

## **A Sino-Southeast Asian Circuit: Ethno-histories of the Marine Goods Trade**

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The present essay looks at Overseas Chinese networks through one window: the historical and contemporary trade in marine produce, which linked China and the many countries of Southeast Asia in an economic embrace for hundreds of years. In the first third of the article, I note some of the theoretical, historiographical, and historical outlines for examining these communities and processes across historical time. This is done in fairly shorthand form, as I have written about these connections in more detail in other places. The second two-thirds of the essay links these historical peregrinations with how the marine goods trade works now between China and Southeast Asia. This portion of the essay is based on published academic literature, but also significantly comprises my own oral-history interviews with these traders throughout East and Southeast Asian ports, as well as visits to collecting and trans-shipment sites of these commodities too. In the pages that follow, I hope to show the broad dimensions of this commerce in both historical and contemporary terms, as a crucial connective link between China and Southeast Asia over the past several centuries. Far from being an antiquated trade in strange and often exoticised objects culled from the sea, the traffic in marine goods can be seen as an important vestige of historical trans-oceanic connections. This commerce echoes the past in nostalgic and interesting ways, but it also continually evolves into the future, as the statements of these traders reveal when they speak into the record on their own terms.