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Silently Smuggled and Invisibly Dyed: The Trans-Pacific Smuggling of Semi-processed Asian Textiles and Peruvian Bullion in the Spanish Colonies and at Sea, 1547-1800

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Trans-Pacific economic history shows us how Spanish-centred maritime commercial activities were not all that was going on in and across the Pacific. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the smuggling of Chinese silk and textiles to the Spanish colonies formed a persistent problem for colonial authorities. Silk from the Manila galleon route was smuggled from Acapulco to Peru with the complicity of high officials and clerics.¹ Mule trains then ferried it to the ‘silver capital’ of Potosí in Upper Peru, where a cornucopia of silk, textiles and luxury items were illegally sold.² These were consumed by people of all social classes, who preferred Chinese textiles, or ‘*ropas de China*’, to European manufactures.³ While Spanish authorities repeatedly attempted to curtail this smuggling, it effectively undercut the European colonial market, giving rise to a ‘subversive economy’.⁴ From the late seventeenth century onwards, buccaneers, pirates and French smugglers all connected to this subversive economy involving contraband and consumption cultures on the Latin American coast. This paper explores the silk and bullion smuggling trade between China and Peru, revealing a more complex trans-Pacific exchange beyond the routes involving the Spanish ‘Manila Galleon’.⁵ The research into these cultures and practices forms part of the ERC Advanced Grant Project on ‘the Structure and Impact of Trans-Pacific Trade, 16th to 18th centuries’ (TRANSPACIFIC, Grant agreement ID: 833143) at KU Leuven, which reinvestigates hidden transpacific commodity flows, specifically looking at invisible or overlooked actors beyond the official Manila galleon trade.

During the eighteenth-century War of the Spanish Succession, the interruption of European export commodities to Peru provided new opportunities for smuggling of a different kind, opening a space for French illicit trade of European commodities to Peru. Initial incursions of buccaneers and pirates into the Pacific thereby influenced the subsequent French smuggling trade, which exchanged European manufactures for unminted silver, and subsequently unminted silver for Chinese textiles. In this paper, I show how this movement, including its consumer markets in Europe, strongly depended on merchants’ and sailors’ self-organised networks, to which the authorities reacted with a view towards both mercantilist protection and merchant-capitalist expansion.

The French illicit trade and smuggling of European finished manufactured commodities to Peru tapped into the already-existent culture and infrastructure of the subversive economy. Bypassing

¹ Michèle Colin, *Le Cuzco a la fin du XVIIe et au debut du XVIIIe siècle*, Caen: Université de Caen, 1966.

² Lewis Hanke, *The Imperial City of Potosi, an Unwritten Chapter in the History of Spanish America*, Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957.

³ Arturo Giráldez, *The Age of Trade: The Manila Galleons and the Dawn of the Global Economy*, Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015.; Kris Lane, *Potosi: The Silver City that Changed the World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019.

⁴ Murdo J. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomical History, 1520-1720*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.

⁵ Described in detail by Giráldez or Schurz, who briefly touched on the French presence in William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1939, pp.301-302. See also Dennis O. Flynn et al. (eds), *European Entry into the Pacific Spain and the Acapulco-Manila Galleons*, New York: Routledge, 2017, and Giráldez (2015).

the trans-Pacific Manila galleon trade, French sailors would cross the trans-Pacific route to China and Amoy, while shipping Peruvian silver or bullion in return for Chinese silks. Moreover, colonial Peru was no longer the endpoint of this ‘interloper’ trade as both Chinese commodities and profits of Peruvian sales were transported onwards to European ports, both in France and beyond.⁶ The bullion from Potosí was used by French ships to acquire unfinished and processed textile commodities in China, in various stages of their production process: from semi-processed silks to finished products.⁷ These in turn fed back into both the Peruvian and European economies.

Eventually this even formed an impetus for French ships-of-opportunity arriving at the port of Ostend in the Southern Netherlands. The import of Chinese textiles in Ostend via this trans-Pacific French trade influenced the local market, not only to the point where Ostend merchants would fit out their own Asia expeditions, but also as a way by which common sailors were made aware of the nature of Asian textile products. On these expeditions, the smuggling of Asian silk and textiles also formed a problem for the Ostend merchants’ legitimate trade, as even common sailors were found hiding silk stockings in their seamen’s chests. Despite difficulties in assessing the quantitative extent of such contraband trade, new research shows how agents within the Peruvian, French and Ostend contexts shared similar approaches of valuing, appraising, and handling smuggled textile or bullion commodities. These commodities were qualitatively valued according to their processed or semi-processed states, which in turn determined their use and exchange values in a practical sense. Therefore, these contexts provide comparative insights into a wider subversive economy where the valuing practices of semi-processed commodities mattered, and for which a quantitative or statistical approach based on official trade figures is of less use.⁸

This paper also shows how the (semi-)processed states of the commodities both determined their potential declaration as illegal goods and the practical possibilities for their clandestine transport. Consequently, the refined or finished state of the commodities mattered in smuggling as much as it did in legitimate commerce, as it influenced and determined both their valuation and physical form as they moved along the commodity chain,⁹ with an impact on the agency and organisation of the workers transporting them. Similarly, recent work by Rebecca Gruskin criticises histories ascribing agency to the commodity itself,¹⁰ as she rather chooses to follow the value embedded within commodities as they travel. Doing so, she emphasises how commodities are multiform: they take on

⁶ Erik Wilhelm Dahlgren, *Les relations commerciales et maritimes entre la France et les côtes de l’Océan Pacifique (commencement du XVIIIe siècle). I: le commerce de la mer du Sud jusqu’à la paix d’Utrecht*, Paris: Champion, 1909.

⁷ This paper uses the designation ‘semi-processed’ to point out commodities that have not yet reached their final use value form. The nature of the commodity (i.e., raw resources) may already have been processed to a certain extent (for instance mined, or partly refined), but have not yet reached its final or even recognisable form.

⁸ Which also follows from the new perspective offered by von Brescius’ study on the private trade or smuggling of Asian goods by Scottish merchants or mariners in eighteenth century Europe. See: Meike von Brescius, ‘Worlds Apart? Merchants, Mariners, and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe’, in Maxine Berg et. Al. (eds), *Goods from the East, 1600-1800*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp.168-82.

⁹ Understood here as a concept coined by Wallerstein and Hopkins to indicate linked production processes that crossed multiple frontiers and held multiple modes of controlling labour. These linkages occurred through the production of the commodity form. See: Immanuel Wallerstein & Terence K. Hopkins, ‘Commodity Chains in the World-Economy Prior to 1800’, in Immanuel Wallerstein (ed.), *The Essential Wallerstein*, New York: The New Press, 2000, pp.221-33.

¹⁰ One may see this as a criticism of the agency of objects as actants, as proposed by Bruno Latour’s ‘Actor-Network Theory’. See: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.72. This theory’s rebuttal has been carried out neatly by Hylton White, who contrasts it to Marx’ critique of commodity fetishism in Hylton White, ‘Materiality, Form, and Context: Marx contra Latour’, *Victorian Studies* 55:4 (Summer 2013), pp.667-82.

multiple properties as their use or exchange values are transmuted across space and time. She thereby broadens Marx' definition of these values by pointing out that other uses emerge as profitable or desirable when a commodity's exchange value changes.¹¹ As to how commodities get revalued as they travel, the numerous agents involved in textile or bullion smuggling within the above-mentioned contexts seemed to know precisely which goods to order and to transport: unminted or semi-processed silver in its pre-coinage form, small or easily concealable textiles such as stockings, gowns and handkerchiefs, or even 'raw' silks or unfinished textile products such as threads used in further manufacture.

New evidence from archives in Potosí and Peru, coupled with European sailors' personal letters, reveals ways in which the processed and unprocessed states of silk textiles and unminted bullion played a crucial role in the long-running smuggling culture of the Spanish colonies and at sea. The present paper aims to indicate on what levels this subversive economy extended. It looks at which agents were involved, how it crossed over the contingent line between legal and illegal economic practices, and what consequences and influences this had on subsequent commercial developments. It questions how the qualitative nature of silk and bullion as unfinished or processed commodities determined or impacted transpacific smuggling. Lastly, it also indicates how information was gathered on the nature of these commodities, and the state in which they could be smuggled. This paper thus provides a sweeping look at the early-modern trans-Pacific smuggling trade from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and its extension into the Ostend-Asia ventures, providing some indications on how these questions can be addressed.

To do so, the first section considers the contraband culture in Peru and Chile by examining the legal status of silk imports in relation to the potentially semi-processed nature of Chinese silks, and how this determined smuggling practices and opportunities. It mentions how smuggled commodities could be moved via coastal barges, or even through convents. It then shows how these routes and practices linked to a culture of conspicuous consumption within a broad section of the Spanish colonial society. Subsequently, it considers how the commodity's nature enabled its exchange and circulation, as semi-processed Peruvian silver bullion was also smuggled outward by mule caravans or barges, passing via taverns or *pulperías*. The second section then shows how the aforementioned smuggling culture and its practices also attracted pirates and eventually fostered French clandestine trade opportunities in the Pacific, for which the processed or semi-processed nature of these commodities mattered in their value, as they formed opportunities for transportation and exchange. The final section then considers how the development of French smuggling trade triggered the silk and tea trade from the Southern-Netherlandish port of Ostend, which enables a comparison of the smuggling practices of common sailors and officers. It shows how they formed self-organised networks in which the status and form of the commodities directly enabled their means of circulation. Newly uncovered sources give us a detailed look into such smuggling networks and allow for a further comparison of actual practices. These reveal how the processed and legal status of commodities fostered smuggling as a form of 'non-compliance' towards the legal framework of transpacific- and Indian ocean trade.

¹¹ Rebecca Gruskin, 'The value within multiform commodities: North African phosphates and global markets in the interwar period', *Journal of Global History* 16:3 (2021), pp.315-16. In reference to Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, volume 1*, New York: Vintage Books, 1977, pp.125-31.

Contraband culture in Peru and Chile: Chinese silk for unminted bullion (16th -18th centuries)

The Peruvian smuggling of Chinese silk

Throughout the age of the Spanish trans-Pacific Manila galleon trade (1565-1815), Chinese textiles were siphoned off the Spanish galleons' main Acapulco-Manila trade route and transported as contraband into inland Peru, bypassing official taxes and prohibitions.¹² As an example of this smuggling route, archival sources from the *Royal Audiencia de Lima* mention how in 1745, Don Francisco de Ocharan y Mollinedo ordered eight cases of Chinese silks to be brought into Peru through maritime routes:

[T]he eight cases of *Ropa de China* will come in the Barge named 'El Chancayano de la Tra Costa' with the number of Rope of the Puebla [locally produced textile, presumably mixed in] and will re-enter the road as prohibited effects, bypassing Lima customs.¹³

These Chinese textiles, most probably silk, were smuggled in a Peruvian coastal barge and mixed up with locally produced 'Puebla' textile in order to bypass Lima customs. The use of such coastal barges in bypassing customs was quite common, as Clayton reports how the movement of many coastal vessels at the viceroyalty of Peru evolved a lively maritime economy in itself, even beyond the flow of trade with the colonial mother country.¹⁴

The smuggling of silk or Chinese textiles was not uncommon either, and could involve both raw Chinese silk, partially stitched garments or finished manufactures. Since 1579, these were mostly shipped from the Philippines to Mexico to the benefit of Mexican silk guilds, which could vary the production of their finished fabrics using smoother thin weaves.¹⁵ One may notice how silk smuggled and moved in several forms, from raw floss to thread or yarn to be used in further manufacture, as it had not yet been transformed into the eventual commodity form suited to its final destination. Instead, silk was being transported or smuggled in a non-finished or semi-processed form. As Giraldez mentions, large supplies of Chinese yarn benefited local silk manufacturers in Mexico City, Puebla or Oaxaca. Their finished products would in turn head back to Peru as finished commodities. In 1594, a Spanish official from Lima already explained the rationale behind this commodity flow, as he mentioned to Spanish king Philip II how "a man can clothe his wife in Chinese silks for two hundred reals, whereas he could not provide her clothing of Spanish silks with two hundred pesos". Giraldez points out that this was still the case in 1718, as Baltasar de Zuñiga, Viceroy of New Spain and future President of the *Consejo de Indias*, refused to implement a royal decree forbidding galleons from carrying silk. He also alleged that Chinese textiles were cheaper than fabrics coming from Spain and added convincingly that "the majority of people in Mexico preferred products from the Manila Galleon, the Nao de China".¹⁶ This makes clear that the smuggling of silks and textiles took place over a long term and on a significant scale of demand by the people of Peru and Mexico.

¹² See Colin (1966); Giraldez (2015).

¹³ AGN [Archiva General] Lima, Primera Parte, GO-CO 2 199.58 'Por Carte de 27 deesoaradi suus ordena vex. Que los ocho cajones de Ropa de China 21 Diciembre de 1745 Sancho Davilas'

¹⁴ Lawrence A. Clayton, 'Trade and Navigation in the Seventeenth Century Viceroyalty of Peru', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 7:1 (1975), p.1.

¹⁵ Debin Ma, *Textiles in the Pacific*, London: Routledge, 2005, p.62.

¹⁶ Giraldez (2015), p.175.

The processed or unprocessed nature of these smuggled textiles had been a central concern in Peruvian contraband since earlier times. The *Archive of the Cabildo at Potosí* shows that this was already addressed during the sixteenth century, as we find a 1587 accord on the prohibition of selling dyed silk, via a letter in which King Philip II ordered that all barrels leaving for Lima had to be controlled by permit, in order “to avoid escapes like that of Diego Vásquez, who escaped recently with a quantity of money” as it became prohibited for the “merchants of the Villa to sell, together and frequently, satin, silks tafetanes, damasks, velvet and knitted stockings that have been dyed in this kingdom (without a signal by which you can see the colors that this silk originally holds)”, which the authorities of Potosí declared by oath to have checked.¹⁷ The processing of the silk textiles, and particularly the dyeing process, therefore played an essential role in determining their status as legal or illegal commodities. The dyeing process could have made certain Chinese textiles appear indistinguishable from European silks, hence competing with the import of dyed silks from the European manufacturing industry. As illegally dyed textiles provided a competitive disadvantage for both local and European manufactures for the Spanish colonies, it enabled an interest in smuggling these textiles.

Unsurprisingly, both legitimate and illegitimate Spanish colonial traffic would also attract raiders seeking plunder and profit. As ‘outside agents’, pirates and privateers already started brutally intervening in this process of Spanish colonial commodity exchange during the sixteenth century. Their records give us an indication of the mixed cargoes found on board Spanish ships sailing across the Pacific, which included silk, precious metals and various other commodities. In his sixteenth-century travelogue, pirate-privateer Thomas Cavendish, consciously emulating Francis Drake’s earlier plundering exploits in the Pacific, mentioned how his crew took “two rich ships” near Guayaquil on 17th May 1587, which were:

laden with sugar, syrup, corn, *Cordowaen* skins, Pigs, lard, sacks of Potatoes, many Indian Skirts, some Marmelades, and thousand hens. The other ship was laden with wheat flour and boxes of Marmelades. If it were in England or elsewhere in Christendom, the first ship would have been worth 20000 pound sterling. We filled our ships as full as we could stow them.¹⁸

Other ships plundered by Cavendish contained “silks, satins, damask, musk and other costly mercantile goods. Also all sorts of victuals (...) and all sorts of good Wine”.¹⁹ In 1587, Cavendish also pointed to the production process of textiles, as he noted how the *sangleys* or Chinese inhabitants of Manila embroidered textiles and made raw or semi-processed silk into luxury garments:

[T]hese Sanguelos are a people of remarkable intelligence in all handicraft, of invention, imagination, and creation: yes so artful and expertly that no Christians can surpass them in needlework, embroidery, on satin, silk, or making linen, beasts, birds, fish or worms, and counterfeit with Silk, gold or pearls very excellent.²⁰

¹⁷ Archivo de Cabildo de Potosí, BO ABNB (National Archives of Bolivia), CPLA 5: 103v-104v [‘fecha 6/10/1587/ s. XVI/ Potosí’].

¹⁸ Thomas Cavendish, ‘(Voyagie) van Mr Thomas Candish, met drie Schepen door de Magallaensche Straet rondom de Werelt, inden Iare 1586, 1587, en 1588. Hebbende door’t kruycen vander Zee gheseylt 13000 Mijlen.’, in Jacob Pietersz Wachter, *Journalen van drie Voyagien*, 1643, p.20.

¹⁹ Cavendish (1643), pp.32-3.

²⁰ Cavendish (1643), p.36.

The trans-Pacific Manila galleon's silk and textile transport was thus not only a case of raw Chinese silk being manufactured into finished commodities in Mexico. The Chinese community in Manila already carried out some processing on the raw material itself, although not always with the intent of providing the wholly finished product. Cavendish provided an early indication of the wide range of Chinese craftsmanship at Manila, which was listed in 1604 as including embroidery, tailoring, silversmithing, tattooing, shoemaking and other forms of menial labour.²¹ A century later, despite strong Spanish colonial biases and threats of expulsion towards the Manila Chinese, the quality of their craftsmanship was still praised as incomparable.²²

Coastal maritime sub-routes formed a crucial channel for raw silk smuggling beyond the transpacific crossing between Manila and Acapulco. Different strategies of clandestine transport were used to siphon off contraband beyond this route. MacLeod mentions how the *limeños* (coastal barge pilots) sent a fleet of small coastal ships to Paita in order to meet the smugglers: "There in the port or on the high seas the forbidden Chinese merchandise was transferred to the vessels from Lima, and landed at coves north and south of Callao". Another maritime method was the transfer of forbidden goods to lumber ships from Guayaquil, which transported wood for construction down the coast to Lima.²³

Next to maritime routes, MacLeod also mentioned how convents and local monasteries in Lima and Cuzco were used as warehouses for Chinese contraband, as they were not subject to official search and were stocked through the complicity of local merchants, friars and officials.²⁴ Likewise, Etsuko Miyata seems to indicate that Augustinians and Jesuits were the main religious parties involved. She mentions how sources repeatedly show Jesuits openly acting as raw silk merchants, while also dealing in gold, mercury, lead and textiles, despite official Spanish bans on religious orders' participation in trade. Although the presumed reason consisted of further efforts to sustain their presence and religious drive in the Pacific, they kept reinvesting their profits in expanding and maintaining their onward private trade during the seventeenth century, and possibly beyond.²⁵

Michèle Colin also mentions how Franciscan convents often did not respect the rules, as friars took up active roles in smuggling. This led to several royal impositions that attempted to reduce the clerics' role in smuggling. On 29th January 1682, Spanish King Charles II published an order which prohibited "illicit and too frequent secular conversations" in religious convents. In 1702, King Philip V exhorted the orders of New Spain and Peru to keep watch that contraband merchandise would no longer be hidden in convents. In addition, Colin also mentions that the Vicar General's traveling entourage usually consisted of sixty charged mules and sixty others. In 1702, the province of St Francis de las Charcas sent a petition, as Father Commissioner General Fray Miguel de Mora had been scandalised on a recent visit that all the posts, from the provincial until the least important monk, were for sale, and that little attention was given to "their worthy subjects or to the poor".²⁶ Monks and religious officials of multiple congregations and orders thus formed part of the Trans-Pacific

²¹ AGI Filipinas, 27, N.148, Petición del Cabildo secular de Manila sobre Parián de sangleyes, fol. 887r-892 vo.

²² AGI Filipinas, 28, N. 131, Expediente sobre expulsion de sangleyes, fol. 960r-1130 vo.

²³ MacLeod (2007), pp.169-70.

²⁴ MacLeod (2007), p.170.

²⁵ Etsuko Miyata, *Portuguese Intervention in the Manila Galleon Trade*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2016, p.29.

²⁶ Colin (1966), p.75.

smuggling trade, and the mule trains and ships employed along their travel routes formed part of the infrastructure enabling it.

This long-term dynamic of silk smuggling from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, and its wide complicity on different social levels, formed a consumption pattern that in turn engendered further smuggling of various possible commodities. MacLeod mentions how the Viceroyalty of Peru acquired silver and wine for Chinese silks, porcelain and other goods, as increasing amounts of Asian merchandise were siphoned off the Manila-Acapulco trade.²⁷ Simon Harvey mentions how the northern Peruvian port of Paita had become one of the main smuggling centres for the region by the 1730s. The elites of Peru's viceroyalty had a weakness for Chinese silk and ribbon as well as French Carcassonne finery and lacework from Flanders, turning smuggling into "a mix of exhibitionism and refined performance".²⁸ One may therefore examine how the smuggling culture and infrastructural possibilities served the conspicuous consumption of Peruvian elites in a wider sense, while also occurring beyond elite circles.²⁹

Chinese silk in Peru and Mexico: its conspicuous consumption and culture of demand

Giraldez provides us with a long-term perspective on the conspicuous consumption of silk and textiles on the streets of Lima and elsewhere in Peru, as he mentions how in 1602 a viceroy described Lima's inhabitants as all wearing "silk, and of the most fine and costly quality. The gala dresses and clothes of the women are so many and so excessive that in no other kingdom of the world are found such". This trend continued well into the eighteenth century, as "in 1735 two Spanish navy officers, Jorge Juan y Santacilla and Antonio de Uloa saw Chinese porcelain for sale in the shops of Lima and observed Chinese silks sent from Chile to Panama".³⁰ In his 1716 travelogue, French traveller Amédée-François Frézier also mentioned how at Lima men were "dressed in French style, but most often in silk vestments, with a bizarre mixture of lively colours".³¹

This long-term consumption of luxury textiles had a significant impact on the Spanish European trade towards the colonies, which in turn formed an imperative for the Spanish king to proclaim impositions. As MacLeod mentions, the Spanish merchants represented by the *Consulado de Seville* found the Peruvian and New Spanish markets filled with Chinese goods to such an extent that they were unable to sell the merchandise they sent from Europe to Peru and Mexico. Moreover, the connivance of royal officials enabled the maritime smuggling of silks up and down the Pacific, in which Guatemala was used as an entrepôt. MacLeod points out how the entry of Chinese goods from Mexico was not forbidden to Guatemala, where they could in turn be loaded for Peru at Acajutla, Fonseca or Realejo. Part of the Manila galleons' illicit cargo could thus be diverted and circumvented

²⁷ MacLeod (2007), p.273.

²⁸ Simon Harvey, *Smuggling: seven centuries of contraband*, London: Reaktion Books, 2016.

²⁹ As a concept coined by Thorstein Veblen, conspicuous consumption may here be considered as following the cultural codes of consumption of 'luxury' clothing originating as an emulation of the signification of wealth or 'pecuniary strength' by upper- or 'leisure' classes, which spread to a wider emulation beyond the consumption these elites or upper classes are initially associated with. These commodities therefore get socially valued in a wider sense. See: Thorstein Veblen, 'Conspicuous Consumption', in Max Lerner (ed.), *The Portable Veblen*, New York: Penguin Books, 1976, pp.111-27.

³⁰ Giraldez (2015), p.154.

³¹ Amédée-François Frézier, *Relation Du Voyage De La Mer Du Sud Aux Cotes Du Chily Et Du Perou, Fait Pendant Les Années 1712, 1713 & 1714*. Paris: Jean-Geoffroy Nyon, 1716, p. 237.

despite Acapulco or Mexico-based customs regulations. However, MacLeod mentioned that the extent of this trade was impossible to estimate due to its illegal nature.³² The widespread consumption culture was also underlined by Lane, who mentions how at Potosí, as one of Peru's main mining and silver-producing centres:

people of all social classes consumed considerable silk and linen as well. Silk fabric came from Granada and from parts of Italy, but soon European silk was undersold by a vast array of textiles, along with raw silk, from China. Chinese fabrics arrived in huge quantities after 1571, when the Manila galleon trade officially began. Chinese textiles, plus cotton print fabrics from India, continued to arrive in the high Andes through the seventeenth century despite repeated crown trade restrictions pushed by Seville's powerful merchant guild.³³

Lima merchants sent so-called 'feeder ships' to acquire the Chinese commodities by supplying the trans-Pacific galleons with Potosí's silver in exchange for silk and other fine Asian goods. Detailed Potosí notary records list Chinese fabrics, along with lacquerware, porcelain, fans, carved ivory, spices and other East Asian imports.³⁴ As Hanke describes, a broad range of luxury goods were consumed at Peru and the mining city of Potosí, which drew many agents to participate in the profession of merchant at the so-called '*Feria de China*': "elegant gentlemen deigned to become merchants (because of lucrative sales), even grocers; pretending their commercial trips were hunting parties in order to avoid the stigma attached to businessmen. Trafficking with free-spending miners...the great fair of Potosí was famous". The *Feria* or 'Chinese market' featured a colourful internationally sourced variety of commodities, involving:

silks of all sorts and knitted goods from Granada; stockings and swords from Toledo (...) knitted goods from Portugal; textiles, embroideries of silk, gold, and silver, and felt hats from France; tapestries, mirrors, elaborate desks, embroideries and laces from Flanders (...) stockings and textiles from Naples, satins from Florence; &c &c also: white porcelain and silk cloths from China; Negro slaves from the Cape Verde Islands and Angola; cochineal dyes, vanilla, cocoa, and precious woods from Spanish America and the Indies.³⁵

It would therefore be wrong to exclusively consider the conspicuous consumption of such goods, and the silk imports in Peru in particular, as luxury products destined for elites. Donna Pierce mentions how Peruvian Viceroy Marqués de Cañete already stated in 1594 that "Chinese silks and other textiles were so cheap that Indian *caciques* and even commoners used them for clothing instead of local manufacture". She also mentions how English friar Thomas Gage declared in the 1620s how black and mulatto women in Mexico wore "skirts and headcloths of silk along with sleeves of Holland or fine China linen wrought with colored silks", whereas "well-off Indian women in Guatemala wore

³² MacLeod (2007), p.165.

³³ Lane (2019), p.57.

³⁴ Lane (2019), p.57.

³⁵ Hanke (1957), p.28.

huipiles (native overblouses) made from fine linen brought from China, which the better sort wear with a lace about”.³⁶

The availability of both European and Asian textiles in unfinished or partially manufactured forms even enabled new forms of hybrid textile products to develop and spread in early-modern Latin American societies. The unfinished form of smuggled textiles thus had a creative impact on the textiles’ end use, giving rise to the creation and consumption of new commodity forms. Both raw and manufactured silk products had their place in such creation and consumption, and evidence from material culture shows how silk was used in local and innovative ways. Elena Phipps mentions how in 1596, the property of Maria de Amores from Quito contained a Chinese *lijilla*, and a *lijilla* of green Castilian damask with golden edges. Likewise, Cantonese silk or Bengali linen were used to locally create textile items for use in the church, such as “miniature Inca-style tunics woven in silk and gold to clothe the statues of Christ”.³⁷ Archival sources detailing the property of a lady to be married shows how Chinese damask was still being sent from Lima to Potosí in 1758, testifying to the ongoing nature of this fashion.³⁸ Because of the various uses of both European and Chinese silk textiles, an ongoing demand for such goods tied into a contraband culture that developed agency and infrastructure to maintain and enable such consumption, seeking ways to undercut the official market. In this sense, a contraband culture formed in Peru in defiance of royal restrictions.

As the smuggling of Chinese silks impacted both the Mexican silk-manufacturing guilds, which had Peru as a principal outlet and market, and the export monopolies of Sevillian merchants, legislation was repeatedly issued in an attempt to curtail this smuggling trade. Chilean archives provide an overview of subsequent eighteenth-century prohibitions, such as the 20th May 1714 “Respondo carta sobre evitar la introducción de ropas de la China”,³⁹ Bartolomé Marigorta’s 25th October 1716 punishment concerning “sobre reintegro a la Real Hacienda de una suma de dinero por comiso de una ropa suya”⁴⁰, and the 23rd December 1717 “prohibición del comercio de ropas de China”.⁴¹ The repeated long-term need for such legislation makes clear that the illicit commerce in Chinese textiles remained ongoing. In exchange for this cornucopia of smuggled goods and enabling the smooth circulation of such illicit yet widespread trade, another raw produce was offered in exchange for silks in China: semi-processed bullion from Peru’s silver mines.⁴² Contraband practices also played a role here, as not only the precious metal itself, but even the mercury used in the initial silver-refining process could be smuggled from China to the Spanish colonies via the Manila galleon trade.⁴³

³⁶ Donna Pierce, ‘From global to local: the diaspora of Asian decorative arts in colonial Latin America’, in Tamara H. Bentley (ed.), *Picturing Commerce in and from the East Asian Maritime Circuits, 1550-1800*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019, p.135.

³⁷ Elena Phipps, ‘The Iberian Globe: Textile Traditions and Trade in Latin America’, in Amelia Peck (ed.), *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013, pp.42-4.

³⁸ ABNB (National Archives of Bolivia), CPLA 49 (250-251v.), ‘11 de Novre 1758 EC 1637’.

³⁹ Archivo Chile (AC), Archivo de la Real Audiencia Capitanía General (ARACG), Vol. 720 Pieza 137 Inicio fo. 329 Término fo. 330.

⁴⁰ AC, ARACG, Vol. 721 Pieza 16 Inicio fo. 102-108.

⁴¹ AC, ARACG, Vol. 721, 33, fo. 155 – 155 vo.

⁴² Charles R. Boxer, ‘Portuguese and Spanish Rivalry in the Far East during the 17th Century’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 78: 3-4 (1946), p.162.

⁴³ Angela Schottenhammer, ‘Trans-Pacific connections. Contraband mercury trade in the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries’, in Bentley (2019), p.164.

'Raw' or semi-processed bullion on the Peruvian supply side: silver and unminted coin

As Dahlgren mentions concerning the Spanish trans-Pacific Manila galleon trade, 'raw' bullion in various stages of its refining and production process, as well as unminted coins, were exported from Peru via Acapulco to the Philippines through complicity of the galleon's officers rather than its merchants. Dahlgren mentions how sources reported that contraband complicity took place on all levels: even the judges of the *Casa de Contratación* responsible for customs duties were themselves on board, while guards and galleon officers were bribed, as primarily unminted coin got out this way. Moreover, galleon officers themselves often did not have to generally declare their personal goods, which was equally valid on the Atlantic galleons' arrival in Europe. In Cádiz, barrels from the Europe-bound ships were thrown into the water and subsequently fished up, containing contraband goods and unminted bullion or semi-processed coin.⁴⁴

What further indications do we have of the illegal transportation of unminted coin, and the processing of silver in Peru? The archives of the *Cabildo de Potosí* reveal how in 1584, the processing of silver was already done using a device or "engine to grind metals" requiring the labour power of "only two Indios", avoiding the expenses of mules and horses in driving the engine.⁴⁵ Permission for the engine's use had to be officially granted by the *Cabildo Secular de Potosí*, presumably to keep control and oversight over the silver production. This reminds one that the mined silver itself was not a 'raw' resource or commodity, but was itself already highly processed as a commodity, even as it remained unminted bullion rather than coin. In this semi-processed commodity form, silver could be conveniently smuggled in different shapes and forms.

Some long-term indications confirm the ongoing smuggling of unminted silver from Peruvian mines, as nineteenth-century statistical sources give a straightforward reason why this was still an issue in 1841: the British Consul at Lima informed the Statistical Society of London that in April 1741 that an estimated one third of the silver production "is smuggled out of the country in the state of *plata pina*' (pine silver); and about 100,000 marcs more from other places not therein specified, and for which no accurate data can be procured".⁴⁶ The Consul's report from July 1836 mentioned that duties levied at the minting amounted to 7¼ percent of the value of the silver brought in, and mentioned how:

it would also appear, from a comparison of the prices realized by silver exported, that, if intended for exportation, the value of the silver is in some degree depreciated by the fact of its being coined. Silver, in bars, for the Peruvian standard, is received at the mint for about 7 dollars 7 reals per marc; and when smuggled on board an exporting vessel, it may be sold for 9 dollars 2 rials. The contraband price for export is therefore more than 14 % higher than the mint price.⁴⁷

It seems likely that similar dynamics were already at play during early-modern times.

⁴⁴ Dahlgren (1909), p.42.

⁴⁵ BO ABNB, CPLA 5: 40v-41v. 1/8/1584/s.XVI/La Plata, 'testimonio'.

⁴⁶ J. T. Danson, 'On the Quantity of Gold and Silver supposed to have passed from America to Europe, from the discovery of the former Country to the present time', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 13-14 (1850), p.31.

⁴⁷ Danson (1850), pp.31-44.

Through which channels would the silver be transported, if it was illegally mined and processed beyond the official permission needed to use processing engines? Some indications can be found for the role of so-called *pulperías* or tavern-shops in the transport of illicit goods in 1589, when the Cabildo mentioned that twenty-four establishments would be fixed in designated locations, “due to the damage caused by receiving silver, quicksilver, piñas of silver produced from the thefts that there are”. These seemed generally potential places of ill-repute, which also sold “watered-down wine to the indios”.⁴⁸ Jane Mangan mentions how these *pulpería* regulations served to curtail fraud and criminal activities, such as the exchange of illicit silver or stolen property. Her research confirms how the *pulperías* acted as transfer points for stolen goods, including a trade in contraband silver that Spanish mine-owners had debated since the 1540s. She states that people on the city streets of Potosí traded widely with unrefined or unminted silver, while other stolen goods also supported an urban black-market trade through the *pulperías*, supposedly threatening official merchant monopolies.⁴⁹ Until at least 1635, authorities especially targeted groups of “indios, negros, or mulatos” as engaging in contraband trade and illicit exchanges involving unrefined silver or silverware. Yet authorities targeting these groups did not imply that these were the only agents actually engaging in such exchanges, rather than forming convenient targets for legislation.⁵⁰ Mangan describes the *pulperías* as a hybrid form between a grocery shop and a tavern, where:

the customer encountered a display of staples such as wine, bread, flour, sugar and soap, kept behind a counter or stacked on shelves lining the walls. Beyond such staples, however, some carried higher-priced food items such as figs, raisins, olives, and spices like cumin, aniseed, saffron, cinnamon or pepper. Earthen jugs lined the counters; large ones contained wine and small ones held honey. (...) in pulperias that more closely resembled taverns, proprietors served wine by the glass (and sometimes chichi), and men congregated inside to drink a few rounds while they played cards or conversed. Upstairs or downstairs one could also find gambling dens or prostitution brothels.⁵¹

These *pulperías* formed at least one channel for illicit transport of unrefined or unminted bullion, which remained active across centuries, through their vital role in contraband culture. Indeed, John Hugh Street still reported in 1815 how a secret agent from the treasury was sent to Uruguay on the Brazilian border in order to investigate the extent of smuggling and to tax goods. This agent had to “check the sources of supply of the country *pulperías*, and he attempted to terminate the smuggling condoned by certain frontier guard commanders, but to no avail”.⁵² Richard Slatta also mentions how Argentinian *pulperías* served illicit purposes of contraband capitalism well into the twentieth century, as:

the *pulpería*, a country store and tavern, stood with the estancia as the most important socio-economic institutions of the Argentine pampa. The store served multiple social and commercial functions (both licit and illicit) and survived into the twentieth century

⁴⁸ BO ABNB, Fecha 14:4/1498/s.XVI/Potosí CPLA 5: 125r-153r.

⁴⁹ Jane E. Mangan, *Trading Roles: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Urban Economy in Colonial Potosí*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, p.51.

⁵⁰ Jane E. Mangan, *Trading Roles: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Urban Economy in Colonial Potosí*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, pp.51-3.

⁵¹ Mangan (2005), pp.58-9.

⁵² John Hugh Street, *Artigas and the Emancipation of Uruguay*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959, p.238.

despite virulent verbal attack and calls for legislative restriction from the colonial era on.⁵³

In addition to the *pulperías*, Ruth Hill mentions how the illegal trade in foreign goods and the smuggling of untaxed gold, silver and mercury not only relied on *caminantes* or merchants traveling the postal routes, but equally on the collaboration of Crown and church officials at the highest levels.⁵⁴ From the *pulperías* and other gathering places, silver would thus make its way from the mining towns and centres to the Peruvian and Chilean coasts. Apart from Spanish sources, we find confirmation of silver transports in buccaneers and privateers' writings from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. During his raids on the Peruvian and Chilean coasts in 1578-1579, Francis Drake already mentioned how semi-processed silver was transported from Peruvian mines by mule trains, in the form of bars:

By the sea, we found by a Spaniard lying asleep, who had lying by him thirteen bars of silver, which weighed 4000 ducats Spanish. (...) we met with a Spaniard and an Indian boy driving eight llamas or sheep of Peru, which are as big as asses; everyone of which sheep had on his back two bags of leather, each bag containing 50 lbs. weight of fine silver. So that, bringing both the sheep and their burthen to the ship, we found in all the bags 800 weight of silver.

Drake's plunder expedition also found 'raw' silver in the form of 'wedges', transported by small barges near the Peruvian port of Arica, where they mentioned "three small barques which we rifled, and found in one of them 57 wedges of silver. In these barges we found not one person", from there on the way to Lima, Drake's marauders also took a small barge "with a good store of linen cloth". In 1579, Drake plundered another ship near the Cabo de San Francisco, where he found a combination of both of these commodities: "our General rifled these ships, and found in one of them a chest full of reals of plate, and good store of silks and linen cloth, and took the chest into his own ship".⁵⁵ The silver transported off Peruvian coasts obviously formed an enticing source of plunder for pirates and buccaneers.

A century later, French buccaneer captains still found similar spoils, as they also robbed mule trains carrying silver, victuals or even semi-processed textiles. After crossing the Magellan straight in 1687, French buccaneers landed at the Chilean coastal town of Huasco, where they captured two small sailing ships and a mule caravan charged with drapes. The mule trains, which we already noted as being of infrastructural importance in the smuggling transport, continued to form an opportune target for indiscriminate robbers and buccaneers. Yet buccaneers typically only took a limited part of their load, as they only took what they could carry.⁵⁶ The case of seventeenth-century pirate Bartholomew Sharp's raids in the Pacific proves a peculiar property in the raiders' involvement with bullion in the unminted, semi-processed or even unrefined stages of its production process: its recognisability as the finished product, or even as a product of actual value. The buccaneers' untrained

⁵³ Richard W. Slatta, 'Pulperías and Contraband Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires Province', *The Americas* 38:3 (1982), pp.347-62.

⁵⁴ Ruth Hill, *Hierarchy, Commerce and Fraud in Bourbon Spanish America: A Postal Inspector's Exposé*, Vanderbilt University Press, 2005, p.108.

⁵⁵ Francis Drake, '(Iournael) vande heer Francoys Draeck ende heer Jan Haukeins / Ridderen / naer West-Indien gepretendeert Panama in te nemen met ses van des Coningings Majesteys Schepen ende 21 and're / in den Jare 1593', in Jacob Pietersz Wachter, *Journalen van drie Voyagien*, 1643, pp.155-6.

⁵⁶ Etienne-Edouard Ducéré, *Journal de bord d'un flibustier (1686-1693): d'après un manuscrit de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Bayonne: Imprimerie A. Lamaignère, 1894, pp.91 & 94.

eyes were not able to recognise it as valuable treasure. Basil Ringrose's *South Sea Waggoner*, an account of Sharp's buccaneer raiding expeditions, mentions how Sharp's crew captured the Spanish ship *Rosario* near Chile in 1681. The buccaneers were initially unable to recognize the silver in its raw form as part of the *Rosario*'s cargo, as Ringrose's account mentions:

In this Ship, besides the lading above-mentioned we found also almost 700 Pigs of Plate [silver ingots], but we took them to be some other Metal, especially *Tin*: and under this mistake they were slighted by us all, especially the Captain, and Seamen, who by no persuasions used by some few, who were for having them rummaged, could not be induced to take them into our Ship, as we did most of the other things. Thus we left them on board the *Rosario*.⁵⁷

The account further mentions how the crew only realised the loss of this precious loot when having one remaining piece of it checked by a knowledgeable sailor at another port. This even led the chronicler to mention the refining and coinage process as the key form of labour that would make the commodity recognisable:

[W]e turned her away loose unto the Sea: being very glad we had got such good Belly-timber out of her, and thinking little what quantity of rich Metal we left behind. It should seem this Plate was not yet thorowly refined and fitted for to coyn; and this was the occasion that deceived us all. One only Pig of Plate, out of the whole number of almost seven hundred, we took into our Ship, thinking to make Bullets of it: and to this effect, or what else, our Seamen pleased, the greatest part of it was melted or squandred away. Afterwards, when we arrived at *Antego*, we gave the remaining part of it, which was yet about one third thereof, unto a *Bristol* man, who knew presently what it was, (though he dissembled with us) brought it for England, and sold it there for seventy five pound sterling, as he confessed himself afterwards to some of our men. Thus we parted with the richest Booty we had gotten in the whole Voyage, through our own ignorance and laziness.⁵⁸

None of the buccaneer crewmembers had been able to recognise the silver for what it was. Whether or not buccaneers were able to recognise the nature of unminted silver, their tales of plunder and information on both the coasts and possible gains there managed to spark subsequent French smuggling expeditions, which would eventually cross the Pacific twice per journey.

Raw and refined textiles and bullion from buccaneers to the French trans-Pacific smuggling trade (1691-1749)

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, immediately preceding and during the War of the Spanish Succession, the Peruvian textile consumption and contraband culture formed an opportunity for French merchants looking for new markets. Dahlgren mentions how Saint-Malo merchants sought to actively support and extend this consumption pattern in trade towards Spanish America. As a result, European products would be sent from Flanders or France via Cadiz to Mexico

⁵⁷ As cited in Derek Howse and Norman Thrower (eds), *A buccaneer's atlas. Basil Ringrose's South Sea Waggoner*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p.22.

⁵⁸ Howse & Thrower (1992), pp.22-3.

or Peru.⁵⁹ As an example, he mentions how in 1691 a single Saint-Malo merchant sent about 500,000 livres of French textiles (*toile de Rouen et Bretagne*) to the ‘Mexico fleet’, and asked for government support in these exports by arguing that:

it is of such great importance to sustain this commerce, as it unloads our manufactures from the kingdom, and brings in money, and it is necessary to maintain the usage of our textiles in Spain and the Indies and not, by depriving them of it and putting them in necessity to accustom themselves to pieces of Hamburg or elsewhere, where they study as much as possible how to counterfeit them, to thus attract a useful and precious commerce.⁶⁰

Dahlgren has noted how the distance of Spanish colonies to the motherland made authority weaker, which attracted loose associations of pirates, and buccaneers or *flibustiers*. As a reaction to such predation, the expedition frequency of Spanish galleons for European exports and resupplying was made irregular so as to remove the risk of predictability for prey. An economic result of this irregularity was the occasional scarcity of European products in the colonies, the inhabitants of which remediated by engaging in contraband on all levels.⁶¹

Next to the danger buccaneers, pirates and privateers presented to shipping supply lines, their presence also enabled the knowledge transfer of information concerning the Pacific environment, including the availability of raw and refined produce. For instance, French buccaneer-pirate Raveneau de Lussan plundered the Mexican coast on the Pacific side in 1688, capturing Tehuantepec and reaching Acapulco. He published his buccaneer journal as a travelogue dedicated to the French naval minister, as his actions received subsequent official approval.⁶² In this journal, de Lussan mentioned returning with pearls, gold and jewels worth thirty thousand pieces of eight. One reason Lussan carried his wealth in precious stones and gold was that he considered the plundered Peruvian silver as too bulky to transport over his route crossing the Isthmus of Panama. He did mention how silver was so richly available in Peru that most things that were made of steel in France, were made of silver there.⁶³

Another French buccaneer, Captain Massertie, authored the second part of an anonymous buccaneer journal giving a detailed account of a buccaneering crew’s Spanish Pacific maritime and coastal predation in 1694. In this journal, Massertie mentioned taking gold, precious stones and silver, which all formed part of the natural and economic resources provided in Peru.⁶⁴ As Paul Mapp mentions, “such tales of wealth recounted in Saint-Malo dives or set to paper by Paris publishers, could not fail to attract the attention of French government officials”. Mapp notes how Louis XIV’s ministers and officials, and especially the Comte de Pontchartrain, were eager to directly enter Spanish pacific markets. Pontchartrain even gathered extensive private collections of maps and globes, and began gathering charts

⁵⁹ Dahlgren (1909), p.77.

⁶⁰ Dahlgren (1909), p.79.

⁶¹ Dahlgren (1909), pp.32-3.

⁶² Raveneau de Lussan, *A journal of a voyage made into the South Sea, by the bucaniers or freebooters of America, from the year 1684 to 1689 written by the Sieur Raveneau de Lussan*, London: Tho. Newborough, 1698.

⁶³ Paul W. Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012, p.229.

⁶⁴ Partly edited as Ducéré, *Journal de Bord d'un Flibustier*; the original is to be found as ‘Journal de bord, du 8 juin 1690 au 4 septembre 1694, tenu par F. Massertie, avec plans et profils’, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Français 385.

within a ministry of the Marine office.⁶⁵ This would eventually shape the collection in which Massertie's journal ended up.

As the environment of French court officials unofficially warmed to the idea of Peruvian interloper commerce, the court remained wary of the diplomatic consequences of official involvement. This was with good reason, as Hill mentions how Spanish King Philip V issued no less than twelve decrees between 1703 and 1715 in an attempt at quashing the French illegal trade with Peru.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, French merchants had already started organising direct illicit trade expeditions. A constellation of French merchants from the port of Saint-Malo gathered around merchant Noël Danycan in 1698, as he fitted out an expedition with the explicit purpose of gathering information for subsequent trade on the Peruvian coast, under the pretext of engaging in the China trade. This was enabled by the connected social resources of several family trading houses that controlled the trade in an oligarchical way, and invested in high-risk high-return activities.⁶⁷

On 17th December 1698, the ships *Phélypeaux*, *le Maurepas*, and *La Bonne Nouvelle* left St Malo under the command of M. de Beauchesne and captain de Terville.⁶⁸ In this context, it was no coincidence that de Beauchesne himself had been a former buccaneer and had experience in navigating Pacific waters. Lande and Levine consider his activities as representing a shift from an era of South Sea buccaneering to an era of smuggling.⁶⁹ The expeditions true orders were to engage in reconnaissance of gold and silver mines, import spices, silks, *exquisite* wood and especially gold and silver. In addition, they also had to:

create ample journals with everything to know about an unknown land in which one proposes to make an establishment: the nature of the people, their talents, way of life, religions, customs, habitations, commerce, and by who and how they are governed, what grows on their land and the usage of each thing, if they are laborious, industrious, and manufacturers (...) all real things, essential, useful and true, without flattery nor repeating previous reports.⁷⁰

In exchange for their European manufactures, early eighteenth-century French smugglers mostly exported unregistered or unminted bullion from Peru. Dahlgren mentions how among all of the money earned by three French vessels in 1705, valued at 7 million livres, almost half of the load consisted of unminted silver or *piñas*, bars of silver and silver vessels. Likewise, in 1710 one French ship had exchanged its whole provision of piastres of the value of 280,000 livres against Peruvian *piñas*, as the crew had found an abundance of unregistered metal there “forbidden for export”.⁷¹ Beyond the Spanish Manila galleon smuggling or buccaneering-privateering, raw bullion would also continue to serve the French trans-Pacific smuggling trade.

⁶⁵ Mapp (2012), p.125.

⁶⁶ Hill (2005), p.108.

⁶⁷ As mentioned most recently by Henning Hillman, *The Corsairs of Saint-Malo*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2021.

⁶⁸ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 8972, ‘Commencement de la Compagnie des Marchands pour le commerce de Chine, 1698’, fo. 243; See also Dahlgren (1909), p.131.

⁶⁹ Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500-1750*, New York: Routledge, 2016, p.146.

⁷⁰ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 8972, ‘Commencement de la Compagnie des Marchands pour le commerce de Chine, 1698’, fo. 243; See also: Dahlgren (1909), p.131.

⁷¹ Dahlgren (1909), p.49.

Despite official prohibitions and the coastal inhabitants' initial distrust of the French as potential pirates, the inhabitants of the Chilean port of Arica ignored official prohibitions, and both sold them victuals and engaged in commerce. The French vessels were transported to the port of Ilo, where they could hide. Although the European textiles brought on board were rotten, the cargo of one vessel still sold for the value of 50,000 *écus* at Arica. The commerce then continued without interruption at the Peruvian ports of Callao and Pisco, despite the Spanish Viceroy's orders. His commerce concluded on 27th May 1700, as the commander set sail from the Peruvian coast to the Galapagos and other isles to replenish, on indications of former filibusters or pirates who had previously sailed these waters.⁷² This successful expedition started a regular movement of French contraband trade with Peru, in which semi-processed or unminted bullion and silks played a central role.

In his journal, de Beauchesne indicated Arica, where some of his previous buccaneer contacts had meanwhile settled, as one of the richest ports to which the gold or silver from Potosí's mines was transported. However, the metal was now brought to Lima by land since the attacks of the buccaneers or filibusters, as the port lost its previous importance.⁷³ Nevertheless, the expedition reached Arica and the nearby Ile de Guano (now Peninsula del Alacrán), of which de Beauchesne described the inhabitants as:

for the most part mulattos or Indians... but exchanges were less with them than with merchants, and the indigenous and s from surrounding areas, and even from localities situated ten or twelve miles inland.

He described how his trading partners transported all sorts of goods and produce by mule train to Arica, such as wool or sugar, yet their main cargo consisted of silver ingots:

They transported their products by mule train, or on little camels, or great sheep, called lamas, of which the wool was utilized, even if inferior to the French one, with sugar produced at Arica those were two articles for the return trip, though their main charge would be silver ingots (*argent en lingots*), or in the form of plated silver.

As other authors before him, de Beauchesne noted how the use of this metal was:

so widespread in the region that the inhabitants of the countryside would use it for all sorts of uses, for their kitchen utensils, their plates, their vases etc. the gold is of inferior quality, but advantageous for exchange.⁷⁴

On 16th November 1702, de Beauchesne's expedition arrived at the Peruvian port of Ilo, where merchants bought all of the remaining European merchandise for 400,000 piastres. Despite Spanish officials' opposition, the French goods were sold out in eight days. De Beauchesne mentioned that a way of avoiding the Spanish officials or *corregidor*'s authority was to secretly deal with merchant contacts at night and in secondary ports:

⁷² Dahlgren (1909), p.140.

⁷³ See 'Journal du voyage de M. de Beauchesne par M. de Villefort', Manuscrit de la Bibliothèque du Ministère de la Marine (Service Hydrographique), Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

⁷⁴ Dahlgren (1909), pp.149-50.

instead of disembarking our textiles at Ilo, our loaded sloop left in the night, and disembarked 7 or 8 miles to the north, at Pacay, Yerba Buena and Tambo Pallas, were the buyers had their people go to take their merchandise.⁷⁵

Despite officials clamping down on smuggling trade, a wide range of them remained complicit in the illicit trade, as was the case in previous centuries. Kenneth Andrien mentions that when newly appointed *oidor*, Bernardo Gómez Frigoso was made a ‘social pariah’ as he attempted to expose such widespread complicity in contraband trade. On 27th January 1716, Gómez discovered a cache of illegal goods in Lima, which he had seized. The next morning, he found the guards dutifully placed before the locked door, but the walls of the building had been removed and the merchandise stolen. The guards refused to give their names and fled. His colleague officials on the *Audiencia* berated him for pressing charges, a mob of angry citizens attacked him in the street, and eventually the evidence was sold, moved and destroyed. Gómez himself was eventually convicted for distorting evidence in the case.⁷⁶

Following de Beauchesne’s highly profitable exchange, French cloth manufacturers and merchants from Bayonne, Marseille and Saint-Malo were lured by the prospects of access to Peruvian silver and of markets for their textiles. Andrien mentions how they undercut the market of textiles produced in the Spanish colonies, as they could import a wide variety of European textiles to meet the specialised needs of colonial consumers. Upscale cottons, linens and damasks from Rouen, Cambrai and Brittany were suited for elite tastes, while common wool cotton and flax textiles were aimed at more modest incomes.⁷⁷ This gave rise to what Paul W. Mapp considers as a commercial innovation of great significance: the continued direct commerce between French ports and Spanish settlements in Peru and Chile.⁷⁸ Thus, Allan J. Kuethe and Kenneth Andrien mention how by 1714, more than 65 percent of goods sold in Peruvian markets consisted of French contraband.⁷⁹ Peru proved to be a profitable market for French and European products, yet the French authorities officially forbade such commerce, so as not to disturb European peace treaties. However, as the profitability of the contraband traffic was solidly proven by de Beauchesne’s expedition, Saint-Malo merchants kept sending out expeditions despite official prohibitions, with the occasional unofficial support of French officials.⁸⁰

Recent work by Susan Schopp and Annick Fouquier examines in detail how the French trade extended its reach across the Pacific to China, where Peruvian silver was exchanged for Asian products that were sold both in Peru and onward to Europe.⁸¹ Schopp demonstrates how the trans-Pacific French sea route was established via Peru to Canton since 1707.⁸² One of the first ships to

⁷⁵ Dahlgren (1909), pp.153-4.

⁷⁶ Kenneth J. Andrien, *The Kingdom of Quito, 1690-1830: The State and Regional Development*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.30.

⁷⁷ Andrien (1995), p.29.

⁷⁸ Mapp (2012), p.123.

⁷⁹ Allan J. Kuethe & Kenneth J. Andrien, *The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century, War and the Bourbon Reforms 1713-1796*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.35.

⁸⁰ George Verne Blue, ‘French interest in Pacific America in the Eighteenth Century’, *Pacific Historical Review* 4:3 (1935), pp.246-7.

⁸¹ Susan Schopp, *Sino-French Trade at Canton, 1698-1842*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020; Annick Fouquier (ed.), *The French and the Pacific World, 17th-19th Centuries: Explorations, Migrations and Cultural Exchanges*, New York: Routledge, 2020.

⁸² Schopp (2020), pp.61-2.

take this route was the *Saint Antoine de Pade* under Captain Frondat, which left France in 1707 to reach the notorious smuggling ports of Huacho and Pisco in Peru, and proceeded to Macao and Canton in 1708 in order to exchange Peruvian silver for Chinese goods. Eventually, only the French Revolution would be a turning point that thwarted further French involvement in the Pacific until the 1810s, when French whaling expeditions ventured there again. Between 1707 and the 1780s, French Pacific smuggling involvement remained active in various ways.⁸³

Although much of the research on trans-Pacific crossings concerns how the silk markets of Macao were connected to the Philippines and Latin American coasts,⁸⁴ or how the galleon trade made Manila,⁸⁵ the French smuggling trade in the Pacific shows that the traditional galleon trade by no means formed the full extent of the trans-Pacific trade between Chinese ports and Spanish colonial territories. Moreover, the raw and manufactured form of textiles and bullion were of importance in enabling this trade.

From the transpacific route to the Southern-Netherlandish port of Ostend (1717-1721)

In the period following the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), this French movement of illicit contraband trade, which had encompassed Canton and a dual crossing of the Pacific back towards Peru and to Europe, also reached the port of Ostend in the Southern Netherlands. There, it would inspire groups of merchants to in turn set up Ostend-Asia expeditions themselves. Here too, the qualitative nature of raw silk commodities was of importance to trade and customs regulations.

Archival research has allowed us to identify at least four of the French ships that sailed into Ostend between 1717 and 1718: the *Maillebois* (1714-1718),⁸⁶ the *Lamoignon* (1714-1718), *Grand Dauphin de St. Malo* (1714-1717), and *Le Martial* (1713-1718). Records in the Belgian State Archives allow us to further examine the sales conditions and cargo list of the ship *Le Marquis de Maillebois*, captained by Monsieur de la Perche from China to Ostend, where it arrived on 10th June 1718. The actual sale proceeded on 1st August 1718, under the condition that if the commodities were accepted ‘as is’ the export purchaser could avoid customs while imports would be taxed at the usual rate:

[B]uyers have to buy the merchandise in the state it is in, cannot pretend any refraction of repayment due to damages, rottenness, or other conditions. Part of the proceedings will be spent as alms for the poor of the town. The seller [Captain de la Perche or his merchant-shipwrights] has been charged customs, the buyer doesn’t have to pay for goods sent out of the country [Austrian Netherlands] whereas the merchandise remaining in the country would pay customs according to Imperial tariff. Those buyers paying in the city of Ostend within six weeks following the Auction or Sale were granted a discount.

Considerable importance was granted to the raw or processed nature of the commodities within the sale or auction of the *Maillebois* cargo. The auction list stressed that pieces of damask or silk would

⁸³ Annick Foucrier, ‘The French Presence in the Pacific Oceana and California, 1700-1850’, in Foucrier (2020).

⁸⁴ Flynn et al. (2017).

⁸⁵ Raquel A. G. Reyes, ‘Flaunting It: How the Galleon Trade Made Manila, circa 1571-1800’, *Early American Studies* 15:4 (2017), pp.683-713.

⁸⁶ The numbers between brackets indicate the journey time from the initial venture from France to Peru, crossing the Pacific to China, back to Peru, and eventually to Ostend. Along this route, these ships were easily at sea for three, four, or even five years.

be sold “as is”, contained 308 cases of “Raw Nankin Silk”, out of which “181 ugly” as “some have little spots, a bit wasted or blemished”.⁸⁷ The state of the goods was important in determining their condition, price and desirability for purchase. For example, the cargo of Chinese black pepper was divided into three categories: 111 bales of pepper, the dust of pepper and some quantities of pepper found in the attic or between the floorboards. Next to raw silk one also finds mention of luxury fabrics such as ‘lampas’, or 1,340 pieces of ‘pequins’ in “different colours and states (gray or embroidered with flowers)”, and even 800 pairs of “*bas de soye à homme en différents couleurs*” (socks in different colours), or even as finished products such as eleven whole finished bedchamber sets.⁸⁸ The state of the commodities clearly mattered, and varied from raw silk and pieces of fabric to wholly manufactured socks or bedchamber sets.

In the October 1718 auction and cargo list of the ship *Lamoignon*, we mostly find refined and manufactured textile products: damasks, 30 dresses, 996 *paires de bas de soye* [socks], 29 pieces of embroidered satin, 19 pieces of *velours* embroidered with flowers, but also 1061 livres of silk thread for sewing.⁸⁹ On 10th October 1718, the judge of customs at Ostend, Don Pedro Fernandez, received government instructions to “proceed with the public sale of the cargo and commodities of the vessel named La Lamoignon consisting in manufactures of diverse merchandise (...) except for the velours embroidered with flowers and the rubans, and the sewing silks, which were to be locked until further order”.⁹⁰ His instructions also mentioned Thomas Ray as the principal merchant to whom the arriving vessels were addressed.⁹¹

Government instructions explicitly stated that sales from such foreign vessels could not proceed except by permission. Authorities and customs officers made a distinction between types of commodities to be sold by taxing them in specific ways, and that the qualitative state of the commodity (as finished product or as a potential part of a European manufacture process) mattered in these decisions. The authorities thereby reacted to a trade already initiated by Ostend merchants such as Ray, and the French shipwrights or captains who had taken the initiative to have the French smuggling ships arrive at Ostend.⁹²

In a letter to the Council of Finances on 11th October 1718, Ray protested against the suspension of the public sale of flowered *velours*, *rubans*, *listonnerie* and sewing silks or silk thread, as “one could even defend the cause that these are essential manufactures in the said town [Ostend].” However, their sale or auction was suspended until it would be clearly recognised whether it concerned fabrics from France or from the Indies. This again implied the importance of the goods’

⁸⁷ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘Voute de chargement Maillebois’, fo.1 vo.

⁸⁸ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘Voute de chargement Maillebois’, fo. 2.

⁸⁹ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘Voute de chargement Maillebois’, fo. 2.

⁹⁰ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘Ostende le 28 8ber 1719 D E Fernandez’, fo. 1 – vo.

⁹¹ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘Ostende le 28 8ber 1719 D E Fernandez’, fo. 2.

⁹² ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘Ostende le 28 8ber 1719 D E Fernandez’, fo. 2.

state or qualitative nature in regards to their legitimate or illegitimate character. Ray nevertheless urged that the auction should proceed:

so as not to discredit the Port of Ostend, which is the only one from which one can hope for the navigation and commerce of these provinces to reflourish, by permitting the sale by special grace (...) with a clause from your Honour that the foreign vessels wielding a permission could charge merchandise from the Indies cannot fix by their directors the Day of Sale without permission from the ministry.⁹³

Thereby, the request was made to use Ostend as a freeport under the aegis of the government, which proceeded to allow this by exception and in turn turned potential smuggling into a coordinated legal auction. On 31st October 1718, a second letter mentioned that permission was accorded for:

the interests in the vessels from France the *Martial*, *Maillebois* and *Lamognong* charged with merchandise having demanded permission to come to Ostend to sell their cargo on the condition that they could depart while not paying customs tax: this permission is accorded in favour of the commerce and to benefit the port of Ostend [a struck-through part of the manuscript reads: on the condition that they do not stay there].⁹⁴

The clause that was removed here may have indicated an eagerness to have the transactions concluded as swiftly as possible, as both merchants and authorities would have been aware of the illicit nature of the French smuggling trade, and the potential risk for infringing treaty rights.

This letter also indicated how the ‘raw’ nature of part of the silk again played a role in determining taxation tariffs: “Six months after the day of arrival they are to pay one percent except for the raw silk which will be submitted to full taxes (and by consequence, sold more expensive). And the merchandise is to be put in storage under key until auction”. The letter also referred to a 1680 decree that stipulated foreign vessels could enter with their cargo at Ostend and leave without paying any rights on the merchandise which they did not unload. It mentioned that:

we could apply the same benefit to the merchandise of the ships which have entered under permission at Ostend and have been immediately out in storehouses under power of the officers who keep the keys thereof, without us being accused of conducting novelties in customs levying against the Peace Treaties and the Barriere treaty.⁹⁵

In collaboration with Ray, other Ostend merchants, and the customs officers, the Austrian-Netherlandish authorities had found a way to accommodate the French smuggling trade, including the particular role the import of raw silk could play in European manufacture. As for the Austrian-Netherlandish officials’ and merchants’ reasons for doing so, the letter explicitly mentioned the ambitions to turn Ostend into a flourishing port via such trade, and the competition with:

multiple families and capitalists of Holland to whom the VOC [Dutch East-India Company] doesn’t permit to equip ships for the Indies and to trade on their own Account

⁹³ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘le 11 8bre 1718 Thomas Rey to Conseil de Finances’.

⁹⁴ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘B le 31 8bre tenus copie a mr Ray’.

⁹⁵ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘B le 31 8bre tenus copie a mr Ray’.

retire from the United Provinces to undertake this trade under banner and Protection of His Majesty, which will give a great failure to the Dutch company, will repopulate and flower the Austrian Netherlands, attract and form sailors and naval officers of our nation which could then serve on the vessels of war and fleet of His Majesty. The aggrandisement of the town of Ostend would put the Austrian Netherlands in an as flourishing state than during the reign of the Dukes of Burgundy.⁹⁶

In 1721, following the introduction of the French vessels into Ostend, and the first tentative steps Ostend merchants such as Ray took in directly fitting out ships for the China trade, the Ostend merchants negotiated with the Austrian Netherlandish authorities concerning the imposition of taxes on incoming goods from ‘the Indies’ (i.e., both China and India). Here too, the raw or refined nature of the commodities mattered. Generally, the councillors charged 5 percent on pepper, spices and textiles. In distinction, unfinished textiles would be taxed in view of their use in European or local country manufacture:

the raw silks, wool and cotton, as well as the dyes, are free of entry, in favour of the fabrics, that they are received exempt of customs by Holland, and that it would benefit the commerce of the United Provinces by charging their lading via Ostend, but there should be a distinction between those bought for the fabrics of the Country [European manufacture] and charge at 4% the value for all rights of exit. 5% on the silk fabrics, whole silks, filets and other matters.⁹⁷

Here we see how official taxation policies benefitted the import of unfinished textiles and their manufacture in Europe while taking the intra-European commercial competition into account, particularly with Holland. This also completed the circular movement of potential re-export of manufactures by French ships towards Peru or elsewhere.

When Ostend merchants such as Thomas Ray themselves started fitting out vessels towards the Indies, the discussion among Austrian-Netherlandish dignitaries at Brussels concerning the Admiralty reveals how this was “something new which hadn’t been anticipated”, at least by the authorities.⁹⁸ However, the authorities moved swiftly to recuperate or incorporate what they could from the French illicit trade and the projects following it. These ventures gave rise to subsequent Ostend-Asia trade expeditions, where smuggling of commodities extended on micro-levels of self-organised networks of merchants and sailors. The French trans-Pacific trade had thus formed the beginning of an enterprising Ostend-Asia connection, which would undoubtedly have influenced the local market’s taste for Asian textiles in the Austrian Netherlands. Evidence from literate sailors’ letters and shipboard documents shows us how this taste and knowledge of Asian textiles supported sailors’ personal smuggling affairs: here too, the specific quality and state of silk commodities played a role in the smuggling process, moving it along its commodity chain.

⁹⁶ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8604 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘B le 31 8bre tenu copie a mr Ray’, fo. 2.

⁹⁷ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8602 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘Sur l’entré de 4 a 5 pourcent propose par les cons administrateurs pour entré ou Transit de marchandises des Indes indirectement avec des reflexions 1721’, fo. 1.

⁹⁸ ARA (Rijksarchief Brussel) AGR 8602 AR Conseil de Finances / Raad van Financiën, ‘” 21 june 1721 Reflexions sur l information du Juge Bauwens touchant les deux vaisseaux nommés l’impératrice capne waersegger et le Prince Eugene capne Boubereel arrives de la Chine à ostende dont est le directeur le sr Thomas Ray”, fo. 1 vo.

Ostend sailors' self-organised smuggling: contraband textiles and raw silk

On the Ostend expeditions to China and India, crewmembers were allowed to conduct a limited particular or private trade or *pacotille* beyond their official wage. Although crewmembers' contracts officially forbade them to import European trading goods into Asia, sailors' chests and 'personal luggage' remained unchecked on an informal level. Officially, captains ran the risk of being fined if the extent of their *pacotille* extended beyond the allowed 'privilege', yet in some cases this even exceeded 20 percent without being punished. Smuggling took place to a considerable extent in both Bengal and Canton, as Parmentier mentions the ship *Tijger*'s crew engaging in mutiny at Canton in 1726, in an attempt to obtain larger *pacotille* privileges. This sparked a thorough investigation, from which officials gathered that some officers bought off the chests or *pacotille*-space of sailors, in order to export larger amounts of goods than were allowed. Sailors and officers both attempted to sell or auction off this illegal cargo in intermediate ports during the return journey.⁹⁹ In this sense, common sailors had already set up an elaborate self-organised social system of smuggling since the earliest Ostend-Asia expeditions.

On 27th June 1720, First Lieutenant Joannes De Vos of the ship *Huys Van Oostenryck* had returned from Canton and declared to an Ostend notary how he had requested his captain if he could fill his shipboard sleeping berth with personally acquired goods from China. He indicated that the crew had to sleep in cramped conditions, as they had brought a considerable extent of 'personal merchandise' or smuggled goods. De Vos was only allowed to bring 15 pounds of tea and received the advice to invest his remaining capital in the purchase of silk, in a quantity limited to his sailors' chest, which the captain obliged him to stow in his berth. The ship had an unfortunate fate, as it was captured and plundered near Madagascar by Edward Congdon's pirate ship *Dragon*. In this encounter, De Vos reported the loot that the pirates took from his own chest, consisting of "16 pieces of damask, a piece of yellow tafta, 12 pounds of green tea, 2 pairs of silk stockings, the main part of his clothes and underwear, a set of porcelain, and his navigational tools", all of which were divided among all pirates.¹⁰⁰ Comparing the nature of the limited number of commodities De Vos smuggled with him, we notice their similarity to the earlier cargoes the French trans-Pacific ships had brought to Ostend. This included both finished manufactures such as socks, and pieces of yellow or damask textile.

Sources from Austrian-Netherlandish notary archives show us how orders could be placed for specific commodities to be smuggled back on an individual scale for the Ostend-China voyages. For instance, Captain Nicolas De Rudder of the ship *Brusselsche Galeye* received a request from Ostend merchant Thomas de Grysperre in 1719, giving him 1,500 French florins to buy Chinese wares, which he would deliver to him on his return.¹⁰¹ Occasionally shipboard sources provide us with small glimpses giving us an insight into how these commodities were smuggled. For instance, when quartermaster Jacobus Verbrugge passed away due to illness on his 1725 journey to China, the

⁹⁹ Jan Parmentier, *Oostende & Co.*, Gent: Ludion, 2002, pp.30-3.

¹⁰⁰ Rijksarchief Brugge (RB) TBO 132/8 – 12 '1941. Depot notaris F.J. Van Caillie te Oostende – Rijcx, Philips senior Oostende – band 2 januari 1720 – 29 december 1720 – 'declaratie Joannis de Vos aan Philips Ryx not. 28 Juny, 30 Juny, eersten July 1720 Joannis De Vos schipper en onderstuurman van den fregat schepe genaemt het Huys van Oostenrycke', fo. 14-16.

¹⁰¹ Rijksarchief Brugge (RB), Notariaat, depot F.J. Van Caillie 1941, 12, akte 139 (10.2.1719). 'Thomas de Grysperre – Nicolas De Rudder'.

copybook of shipboard letters contained a letter by ship's merchant Joan Tobias. He noted how Verbrugge's sailor's chest had to be opened so as to be visited by Chinese customs officials, and that he would personally take out the quantity of money and a set of Chinese fans, to deliver to his contact person.¹⁰² Likewise, the *Keyserinne*'s records mention how the Company's supercargos requested to inspect the sailor's chest of common sailor ('*matroos*') Joannes Pernier, in which they found a quantity of foreign European currency, some small textiles, tea and porcelain. All these could indicate unseen micro-transactions among European crewmembers, occurring beyond the 'official' Ostend-Asia commerce:

The chest had been broken open in the Room of sr Joan Tobias as the key was missing due to the absence of its Owner or his accomplices (...) and we found in it (...) twelve pieces of eight, ten Zeuwse Rijxdaelders, an English crown and a Foreign piece item in a White Nightcap 84 ½ pieces of eight, four embroidered women's skirts, a small piece of handkerchief, two pieces of blue damask one Red, a little box with 10 eau de vie, bottles with inscription Jeems Comer, 6 black stockings, ca. 4 catty of tea, some cups and saucers.¹⁰³

Another unique source among the Ostend-Asia material of the so-called 'Ostend Company' (GIC) reveals the family correspondence addressed to sailor Laurens Garmyn. These letters grant us concrete insight into how the micro-transactions and small-scale smuggling networks were organised. It also reveals which goods and objects sailors' *pacotille* consisted of: small objects and goods personally and informally bought, perhaps from suppliers or little shops around or near the European factory or settlement. Yet the use of informal friendship and family networks could easily turn this personal acquisition into wider smuggling. On 10th September 1726, Garmyn's mother, Joanne de Laer, wrote that she sent her letter with Mr Jacobus Darden and merchant Strebel on Captain Meyne's ship *Carolus Sextus*,¹⁰⁴ which would arrive in 1727. She also mentioned Darden as a reliable partner for "moving across some goods": "this man can do you good service in moving across some goods, it is one on whom you can count and rely."¹⁰⁵ Laurens' father, Pieter Van Aecken, also sent a more extensive letter with the ship *Hope* of Captain Carpentier in 1726,¹⁰⁶ who is mentioned as Gaermyn's cousin. Laurens' father's letters clearly show us how informal networks were set up in order to maximise profit in the quantity of smuggled goods, through maintaining friendship and family connections. Van Aecken wrote how he included money in his letter, with a specific order to buy

¹⁰² 'de kisten bennen open, om te beter aan de hopo huysen gevisiteert te conne werden, het geld en partij wayers vanen quartiern: blijve hier onder mijn berustende, en sal het selve, als u opkomt, overleeveren' tl., In: SAA (Stadsarchief Antwerpen), GIC 5749 'Copyboeck Schip Keyserinne 1725 China'.

¹⁰³ 'de kist in de Caemer van sr Joan Tobias open geslaegen by manquent van Sleutel in Apsentie vande Eygenaer ofte sijn mede mackers en hebben wij ondergeschreven daer in gevonden (...) twalf stucken van Achten, thien Zeeuwsche Rijxdaelders, een Ingelse Croon, en een Vremt stuck item in een Witte Slaepmutse vier en tachtigh en half stucken van achten, vier geboordeurde vrouw rocken, een Cleen stucktie neusdoeck, twee stucken blau Damast 1 do. Root, een doostie met 10 caudevie, rijn flesties met opschrift Jeems Comer, 6 zwarte causen, ca 4 catty thee, wat copties & schotelties' tl., In: SAA GIC 5749 'Copyboeck Schip Keyserinne 1725 China' – '23 9bre Canton 1725'.

¹⁰⁴ Parmentier (2002), p.141.

¹⁰⁵ "wandt dese man UE com goeden dienst doen in het over bringen eenigh goet het is een daer ue op can staedt maecken en betrouwen mach". SAA GIC 5791 'Familiebrieven Laur Garmyn Bengale 1726' – 'Oostende den 10 September 1726'.

¹⁰⁶ Parmentier (2002), p.140.

(“*daer voor te coepen*”) white muslin cotton handkerchiefs with a red stripe, and some with yellow stripes.¹⁰⁷

It is particularly notable how Van Aecken engaged in risk spreading by not sending the money as one parcel, but by dividing its delivery via multiple crewmembers onboard captain Meyne’s ship: second pilot Pieter Bruynet (10 crowns), first pilot Hinderik Loer (fifteen crowns), and first constable Jacobus Derdin (fifteen crowns) were all involved. He further spread his deliveries to Laurens by also sending money through pilot Roegier Nowels (sixteen crowns) and pilot Caerel Lemoyne (sixteen crowns) on the ship of Captain Michiel Cayphas, and sends an additional sixteen crowns via ship’s pilot Joannis Lingheledt. Pieter clearly spread the capital for use in personal trade among the sailors, and perhaps also to keep it out of sight of Company officials, while ordering his son to:

invest all that money in white muslin handkerchiefs with red stripes and yellow, you should give exactly the same amount of money to each pilot according to the money I gave to them, and the other 100 crowns you should see if you find anyone who has privilege [of *pacotille*], who want to bring those goods and make a solid agreement with them.¹⁰⁸

Informal networks of GIC sailors thus developed in order to spread the capital and products amongst themselves, expanding their margin of personal gain through the engagement of each crewmember’s *pacotille*, in order to engage in personal trade on a larger scale for the benefit of their personal or familial enrichment. The members of these networks and those placing their orders apparently knew exactly which kinds of commodities they wished to order. The opportunity for such smuggling was determined by the objects’ nature as small textile items, which could be easily stowed, but also by a sense of fashion: the exact colours and types of cloth were deemed important. As finished products, we find similar orders to what the French trans-Pacific ships had earlier brought into Ostend: silk stockings, handkerchiefs and articles of clothing.

Conclusion: the role of ‘raw versus refined’ silk and bullion as trans-Pacific smuggling commodities

This paper has revealed a history of ‘non-compliance’ versus the constraints of legal commerce and mercantilist laws: a non-compliance that shaped the trans-Pacific space. Piecing together fragments from Latin American archives and manuscript sources related to non-complying agents, such as buccaneers or smugglers, allows a glance at the less visible trade, which reveals the sometimes swashbuckling nature of entrepreneurial forms of early capitalism involved in Europe’s colonial expansion in the Pacific. It also shows how different practices of valuing allowed non-compliance to take place, according to the status or nature of the commodities involved at a particular point in time.

The qualitative nature of both the raw and refined silver and textile commodities was of great importance to the consumption culture and smuggling practices in China, the Spanish colonies, and Europe. Especially the nature and availability of ‘raw’ bullion or unminted coin held a great attraction to pirates and smugglers, whereas it formed only one link in a wider trade chain for the French trans-Pacific merchants. The ‘raw’ and therefore untaxed state of silk textiles and silver proved important

¹⁰⁷ SAA GIC 5791 ‘Familiebrieven Laur Garmyn Bengale 1726’ – ‘Oostende 1726 Beminde Sonne Gaermin’, fo. 1.

¹⁰⁸ SAA GIC 5791 ‘Familiebrieven Laur Garmyn Bengale 1726’ – ‘Oostende 1726 Beminde Sonne Gaermin’, fo. 1 vo.

in the illegal trade at Peru, where an infrastructure developed using mule trains, coastal barges and a widespread complicity of agents involving merchants, postmen, clerics and officials. The ‘raw’ nature of silks and textile commodities was also important in the Spanish colonial consumption culture, as it fed both guild manufactures and was apparently cheaper than European exports. The silk-dyeing process was of importance in European ports such as Ostend as well as at Potosí, as the processing of unfinished textile goods into finished commodities could provide both competition to ‘official’ manufactures or infringe on the clauses of peace treaties. As the Austrian-Netherlandish sources mentioned, the authorities were highly aware of the impact that Chinese silk-yarn imports could have on Flemish or French manufacture.

Just as the silks in Peru, the textile commodities acquired by smuggling at Ostend were not only destined for elites. Resultingly, the qualitative state of textile commodities was also important to the self-organised smuggling networks of Ostend sailors. Differently to the large-scale French smuggling expeditions organised by merchants, we see that sailors particularly valued smaller-sized finished manufactures such as socks or handkerchiefs. These would be easier to stow, but would also be gathered or sold onwards as finished commodities, not destined for a further manufacturing process.

The focus on specific commodity forms of silver and silks has allowed us to trace how these commodities changed in nature and form as they were transported through the commodity chain. The commodity’s state and form mattered during different stages of the commodity’s movement through the chain: the required shape or form of the commodity was not only determined by the production process, but also by its use value to consumers and transporters. For textiles, we have seen how bulk goods became garments, or how raw silk was transformed into handkerchiefs or gowns, ordered and transported according to the smuggling possibilities they provided as well as their role in the receiving consumption cultures. These trans-Pacific smuggling practices show us how value was created all along the commodity chain: as commodities were modified, their value was reflected by different cultures through which it passed and the use value the commodity held for them. The ‘raw’ nature of textile items thereby held an impact on European economies as well as overseas territories.

The raw and refined nature of textile commodities and bullion mattered in trans-Pacific smuggling: the raw silk used in clothing manufacture could potentially provide an unfair market advantage, while raw bullion was easier for illicitly export due to its avoidance of official coinage or customs-registration procedures. The finished silk manufactures imported into Europe would be of a specific nature – as silk stockings, dresses or bed covers – and were apparently easier to transport or smuggle on a small scale, as there was a specific demand for such items. The ‘semi-processed’ or ‘unfinished’ nature of unminted coin proved a vital element to the silk commodity chain in the trans-Pacific smuggling trade. One may therefore conclude that while the qualitative nature of the commodities invited smuggling, smuggling practices also determined the level of processing – how raw or refined the commodities should be – at each stage along the commodity chain.

This paper also considered the ‘unseen’ or hidden infrastructure which allowed these commodities to move along the commodity chain: literature revealed the ‘wicked ingenuity’ by which convents were used as smuggling entrepôts, while we also saw how smuggling ports or *pulperías* functioned as ‘anti-markets’. Braudel employs this notion of the ‘anti-market’ to indicate a zone or layer beyond the (regulated) markets, where capitalism operates freely and unrestricted. He notes that

these zones are characterised by exclusivity, monopolies and privileged access to information. Secrecy and monopoly form strategies in the capitalist mode of exchange characterising such zones, in an unregulated market opposed to and distorting practices of “fair exchange and the price mechanism”.¹⁰⁹ Contemporary economic anthropology places such informal economic mechanisms beyond the ‘legal-illegal’ dualism, as it points at a complex economic whole that maintains links with formal processes. The resulting situation is labelled as ‘legal variability’ involving regimes of value across frontiers in global commodity chains. Formal and informal domains, or markets and anti-markets, may alternate according to structures of governance or geographical domains and cultures where the commodity passes.¹¹⁰ Early-modern trans-Pacific smuggling shows this same character, especially when considering the wide-ranging complicity of actors involved in formal and informal trade. Many classes within Peruvian society colluded in the conspicuous consumption of silks as well as in the illicit or informal smuggling culture, including at the level of local authorities and officials who regulated against smuggling while participating in it.

The labour force of sailors smuggling the commodities across the commodity chain did not necessarily operate in companies. Instead, they organised themselves according to their own collaborative organisational forms, which relied to a considerable extent on the part the common seaman played as a cultural conduit – a still often overlooked aspect of early-modern economic history. These sailors were shown to engage their kinship relations within their labour-class or friendship groups in setting-up smuggling arrangements. As the early-modern sailor was the worker who handled the goods directly by loading the ship, his labour formed a crucial transport function in the commodity chain. Rediker points out it was therefore not unusual that he “intercepted some of these goods along the way”,¹¹¹ as “smuggling had broad public support, and it provided berths for many a sailor”.¹¹² The picture of trans-Pacific trade and smuggling shows an intricate interlacing at different social levels, as movements of smuggling along the commodity chain involved commodities in their variously valued processed and semi-processed states. The actual decision to transport contraband, such as unfinished silk or unminted bullion, depended on the smugglers’ valuation of the commodity: according to the exchange value the commodity would yield, or according to the use value it held within the smuggling infrastructure at that point in time.

Further research remains to be done on a comparative level, involving both the trans-Pacific dynamics and the wider world of early-modern maritime smuggling. This would also involve an investigation into the meaning and developments of smuggling along various commodity chains in early-modern Asia and the Pacific, while investigating the roles and involvement of non-European agents and different cultures of consumption, production and valuing. Source-based research testifying to practices of valuing and non-compliance within the maritime domain can also shed further light on both the circulation and state of the commodities involved.

¹⁰⁹ Fernand Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977, pp.92-3.

¹¹⁰ Rosana Pinheiro-Machado, ‘Rethinking the informal and criminal economy from a global commodity chain perspective: China-Paraguay-Brazil’, *Global networks*18:3 (2018), pp.479-80.

¹¹¹ Marcus Rediker, *Between the devil and the deep blue sea: merchant seamen, pirates, and the Anglo-American maritime world, 1700-1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.29.

¹¹² Rediker (1987), p.72.

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- 1) The networks through which commodities were produced and circulated within, between and beyond empires;
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- 3) The impact of agents in the periphery on the establishment and development of commodity networks: as instigators and promoters; through their social, cultural and technological resistance; or through the production of anti-commodities;
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