The history of the Gulf in the second millennium has been hardly explored despite the availability of better documentation. Trade, as revealed in the five chapters of Part II, continued to be pivotal to the region's economic development despite political changes. Court policies during the tenth and eleventh centuries, argues James A. Anderson, could not stop coastal people from 'slipping through holes' between the existing kingdoms to continue their age-old maritime trade (chap. 5). The maritime trading ban during the Ming and Qing eras, nonetheless, did influence the rise and fall of the 'commodity-economy expansion' and 'export-oriented products' such as ceramics and silks during Vietnam's Lê Dynasty. This, coupled with the transformation of regional and international maritime trade, was the major cause of the disappearance of Vân Đồn Port in the sixteenth century (John K. Whitmore, chap. 6) and the ultimately unsuccessful resurgence of Vietnamese silk in the seventeenth century (Iioka Naoko, chap. 7). The intricate history of the Gulf during the tumultuous seventeenth century, according to Niu Junkai and Li Qingxin, was flavoured with the presence and activities of a number of 'political pirates' who undoubtedly influenced the downturn of gulf trade and traffic (chap. 8). Although the situation may have eased in the following centuries, it could not help prevent the Tongking Gulf from becoming a backwater in the nineteenth century, despite the continued maritime trade in rice (Vu Duong Luan and Nola Cooke, chap. 9).

The Tongking Gulf through history is an important book. Its well-researched chapters and non-state-centric viewpoint will make it valuable well into the future and attractive to readers of Asian maritime history. It is hoped that this volume will inspire people to pay more attention to this region, especially to aspects not mentioned in this volume such as religion, acculturation, and so forth.

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Commanders of Dutch East India ships in the eighteenth century
By JAAP R. BRUIJN
Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011. Pp. 336. Maps, Plates, Notes, Bibliography, Index.
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Until the 1780s, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was the largest organisation in the shipping traffic between Europe and Asia. The numbers of ships sent by the VOC to and from Asia far exceeded those of ships sailing under the flag of the English or the French East India companies. Most of this Dutch-Asiatic shipping took place in the eighteenth century. Between 1700 and 1796, 2,957 voyages were made to Asia and 2,369 voyages back to Europe. Among the commanders of Dutch East Indiamen in the eighteenth century, more than a thousand made an outward or homeward-bound voyage two or more times and at least six hundred others

completed a single voyage. These commanders in the service of the VOC (*schippers* in Dutch) are the subject of a new book by the doyen of Dutch maritime historians, Jaap Bruijn. For this book, Bruijn has studied the records and careers of a few hundred *schippers* in depth.

The book consists of two parts. The first part examines the social background and onshore lives of commanders in the towns in Holland and Zeeland (Enkhuizen, Hoorn, Middelburg, Delft, Rotterdam and Amsterdam) where the six Chambers of the VOC were based and where most of the commanders came from. Each chapter on a city outlines the local economy and discusses key characteristics of the local group of VOC *schippers* such as their origins, wealth, residence, marital status, religious affiliation, business affairs and social mobility. Other chapters look at commanders outside the Chamber towns and at naval officers employed by the VOC after 1740. The second part of the book, entitled 'Commanders at sea', is thematically organised and is more analytical in nature. Chapters in this part discuss aspects such as training and examination, appointment, income (normal and private), life on board, discipline, shipping disasters and professionalisation. The book concludes with a brief comparison between VOC *schippers* and commanders of other European companies, and with a summary of the main patterns and changes in the characteristics of VOC commanders in the eighteenth century.

Bruijn's book is a pioneering study of its kind. It is the first collective biography ever of commanders of East Indiamen of a European nation in the early modern period. It is well-researched, it is written in a readable style and it provides a wealth of arresting detail and insights. A few examples may suffice. VOC-commanders did not only receive a much higher fixed pay that 'anybody else who sailed for a living' in the Dutch Republic (p. 312), but also enjoyed substantial fringe benefits (such as bonuses for fast voyages) and ample opportunities to make huge sums of money from trade in private goods. It was not unusual for commanders to take slaves on board from Asia or the Cape, who 'probably lived at home' with them in the Netherlands (p. 231). The idea floated by some Dutch naval officers in the eighteenth century (and a few twentieth-century historians, including Charles Boxer, in their wake) that VOC-*schippers* in the late eighteenth century were incompetent navigators and that the Company directors stifled any attempt at innovation, turns out to be no more than a myth. Most of the VOC-commanders were in fact very good at their job and the VOC was, until the very end, not at all averse to introducing changes in ship design or navigation. VOC-commanders came off well in comparison with their colleagues in other European companies.

Apart from some remarks in the chapter on private income and at a few other places, the book, alas, hardly deals with the VOC *schippers*' activities at sea or ashore in Asia. A follow-up study on this subject would be welcome, because after all commanders frequently made a number of voyages in Asia before returning to Europe. Another issue that Bruijn's book touches upon, but does not fully address, is the power relations between commanders and VOC directors. While VOC directors were, if necessary, perfectly capable of disciplining individual commanders, they were apparently not as able to withstand the resistance of commanders as a group. In 1752, for example, the directors 'because of rising discontent among the commanders' gave them permission 'to double the amount of the private goods they

transported' (p. 214). What determined the power relations between commanders and directors over time? It is one of the merits of Bruijn's fine study that it gives rise to such intriguing questions for further research.

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Translation in Asia: Theories, practices, histories
Edited by RONIT RICCI and JAN VAN DER PUTTEN
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There is much that scholars of Asia can learn from thinking about translation, and much that translation studies scholars can learn from studying practices in Asia, as this excellent book, *Translation in Asia: Theories, practices, histories*, edited by Ronit Ricci and Jan van der Putten reveals. The book consists of an introduction and eleven chapters, with contributions by Thomas Hunter, Torsten Tschacher, Peter Friedlander, Ronit Ricci, Haslina Haroon, Vijayakumar Boratti, Jose Mario Fransisco, Didi Kwartanada, Erlinda Alburo, Paul Rae and S. Sanjeev. Essays discuss translation in South and Southeast Asia (despite the broad 'Asia' of the title), and from, into, and between languages including Sanskrit, Javanese, Malay, Tagalog, Cebuano, Filipino, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindi, Mandarin, Arabic, Spanish and English. The period of translation history covered is broad; from the two millenia-old cosmopolis shaped by Sanskrit, to contemporary performance in Singapore.

The essays take translation studies in exciting new directions. The strongest linking thread is the questioning of ways interlingual transfer — and language itself — is conceptualised in South and Southeast Asia. Rather than merely identifying instances of a practice readily familiar (from a Euro-American-centric perspective) as 'translation', the writers work hard, from the inside out as it were, to find local explanations of where languages begin and end, and how movement between them is both thought about and practised. This approach reveals a wealth of translation activity and often traditions of profound reflection about it. It leads to discussion about the juxtaposition of and movement between vernacular and cosmopolitan languages (Hunter's wonderful essay on Sanskrit and Old Javanese, and Tschacher on the rendering of Islamic texts in Arabic into Tamil); between languages of writing and speech; between high and low status languages; and between the sacred and secular. It raises questions such as: what is 'unintelligibility', where does it lie, and what is its purpose? It shows how language encounters stimulate the formulation of ideas about 'translation' (for instance Munshi's reflections on Malay); influence language practice (commentary on 'foreign' texts influencing the structure of the local language); and highlight both complex interrelationships between languages and scripts, and differences between manuscript and print culture.