

increased geographical mobility of younger generations who could have been accompanied by a simultaneous process of immobilization and labor exploitation. Different historical periods exhibit similar dynamics, shifting from one place to the other to allow further capital accumulation. The results are an important, yet unexpected, component in the study on labor, coercion, and (im) mobility, that is: political mechanisms and the way compulsion, mobilization, and social reproductive changes interact with processes that could promote controlling regimes even more.

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Leonard Blussé, *De Chinezenmoord. De kolonisatie van Batavia en het bloedbad van 1740* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 2023). 360 pp. ISBN 9789463821810.

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Historian John Wills has advanced a conceptual framework aimed at delineating the “long process of the Asian maritime facet of the modern world system”. He suggests employing the term “interactive emergence” instead of the conventional designation of “European expansion”. This alternative conceptualization appears to offer a more nuanced portrayal of the intricate interplay between European and Asian civilizations during the early modern era.<sup>3</sup>

In his examination of the evolving urban structures in Euro-Asian contexts, Wills identifies notable parallels between the cities of Manila and Batavia.<sup>4</sup> He underscores the necessity of delving into the multifaceted layers of socio-political and cultural dynamics that characterize each locale in order to comprehend the intricacies of Euro-Asian urban convergence fully.<sup>5</sup> In my view, the complexity inherent in these layered convergences forms the foundation upon which prosperity hinges, contingent upon the harmonization of global

3 John Wills, ‘Review: Maritime Asia, 1500-1800. The interactive emergence of European domination’, *The American Historical Review* 98:1(1993) 83-105 at 84-85, 99.

4 Ibid, p. 100; John Wills, ‘China’s father shores. Continuities and changes in the destination ports of China’s maritime trade, 1680-1690’. in: Roderich Ptak, Dietmar Rothermund (eds), *Emporia, commodities and entrepreneurs in Asian maritime trade, c. 1400-1700* (Wiesbaden 1991) 53-77 at 60.

5 Wills, ‘Review’, 104-105.

economic opportunities, regional geopolitical arrangements, and equitable local distribution of resources within a dynamic equilibrium. This intricate balance facilitates the generation of substantial profits under normal operational conditions, yet the system remains vulnerable to disruption should any constituent layer deviate from its prescribed trajectory.

This monograph authored by Professor Leonard Blussé represents a scholarly endeavor aimed at elucidating a specific juncture in the socio-political landscape of Euro-Asian urban centers. It focuses on a pivotal moment characterized by the disruption of equilibrium and the ensuing occurrence of an unprecedented racial genocide targeting Chinese residents within the confines of Batavia in 1740.

Retrospectively examining the seventeenth century, Manila consistently grappled with recurring episodes of violence against its Chinese population, while Batavia ostensibly enjoyed a semblance of social harmony. However, the tragic events of the 1740 massacre underscore the fallibility of Batavia's socio-economic framework in the face of contingent factors, despite its perceived insulation from such upheavals due to its reliance on converging economic interests.

The first chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving Dutch-Chinese collaborative framework within Batavia over the course of nearly a century, tracing its inception and subsequent adaptation amid shifting socio-economic dynamics. In response to the escalating challenges confronting the Dutch East India Company (VOC) during the latter part of the seventeenth century, VOC authorities endeavored to promote the cultivation of sugar fields. This initiative was spurred by the decline of neighboring local kingdoms and the abatement of threats in the peripheral zones surrounding Batavia. However, this reform inadvertently sowed the seeds of the tragic event in 1740, as the requisite surveillance mechanisms failed to keep pace with the expanding scope of agricultural activities.

Central to this narrative is the figure of Governor-General Joan van Hoorn, whose diplomatic mission to Beijing in 1668 catalyzed a profound appreciation for the indispensable role of Chinese immigrants in fulfilling the labor demands of Batavia's burgeoning agricultural sector. Despite the gradual decline of the sugar trade in the early decades of eighteenth century, the influx of Chinese migrants to the shores of Java persisted unabated, giving rise to a surplus population of rural Chinese settlers perceived as a nuisance by Batavian authorities. This predicament was exacerbated by market fluctuations that precipitated

the abrupt dissolution of sugar farming operations, compounding the challenges faced by both the Company and the local administration.

If the Batavian ruling elite had demonstrated greater cohesion, the city might have avoided the adverse repercussions of market fluctuations. This administration effectively facilitated the integration of the ethnically diverse population, fostering close cooperation among its inhabitants for a century. However, Blussé, commencing approximately midway through chapter 2, unveils the underlying vulnerabilities of this ruling elite well in advance of the 1740 incident. His analysis centers on the antagonistic rift between two factions within the Council of the Dutch East Indies, spearheaded by Adriaan Valckenier and Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff, respectively, whose discord significantly impeded bureaucratic functionality during the crisis. The passive stance adopted by the overarching “high government” inexorably precipitated a series of erroneous decisions, exacerbating the conflict irreversibly.

Moreover, the inefficiency of surveillance mechanisms can be attributed to a deteriorating environmental health conditions, coinciding with significant urban transformations within Batavia concurrent with the expansion of agricultural lands and deforestation initiatives. The rapid expansion of paddy and sugarcane fields triggered a chain reaction, resulting in the inadvertent degradation of the city’s canal system. Stagnant water bodies subsequently became breeding grounds for *Anopheles* mosquitoes, precipitating a malaria epidemic and depleting the pool of able-bodied soldiers necessary for maintaining security, thereby undermining the ruling class’s resilience in the face of systemic crises.

The subsequent chapters of the book delve into the unfolding tragedy itself. Following van Imhoff’s implementation of stringent measures to deport criminal Chinese immigrants to Sri Lanka and his directive to intensify urban surveillance, Chinese residents in Java interpreted these actions as precursors to further oppressive measures and preemptively took action. Subsequently, conflict erupted, leading to the breakdown of local order across various rural areas. Amid mounting fear and suspicion, Dutch citizens within the fortified city walls turned on their Chinese neighbors, unleashing a wave of indiscriminate violence that rapidly escalated into a racial genocide before authorities could intervene.

The elucidation offered by this book underscores the imperative of recognizing the gradual evolution of socio-economic structures, which, while not serving as immediate catalysts for conflict, nonetheless

establish the underlying conditions conducive to its eruption. The emergence of Chinese immigrant communities beyond the confines of Batavia's walls was a consequence of both global economic forces and the policies enacted by the Chinese Qing court and Dutch colonial administrators. Despite the integration of intermediary Chinese residents into the city's administrative fabric, they were ill-equipped to contend with the rapid transformations unfolding around them, while colonial authorities were similarly deficient in their capacity to manage the influx of immigrants effectively. The collective failure of responsibility evidenced here stemmed from the ruling elite's inability to grasp the full complexity of the contextual landscape. This text thus offers insight into the multifaceted long-term changes occurring in early eighteenth-century Java, which transcended contemporaneous comprehension and delineated a cityscape characterized by a "prototypically regional nature" that persists into the present day.<sup>6</sup>

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Janna Coomans, *Community, Urban Health and Environment in the Late Medieval Low Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). 334 pp. ISBN 9781108831772.

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Over the past decade or so, scholars have been re-examining the state of pre-modern public health. By re-interpreting both the reality on the ground and contemporary efforts to manage and regulate public health, they are completely upending long-held convictions that medieval cities were quagmires of filth, that medieval people (residents and officials alike) were apathetic, and that it took a cataclysmic event like the Black Death to spur efforts to 'clean up' urban spaces. We now know that urban communal health management across Europe predates the Black Death by centuries; that it encompassed a broad range of environmental, infrastructural, spiritual, and moral aspects; and that it actively engaged all levels of society.

Janna Coomans's extensive, comparative study of urban public health in the late medieval Low Countries expands upon well-known

6 Eric Tagliacozzo, *In Asian waters. Oceanic worlds from Yemen to Yokohama* (Princeton 2022) 198.