junk would stay for a few months until later June or early July. Then, it returned to China, laden principally with sea cucumbers, ranging from 2,000-6,000 piculs, as well as other marine and tropical products, such as agar-agar, tortoiseshell, edible bird's nests, shark fins, rattan, etc. Each junk was commanded by a Chinese captain. Some captains made continuous trips, while others appeared merely once. Each of them, as we will see, represented a "ocean trading company" (*yanghang* 洋行) in Amoy which had managed to obtain a Makassar pass via an auction in Batavia the preceding year.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ ANRI, Makassar 141, "Dag Register 1 Oct 1800 - 13 Mei 1804".

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. ANRI, Makassar 142, "Dag Register 1 Juni 1804 - 31 Mei 1806".

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. ANRI, Makassar 143, "Dag Register 1 June 1806 - 31 Mei 1809".

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ ANRI, Hoge Regering 3578, fols. 29-30.

¹¹⁴ ANRI, Makassar 115, "Secrete Dag-Register van 19 October 1803-Mei 1809," fol. 86.

¹¹⁵ ANRI, Makassar 143, "Dag Register 1 June 1806 - 31 Mei 1809".

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Chen, "Qingdai zhongye xiamen de haishang maoyi," 63-66.

Chapter 4

The Amoy merchants, who geared these junks, formed a number of ocean trading companies. Their roles, like the *hong* merchants in Canton, included collecting tax from overseas trade, guaranteeing law-abidingness of seafarers, and sending tropical exotics to the Manchu court as tributes.¹¹⁸ Yet, they operated in a distinct milieu. Unlike Canton, Amoy barely received any European ships. It was a centre of a far-flung Chinese junk trading network, and functions as a rendezvous for three trading branches, namely: 1) northward coastal trade with the Lower Yangzi, North China, and Manchuria; 2) eastward cross-strait trade with Taiwan; 3) southward overseas trade with Southeast Asia (the so-called Nanyang).¹¹⁹ These ocean trading companies received licenses from the Manchu Qing Empire to enjoy a certain degree of monopoly in overseas trade with Southeast Asia, in a way like the chartered overseas trading companies of European colonial empires. For securing that monopoly, they routinely provided tropical rarities, such as edible bird's nests, to the Manchu court in Beijing, and paid substantial financial contributions for local governance.¹²⁰ Their business was most prosperous during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735- 1795). In a good year, less than ten ocean trading companies organised about 60-70 ocean-going junks to Southeast Asia.¹²¹

By the early nineteenth century, these licensed companies had begun to face fierce competition from unauthorised private traders, who were largely free from burdensome contributions to the Manchu court and local government. As a result, the licensed ocean trading companies gradually lost ground in Southeast Asia to private traders. Their last strongholds were Makassar and Batavia routes, thanks to a long-established relationship with the Dutch.¹²² Each year, when a junk arrived at Batavia, its captain delivered a letter from an ocean trading company, along with some gifts, to the Governor

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 61-100.

¹¹⁹ Ng, *Trade and Society*.

¹²⁰ Chen, "Qingdai zhongye xiamen de haishang maoyi," 92.

¹²¹ Ibid, 74, 92.

¹²² Blussé, "Junks to Java"; idem, "The Vicissitudes of Maritime Trade."

General of the Dutch Empire in Asia. Thereafter, they would bid for an annual pass to Makassar, which became highly valuable because of the huge profit from the sea cucumber trade. For instance, on 29 June 1809, a Makassar pass was acquired at an astonishing price of 130,000 *rijksdaalders* in Batavia by an Amoy junk captained by Que Tongsoeg.¹²³ With this pass, another junk would be geared from Amoy to Makassar by the same ocean trading company that made investment in the Batavia voyage and obtained the pass. In this deal, the ocean trading company that organised these voyages was Ko Hap Seeng (和合成), owned by Chen Ban'guan (陳班觀).¹²⁴ Chen would soon become the last ocean trading company merchant in Amoy in 1813, when all other ocean trading companies went bankrupt.¹²⁵

Also in 1813, the British East India Company (EIC), which had occupied Makassar in 1812 as part of the Napoleonic Wars, ended the pass system and temporarily closed Makassar for junks from China.¹²⁶ When the Dutch returned in 1816, they attempted to restore the pass system. However, Makassar was now facing increasing competition from alternative ports in the Melaka Straits controlled by the Bugis and the British, to which we will return soon. As a result, the junk trade between Amoy and Makassar never returned to its former prosperity and instead gradually ceased to exist in the 1820s.¹²⁷ Thereafter, Makassar remained as an important regional centre in the trade of sea cucumbers, but no longer played a dominant role.

¹²³ Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek, 1602-1811, vijftiende deel*, 766; ANRI, Hoge Regering 1178, "generale resoluties, 1809 april 4 - 1809 juni 29," 29 Jun. 1809, fol. 1246. The deal was guaranteed by two Chinese in Batavia: Tan Peengko (陳炳郎, Chen Binglang) and Tan Taplong. Tan Peengko was a Chinese Lieutenant in Batavia from 1792-1808. Blussé and Nie, *The Chinese Annals of Batavia*, 193, 255.

¹²⁴ Chen, "Qingdai zhongye xiamen de haishang maoyi," 61-74.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 92.

¹²⁶ The EIC occupied Makassar from 1812-1816 and declined to issue the Makassar pass in 1813. ANRI, Makassar 291/6, "Bekendmaking," 6 Jan. 1813.

¹²⁷ Sutherland, "Trepang and Wangkang," 457-459; ANRI, Makassar 3/2, "Algemeen Verslag van het Gouvernement Makassar over 1833," 1st Afdeeling_B_e. handel.

While the Amoy-Makassar-Batavia system mainly drew sea cucumbers from the eastern Indonesian Archipelago and northern Australia, outside this system, two other sea cucumber networks were also taking shape in late eighteenth-century Southeast Asia. One was the famous Sulu Zone. From the late eighteenth century, Southeast Asian littoral society witnessed intensified raiding by the Iranun and Balangingi Samal from Mindanao and the Sulu Islands. They systematically enslaved coastal communities from Luzon to Sumatra, turning them into either coercive labour or domestic servants in Sulu, which was enjoying an economic boom stimulated by surging Chinese demand for Southeast Asian sea delicacies such as sea cucumbers and edible bird's nests.¹²⁸ The largely unpatrolled waters of the eastern Indonesian Archipelago were an important raiding zone of these "saltwater slavers".¹²⁹ Taking advantage of the absence of strong regional powers, they allied with local raiders, turning some coastal polities of Sulawesi, such as Toli-toli (Totoli) and Tambuku (Bungku or Tobungku), into their forwarding bases.¹³⁰

While the system of the Sulu Zone focused on raiding, the network of the Bugis evolved into an alternative trading system outside the monopoly of the VOC. After the Spice Wars, densely populated Southwest Sulawesi generated massive emigration, which gave rise to a far-flung Bugis-Makassarese diasporic network (Map 4.3).¹³¹ To the west, many moved to the Malay World and established settlements in the disintegrating Johor Sultanate.¹³² To the east, the shallow waters of the eastern coast of Sulawesi attracted them to establish trading posts to collect sea cucumbers from the

¹²⁸ Warren, *The Sulu Zone*; idem, *Iranun and Balangingi*; idem, "Saltwater Slavers and Captives"; idem, "The Balangingi Samal". For criticisms of the slaves to coercive labour model, see Henley, "Review of James F. Warren, *The Sulu Zone*"; Sutherland, "The Sulu Zone Revisited"; Gaynor, "Piracy in the Offing," 841-844.

¹²⁹ Warren, *The Sulu Zone*, 160-165.

¹³⁰ Velthoen, "Wanderers, Robbers and Bad Folk"; Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, 154-163.

¹³¹ Lineton, "Pasompe' Ugi," 173-201; Andaya, "Local Trade Networks in Maluku," 72-75; idem, "The Bugis-Makassar Diasporas"; Leirissa, "The Bugis-Makassarese in the Port Towns Ambon and Ternate."

¹³² Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor*, 279-323.

local Sama people.¹³³ After 1819, via their trans-Java sea network, they increasingly circumvented Makassar to ship sea cucumbers from the eastern Indonesian Archipelago directly to Singapore for trading with the Chinese.¹³⁴

These trading networks bridged the Chinese consumer market with an intertidal zone in archipelagic Southeast Asia.¹³⁵ Along this intertidal zone, there were many coastal communities like the Alfurs in Aru, who, as mentioned earlier in this section, were seasonally mobilised when Chinese dealers came to their villages and exchanged merchandise for sea cucumbers. Besides them, the more professional sea cucumber collectors were the Sama people, recorded as Sama Bajau or Orang Bajau in many written records.¹³⁶ Well-known as “sea people”, they settled their families in boats or stilt-houses in the intertidal zone and practised a maritime-oriented life.¹³⁷ Their ethnic label “Sama Bajau” betrays two traditions. Sama is an autonym, widely used by the Sama in the southern Philippines and eastern Indonesia to refer to their own communities.¹³⁸ It is a word shared by modern Indonesian and Malay, meaning “together” or “same”. In self-reference, the Sama normally couple it with a toponymic modifier, for instance, an island or a strait, indicating their sense of littoral belonging. Bajau, instead, is an exonym. Its origin is debatable. The recent research by Jennifer L. Gaynor reveals a Portuguese root, showing “Bajau” or “Bajo” was derived from an Iberian term “*baixo/baxo*”, meaning “shoal”. It

¹³³ Velthoen, “Contested Coastlines,” 188-212.

¹³⁴ Tagliacozzo, “A Necklace of Fins,” 31, note 41; Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China*, vol. 2, 366-367; Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, 21-74; Koh, “Familiar Strangers and Stranger-kings,” 397-399.

¹³⁵ For the concept of “intertidal”, see Gaynor, *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia*.

¹³⁶ For a survey of the early modern sources concerning Sama’s involvement in the sea cucumber economy, see Nolde, “Changing Tides,” 155-171.

¹³⁷ Gaynor, *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia*; Sopher, *The Sea Nomads*; Pelras, “Notes sur quelques populations aquatiques de l’Archipel nusantarien”; Sather, *The Bajau Laut*; Chou, *Indonesian Sea Nomads*; He and Faure, eds., *The Fisher Folk of Late Imperial and Modern China*.

¹³⁸ Sather, *The Bajau Laut*, 5.

was used to refer to the Sama because they lived on the intertidal zone and were often employed by early Portuguese traders as pilots to navigate shallow waters with many shoals.¹³⁹

With deep knowledge about the tropical waters, the Sama exploited an ecological setting very different from the northern world of sea cucumbers. The relatively calm tropical sea surface of the eastern Indonesian Archipelago contributes to much better visibility than the North China Sea and the Japan Sea. The colourful coral seabed of the tropics also generates a far richer diversity of tropical species of sea cucumbers than the temperate waters of Northeast Asia. Among the rich diversity of tropical sea cucumbers, the types that were most sought after in the Chinese consumer market usually distributed on relatively deep sandy coral reefs, instead of the muddy intertidal zone.¹⁴⁰ The rule of thumb, according to Vosmaer, was that “the deeper the water, the better is the sort of the sea cucumbers for trade”. The typical underwater habitat of valuable sorts of sea cucumbers is “white sand with widespread coral stones, or also covered with a thin layer of mud and vegetated with a sort of seagrass”.¹⁴¹ John Crawford’s *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820) also noted that sea cucumbers were found “chiefly on coral reefs, and never on flat muddy shores,” and “the most considerable fisheries are consequently to the eastward from Celebes (Sulawesi) to New Guinea (Papua) and Australasia (Australia)”.¹⁴² This observation is soundly founded on the rich concentration of coral reefs in this region, which, as Sutherland has pointed out, “were hazardous to shipping but provided essential marine resources”.¹⁴³

With this tropical marine environment, Southeast Asian littoral society developed different techniques to collect sea cucumbers. At a low ebb, sea cucumbers could be garnered from the exposed

¹³⁹ Gaynor, *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia*, 44-63.

¹⁴⁰ Bik, *Dagverbaal eener reis*, 69, note 2; Wang, *Haidao yizhi*, *juan* 4, 111.

¹⁴¹ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 151.

¹⁴² Crawford, *History of the Indian Archipelago*, vol. 3, 441.

¹⁴³ Sutherland, *Seaways and Gatekeepers*, 49.

intertidal zone. This demanded no special expertise and was undertaken mainly by Sama children and women as well as people who lived on the shore, who Vosmaer referred to as coastal inhabitants (*kustbewoners*).¹⁴⁴ For catching larger and more valuable types, certain equipment and expertise were required. Vosmaer noted that, in shallow waters, coastal inhabitants preferred to catch sea cucumbers during the night when the sea was relatively calm, and they could also avoid the scorching sun. They usually carried a torch to light up the sea and stood on their light canoes with a pole. That pole, as its Makassarese name, *tokong-tokong tripang* (sea cucumber bargepoles),¹⁴⁵ indicates, served two purposes, namely, for steering the canoe and for piercing sea cucumbers. For the latter purpose, the pole was designed as a long and thin bamboo with two iron points on one end, like a fork.¹⁴⁶

The deeper waters, where the most valuable sea cucumbers abounded, were Sama's terrain. In 1773, a British country trader-cum-EIC officer, Thomas Forrest,¹⁴⁷ visited some coral islets of the Balabalagan Islands (Little Paternoster), halfway between Borneo and Sulawesi. There, he found many boats of the Sama, who were fishing sea cucumbers in "seven to eight fathom waters" (ca. 12.6-14.4 metres). When they saw sea cucumbers in clear water, they stroke it "with an instrument, consisting of four bearded iron prongs, fixed along an almost cylindrical stone, rather smaller at one end than the other, about eighteen inches long."¹⁴⁸ This device was called *tripang ladung* in Makassarese and Malay, meaning "sea cucumber plummet".¹⁴⁹ It had different local adaptations. Vosmaer, who was most actively along the south and east coasts of Sulawesi, observed that the Sama made it of lead, weighing

¹⁴⁴ Vosmaer, "Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes," 153.

¹⁴⁵ Koningsberger, *Tripang en tripangvisserij in Nederlandsch-Indië*, 61; Cense, *Makassaars-Nederlands woordenboek*, 859.

¹⁴⁶ Vosmaer, "Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes," 153.

¹⁴⁷ Forrest was then affiliated to the EIC factory in Balambangan, an island to the northeast of Borneo. He made several reconnaissance voyages to the eastern Indonesian Archipelago to challenge Dutch dominance. Miller, "English Country Traders and Their Relations with Malay Rulers."

¹⁴⁸ Forrest, *A Voyage to New Guinea and the Moluccas*, 373.

¹⁴⁹ Cense, *Makassaars-Nederlands woordenboek*, 353, 787; Vosmaer, "Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes," 152; Koningsberger, *Tripang en tripangvisserij*, 57.

eight to ten pounds, to which three iron points without barbs were fixed. It was lowered with a line to reach a depth up to ten fathoms (18 metres), and often even deeper.¹⁵⁰ A sample from South Sulawesi is collected by the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3 Sea cucumber plummet (*tripang ladung*) (10 x 10 x 65 cm, palm wood, lead, brass, and rattan, collected from South Sulawesi).

Source: Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, RV-131-7.

This device was key to the Sama's deep-water sea cucumber fishery. It targeted large sea cucumbers living on offshore coral reefs in clear tropical waters. It demanded familiarity with underwater terrain and sea currents. A precondition to accurately target underwater sea cucumbers was that the sea surface should not be very wave-rippled. The Sama exploited a relatively waveless period, namely, the first half of daytime, when land breeze was dying and slowly shifting to sea breeze.¹⁵¹ They also distinguished themselves from other sea cucumber fishers by adhering to this practice. Vosmaer noted that on the north coast of Australia, while the main fleets from Makassar focused on the mass-production of low-value varieties of sea cucumbers through diving in the relatively muddy waters,¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Vosmaer, "Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes," 152.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 152-153.

¹⁵² Ibid, 154-155.

the Sama sailed with their own prahus and stroke more valuable species with their characteristic sea cucumber plummets.¹⁵³

Profit from this profession facilitated some of these so-called sea people to settle down. Vosmaer noted that about 200 households of the Sama chose to stay on Kondingareng (Koedingaring), a small islet immediately outside Makassar. They became the so-called “settled Orang Bajau” (*wonende Orang Bajos*), which I refer to here as the settled Sama.¹⁵⁴ Although Makassarese still called them Water People (*Tau-ri-Djene* or *tu-ridje’ne*),¹⁵⁵ they had already received protection from local land-based political power and kept their wives and children on the shore.¹⁵⁶ They sailed with their relatively big ships, a type of *padewakang* of about 10 to 15 *keoyan* (ca. 270-405 piculs), which loaded a number of small canoes. Once they arrived at a fishing field, they searched for marine products, such as sea cucumbers, with these canoes.¹⁵⁷ Their settlement, Kondingareng, became a renowned centre for processing and trading high-value sea cucumbers, and particularly the top-priced black and large sand sea cucumbers (*tripang passir*).¹⁵⁸

Yet, there were still many unsettled Sama people, labelled by Vosmaer as the “nomadic Orang Bajau” (*rondzwervende Orang Badjos*), which I refer to here as the nomadic Sama. They had no permanent residence and stayed in their boats. Each boat corresponded to a family. Their boats were also relatively small, seldom above 7-8 *keoyan* (189-216 piculs).¹⁵⁹ Many of them lived along the east and south coasts of Sulawesi, presumably under the protection of a major Bugis power in South Sulawesi,

¹⁵³ Ibid, 159, 161.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 115-116.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 114, 159, 161, 175.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 115.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 115-116.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 116, 127, 163, 165, 175; Bik, *Dagverhaal eener reis*, 71.

¹⁵⁹ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 116-117.

Chapter 4

Bone.¹⁶⁰ Their sea cucumbers, known as “*tripang* Bajo” (Bajau sea cucumbers) or “Buton *tripang*” (Buton sea cucumbers),¹⁶¹ were also renowned in Makassar, securing a price better than sea cucumbers collected by non-Sama coastal people.¹⁶²

As we will return to in the final section, the sea cucumbers offered in Makassar were not only from the eastern Indonesian Archipelago. From the second half of the eighteenth century, Makassar became a base for professional sea cucumber collectors, known as *trepangers*, who organised a yearly expedition to the north coast of Australia to catch and process sea cucumbers.¹⁶³ Their products would be sold in Makassar to the Chinese junk that came every year from Amoy. Back to Amoy, the junk’s load of sea cucumbers would be redistributed by Chinese coastal traders to the Lower Yangzi and North China, catering to a consumer market that was developing a new taste for tropical sea cucumbers.

Reviewing these changes, we may find that, after the Spice Wars, despite the VOC’s monopoly, the waters of the eastern Indonesian Archipelago did not end up as a closed sea (*mare clausum*) or “embittered backwaters”.¹⁶⁴ Instead, largely outside the VOC’s control, the former spice trading centre of Makassar became a sea cucumber hub, and the entire eastern Indonesian Archipelago became increasingly oriented towards a cross-China Seas world of sea cucumbers. The loss of spice trade to the VOC might have only made the emerging trade of sea cucumbers to China more attractive to the local society and pushed a fundamental reorientation of this region from the world of spices to the

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 127-128; Velthoen, “Contested Coastlines,” 201-206; Gaynor, *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia*, 107-165.

¹⁶¹ Velthoen, “Contested Coastlines,” 204; Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 179.

¹⁶² Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 179-180.

¹⁶³ Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*.

¹⁶⁴ Here, I adapt a concept (embittered backwaters) from Reid’s interpretation of the decline of “the cosmopolitan trading cities of Banten and Makassar” after the Dutch conquest. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680, Volume Two*, 281.

world of sea cucumbers. Makassar, moreover, became a forwarding base to further incorporate northern Australia into this sea cucumber world. I want to argue that by the early nineteenth century, from the perspective of Southeast Asian littoral society, the Dutch-controlled Spice Islands in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago, including the Maluku and Banda islands, had become no more than some isolated colonial enclaves surrounded by a globally connected sea cucumber world.

3. In the Shadow of the Liao/Manchu Sea Cucumbers

To many economic historians, the emergence and expansion of this southern sea cucumber world supported a powerful theory that the eighteenth century in Southeast Asia was a Chinese century. During this period, Chinese traders, agriculturalists, and miners penetrated to even the remotest corner of Southeast Asia and profoundly influenced the local economy and society.¹⁶⁵ However, if we change the perspective from economic dominance to cultural interactions, we may also argue that the eighteenth century was also a Southeast Asian century in Chinese food culture. Beyond the previously narrow focus on spices and aromatics, marine products from Southeast Asia, represented by sea cucumbers and edible nests, emerged from obscurity to become top sea delicacies in Chinese cuisine throughout the eighteenth century.

Therefore, instead of raising a question from a China-centric perspective about Chinese economic dominance in Southeast Asia, the following sections approach this issue from the other way around by asking: How did Southeast Asian things conquer Chinese taste? To answer this question, we shall return to the order of the sea cucumbers provided by Vosmaer in 1835. This puzzling table (Table 4.1) listed 19 types of tropical sea cucumbers commercially traded in Makassar. In practice, for indigenous sea cucumbers collectors in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago, such as the Sama, it would

¹⁶⁵ Blussé, “In Praise of Commodities”; Trocki, “Chinese Pioneering in Eighteenth-Century Southeast Asia”; Blussé, “Chinese Century”; Tagliacozzo, “A Necklace of Fins”; Sutherland, “Trepang and Wangkang.”

Chapter 4

be too laborious to precisely distinguish and negotiate a separate price for each type.¹⁶⁶ They instead grouped them into three-tiered categories (Table 4.3).¹⁶⁷

The first tier, called *batoe* by Makassarese or *balla sekali* by the Sama, included the first three types, namely: *kassi* (sand sea cucumber), *batoe* (black stone sea cucumber), and *koro* (white stone sea cucumber). The second tier, called *pandang* by Makassarese or *talipang* by Sama people, usually consisted of *pandang* (spiky sea cucumber), *loeleng* (black sea cucumber), *kassoet* (flat sea cucumber), and *boeang koeliet* (skinned sea cucumber). The third tier, called *gama* by both the Makassarese and the Sama, consisted of less valuable types from *gama batti* (spotted slimy sea cucumber) till *mossee* (burying sea cucumber), but it excluded the last two types, *kawasa* (yellowish legume sea cucumber) and *katjang goreng* (roasted peanut sea cucumber), whose value was too little to count.¹⁶⁸ In the early 1830s, the purchase prices of these three categories from the nomadic Sama were normally as follows

<i>Batoe / balla sekali</i>	25 Spanish dollars per picul ¹⁶⁹
<i>Pandang / talipang</i>	15
<i>Gama</i>	10

Table 4.3 Three categories of sea cucumbers in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago.

Source: Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 174-175.

These three categories provide a key to deciphering the order of the sea cucumbers and to understanding the rise of tropical sea cucumbers in Chinese cuisine. To begin with, the least-valued *gama* category points to a sea cucumber culture indigenous to Southeast Asia. *Gamat* is originally a Malay term, generically referring to all sea cucumbers.¹⁷⁰ Yet, in Makassarese, *gama*’ acquires a specific meaning referring to “strings or threads of slime”,¹⁷¹ and *taripang gama*’ specifically refers to a slimy

¹⁶⁶ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 148-149.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 149, 178-179.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 174-175.

¹⁶⁹ Reals of 24 silver *dubbeltjes*.

¹⁷⁰ Akamine, “The Role of Samas/Bajaus,” 155-156; Hairul and Khan, *Kamus Lengkap*, 268; Burkill, *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of the Malay Peninsula*, 1200.

¹⁷¹ Matthes, *Makassaarsch-Hollandsch woordenboek*, 72.

variety of sea cucumber that “secretes strings of slime in excretion”.¹⁷² This meaning likely stems from an everyday observation that the primary function of sea cucumbers in Malay medicine is for making liquid medicines, known as *gamat* water (Malay: *air gamat*) (figure 4.4) or *gamat* oil (Malay: *minyak gamat*), as a remedy for a wide range of illness, such as “wound healing, treatment of stomach ulcers and as a painkiller”.¹⁷³ The most commonly used species for making these liquid medicines are *Stichopus berrmanni* (curry fish) and *Stichopus horrens* (warty sea cucumber), whose body can excrete slimy fluid.¹⁷⁴ Given the close contact between the Malay and the Makassarese people since the sixteenth century,¹⁷⁵ it is possible that the former’s practice of using slimy sea cucumbers for making liquid medicines might have given the latter an impression that the sea cucumbers (*gamat*) used by the Malay people are slimy. As a result, they borrowed the Malay term, *gamat*, specifically for slimy sea cucumbers.

¹⁷² Cense, *Makassaars-Nederlands woordenboek*, 786.

¹⁷³ Choo, “Fisheries, Trade and Utilization of Sea Cucumbers in Malaysia,” 58-59.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 57; Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers of the World*, 102-105.

¹⁷⁵ After the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese (1511), dispersed Malays moved throughout the Indonesian Archipelago. Since at least the late sixteenth century, a Malay community had been established in Makassar. Cummings, “The Melaka Malay Diaspora in Makassar”; Amir and Hussin, *Pedagang Melayu di Sulawesi Selatan*.



Figure 4.4 A bottle of *gamat* water from Malaysia. The yellowish sea cucumbers depicted on the package represent the typical *gamat* sea cucumbers.

Source: <https://shopee.com.my/Air-Gamat-Asli-MH-Saujana-i.41498664.1489826238>.

Why did these slimy sea cucumbers, originally for making traditional Malay medicines, become the least-valued category in Makassar's China trade? This question is related to Chinese perceptions of tropical sea cucumbers. Within this *gama* category, the two relatively valuable types were *gama batti*

(spotted slimy sea cucumber) and *gama* (slimy sea cucumber). Vosmaer provided details about *gama batti*. It was a sort of spotted sea cucumber, whose entire surface was covered with circular, faint-yellow or white spots. When dried, it had unregular deep furrows and unevenness. Its body was pale brown. It was considered as the best in the *gama* category and was also the only *gama* species from the relatively deep waters.¹⁷⁶ Hokkien Chinese traders in Makassar called this spotted slimy sea cucumber (*gama batti*) “*tsja-thang*”, and the slimy sea cucumbers (*gama*) “*tsja*”. While *thang* (斑? or 點?) is likely a character meaning “spot”, the shared syllable *tsja* is the Hokkien pronunciation of 赭 (*zhe* in Mandarin Chinese), referring to a clay pigment, ochre, whose colour ranges from yellow to deep orange or brown.¹⁷⁷ This is exactly the typical colour of the most important *gamat* species in Malay tradition, namely, *Stichopus horrens* (warty sea cucumber) and *Stichopus herrmanni* (curry fish) (Figure 4.4).¹⁷⁸ For their yellowish colour, these two species are also known as yellow jade sea cucumbers (*huang yu shen* 黃玉參) in the present-day sea cucumber market.¹⁷⁹

Several other types of sea cucumbers in the *gama* category also fall within this colour range. *Taaikongkong* (*tai kongkong*) in Makassarese means “dog dung” (*bondendrek*), apparently because of its unpleasant appearance.¹⁸⁰ Its Hokkien Chinese name *ba* (屎) refers to a similar thing, namely, excrement. In the present-day sea cucumber market, it is also made of *Stichopus herrmanni* or *Stichopus horrens*.¹⁸¹ *Koenngie* means yellow in Makassarese, known as made of *Holothuria fuscopunctata* (elephant trunkfish).¹⁸² According to Vosmaer, *Koenngie* was the largest sort of sea cucumbers in Makassar,

¹⁷⁶ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 171.

¹⁷⁷ Schlegel, *Nederlandsch-Chineesch woordenboek met de transcriptie der Chineesche karakters in het Tsiang-tsin dialect*, 716.

¹⁷⁸ Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers*, 102-105.

¹⁷⁹ Akamine, *Namako o aruku*, 245.

¹⁸⁰ Cense, *Makassaars-Nederlands woordenboek*, 787.

¹⁸¹ Tuwo, “Status of sea cucumber fisheries and farming in Indonesia,” 51; Akamine, *Namako o aruku*, 236, 310.

¹⁸² Cense, *Makassaars-Nederlands woordenboek*, 786; Tuwo, “Status of sea cucumber fisheries and farming in Indonesia,” 51.

sometimes reaching one foot long in its dried form.¹⁸³ Because of its large size, it was also the only type of low-value *gama* sea cucumbers that demanded cutting open before being dried. It, however, had a very low market value because its skin was too thick, but its edible part was very meagre and not delicious. The Chinese called them *jōe-poeë* (橘皮), namely, orange peel.¹⁸⁴ *Donga* is derived from a Malay term, *dongak*, which means “tilted upwards as of the end of an object”.¹⁸⁵ In Makassarese, it refers to a type of sea cucumbers “with a little bent snout”.¹⁸⁶ J. C. Koningsberger’s 1902-1903 sea cucumber survey shows that it corresponded to *Holothuria graeffii* (*Pearsonothuria graeffii*).¹⁸⁷ Its colour is “cream to tan with numerous large brown patches and with fine dark speckling”.¹⁸⁸

A shared feature of these colourful *gama* sea cucumbers is that they were all relatively easily accessible to Southeast Asian littoral society but fell outside the Chinese conceptualisation of the perfect sea cucumbers. According to Vosmaer, besides the spotted slimy sea cucumbers, all other *gama* sea cucumbers were from “shallow grounds” (*ondiepe gronden*).¹⁸⁹ They could be garnered by coastal populations, especially children and women, during a low ebb. Meanwhile, they were very alien to the taste of Chinese elite consumers, who initially only preferred black and spiky Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers from the temperate waters of Northeast Asia. All the above mentioned *gama* sea cucumbers are neither black, nor spiky, nor from temperate waters. Eighteenth-century Chinese medical practitioners explicitly depreciated them. For instance, a mid-eighteenth-century Chinese medical treatise, *Mirror of a Hundred Herbs* (*Baicao jing* 百草鏡), notes that yellow sea cucumbers were from the

¹⁸³ Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers*, 56; Tuwo, “Status of sea cucumber fisheries and farming in Indonesia,” 51; Akamine, *Namako o aruku*, 310.

¹⁸⁴ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 171-172.

¹⁸⁵ Hairul and Khan, *Kamus Lengkap*, 232.

¹⁸⁶ Cense, *Makassaars-Nederlands woordenboek*, 786.

¹⁸⁷ Koningsberger, *Tripang en tripangvisserij*, 47.

¹⁸⁸ Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers*, 38.

¹⁸⁹ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 171.

muddy tideland of the South Sea. They were large and spike-less. Their meat was tough and not delicious. They possessed no such medical functions as the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers.¹⁹⁰

For Southeast Asian literal society, one strategy for countering these prejudices was to search for tropical species that resembled the idealised model of temperate sea cucumbers. In the *gama* category, there was a sort of sea cucumber called Japan (*jepoen* 日本 in Hokkien Chinese and *japan* in Dutch). The so-called Japan sea cucumbers are a type of greenish, squarish, and spiky tropical sea cucumber, namely, *Stichopus chloronotus* (greenfish).¹⁹¹ It is observed by the researcher of sea cucumber culture, Akamine, that, in the present-day sea cucumber market, the Japan sea cucumbers are known as green spiky sea cucumbers (*lii cishen* 綠刺參). After proper processing, its dried form closely resembles Japanese black and spiky sea cucumbers.¹⁹² Akamine has made an insightful suggestion that the fact that a type of commercially traded sea cucumber in early nineteenth-century Makassar was named after Japan, implies that there was communication between the northern and southern traditions in the early modern period.¹⁹³

Who made that communication possible? In Chinese maritime history, it is well-known that these two worlds were connected by a cross-China Seas junk trading network. Makassarese sea cucumbers, as mentioned in the previous section, were first shipped to Amoy, and then redistributed via a Chinese coastal trading network. An important port city in this coastal network was Zhapu (near Hangzhou), which was the centre of Sino-Japan trade in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁹⁴ Via Amoy and Zhapu, information could be circulated between Japan and Makassar. This

¹⁹⁰ This work was compiled by the younger brother of Zhao Xuemin and cited in Zhao, *Bencao gangmu shiyi*, *juan* 10:37.

¹⁹¹ Koningsberger, *Tripang en tripangvisserij*, 42.

¹⁹² Akamine, *Namako o aruku*, 149-151.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 307-315.

¹⁹⁴ Ng, *Trade and Society*, 151-152; Liu, “Qingdai de Zhapu gang yu Zhong-Ri maoyi”, 187-244; Jiao, “Kuaguo maoyi yu defang shehui.”

link may also help explain why the greenish spiky sea cucumber from Makassar was named after Japan instead of Liaodong/Manchuria. Different from the domestically traded Liao/Manchu sea cucumber, both Japan and Makassar sea cucumbers were imported from overseas. Before entering the Chinese consumer market, they had a good chance to be mixed at a trading port along the China coast, such as Zhapu or Amoy.

Yet the price of these tropical “Japan” sea cucumbers was low. In 1789, it was sold at 12 Spanish dollars per picul in Makassar, lower than slimy sea cucumbers (*gama*, 17 Spanish dollars) and foul sea cucumbers (*taaikongkong*, 15) but higher than yellow sea cucumbers (*koine*, 11) and bent sea cucumbers (*longe* or *donga*, 9), merely achieving a medium price in the *gama* category (Table 4.7).¹⁹⁵ Such a low price, on one hand, might be caused by its easy accessibility in Southeast Asia. Like many other *gama* sea cucumbers, it is a shallow-water species, with a habitat “in shallow waters from the intertidal to depths of 10 m,” and can be gleaned by hand at low tide.¹⁹⁶ On the other hand, we must also acknowledge that although its shape resembles the black and spiky sea cucumbers from Japan, a seasoned trader can easily tell the difference. Its body is relatively squarish, its pricks are strictly aligned in four rows (instead of irregularly covering the entire dorsal surface), and its colour is greenish black (instead of greyish or brownish black). We shall bear in mind that the sea cucumber market in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century China had attained considerable sophistication so that even the authentic Japanese sea cucumbers were carefully classified into over ten grades in accordance with some subtle differences.¹⁹⁷ By the end of the eighteenth century, their export price in Nagasaki ranged from 0.09 tael per catty (ca. 15.43 Spanish dollars per picul) to 0.406 tael per catty (ca. 69.6 Spanish dollars per

¹⁹⁵ NA, VOC 3858, “Bijlaagen gehoorende tot de resolutien beginnende met den 1 Maij anno 1789...N. 3,” fols. 5-7.

¹⁹⁶ Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers*, 100-101.

¹⁹⁷ *Huizhou minjian zhenxi wenxian*, vol. 15, 296.

picul).¹⁹⁸ In such a professional market, the “fake” Japanese sea cucumbers from Makassar might be used to adulterate a lower grade of Japanese sea cucumbers but could be easily exposed if being mixed with higher grades.

A better strategy was to find a tropical species that was no less spiky and black. This leads us to the second category, *pandang*. This category is named after its most valuable sort, *pandang*, which in Makassarese means the spiky fruit of pandanus (*pandan*). Its Malay name is *nanas*, meaning “pineapple”, and its Hokkien Chinese name is *tyjie* (刺), meaning pricks. It corresponds to a large deep-water species, *Thelenota ananas* (spiky sea cucumbers), whose habitat is “reef slopes and passes, hard bottoms with large coral rubble and coral patches in waters between 1 and 25 m”.¹⁹⁹ Vosmaer noted that a well prepared *pandang* sea cucumber was black, large (between 0.5 to 0.75 foot long), and densely covered by pricks (Figure 4.5).²⁰⁰ These features made it a good rival for the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers. In 1789, it was sold at 23 Spanish dollars per picul in Makassar, almost twice as much as the Makassarese Japan sea cucumbers (12), and already above the price of the lowest grade of Japanese sea cucumbers in Nagasaki (15.43).²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Arai, *Kinsei kaisanbutsu bōekishi*, 47.

¹⁹⁹ Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers*, 116; Koningsberger, *Tripang en tripangvisserij*, 41

²⁰⁰ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 167.

²⁰¹ NA, VOC 3858, “Bijlaagen gehorende tot de resolutien beginnende met den 1 Maij anno 1789...N. 3,” fols. 5-7; Arai, *Kinsei kaisanbutsu bōekishi*, 47.



Figure 4.5 Spiky sea cucumber (*Tripang pandang*, *Thelenota ananas*).

Source: Photo by the author in Makassar, 2020.

Moreover, Vosmaer also noted that the Sama had a different term for the *pandang* category, namely, *talipang*.²⁰² It points to the root of a very commonly used word for sea cucumbers borrowed in English as trepang. Akamine has made an innovative study of the root of trepang. He points out that sea cucumbers are generally known as *gamat* in the Malay Peninsula, as *balat* in the Philippines and among the Sama, and as trepang in the Indonesian Archipelago.²⁰³ The last term spread globally after being appropriated by English as trepang and by Dutch as *tripang* around the late eighteenth century. However, as the root of trepang, *talipang* originally refers to something very different. It means centipedes in Sama languages. Likely for their similar appearance, the Sama refer to the spiky *pandang* sea cucumber as *bat lalipan*, *bat talipan*, or *balaq talipang*. As *bat* (*balaq*) is a generic term for sea cucumbers in the Sama language and *lalipan* (*talipan* or *talipang*) means centipedes, these terms in Sama languages

²⁰² Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 174.

²⁰³ Akamine, “The Role of Samas/Bajaus,” 155-156.

literally mean “centipede sea cucumber”. In the Indonesian Archipelago, these terms interestingly evolved into *trepang* referring to sea cucumbers generically, instead of centipede sea cucumbers only.²⁰⁴

The challenge, as Akamine acknowledges, is how to historicise this semantic shift. Searching Dutch sources, I find that this term first appears in the earliest evidence concerning the trade of sea cucumbers in Makassar. One is a report dated 17 January 1695 first identified by David Henley in his study of North Sulawesi. The report was written by a VOC official in Toli-toli (Totoli), an important bay in northern Sulawesi, about some sea cucumber fishers coming from Makassar. It shows that “with proper passes” issued by the Dutch authority in Makassar, the fishers came to the north coast of Sulawesi to collect “*tripan*”. According to these fishers, their “*tripan*” could be sold for 3 rijksdaalders per picul in Makassar, 7 rijksdaalders in Batavia, and 30 rijksdaalders if brought to China. By then, they had already collected 60 piculs and were planning to sail further to Manado on Northeast Sulawesi.²⁰⁵ Another report, first identified by Lance Nolde in his study of Sama’s sea cucumber fishery, is also dated 1695 (18 October 1695). It shows that the Chinese Captain in Makassar, who, as aforementioned, was Wang Yue (Ongwatko), had a contract with the king of Buton, a local regime in Southeast Sulawesi, to let the latter’s people search their beaches (*stranden*) for sea cucumbers (*taripan*), which were described in the Dutch report as “a type of jellyfish” (*een soort van quallen*), for 4 rijksdaalders per picul. It also shows that these people in Buton had already collected 156 piculs, but for unknown reasons, the Chinese Captain declined to pay.²⁰⁶

These records indicate that by 1695 a sea cucumber economy had been emerging in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago with Makassar as its centre. The Chinese community in Makassar was now searching for sea cucumbers around the island of Sulawesi, already as north as Toli-toli and as

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 157-159.

²⁰⁵ NA, VOC 1579, Ternate, fols. 171-172; Henley, *Fertility, Food and Fever*, 71, note 71.

²⁰⁶ Nolde, “Changing Tides,” 157; NA. VOC 7969, Makassar, fol. 207.

southeast as Buton (Map 4.3). They mobilised the local people to collect sea cucumbers, who seemingly had already learned how to properly cure them for Chinese consumers. Some local fishers, such as those visiting Toli-toli, were even aware how the long-distance trade was organised and the huge price gap between Makassar and China. It is also interesting to note that the Dutch officials in Makassar tolerated these activities and even issued passes for these sea cucumber fishers to sail deeply to the patrolled waters around the Spice Islands.

While commercially traded sea cucumbers, known as *tripan* or *taripan*, were emerging in Makassar, in their consumer market, China, tropical sea cucumbers were facing prejudices. In the second half of the seventeenth century, there were popular rumours in China claiming tropical sea cucumbers from overseas as made of either cowhide or skin of big fish. Zhou Lianggong's 1660s account suggests that sea cucumbers from Fujian were white and were stretched by bamboo sticks to as large as human hand palm, and claimed that "people of the sea even artificially make them with cowhide to fool others" (海上人復有以牛革偽為之，以愚人者).²⁰⁷ Nie Huang's 1698 fish album also described tropical sea cucumbers as white and as stretched by bamboo sticks for drying. It further noted that "in recent years there are a lot of white sea cucumbers. They are all artificially made by foreigners with skin of big fish" (近年白海參之多，皆係番人以大魚皮偽造).²⁰⁸

These rumours can be interestingly linked to a Southeast Asian term for sea cucumbers, *balat* or *balag*. There is evidence that *balat* was used to refer to sea cucumbers in the early modern Philippines.²⁰⁹ To this day the Sama people in the southern Philippines and eastern Indonesia still refer to sea cucumbers as *bat* or *balag*.²¹⁰ As Akamine shows, these terms, including *balat*, *bat*, and *balag*, originally

²⁰⁷ Zhou, *Min xiaoji*, *juan* 2:11b, p. 92.

²⁰⁸ Nie, *Haicuo tu*, *juan* 2, 186-187.

²⁰⁹ Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, vol. 21, 308.

²¹⁰ Akamine, "The Role of Samas/Bajaus," 155; Verheijen, *The Sama/Bajau Language in the Lesser Sunda Islands*, 64-65.

mean skin or shell.²¹¹ For instance, in modern Tagalog, *balát* still means “bark of a tree; skin; peelings; leather”.²¹² The linguistic link between skin/leather and sea cucumbers reminds us of these late seventeenth century Chinese accounts, which indicate that a common practice to cure large tropical sea cucumbers was to cut the body open, stretch it with bamboo sticks, and then dry it in the sun.²¹³ This process, as we can imagine, resembles the process of tanning leather or treating fish skin. The resemblance between these two processes as well as their final products might lead to a linguistic link between skin/leather and sea cucumbers, which was accountable for the rise of the cowhide and fish skin rumours in late seventeenth-century China.

Facing these embarrassing rumours, sea cucumber collectors and traders in Southeast Asia might have some incentives to cut down the linguistic link by using a substitute term for *balat/balaq*. In late seventeenth-century Makassar, the emergence of *tripan* or *taripan* either as a generic term for sea cucumbers or as a specific term for spiky sea cucumbers likely served such a purpose. Makassar is, interestingly, situated between two Southeast Asian sea cucumber cultures. To its west, sea cucumbers are known by the Malay as *gamat*, mainly for making liquid medicines. To its north, sea cucumbers are known by the indigenous communities of the Philippines as well as the Sama as *balat*, implying their leather-like cured form. Makassarese, however, did not have an indigenous term for sea cucumbers. *Balat* had never been borrowed, and *gamat* was adapted only for slimy sea cucumbers. Back to the late seventeenth century, when the sea cucumber fishery was just emerging amid the economic reorientation of Makassar in the wake of the disastrous Spice Wars, there was likely an urgency to find a proper name to rebrand the stigmatised tropical sea cucumbers for the China trade.

²¹¹ Akamine, “The Role of Samas/Bajaus,” 155.

²¹² Ramos, *Tagalog Dictionary*, 30.

²¹³ Zhou, *Min xiaoji*, *juan* 2:11b; Nie, *Haicuo tu*, *juan* 2, 186-187.

Against this backdrop, the emergence of *tripan* or *taripan*, whose root was centipede or centipede sea cucumbers, in late seventeenth-century Makassar likely served two purposes: 1). It helped destabilise the north-south dichotomy by indicating spiky sea cucumbers (centipede sea cucumbers) could be also from tropical waters.²¹⁴ 2). The materiality of the spiky sea cucumbers it originally referred to further helped shed off the cowhide or fish skin myth. Vosmaer noted that the way of processing the large spiky sea cucumbers (known as *pandang* by Makassarese and *talipang* by the Sama in early nineteenth-century Sulawesi) was distinct from other large tropical sea cucumbers. They had to be moderately dried, lest their surface became too dry and fragile, and lest their precious pricks broke away.²¹⁵ They also demanded no cutting openlikely because of their elongated shape and fragile pricks.²¹⁶ All these distinctive features made their cured form unlikely to be mistaken for cowhide or fish skin. After all, neither cowhide nor fish skin has a spiky surface.

Reviewing the nomenclatures of different types of tropical sea cucumbers in Makassar, I think that of the three-tiered categories, the least valued *gama* category represented an undervalued Southeast Asian sea cucumber culture, which favoured slimy and yellowish sea cucumbers for making the liquid Malay *gamat* medicines, but they failed to meet the established criteria of perfect sea cucumbers in China, which instead favoured the black and spiky Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers. The second tier, namely, the *pandang* or *talipang* sea cucumbers, bears witness to interactions between the northern and southern worlds. It shows a local initiative from the fishing and trading communities in Southeast Asia to emulate the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers by collecting black and spiky sea cucumbers from tropical waters. In both cases, the southern world of sea cucumbers was in the shadow of the dominance of

²¹⁴ Akamine, "The Role of Samas/Bajaus," 160.

²¹⁵ Vosmaer, "Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes," 167.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 166-167.

the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers, as it had to follow the standard established by the latter. However, for the top tier, the *batoe* category, the situation would become dramatically different.

4. Beyond the Liao/Manchu Dominance

The rise of the sea cucumbers in the *batoe* category was a process through which the southern world of sea cucumbers proposed its own high-value varieties that were able to challenge the dominance of the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers. For understanding that process, I need to first introduce the change of the price of sea cucumbers in Makassar throughout the eighteenth century.

In the early stage, the price of sea cucumbers was very low in Makassar. As mentioned in the previous section, the 1695 report from Toli-toli indicates that these sea cucumbers, if “well dried and cooked”, were only sold for three rijksdaalders per picul in Makassar, merely one tenth of their expected price in China. The situation did not improve much till 1730, when the Makassar Harbourmaster register showed that there were four types of sea cucumbers (*taripang*) traded in Makassar, namely: white (*wit*), spiky (*padang* or *doeri*), stone (*steen*), and black (*swarte*) (Table 4.4).²¹⁷ Their price was as follows:

Type	Price (rijksdaalders per picul)
Black sea cucumber	6
Stone sea cucumber	4
Spiky sea cucumber	3
White sea cucumber	2

Table 4.4 Price of sea cucumbers in Makassar (1730).

Source: NA, VOC 2163, fols. 132-139; Sutherland, “Trepang and Wangkang,” 465.

²¹⁷ NA, VOC 2163, fols. 132-139.

Chapter 4

The overall low price notwithstanding, distinctions had emerged.²¹⁸ Whereas white sea cucumbers received the lowest price, spiky sea cucumbers fared slightly better and stone and black sea cucumbers were the most expensive. This pattern likely represents an early stage of market differentiation when traders attempted to exploit the diversity of tropical sea cucumbers for trade to China. This attempt would soon bear fruit. The 1740 data (Table 4.5) shows that while the price of white sea cucumbers remained sluggish, the price of stone and black sea cucumbers had taken off. It is worth noting that above black sea cucumbers, sand sea cucumbers (*passir*) had emerged as the most valuable sort. Meanwhile, slimy *gama* sea cucumbers for the first time appeared and were rendered as the least valuable variety.

Type	Price (rijksdaalders per picul)
Sand sea cucumbers (<i>passir</i>)	32
Large black sea cucumbers	27
Small black sea cucumbers	21
Stone sea cucumbers	15.25
White sea cucumbers	5
Slimy sea cucumbers (<i>gama</i>)	4

Table 4.5 Price of sea cucumbers in Makassar (1740).

Source: Sutherland, “Trepang and Wangkang,” 465.

We shall also bear in mind that before 1746, junks from China were not allowed by the VOC to visit Makassar. The trade depended on transshipment via Batavia, which apparently gave rise to extra costs. It is remarkable that, even without direct access to the Chinese consumer market, the sand, black, and stone sea cucumbers had already been sold at high prices. This change indicates that demand for these non-spiky tropical sea cucumbers in China had been growing. Thereafter, the visit of a junk from

²¹⁸ As a comparison, the register shows that the price of edible bird’s nests was 80 rijksdaalders per picul and tortoise shell was also about 80. NA, VOC 2163, fols. 132-139.

A World of Sea Cucumbers

Amoy in 1746 opened a new era in Makassar's China trade.²¹⁹ Benefiting from the lowered shipping cost, the price of sea cucumbers in Makassar would increase further. In 1754, the price of sand and black sea cucumbers had reached 46.25 and 32 rijksdaalders respectively, and the price of spiky sea cucumbers had also climbed to 17.5 rijksdaalders.

Type	Price (rijksdaalders per picul)	Volume (piculs)
Sand sea cucumbers (<i>sant</i>)	46.25	19.83
Black sea cucumbers (<i>swaarte</i>)	32	40.96
Unspecified sea cucumbers	27.5	247.3
<i>Sangolo</i> sea cucumbers	23	164.05
Spiky sea cucumbers (<i>padang</i>)	17.5	67.8
Slimy sea cucumbers (<i>gama</i>)	8.5	149.47
Yellow sea cucumbers (<i>geel</i>)	8.125	50.92
Overall		740.33 piculs

Table 4.6 Price of sea cucumbers in Makassar (1754).

Source: NA, VOC 2859, fol. 192.

The volume of the Makassar-Amoy sea cucumber trade expanded enormously in the second half of the eighteenth century. Whereas the junk of 1754 merely purchased 740.33 piculs of sea cucumbers from Makassar, in the 1780s, a junk would typically carry about 6,000 piculs.²²⁰ While the trade volume grew, strong demand in China for tropical sea cucumbers was still pushing up the price. In 1789, the top two varieties, namely, sand and stone sea cucumbers, were sold for 63.5 and 45 Spanish dollars per picul, already above the average price of temperate sea cucumbers in contemporary Nagasaki, which ranged roughly from 15.43 to 69.6 Spanish dollars per picul (Table 4.7).²²¹ Given the longer distance and higher shipping cost of the Makassar trade, we may assume these top tropical sea

²¹⁹ Knaap and Sutherland, *Monsoon Traders*, 145. Before 1769, this direct trade was at times prohibited. Thereafter, it became regular.

²²⁰ Knaap and Sutherland, *Monsoon Traders*, 102.

²²¹ Arai, *Kinsei kaisanbutsu bōekishi*, 47.

Chapter 4

cucumbers from Makassar were sold at a higher price in the Chinese consumer market than temperate sea cucumbers from Japan.

Type	Price (rijksdaalders per picul)
Sand sea cucumber (<i>passer</i>)	63.5
Stone sea cucumber (<i>batoe</i>)	45
Black sea cucumber (<i>zwarte</i>)	41
Stone sea cucumber (middle size) (<i>batoe tenga</i>)	26
Spiky sea cucumber (<i>pandang</i>)	23
Slimy sea cucumber (<i>gama</i>)	17
Stone sea cucumber (small size) (<i>batoe kijjel</i>)	17
Foul sea cucumber (<i>taaikongkong</i>)	15
Marege (first sort)	13
Marege (second sort)	12.5
Japan sea cucumber (<i>Japong</i>)	12
Yellow sea cucumber (<i>konie</i>)	11
Black sea cucumber (small size) (<i>itang kijjel</i>)	11
Burying sea cucumber (<i>mose</i>)	9
Bent sea cucumber (<i>longe</i>) ²²²	9

Table 4.7 Price of sea cucumbers in Makassar (1789).

Source: NA, VOC 3858, “Bijlaagen gehoorende tot de resolutien beginnende met den 1 Maij anno 1789...N. 3,” fols. 5-7.

How did the southern world of sea cucumbers turn the order around? From these price lists, we may find that the most valued types in eighteenth-century Makassar were not the spiky (*pandang*), but the sand, stone, and black varieties. Among them, the so-called black sea cucumbers were not made of a single species. Among commercially traded tropical sea cucumbers, a number of species from the *Actinopyga* genus are black. They include *Actinopyga miliaris* (blackfish or hairy blackfish), *Actinopyga paleuensis* (deep-water blackfish), and *Actinopyga spinea* (burying blackfish).²²³ Besides that, some reddish

²²² *Longe* (*long* in Malay) has a similar meaning as *dongak* (*donga*), namely, curve or bend. Hairul and Khan, *Kamus Lengkap*, 638.

²²³ Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers*, 20-25.

species in this genus, such as *Actinopyga echinites* (“deep-water”²²⁴ redfish) and *Actinopyga lecanora* (stonefish), are also traded as “black” sea cucumbers after being properly cured.²²⁵

Even the top-priced sand (*passir*) sea cucumbers were by their nature also a type of black sea cucumber. Their dried form was elongated, round, large, black, and not cut open (Figure 4.6).²²⁶ Its surface was distinctively wrinkled, as reflected by its Hokkien Chinese name, *Soa-djao* (*shazhou* 沙縐), literally meaning “sand wrinkles”, or *ouw-soa-djao* (*wu shazhou* 烏沙縐), literally meaning “black sand wrinkles” (Table 4.1). It was also known by contemporary overseas Chinese as “black wrinkles” (*wuzhou* 烏縐).²²⁷

These features helped distinguish the sand sea cucumber from less-valued ordinary black sea cucumbers. Vosmaer pointed out that while their preparation was the same, the ordinary black sea cucumbers had a flat and relatively brown belly, and the two ends of their body, as well as some other parts, had some plain surfaces (*vlakken*). Their dried size, seldom larger than 4 Rijnland inches, was smaller than the sand sea cucumber, which sometimes reached half a Rijnland foot (6 inches) long. Moreover, if those ordinary black sea cucumbers had a very flat and quadrilateral shape and a regularly wrinkled surface, they would be classified as flat sea cucumbers, known as *kassoet* (shoe) in Makassarese and Malay, *biah* (xue 靴) or *ouw-biah* (*wuxue* 烏靴) in Hokkien Chinese, and *platte tripang* (flat sea cucumbers) in Dutch.²²⁸

Why did these distinctions matter? Contemporary Chinese sources shed light on their reception in China. Zhang Mu’s 1813 dietary guidance advises that large black sea cucumbers (*dawn* 大烏) that

²²⁴ It is in fact a shallow-water species, “mostly on flats (reefs and seagrass beds) down to 10 m depth”. Ibid, 14.

²²⁵ Akamine, *Namako o aruku*, 176-178, 184-186.

²²⁶ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 165.

²²⁷ Wang, *Haidao yizhi*, *juan* 4, 111.

²²⁸ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 167-168.

were as hard as wood or stone and weighed over half a catty were the best because their “meat is thick and their flavour is delicious” (肉厚味美). The spiky sea cucumber, which weighed two to three taels, were the second best because their “meat is not as thick as the large black, but their flavour is equal” (肉不及大烏之厚，味則相等). “Bottom-of-straw-slippers sea cucumbers” (*caoxie di* 草屨底), namely, the flat sea cucumbers, were ranked as the third because “their meat is meagre and they are tasteless” (肉薄無味).²²⁹

Therefore, the spiky surface, which was the typical feature of the conceptualised Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers, was no longer a determinant. What mattered was the gustatory feelings of being meaty and delicious. As we have introduced in the previous chapter, sea cucumbers, like other top delicacies, were mainly valued for the texture of their meat, which carried the delicately prepared broth and eventually determined whether it was delicious. By this standard, a large and meaty sea cucumber, like a sand sea cucumber, became highly valuable.

²²⁹ Zhang, *Tiaoji yinshi bian*, *juan* 6, 364.



Figure 4.6 A preserved black sea cucumber (likely a sand sea cucumber, *tripang pasir*) (18 x 8.5 cm, collected from Tobelo, Maluku, before 1883).

Source: Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, RV-370-2155.

Moreover, sand sea cucumbers were not ordinary large black sea cucumbers. There is interestingly a distinction between sand sea cucumbers and ordinary black sea cucumbers in Makassar. For instance, in 1740, sand sea cucumbers were sold at 32 rijksdaalders per picul and black sea cucumbers at 27 (large) and 21 (small).²³⁰ In 1754, sand sea cucumbers were sold at 46 rijksdaalders per picul, black sea cucumbers at 32.²³¹ In 1789, sand sea cucumbers were sold at 63.5 Spanish dollars per picul, black sea cucumbers at 41 Spanish dollars per picul and small black sea cucumbers at merely 11 Spanish dollars

²³⁰ Sutherland, "Trepang and Wangkang," 465.

²³¹ NA, VOC 2859, fol. 192.

per picul. By then, even the price of stone sea cucumbers had climbed to 45, standing above the black (Table 4.7).²³² By the early 1830s, while sand and stone sea cucumbers occupied the first category (*batoe*), the black together with flat sea cucumbers (shoe sea cucumbers), which, as mentioned above, were also black, had fallen into the second category (*pandang*), beneath spiky sea cucumbers.²³³

Therefore, sand sea cucumbers were distinguished from black sea cucumbers, even though among the latter there were large black sea cucumbers, but it seems that the sand was never confused with the black, including the large black. Instead, their price difference gradually increased. This divergence stemmed from ecological and social diversity in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago. Tropical black sea cucumbers, as we have mentioned, consisted of a number of species living in widely different habitats. For instance, *Actinopyga palauensis* (deep-water blackfish) is commonly “found on deeper hard reef surfaces and coarse sand with coral rubble”; *Actinopyga miliaris* (blackfish) is “distributed commonly between 0 and 10 m deep, on sandy beds and intertidal areas”; the so-called “deep-water redfish”, *Actinopyga echinites*, is in fact, a shallow-water species, living “in shallow waters, mostly on flats (reefs and seagrass beds) down to 10 m depth”.²³⁴

Among these varied habitats, the underwater environment of the most valued sand sea cucumbers was, like its namesake, sandy. Bik in 1824 noted that “where the sandbanks consist of more sand than mud, the sea cucumbers are typically the best and named *passir* (sand)”. He also pointed out that these sand sea cucumbers “appear many on Konding Aring (Kondingareng)”.²³⁵ Kondingareng, as discussed in section two, was a sandy coral islet immediately outside the port of Makassar, hosting a settled Sama community, who had managed to turn this small islet into a renowned sea cucumber

²³² NA, VOC 3858, “Bijlaagen gehoorende tot de resolutien beginnende met den 1 Maij anno 1789...N. 3,” fols. 5-7.

²³³ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 162, 168.

²³⁴ Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers*, 14-15, 20-23.

²³⁵ Bik, *Dagverhaal eener reis*, 69, note 2; 71. Translated from Dutch.

processing and trading centre. We may not assume that all sand sea cucumbers were collected by the Sama residents of Kondingareng on its surrounding sandy sea-bed, because there were many islets like such in the strait of Makassar. What is remarkable is that this settled Sama community had managed to create awareness of the distinction of their sand sea cucumbers from other black sea cucumbers, representing the best sea cucumbers in Makassar.

Meanwhile, the relative decline of black sea cucumbers indicates the problem of quality control among non-Sama sea cucumber collectors. Vosmaer noted that by the early 1830s, the trade of ordinary black sea cucumbers (*tripang loeleng*) had been suffering from adulteration. Black sea cucumbers, like sand sea cucumbers, were not cut open. Their guts were vomited by themselves or partly squeezed by collectors. Their belly therefore became a hollowed space, which could be filled with adulterants such as small and inedible sea cucumbers, or even sand and small stones. This practice, on one hand, unfairly increased their size and weight, and, on the other, induced decay. Vosmaer attributed this practice to the ignorance of quality control among coastal inhabitants.²³⁶

This problem leads to a social and ecological division between coastal inhabitants and Sama people in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago. These so-called coastal inhabitants, as discussed in section two, mostly collected low-value sea cucumbers from tideland. Their black sea cucumbers likely consisted mainly of shallow-water species from a muddy environment, which were disdained by the market which increasingly favoured sand sea cucumbers collected by the Sama on the sandy seabed. Such kind of distinction between coastal inhabitants and the Sama was not limited to black and sand sea cucumbers but spread to products belonging to the same variety. Vosmaer noted that even for the same type of sea cucumbers, those from the Sama typically received a price higher than those from coastal inhabitants.²³⁷ Given the professionalisation of the Sama in the sea cucumber economy as we

²³⁶ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 167-168.

²³⁷ Ibid, 179-180.

have seen in section two, we may consider that their expertise contributed their products' good reputation. In comparison, coastal inhabitants, such as the Alfurs, often had other occupations and were less likely to specialise in collecting and processing high-quality sea cucumbers. Their amateurism may well be the explanation for their sea cucumbers' poor reputation and lower price.

Different from black sea cucumbers, another type of high-value sea cucumber, namely, the stone sea cucumbers, was largely controlled by the Sama. They were all cut open during the preparation, leaving no space for adulterants. There were two types of stone sea cucumbers, namely, the black stone and the white stone, made of two deep-water species, *Holothuria nobilis* (black teat fish) and *Holothuria fuscogilva* (white teat fish).²³⁸ Their typical habitat was the terrain of the Sama, namely, coral reefs. This is reflected in the names of black stone sea cucumbers. They were known as *batoe* in Makassarese and Malay, literally meaning stone, with a connotation referring to reef stone. Their Hokkien Chinese name, *ounw-tsjo* (*wujiao* 烏礁), and their Dutch name, *zwarte klip tripang*, both mean black reef sea cucumbers.²³⁹

White stone sea cucumbers are named differently in Makassarese and Malay. Whereas the exact meaning of their Makassarese name, *koro*, is unclear, their Malay name, *soesoe*, means milk or breast.²⁴⁰ It refers to two rows of teat-like outgrowths on both sides of its body. Although black stone sea cucumbers (*batoe*) also have this feature, it seems only white stone sea cucumbers were called *soesoe*, perhaps because its white colour evokes a connotation of milk. Besides colour, the major difference between these two types of stone sea cucumbers is their size. In the early 1830s, while the largest sort of preserved black stone sea cucumbers was four to five Rijnland inches, preserved white stone sea

²³⁸ Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers*, 54-55, 70-71.

²³⁹ Vosmaer, "Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes," 165-166.

²⁴⁰ In Makassar, people also refer to a green and black fighting rooster as *djangang koro*, namely, *koro* rooster. It is however not sure what *koro* means. Cense, *Makassaars-Nederlands woordenboek*, 176.

cucumbers were much larger, sometimes as long as 0.75 Rijnland foot (nine Rijnland inches) and as heavy as half a catty.²⁴¹

An interesting observation is that the black colour, which was another distinctive feature of the conceptualised Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers, also became unessential. It was observed by the EIC officer, Thomas Forrest, in his 1773 visit to the Makassar Strait that some Sama people were fishing sea cucumbers on coral reefs. From them, he found that his previous perception of the black sea cucumbers (referred to as “black swallow” by Forrest) as the best was wrong.

The black swallow is reputed the best; but, I have seen some of a light colour, found only in deep water, which I was assured to be of more value in China than the black; and sold even for forty dollars a pecul. The pieces are much larger than are generally those of the black swallow, some of them weighing half a pound.²⁴²

These half-a-pound heavy, deep-water, “more valued in China than the black”, and light-colour sea cucumbers were, with little doubt, white stone sea cucumbers. The price Forrest recorded, namely, 40 Spanish dollars per picul, also accorded with the price of large size stone sea cucumbers in Makassar in 1789 (45 Spanish dollars).²⁴³ Vosmaer also noted that the Chinese preferred fat and large stone sea cucumbers, and graded them in accordance with their size.²⁴⁴ The price list of 1789 also shows no distinction between black and white, but only three grades distinguished by size, namely: the large size stone at 45 Spanish dollars, the middle size stone at 26 Spanish dollars, and the small size stone at 17 Spanish dollars (Table 4.7).²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 165-166.

²⁴² Forrest, *A Voyage to New Guinea and the Moluccas*, 373.

²⁴³ NA, VOC 3858, “Bijlaagen gehoorende tot de resolutien beginnende met den 1 Maij anno 1789...N. 3,” fols. 5-7.

²⁴⁴ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 165-166.

²⁴⁵ NA, VOC 3858, “Bijlaagen gehoorende tot de resolutien beginnende met den 1 Maij anno 1789...N. 3,” fols. 5-7.

During fieldwork in Makassar in early 2020, I also had a relevant experience to share. When I asked a marine product trader about the difference between *batoe* and *gama*, he opened a plastic bag of sea cucumbers, dispersed them on the floor, and told me to look at their size. The three large cut open sea cucumbers are white stone sea cucumbers, and all the rest, according to this trader, are *gama* (Figure 4.7). These stone sea cucumbers in the present-day Chinese sea cucumber market are also known as *zhuo shen* (豬婆參), literally meaning female pig sea cucumbers, because their large and fat body with teat-like protuberances looks like a sow with rows of teats ready to feed her piglets.



Figure 4.7 *Batoe* and *gama*.

Source: Photo by the author in Makassar, 2020.

The preparation of stone sea cucumbers demanded expertise. Vosmaer noted that the Sama called the *batoe* (stone) category, *balla sekali*. In the Sama language and Makassarese, *balla* (*bella*) means “cook” or “boil”; *sekali*, like in Malay, means “very much”.²⁴⁶ Together, this term indicates “cooked or boiled a lot”. As boiling was an essential step in preparing any sea cucumber and deserved no special mention, it was highlighted here because these stone (*batoe*) sea cucumbers demanded a lot of boiling and preparation. According to Vosmaer, the typical preparation of stone sea cucumbers (both black and

²⁴⁶ Verheijen, *The Sama/Bajau Language*, 67; Cense, *Makassaars-Nederlands woordenboek*, 56.

white) was to first half boil them, then cut their dorsum open longitudinally to remove their guts, and then fully boil them. Afterwards, they would be dried above a slow fire and in the sun. This chain of operations should be punctually organised and would last for days.²⁴⁷ They were rendered necessary because stone sea cucumbers for their large size would easily decay if their body was not thoroughly cured.²⁴⁸

Therefore, the three most valuable types, all belonging to the *batoe* category, namely: the sand, the black stone, and the white stone, were all large and mostly preferably collected by the Sama. The Sama's deep knowledge about the waters of the eastern Indonesian Archipelago helped them exploit the deep-water species such as the stone, and the species with a restrictive habitat such as the sand. Their expertise in preparing these large-size sea cucumbers helped their products secure a good reputation in the market. Their high value no longer rested on the superficial feature of being spiky and black. Instead, the large size and meaty texture became essential, as they mattered to the gustatory feeling of chewing a broth-infused sea cucumber. This subtle change indicates that throughout the eighteenth century, Chinese taste for sea cucumbers was evolving beyond the dominance of the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers, as these well-prepared and large-size tropical sea cucumbers were now appreciated for their own gustatory merits.

5. Against the Grain: The Rise of the *Marege* and the *Kayu Jawa*

Meanwhile, underneath these large and meaty *batoe* varieties, a more subtle change was taking place among previously disparaged tropical sea cucumbers, in association with the rise of deeply processed white sea cucumbers from northern Australia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. An interesting observation from Vosmaer's report is that in early nineteenth-century Makassar, the

²⁴⁷ Vosmaer, "Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes," 165-166.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 179-180.

Chapter 4

most deeply processed sea cucumbers were not from the *batoe* category, but two types of white sea cucumbers collected by some professional sea cucumber fishers, known as *trepangers*, based in Makassar from northern Australia.²⁴⁹ These Australian sea cucumbers fell outside the above mentioned three-tiered categories and were independently named after Makassarese names for two North Australian coasts, namely: Marege and Kayu Jawa, approximately corresponding to Arnhem Land and Kimberley.

Since the pathbreaking monograph by C. C. Macknight in 1976, the story of these *trepangers* from Makassar, who organised themselves for a yearly expedition to the north coast of Australia to catch and process a marine creature for the Chinese consumer market, has become well known.²⁵⁰ After that work, researchers in this field primarily focus on the interactions between *trepangers* and Australian aborigines and their cultural heritage.²⁵¹ However, there has yet to be a study to comprehensively examine the emergence of this industry with updated evidence concerning the change in Chinese taste for tropical sea cucumbers. As the final part of this dissertation, this section attempts to revisit the rise of *marege* and *kayu jawa* sea cucumbers from the perspective of the world of sea cucumbers.

To begin with, an interesting observation made by Macknight is that after making a strenuous voyage, those *trepangers* seemingly focused primarily on a low-value species. He noted: “There was a little very good trepang in the area visited by the Macassans, but their commercial success did not depend on it. Instead, they concentrated on transforming the abundant ‘chalk fish’ into trepang Marege’.”²⁵² Those sea cucumbers, known as “chalk fish” or “sand fish”, are a widespread tropical

²⁴⁹ Many of these *trepangers* were the Sama and Bugis. Fox, “Reefs and Shoals,” 136, note 7.

²⁵⁰ Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*.

²⁵¹ Fox, “Notes on the Southern Voyages and Settlements of the Sama-Bajau”; Macknight, “Macassans and the Aboriginal Past”; Chaloupka, “Praus in Marege”; Morwood and Hobbs, “The Asian Connection”; Macknight, “Harvesting the Memory”; idem, “The View from Marege”; idem, “Studying Trepangers.”

²⁵² Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*, 40.

species known as *Holothuria scabra*, whose body is coated in a layer of limy spicules.²⁵³ In the early nineteenth century, Vosmaer also noted that they were a sort of white sea cucumber growing in a relatively muddy environment with poor visibility. As a result, *trepangers* had to dive for catching them by hand, instead of piercing them with a sea cucumber plummet (*ladung*).²⁵⁴ These features help distinguish them from the above-mentioned white stone sea cucumbers, which lived on coral reefs and were caught by the Sama with their skilled plummet-technique.

Northern Australia was not the only source of white sea cucumbers. In early nineteenth-century Makassar, there were four types of (non-stone) white sea cucumbers, two from northern Australia and the other two from the eastern Indonesian Archipelago (Table 4.8). Among them, the least-valued sort was plainly called “white” (*kebo* in Makassarese, *poeti* in Malay, and *witte tripang* in Dutch). Its Hokkien Chinese name, *sau-pae* (瘦白), means “meagre white”, suggesting that it was a sort of very meagre white sea cucumber.²⁵⁵ Falling in the third *gama* category, it was ranked by Vosmaer under the Japan (*djapoen*) and above the yellow (*koenngie*).²⁵⁶ These white sea cucumbers were collected from the eastern Indonesian Archipelago. They received no special processing, besides ordinary boiling and drying, because their low value made them “worth no other handling”.²⁵⁷

	Makassarese	Hokkien Chinese	Main features	Origin
<i>kayu jawa</i>	<i>kai-djawa</i>	<i>lambai-pae</i> (南海白)	Relatively large; cut open, dyed, and possibly also skinned	Kimberley, Australia
skinned sea cucumbers	<i>boeang koeliet</i>	<i>thoet</i> (禿)	Relatively large, skinned	Indonesian Archipelago

²⁵³ Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*, 39-40, 54; Hornell, “The Indian *Beche-der-mer* Industry,” 140.

²⁵⁴ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 155, 159.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 168-169.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 162.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 169.

Chapter 4

<i>marege</i>	<i>marege</i>	<i>lambai</i> (南海)	Small size; cut open, dyed, and possibly also skinned	Arnhem Land, Australia
white sea cucumbers	<i>kebo</i>	<i>sau-pae</i> (瘦白)	Small size; merely boiled and dried	Indonesian Archipelago

Table 4.8 Four types of white sea cucumbers in early nineteenth-century Makassar.

The *marege* was also a relatively small-sized white sea cucumber, but it went through a process that was even more complicated than the highly-priced stone sea cucumbers. It was first boiled for a quarter of an hour and then cut open longitudinally on its dorsum. Thereafter, it would be boiled for another quarter. During the boil, bark from a locally abundant mangrove tree was added to dye its surface with a reddish colour. This dyeing material helped its preservation. After being well cooked, it would be dried once or twice for 24 hours above a gentle fire and then exposed to the sun for two or three days.²⁵⁸ Besides that, there is also evidence that it went through a skinning process through being buried in sand.²⁵⁹ Thanks to these careful preparations, in early nineteenth-century Makassar, it was sold at a price higher than all *gama* sea cucumbers.²⁶⁰

Immediately above the *marege* were skinned sea cucumbers (*boeang koeliet*), which already belonged in the *pandang* category. They were made of relatively large and fat white sea cucumbers collected from the waters of the eastern Indonesian Archipelago. Before being skinned, they were first cooked and buried in sand for about 24 hours.²⁶¹ Thereafter, their chalky skin could be easily removed, because the skin's chalky structure had been dissolved in the weakly acidic environment in the sand.²⁶² After skinning, they would be cooked again and then dried. A properly skinned sea cucumber was elongated, round, curved, and had circles of grooves on its surface. The length of its dried form

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 159-160; Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*, 48-56.

²⁵⁹ Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*, 53-54.

²⁶⁰ Vosmaer, "Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes," 162.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 169-170.

²⁶² Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*, 54.

sometimes reached half a Rijnland foot.²⁶³ There were also some white sea cucumbers only partially skinned, called *gossok* (*gosok* in Malay means “brush, rub, polish”), whose value was lower.²⁶⁴

The *kayu jawa* was the most valuable white sea cucumber. It was larger than the *marege* but cured in the same way. Like the *marege*, there is evidence that it was also skinned.²⁶⁵ In the early 1830s, its price was usually twice as much as the *marege*, reaching the level of the spiky sea cucumber.²⁶⁶ In the 1810s, it was sold in Makassar for 26 Spanish dollars per picul, above the *marege* (19) and the skinned (20), but lower than the large black, which was sold at 30 Spanish dollars (Table 4.9).²⁶⁷

How did these different types of white sea cucumbers emerge? Why did some of them go through such deep processing? To answer these questions, we need to understand how white sea cucumbers were received in their consumer market. Back to the early seventeenth century, when Liaodong-style sea cucumbers had become well-known in China, Chinese literati were unfamiliar with white sea cucumbers from tropical waters. For instance, Xie Zhaozhe, in his mid-1610s encyclopaedia, lamented that in his native place, Fujian, there were no marine products as precious as sea cucumbers, which he, as abovementioned, identified as a product of Liaodong.²⁶⁸ However, Fujian, as a coastal province in South China, in fact, had tropical species of sea cucumbers, which were simply ignored by Xie. Also in the 1610s, Xie’s contemporary, Li Rihua (1565-1635), had a chance to taste white sea cucumbers (*bai haishen* 白海參) in a friend’s home in the Lower Yangzi Region in 1612. This was likely the first time that Li had ever seen a white sea cucumber. Back at home, Li noted in his diary that it was such a “rare taste” (*qiwei* 奇味).²⁶⁹

²⁶³ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 169-170.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 170.

²⁶⁵ Matthes, *Makassaarsch-Hollandsch woordenboek*, 337.

²⁶⁶ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 178.

²⁶⁷ Crawford, *History of the Indian Archipelago*, vol. 3, 442-443.

²⁶⁸ Xie, *Wuzha zu*, juan 9, 258.

²⁶⁹ Li, *Weishuixuan riji*, juan 4, 233.

However, after this initial stage, distinctions emerged. From the mid-seventeenth century, Chinese elite consumers began to exclude white sea cucumbers from their conceptualisation of perfect sea cucumbers. In Zhou Lianggong's 1660s synthesis of black sea cucumbers from the North Sea with the medical theory of nourishing the kidneys, white sea cucumbers from tropical waters were proposed as a counterexample. As mentioned early, Zhou identified that sea cucumbers from Fujian were white and were stretched by bamboo sticks to as large as the palm of a human hand. He suggested that their natural features, such as white colour and southern origin, failed to meet the affinities with the kidneys, and hence they did not carry the same medical functions as black sea cucumbers from temperate waters. He even claimed that their "flavour is also thin and inferior" (味亦澹劣).²⁷⁰

Nie Huang, in his 1698 fish album, further essentialised these differences with an illustration (Figure 4.8). Nie demonstrated that different from the black and spiky sea cucumbers from Liaodong and Japan, there were "white sea cucumbers" (*bai haishen* 白海參) from Guangdong, whose habitat was sea mud (*haini* 海泥), whose dorsum was blue-green (*qing* 青), and whose belly was white. The prototype of Nie's conceptualised tropical sea cucumbers was therefore a type of white sea cucumber living in a muddy environment, likely the same as the species from which the *marege* and the *kayu jama* would be processed in a later stage, namely, *Holothuria scabra* (sandfish).²⁷¹ Yet, back in the late seventeenth century, the preparation of these white sea cucumbers was distinct from the *marege* and the *kayu jama*. As abovementioned, according to Nie, collectors cut their dorsum open, cured them with oyster shell ash, and stretched them with bamboo sticks for drying. Their dried size was like the palm of a human hand. This preserving technique introduced a dilemma: The shell ash served preservative but was accountable for a poor taste, as it influenced the texture of meat, making it like

²⁷⁰ Zhou, *Min xiaoji*, juan 2:11b.

²⁷¹ For the habitat and distribution of *Holothuria scabra*, see Purcell, Samyn, and Conand, *Commercially Important Sea Cucumbers*, 80-81.

cowhide, difficult to be tendered through boiling in broth, but without using shell ash, the sea cucumbers would quickly decay in a tropical environment.²⁷²

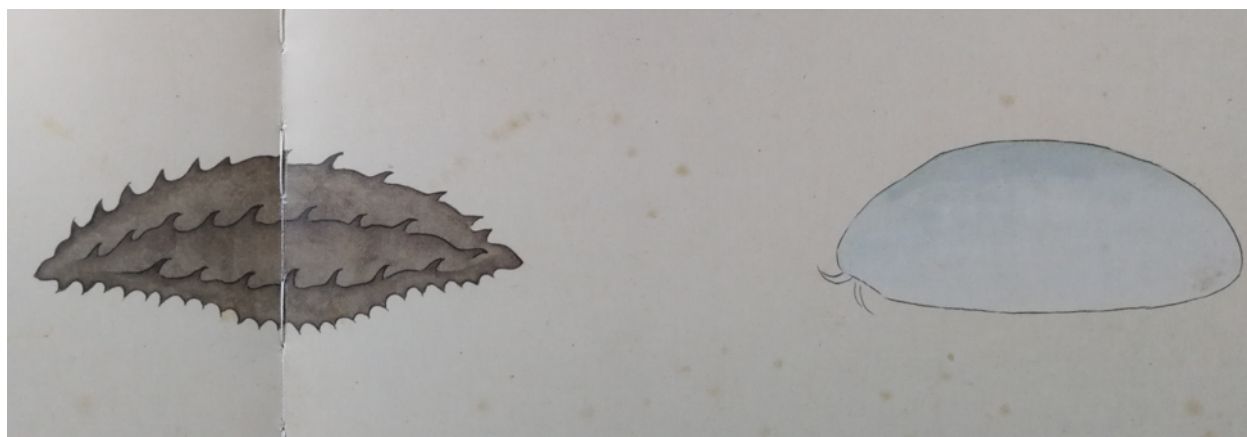


Figure 4.8 Temperate (black) and tropical (white) sea cucumbers in Nie Huang's fish album (1698).

Source: Nie, *Haicuo tu*, *juan* 2, pp. 186-187.

Following this dilemma, Nie evoked a cultural prejudice against the South. Nie noted that “the nature of things from the North is gathered within so that their flavour is all thick; the nature of things from the South of Guang is dispersed outwards so that their flavour is all thin” (北地之物性斂於內，諸味皆厚；廣南之物性散於外，諸味皆薄。).²⁷³ This north-south distinction originated from a medical conception concerning the human body, which claimed southerners' pores were loose, so that their vital force could easily be drained out from the body; northerners' pores were tight, so that their vital force could be safely stored inside the body.²⁷⁴ What is interesting here is that Nie extended this concept to a marine invertebrate, claiming sea cucumbers' body as well as their flavour was determined by the same environmental factors.

The emergence of these prejudices against tropical white sea cucumbers in the second half of the seventeenth century reminds us of the contemporarily popular rumours that claimed tropical white

²⁷² Nie, *Haicuo tu*, *juan* 2, 186-187.

²⁷³ Ibid, 187. South of Guang (Guangnan 廣南) referred to the sub-tropical and tropical areas to the south of the Nanling Range, namely, present-day Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan.

²⁷⁴ Hanson, “Northern Purgatives, Southern Restoratives.”

sea cucumbers as made of cowhide or fish skin, as discussed in section three. The outburst of these disparaging accounts during this period betrayed strong concerns among elite consumers about the emergence of tropical sea cucumbers in Chinese cuisine. These tropical sea cucumbers had begun to substitute temperate sea cucumbers and were destabilising the Chinese conceptualisation of the perfect sea cucumbers. Nie acknowledged that while the black and spiky temperate sea cucumbers tasted “tenderer and more delicious than white sea cucumbers” (柔軟可口，勝於白參), the latter still found a good market for their lower price. The problem, as Nie rightly identified, was that sea cucumbers were “recently demanded by banquets everywhere. As diners become numerous, their production range also expands” (邇來酒筵所需，到處皆是，食者既多，所產亦廣).²⁷⁵

Into the eighteenth century, cultural prejudices against white tropical sea cucumbers still lingered. A work quoted by Zhao Xuemin’s late eighteenth-century *materia medica* claimed that while the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers’ meat tasted sticky (*nuo* 糯), the white sea cucumbers tasted less sticky (*jing* 粳). Stickiness, as a chewy sense, was essential in Chinese judgement of taste.²⁷⁶ The description of the taste here was drawn from a staple food, rice. *Nuo*, which was used in this case for expressing the appreciable stickiness of the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers, is a term originally referring to the glutinous rice (*nuomi* 糯米). *Jing*, for the white sea cucumbers, originally refers to the less sticky Japonica rice (*jingmi* 粳米). In the case of sea cucumbers, stickiness carried more gustatory significance because sea cucumbers’ taste, as we have introduced in the previous chapter, depended on their capacity to carry the broth’s flavour, and, to no less extent, on the capacity of their meat to properly release the absorbed flavour during chewing.²⁷⁷ A sticky and chewy feeling, like the glutinous rice,

²⁷⁵ Nie, *Haicuo tu*, juan 2, 187.

²⁷⁶ A well-studied example is that stickiness influenced the price of rice in eighteenth century China. Cheung, “A Desire to Eat Well,” 91.

²⁷⁷ Akamine, *Namako o aruku*, 179-180.

helped the flavour be enjoyed more lastingly and substantially. Therefore, by essentialising their difference in stickiness, this account was undermining the legitimacy of the white sea cucumbers as a top sea delicacy.

As a result, as much as the black and spiky Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers were conceptualised as a perfect delicacy with both medical and culinary merits, the white and spike-less tropical sea cucumbers were conceptualised as a typical inferior variety, devoid of substantial medical and culinary values. With such a negative stereotype, it comes as no surprise that white sea cucumbers were initially undervalued in Makassar, sold for a mere two rijksdaalders per picul in 1730 and five rijksdaalders in 1740 (Tables 4 and 5).²⁷⁸ In 1754, they were even not purchased by the Amoy junk, perhaps because it was no longer worthwhile to transport such a low-value sort of sea cucumbers from such a distant place.²⁷⁹

However, in 1789, they re-appeared in the purchase list of the Amoy junk, with a new trade name, the *marege*.²⁸⁰ *Marege*, as introduced earlier, referred to the coast, presently known as Arnhem Land in northern Australia.²⁸¹ It originally referred to the aboriginal people who lived there and was later-on extended to the deeply processed white sea cucumbers from this region.²⁸² These sea cucumbers were, meanwhile, known by a different name among Hokkien Chinese traders in Makassar, *lambai* (南海), which literally means the South Sea.²⁸³ The “South Sea” here was apparently not the

²⁷⁸ NA, VOC 2163, fols. 132-139; Sutherland, “Trepang and Wangkang,” 465.

²⁷⁹ NA, VOC 2859, fol. 192.

²⁸⁰ NA, VOC 3858, “Bijlaagen gehoorende tot de resolutien beginnende met den 1 Maij anno 1789...N. 3,” fols. 5-7.

²⁸¹ For the geographical ranges of Marege and Kayu Jawa (Kaju Djawa), see Morwood and Hobbs, “The Asian Connection,” 197-198.

²⁸² Matthes, *Makassaarsch-Hollandsch woordenboek*, 255. For the different interpretations of this term, see Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*, 151, notes 32-33.

²⁸³ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 162.

South China Sea. It instead referred to the sea to the south of Makassar, implying that the Chinese in Makassar were aware that these sea cucumbers were from the south of the sea.

The emergence of this southern frontier of sea cucumbers is well documented in Dutch sources since the early eighteenth century.²⁸⁴ As early as the 1720s, the VOC's factory in Timor had noted that Sama fishers from Makassar were visiting the waters around Timor to collect sea cucumbers.²⁸⁵ Their activities raised the VOC's concerns over unauthorised private trade. The Company, therefore, introduced a new license system to regulate these southward sea cucumber collecting voyages.²⁸⁶ In 1754, the VOC found that the "Southland which is in the Southeast of Timor not far from thence, is made now and then from Timor and Makassar, but produces so far we know nothing but tripang, being dried jelly-fish, and wax".²⁸⁷ These voyages were an extension of the previous sea cucumber collecting around Timor and the Ashmore Reef (Pulau Pasir), situated halfway between Timor and Australia.²⁸⁸

The exact destination of these early voyages is an unsettled issue. Macknight suggests that the coast of Kimberley (Kayu Jawa), which was situated directly to the south of Timor, was first exploited in the mid-eighteenth century, and Kimberley (Marege), which was further away to the southeast of Timor, would be later exploited by *trepangers* from around the 1780s.²⁸⁹ However, I tend to believe that the order was more likely the opposite. As the following paragraphs will elaborate, the coast of Kimberley, albeit closer, was more difficult to reach, because the *trepangers* from Makassar usually sailed with the northwest monsoon, which would bring them to the southeast of Timor, corresponding to

²⁸⁴ Fox, "Notes on the Southern Voyages."

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 459-460.

²⁸⁶ NA, VOC 2100, "Van Macassar onder dato 17 Septb. 1728," fols. 64-73. Knaap and Sutherland, *Monsoon Traders*, 24.

²⁸⁷ Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*, 94-95; Robert, *The Dutch Explorations*, 147.

²⁸⁸ Fox, "Reefs and Shoals," 117-120.

²⁸⁹ Macknight, "Harvesting the Memory," 136-137.

Arnhem Land. Therefore, the abovementioned 1754 Dutch account also referred to the “Southland” as “in the Southeast of Timor”, instead of the South of Timor. Further, if we take the Hokkien Chinese names of their products into consideration, we may find that the term for the *marege* was *lambai* (南海), meaning “the South Sea”, and the term for the *kayu jawa* was *lambai-pae* (南海白), meaning “the white of the South Sea”. The latter was most likely derived from the former, indicating it was the *marege*, instead of the *kayu jawa*, that first became well-known in the sea cucumber market.

Although the north coast of Australia had been exploited by sea cucumber fishers from Makassar since at least the 1750s, we may not assume that they had by then already focused on the mass production of the deeply processed white sea cucumbers known as the *marege* and the *kayu jawa*. As mentioned earlier, on the shipping list of the 1754 Amoy junk, there were no white sea cucumbers, including *marege* and *kayu jawa*, at all (Table 4.6). The 1789 report refers to the *marege* only, and it also indicates that that trade had yet to prosper. On the one hand, the captain of the 1789 Amoy junk and the local traders of Makassar were still discussing how to divide the *marege* into different grades, indicating that there had yet to be a clear standard for that trade.²⁹⁰ On the other hand, the *marege*’s price was by then very low, merely, 13 Spanish dollars per picul for the first grade and 12.5 for the second grade, much lower than the slimy sea cucumbers (*gama*), which were sold for 17 Spanish dollars per picul (Table 4.7). The price of the *marege* in the preceding year (1788) was even lower: 13 Spanish dollars for the first grade, 12 for the second grade, and 11 for the third grade.²⁹¹ For both years, the *marege* were among the least valued sea cucumbers in Makassar. Such a low price indicates that these *marege* sea cucumbers were likely received in the Chinese consumer market merely as ordinary low-value white sea cucumbers.

²⁹⁰ NA, VOC 3858, “Bijlaagen gehoorende tot de resolutien beginnende met den 1 Maij anno 1789...N. 3,” fol. 7. They were classified into three grades in 1788 and only two grades in 1789.

²⁹¹ Idem, fols. 5-7.

Chapter 4

The situation changed dramatically around the turn of the century. By the 1810s, the other two types of deeply processed white sea cucumbers, namely, skinned sea cucumbers and *kayu jawa* sea cucumbers, had appeared. Together with the *marege*, they all fetched a good price. The *marege*'s price had climbed to 19 Spanish dollars per picul, already substantially higher than slimy sea cucumbers, which were then sold at a mere 12.5 Spanish dollars. The price of skinned sea cucumbers was slightly higher, at 20 Spanish dollars. The *kayu jawa* were apparently the most successful, sold at 26 Spanish dollars per picul. This price was already higher than spiky sea cucumbers (24) and was approaching large black sea cucumbers (30) (Table 4.9).

Type	Price (Spanish dollars per picul)
<i>Tacheritang</i> (Unknown sort)	68
Large stone sea cucumbers (<i>batu-basar</i>)	54
Large black sea cucumbers (<i>itam-basar</i>)	30
<i>Kayu jawa</i> (<i>kayu-jawa</i>)	26
Spiky sea cucumbers (<i>tundang</i>)	24
Middle-size stone sea cucumbers (<i>batu-tengah</i>)	22
Skinned sea cucumbers (<i>bankul</i>)	20
<i>Marege</i> (<i>märeje</i>)	19
Middle-size black sea cucumbers (<i>itam-tengah</i>)	15
Small stone sea cucumbers (<i>batu-kachil</i>)	14
Foul sea cucumbers (<i>taikongkong</i>)	13.5
Slimy sea cucumbers (<i>gama</i>)	12.5
Japan sea cucumbers (Japan)	12
Burying sea cucumbers (<i>mosi</i>)	9
Yellow sea cucumbers (<i>kunyit</i>)	9
Small black sea cucumbers (<i>itam-kachil</i>)	8
Bent sea cucumbers (<i>donga</i>)	7
Yellowish legume sea cucumber (<i>kawasa</i>)	5
Roasted-peanut sea cucumber (<i>pachang-goreng</i>)	5

Table 4.9 Price of sea cucumbers in Makassar (1810s).

Source: Crawford, *History of the Indian Archipelago*, vol. 3, 442-443.

The success of the *kayu jawa* was not without cost. For the early nineteenth-century *trepangers* based in Makassar, a voyage to the coast of Kimberley (Kayu Jawa) was adventurous. Albeit situated right to the south of Timor, Kimberley was difficult to reach, because a fronthaul from Makassar to North Australia normally took place during the north-west monsoon. While crossing the Timor Sea, a *trepanger* fleet, usually consisting of dozens of ships,²⁹² could be blown off-course by the monsoon to the east and end up on the coast of Arnhem Land (Marege). For those who managed to keep a due south course and reached the coast of Kimberley (Kayu Jawa), they would meet aboriginal people who were more hostile than the aborigines in Marege.²⁹³ In case the arrivals were not numerous enough to defend themselves, they would have to either leave Kayu Jawa and move to Marege or avoid landing and instead choose to process sea cucumbers on board.²⁹⁴ Vosmaer noted:

It is not rare that, when these vessels return to Makassar in the course of May, they also bring along news that some of the seafarers have died in a miserable way, by falling into the hand of the aborigines of Kayu Jawa, or by dragging away by sharks or other ravenous sea monsters.²⁹⁵

From the *marege* to the *kayu jawa*, the rise of these deeply processed white sea cucumbers in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Makassar, interestingly, corresponds to a popular variety of reddish meaty sea cucumbers, also known as from Makassar, in the contemporary Chinese consumer market. These meaty sea cucumbers were arranged ahead of all other sea cucumbers in the repeatedly mentioned handbook of the Huizhou “southern goods” merchant. As we have discussed in section two of chapter three, this handbook was most likely compiled between 1784 and the 1820s, namely, during the crucial period when these deeply processed white sea cucumbers were emerging in

²⁹² Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*, 27-28.

²⁹³ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 157-158.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 157-158, 160.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 161. Translated from Dutch. The behaviours of these *trepangers* were at least equally responsible for the hostility, and their relationship also changed over time. Crawford, “Late Prehistoric Changes in Aboriginal Culture on Kimberley,” 103-107.

Makassar. In the section for sea cucumbers, the handbook first introduced meaty sea cucumbers (*roushen* 肉參), and noted that “those from Makassar are the best. They are rarely broken, smooth and clean, taste sticky, and have a reddish colour” (惟望加錫最高，破碎少，光吉，性糯，色道紅). In comparison, those from Johor “are often broken and taste tough” (破碎多，性帶硬). Those from Hainan “are smaller and whitish, but still taste sticky” (小些，帶白色，其性亦糯). “Most recently Luzon is also exporting [meaty sea cucumbers], better than Johor’s. Although their size is small, they are smooth and clean” (呂宋新出，比遊佛貨高些，只頭甚小，而光吉).²⁹⁶

Therefore, from the perspective of the compiler of this southern goods handbook, the reddish meaty sea cucumbers from Makassar were the best meaty sea cucumbers in the Chinese consumer market. The challenge is how to identify them in the classification of sea cucumbers in contemporary Makassar. Vosmaer noted that in early nineteenth-century Makassar, two groups of sea cucumbers were often be boiled together with mangrove bark and hence acquired a reddish colour.²⁹⁷ The first group consisted of low-value *gama* and white (*kebo*) sea cucumbers. These sea cucumbers were only simply boiled and dried without going through deep processing. For preventing these roughly processed sea cucumbers from quickly decaying in the tropical weather, the local fishers often added mangrove bark during boiling, whose dyeing components helped preservation.²⁹⁸ However, we can easily exclude this group, because the handbook identified the reddish meaty sea cucumbers from Makassar as a high-quality variety, which was “rarely broken, smooth and clean,” and tasted “sticky”. None of these low-value *gama* and white sea cucumbers possessed these merits, as they were usually meagre, rough, and carelessly prepared.

²⁹⁶ *Huizhou minjian zhenxi wenxian*, vol. 15, 295.

²⁹⁷ Vosmaer, “Korte beschrijving van het zuid-oostelijk schiereiland van Celebes,” 159-160, 168-169, 172.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 168-169, 172.

The second group consisted of the *marege* and the *kayu java*. Vosmaer noted that the *trepangers* in northern Australia usually boiled their sea cucumbers with mangrove bark as they found abundant mangroves on the beaches and hence conveniently used the bark to dye their sea cucumbers for better preservation.²⁹⁹ As a result, both *marege* and *kayu java* sea cucumbers were typically reddish. Moreover, the distinctive features of the reddish meaty sea cucumbers from Makassar can further help us identify them with these varieties from northern Australia. According to the handbook, compared with meaty sea cucumbers from other places such as Johor, which was a centre of the Bugis network, and Luzon, which connected the Sulu Zone and China, Makassar's meaty sea cucumbers were renowned for their smooth and clean surface, sticky taste, and unbrokenness. All these features can be associated with the *trepangers*' professional operations on the north coast of Australia, including well-scheduled boiling and drying, thoroughly removing the unpleasant chalky skin, and eviscerating.

Therefore, these attentive works helped remove unpleasant features of white sea cucumbers and turn them into a clean and sticky meaty delicacy ready to be boiled and saturated with broth. These works also helped debunk the stigma that rendered white sea cucumbers from tropical waters as inferior and instead transformed them into a valuable sea delicacy, foremostly recommended by the compiler of this handbook, who had comprehensive knowledge about Chinese consumers' gustatory preferences for edible exotics. As a result of these changes, out of the previously disparaged white sea cucumbers, the *marege* and the *kayu java* became two unique varieties from Australia that arose in the world of sea cucumbers against the grain.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 159-160.

Conclusion

From the Japan Sea to the north coast of Australia and from Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers to the *marege* and the *kayu jawa*, by the early nineteenth century, a world of sea cucumbers had taken shape after over two centuries of cross-cultural interactions between consumers and producers and between the temperate and the tropical species. This world was, moreover, still expanding. From the early 1820s, southern Pacific Islands such as Fiji would join it, when American traders sailed to Canton and Manila via the southern Pacific route which connected these islands with the Chinese consumer market.³⁰⁰ As a result of this expansion, the originally cross-China Seas world of sea cucumbers was now shifting further towards the Pacific World.

Reviewing the rising trajectory of this world from the late sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries, we find that it manifests some unique features of sea cucumbers in comparison with the other top sea delicacies we have seen in chapter three. Unlike edible bird's nests and shark fins, sea cucumbers are not really rare in the natural world. They are an invertebrate animal widely distributed in coastal waters, with a good potential to be collected en masse and processed. Meanwhile, unlike another invertebrate, abalones, whose commercially important species are mostly from temperate waters, sea cucumbers are not confined by that. Besides the black and spiky temperate species, which shares the same habitat with abalones, there are furthermore diverse tropical sea cucumbers with distinctive features. Therefore, they have a good potential to be developed into a diversified trade in a broader geographic range.

From the late sixteenth century, along with the change of taste in China, these potentials were materialised in an expanding world of sea cucumbers. Liaodong, the militarised border society of the Ming Empire, can be considered as the first Chinese sea cucumber frontier of this world. Thereafter,

³⁰⁰ Ward, "The Pacific *Bêche-de-mer* Trade with Special Reference to Fiji"; Edward D. Melillo, "Making Sea Cucumbers out of Whales' Teeth."

in association with the Manchu Conquest of China, Shandong, the Manchu coast of the Japan Sea, Korea, and Japan joined this sea cucumber world at different stages through the seventeenth century.

From the late seventeenth century, a southern world of sea cucumbers was also emerging. Focusing on Makassar, a centre of this southern world, this research finds that the eastern Indonesian Archipelago became a sea cucumber frontier of China not simply because of a unidirectional expansion of a China-centric world economy. Instead, littoral society in this region, such as the Sama fishers and the merchant community of Makassar, had strong initiatives to join it, particularly in association with the economic transformation of this region in the wake of the Spice Wars.

However, their products initially faced cultural prejudices in the Chinese consumer market that perceived the black and spiky sea cucumbers from temperate waters, namely, the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers, as the perfect sea cucumbers and disdained tropical species. To shed off these prejudices, Southeast Asian fishers exploited the biodiversity of tropical waters with their diving, fishing, and food-processing expertise to propose a wide range of tropical products. These products worked differently in the Chinese consumer market. Some were still undervalued, some were accepted by Chinese consumers as top delicacies, and some were transformed by professional *trepangers* from low-value to high-value. The availability of such diverse types of tropical sea cucumbers gradually destabilised the dominance of the Liao/Manchu sea cucumbers throughout the eighteenth century. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Chinese consumers no longer simply identified the spiky and black sea cucumbers from temperate waters as the best sea cucumbers. Instead, the distinction of taste gradually shifted towards size and texture for they mattered to the gustatory experience of chewing sea cucumbers more essentially.

As the final remark of the final chapter, I suggest that there was no monolithic dominance of Chinese high taste over non-Chinese littoral society. Instead, the taste was communicated and negotiated between Chinese consumers and non-Chinese producers. Even though they might have

Chapter 4

never met or corresponded with each other, they kept material, gustatory, and intellectual exchanges through the circulations of things and knowledge in this world of sea cucumbers. After all, a Southeast Asian collector's diving, fishing, and food processing knowledge was no less essential in shaping how a sea cucumber tasted in China, than a Chinese literatus' medical and culinary knowledge. They both mattered to the change of Chinese taste for edible exotics in a global context and deserve an equal level of scholarly attention from researchers of food and global history.