Nevertheless, Shiroyama presents her argument with admirable clarity and draws on a broad range of archival materials to document the evolution of China’s currency system in the early twentieth century. Useful tables, charts, and maps appear throughout the volume, and she explains technical issues related to the operation of exchange rate mechanisms with skill. Her transnational framework reflects a growing methodological trend in the field of modern Chinese history and ensures that this book will appeal not only to a specialized sinological audience but also to scholars working in comparative economic history and development studies. Readers will discover in Shiroyama’s historical narrative resonances of later debates about the vulnerability of Third World states to foreign exchange crises as well as ongoing disputes with the PRC about the manipulation of its currency, the renminbi. In part because of the continuing relevance of the themes it explores, Shiroyama’s monograph will serve as the definitive treatment of China’s experience during the Great Depression for many years to come.

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**NOTES**


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This collection of primary source–based studies is an excellent window focal on the history of traveling transnational diaspora sojourner and settler activities,
organizations, commercial ventures, commodity production, and the trading thereof. It is, above all, a book about the variety of post-1000 human networks among Chinese and non-Chinese: laborers, miners, seamen, traders, merchants, financiers, Chinese and European company and colonial government elite, and post–World War II political authorities in the Southeast Asia region. The book is a solid exercise in historical research, organized into five sections: “Longue Duree,” “Precolonial,” “Early Colonial,” “High Colonial,” and “Postcolonial.” Many case studies demonstrate cutting-edge revisionist historical research methodologies that embrace a variety of innovative multidisciplinary approaches that allow historians to reread the historical sources.

In contrast to past research that has too often been exclusively focused on the issue of Chinese and European agencies in the Southeast Asian region, these studies are sensitive to local voices and initiatives and see Chinese and European successes as the end product of effectively negotiated interactions with locals. Thus, there was a reason why the Chinese concentrated their interests and activities on certain items (whether in trade or the production thereof) and why they dominated certain regional markets but not others. Where and why the Chinese were not a local factor is equally important relative to this book’s reconstruction of the historical past. Consistently regional marketplaces are demonstrated to have been neither of an exclusive Chinese nor another external agency (e.g., European companies or colonial regimes), but are better characterized as centers where there was lively competition with Southeast Asians. Chinese commercial success was not only the by-product of a greater Chinese efficiency and/or organization, but was also due to the ability of the Chinese to offer an outsider’s opportunity to local rulers that allowed circumvention of existing local networks. The book’s concluding chapters suggest that these inclusive studies are most important because they document similarities of human interactions and processes over time, as this book provides evidence of past successes and failures among Southeast Asia regional multiethnic agencies that can potentially influence evolving twenty-first-century interactions in the wider Asia regions.

These studies document how Chinese were regionally prominent in commodity production and sales and in certain types of trading and financial management, all based in multilayers of Chinese and non-Chinese community agencies. Individual chapters provide historical analysis of the Southeast Asia–based opium industry; fisheries; rice, jade, copper, and gemstone mining; cotton and textiles production, marketing, and consumption; coinage minting; metalwork; and the collection and market distributions of tortoiseshells and other marine goods, edible birds’ nests, printed books, and timber. While most of the chapters are studies of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, one chapter by Man-houng Lin explores Taiwan–based Chinese community initiatives in China and Korea and their foundational networking in Southeast Asia during the twentieth-century era of Japanese imperial sovereignty. Another chapter by Takeshi Hamshita presents
Ryukyu historical texts that document Ryukyu-based Chinese traders’ overseas ventures in China and Southeast Asia during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries.

Anthony Reid’s initial article presents a revisionist review of early Southeast Asian ironworking. Reid discredits the previous belief that there was an early Southeast Asian bronze age centered in Ban Chiang in northeast Thailand, but instead reports that archeologists now generally agree that Southeast Asian bronze casting began in the middle of the second century B.C.E., as this was distinct from older Chinese bronze traditions and predated the rise of early Southeast Asian states. In that same era, Southeast Asians were mining, smelting, and working gold, iron, copper, and tin into a variety of ritual and everyday items that were locally consumed or shipped from mainland to island Southeast Asia, where iron and copper were scarce. Reid’s article addresses the importance of Chinese metalworkers, resident from 1300 at Karimata, an island off the coast of southwest Borneo, which by 1600 had become the preferred source of iron tool imports to Java and Makassar, and everyday steel axes to the Malay Peninsula, where Karimata steel tools were considered superior to those produced by mixed Chinese and local ironworking competitors at Belitung, an island off the northwest Borneo coastline. By the eighteenth century, however, China’s iron and metalwork benefited from increased China-based shipping and a favorable economics-of-scale sufficient to diminish regional demand for Karimata ironwork. By 1800, resident ironworkers left the island to resettle on the continental mainland. Similarly, Reid provides a useful historical timeline of silver, gold, copper, and lead mining and production, with emphasis particularly on the Malayan Peninsula tin industry. In sum, Reid argues that the Chinese were in various ways accountable for regional transitions to industrial-scale mining and metalwork production.

C. Patterson Giersch’s article on Qing-era cotton and copper production and caravan trade between China’s southern Yunnan Province and adjacent regions of the Southeast Asian mainland is the first of several studies that focus on the fluid China-Southeast Asia borderlands. These continental borderlands are often referenced in recent scholarship as the borderless region of Zomia, collectively the Yunnan and neighboring upstream highlands in what is today Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Giersch’s study is notable in its application of a social science urban networking and core-periphery analysis as a means to understand regional cotton and copper production and circulation. He highlights the critical role of institutionally networked relationships between merchants and temples, as this transnational networking enabled Chinese family firms and merchant associations to dominate regional trade until the 1880s, when colonial era streamer transport from Rangoon to Canton redirected the cotton trade and corresponding merchant networks and temporarily marginalized western Yunnan.
Adam McKeown’s overview essay on Chinese labor argues the need to move beyond prior preconceptions of Chinese overseas labor as coolies to understand Chinese labor as an objective commodity of exchange that had historical meaning and value. He argues that one must put aside the legacy of the slavery abolitionists in the West, who polarized ideas of freedom and slavery, to view Chinese migratory labor as similar to post-1600 European populations who, facing tough economic, political, or social situations, made the rational choice to migrate globally. McKeown suggests that Chinese labor was little different from the indentured laborers or slaves who in the American context had various levels of autonomy, subjection, and integration into families or wider society. Thus, American slaves, like the Chinese laborers, had periods of commoditization and social integration. If anything, Chinese contracted coolie labor was not backward, but was subject to similar dislocations, notably the alleviation of poverty and overpopulation, as those faced by Western immigrants who, Western historians suggest, progressively opened frontiers and contributed to the formation of modern nation-states. As with other derivative nineteenth-century colonial era Western prejudices, Western economic values (McKeown is specific to a Marxist labor analysis) are not universal truths that can be easily applied to a Southeast Asian context. There, in McKeown’s view, Southeast Asia needs to be seen as a continuously sophisticated vital market economy before and beyond European presence.

Carl Trocki’s summary essay on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Southeast Asia–centered opium trade stresses the trade’s contribution to the overall development of the regional economy. As he demonstrates, opium was the first mass consumer product in the region, the major incentive for Chinese laborers and Southeast Asian peasants to enter the cash economy. Laborers worked more effectively for a substandard wage when opium was part of their income. In turn, opium sales were the agency of capital accumulation for Chinese entrepreneurs who controlled the region’s colonial era farms and mines. This capital financed the production of Southeast Asia’s other major products, for example, tin, pepper, gold, and rice, and subsequently backed the creation of shipping lines, property empires, factories, banks, insurance companies, and other components of the modern Asian economy. Opium-derived capital also financed the accumulation of people and resources that was foundational to several of Asia’s modern cities: Singapore, Batavia/Jakarta, Bangkok, Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

In the second section, “Precolonial,” Heather Sutherland’s chapter, “A Sino-Indonesian Commodity Chain: The Trade in Tortoiseshell in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” continues the discussion of Chinese labor institutions and networked communities. Sutherland demonstrates that in societies with a relatively low level of institutionalization, whether legal or bureaucratic, societal security was achieved in kin or through patronage networks based in personal relationships. She addresses the historical problem of documenting these complex
human transactions, wherein there is an absence of quantified data. Instead, she utilizes cursory reports by European competitors or regulators that were appended to the details of complex marketplace transactions. At the outset, Sutherland discredits prior assertions that Chinese traders were the facilitators or middlemen in the service of European company or colonial elites. Instead, she convincingly proposes, referencing the details of her case studies, that the Chinese diaspora active in the Indonesian archipelago was not statically ethnic-exclusive and/or a fixed entity. Instead, successful Chinese traders functionally depended on a pliable mix of networking among ethnic groups and tranethnicities. For example, within the Indonesian ports of trade, indigenous and Chinese were subdivided into localized, floating, and homeland-based groups. Individual identity was geographically and socially mobile; social capital (trust, norms, networks) was mobilized through personal ties that were often organized around a mix of externally and locally meaningful ideas of cultural identity.

Sutherland embarks on a commodity chain analysis of tortoiseshell gathering and market networks during the time of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), as these relate to wider patterns of trade and relationship outside the realm of European dominance in the Sulu Sea region of the Indonesian archipelago. In sum, Sutherland concludes that regional forest products and marine commodities were particularly difficult to manage in the maritime regions centered on Makassar because of disparate collecting zones and multiple exchange sites, in contrast to localized Indonesian archipelago spice production (e.g., pepper, nutmeg), which was easier to monopolize. Thus, a transcommunal mix of networked Chinese, Buginese, and local traders (Wajorese from Selayar) openly traded a variety of textiles for tortoiseshells that were in high demand in China’s marketplace, easily avoiding Dutch attempts to impose a regional monopoly. In broader context, for a century and a half (until the mid-nineteenth century), changes in the regional commodity chains moved Makassar from the periphery of commerce to the center.

In section 3, “Early Colonial,” Kwee Hui Kian’s chapter “The End of the ‘Age of Commerce’? Javanese Cotton Trade Industry from the Seventeenth to the Eighteenth Centuries,” overlaps with Sutherland’s analysis. Kian negates prior depictions of the assumed underdevelopment of Java that was argued to be demonstrated by a late seventeenth-century decline in Javanese demand for imported Indian textiles. This was said to be consequent to Dutch marketing in Java of industrially textiles from the Netherlands that not only undersold Indian textiles, but also interrupted demand and negated further technological development of Java’s previously vital cotton textile industry. Thus, Anthony Reid had proposed, in his publications of the early 1990s, that local consumption of less expensive and lower-quality traditional Javanese batik was the alternative source for an impoverished society that could no longer afford to buy Indian or Dutch textile imports (as this was consistent with Reid’s projected end of the Southeast Asian
Age of Commerce). Against this assertion, Kian cites Peter Boomgard and other revisionists who have used Dutch colonial records to document that the decline of labor-intensive yarn spinning and textile weaving did not have an aggregate negative impact on local welfare, but instead released Javanese textile laborers to produce commercial crops for the increasingly profitable marketplace. Kian’s study, based on Dutch East India Company records, adds to this image of a still profitable Java local economy. He demonstrates that Dutch-imported textiles did not produce a decline in local textile productivity and profitability, but instead the accessibility of imported machine-spun threads encouraged a renewal of Javanese batik production. The imported Dutch yarns were stronger and produced textiles that were smoother in texture and more durable than Indian textile imports, increasing the marketability of batik relative to expensive imported textiles. Javanese producers worked for Chinese entrepreneurs and Javanese lords who supplied the imported threads. At the end of the eighteenth century, the most prominent textile production centered in the vicinity of the sultanate court at Surakarta. Higher quality textiles were manufactured at the Surakarta and other sultanate courts, while lesser textiles were the product of a dispersed household cottage industry. Commoners spun and wove textiles during the nonproductive periods in the agricultural cycle and sold their product to peddling traders. Frequently a bakul entrepreneur, who provided the ultimate connection to Chinese merchants based in the north coast ports of trade, would supply materials and equipment, dictate the size and quality of the product, and pay a wage to his productive workers. Kian links this Java textile market restructuring to a wider regional Javanese textile trade, citing Dutch records that document substantive late eighteenth-century north Java coast port exports of Java’s textiles to Borneo and the Melaka Straits region. He concludes that Dutch attempts to manage Java’s textile production consistently failed and that Dutch officials instead depended on port-based entrepreneurial Chinese towkays and the Java ruling elite as their textile trade intermediaries.

Shifting focus to the Southeast Asian mainland, in section 4, Nola Cooke tracks the rise and fall of an innovative fish industry from the nineteenth century, in “Tonle Sap Processed Fish [Industry]: From Khmer Subsistence Staple to Colonial Export Commodity.” Initially under the encouragement of French colonial officials, Vietnamese fishery entrepreneurs who doubled as regional revenue collectors provided hands-on management of Khmer fishermen, backed by Saigon-based Chinese speculative capitalists who sold business shares to several layers of subfarmers in their networked monopoly. In the 1890s, the earlier small and medium fishing operations were replaced by larger fisheries owned by mixed Chinese, Sino-Khmer, and Vietnamese capitalists, ultimately controlled by higher level Chinese financiers who held French-assigned fisheries farm licenses. To undercut these powerful Chinese entrepreneurs, from 1908 to 1920, the French colonial regime subsequently removed all restrictions on fish
farming, with negative consequences as the lake was overfished. When regulations that negated fishing in the spawning season were ignored, the Tonle Sap fish population disappeared. To reverse this, from 1920 the French directly regulated the Tonle Sap fisheries, and, subsequently, they have been managed by the Cambodian state—with the exception of the Khmer Rouge era (1975–1979), when the Marxist regime tried to transition large portions of the seasonally submerged lakebed into rice fields, with negative results relative to fish reproduction.

Collectively the four chapters in the final “Post-Colonial” section commonly study contemporary movements of products via “commodity chains” within contemporary Southeast Asia and beyond to neighboring China. Herein, national borders have been easily ignored with both positive and negative consequences. In sum, the contemporary age is marked by regional patterns that are argued to be similar to those portrayed in the book’s studies of earlier historical eras. Bien Chiang addresses Sarawak’s edible bird’s nest trade that caters to an exotic China/Chinese marketplace. Eric Tagliacozzo provides an ethnohistory of marine-goods trading in “A Sino-Southeast Asian Circuit,” which draws from his collected oral histories of regional Chinese families and family firms still active as marine-goods sellers. Wen-chin Chang’s chapter focuses on Burma’s illegal transnational jade trade, which has been controlled by Yunnan itinerant merchants during the post-1962 age of “Burmese Socialism.” This trade takes place in the northern Burma, south Yunnan, and northern Thailand borderlands—or borderless region—which is also the setting for Patrick Wood’s concluding politically sensitive study, “Conflict Timber along the China-Burma Border.” This lucrative timber trade is beneficial to the ruling Burmese military, but exploits the natural resources and violates the territorial space of Kachin minority populations upstream. This trade is a contemporary example of a Southeast Asia government’s use of Chinese entrepreneurs to circumvent local societal structure, to assert the military government’s regional interests against one of several highland minority populations who have regularly posed armed resistance to the downstream Burmese government, but with prior backing by multilayered Chinese entrepreneurs who are now allied with the Burmese military.

In summation, this is a substantive volume with ideas presented by various authors individually and as a collected enterprise that, in the best revisionist tradition, forces historians, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and others to reevaluate the power, influence, and dominance of local Southeast Asian agencies against the earlier proposals of Chinese and Western predominance of overseas and regional trade after 1600. While accessible to upper-level undergraduates, this book should be mandatory reading among scholars and graduate students who specialize in the diverse aspects of Southeast Asian, Chinese, and colonial-era history, and also those who variously study diasporas, servitude, immigration, and economic, maritime, and borderlands topics. As noted above, the book has great
importance in its potential to allow scholars and diplomats to draw on the past to envision China’s future relationships within Asia and beyond.

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Historical themes play an important role in poetic composition in Chinese literature and are prominent in the subgenre of “poems on history” (*yongshi shi* 詠史詩). Wei Chunxi’s book, *Song qian yongshi shi shi* 宋前詠史詩史 (History of poems on history in the pre-Song period), based on his PhD dissertation at Shandong University, is the first that systematically discusses the literary history of this subgenre with a broad temporal scope.

Wei defines the term *yongshi shi* in his introduction: “It is an important category/theme in ancient Chinese poetry. *Yongshi shi* are based on historical figures, events and relics-chanting and reflecting on them in order to articulate the poets’ emotions, express arguments and historical inspiration or using history for entertainment, admonition, remonstration, or education” (p. 1). In his first chapter, he further explains this connotation by comparing *yongshi* with the “meditation on the past” (*huai gu* 懷古) and “expression of my heart” (*yong huai* 詠懷) subgenres, as well as historicised myth and folklore, historical allusions, epic, and poetic history. This chapter also investigates the scope and origin of *yongshi shi* (pp. 13–34).

The main body of the book is arranged by chronological sequence and dynastic periods. Wei divides the second to eighth chapters into five parts by their evolutionary features: the germination period from the *Shijing* 詩經 to the Warring States (chapter 2); the formation stage in the Han dynasty (chapter 3); the development phase in the Wei-Jin era (chapter 4); further progress in the Northern and Southern dynasties, and Sui dynasty (chapter 5); and the flourishing period: the early Tang (chapter 6), high Tang (chapter 7), and mid-late Tang (chapter 8).

Wei feels that most of the available articles and books on *yongshi shi* center on several important literary figures who made tremendous contributions to the development of writing *yongshi shi*, such as Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 253–ca. 307),