

A Reflection on Cultural Interaction Through European-Chinese Relations in Seventeenth-Century Hirado: Gift-giving in a Context of Blurred Borders between Social Relations, Trade and Smuggling

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Already from the sixteenth century onwards, the port of Hirado 平戸 in Kyūshū 九州 became one of the most important centres for consistent exchange and active commerce, and served as a base for Chinese, Dutch, English and Japanese mariners and pirates, as Clulow has historically charted in a recent article.¹ As the English East India Company started developing its trade ventures throughout Asia, its chosen foothold in Japan was Hirado. Through the support and letters of William Adams (1564–1620), an Englishman already employed in Hirado, captain John Saris (c. 1580–1643) established a factory or trading outpost there in 1613. Employing Adams as interpreter and tailor Richard Cocks (1566–1624) as chief merchant, his final instructions were to develop trade from Japan towards the Korean coast, Siam and China. He left with full confidence in its future prosperity, encouraged by his highly favourable initial encounters in Japan. However, English textile almost completely failed to sell in Japan, and other trade aspirations did not fulfil expectations. Eventually, the company's directors decided the Hirado outpost presented a financial failure, and a ship was sent to carry off the remaining personnel in 1623. Several reasons are usually cited for this commercial failure, amongst which were Dutch lobbying, the high cost of living in Japan due to gift-giving, and an elaborate Chinese system of cheating which profited from so-called “English inefficiency”.² This inefficiency has often been attributed to the chief merchant, as a victim of an elaborate deception from the “piratical” Chinese community. I partially disagree with this explication, and would rather point to cultural issues, and the contrast between local practices and the macro-economical perspective of the EIC-directors. Even

1 Cf. Clulow 2006.

2 Cf. Wilbur 1951, 83ff.

if economically unsuccessful, the short English history in Japan is very revealing on daily life and customs in seventeenth-century Hirado, including the role of its Chinese community. Especially the diaries and correspondence by captain John Saris, who established the English settlement in Hirado, and his chief merchant Richard Cocks, who ran the factory during ten years, show us some interesting perspectives. The sources from these accounts will form the main support of this article.

1 Foreign Gifts in Seventeenth-Century Japan: A Social Perspective

Upon examining these English sources, it is evident that the exchange of various gifts was a daily occurrence in Hirado. Whereas most research concerning gifts is focussed on commercial or diplomatic tribute in the context of a newly forming state ideology in Tokugawa 徳川 Japan (1603–1868),³ one can also notice a wider phenomenon of gift-exchange on different social levels within the community of Hirado, which demonstrates how gift-exchange went beyond diplomatic or commercial leverage in serving as a daily social practice. An example of this can also be found in Hesselink's book *De gevangenen uit Nambu*, in which he argues for a clash of differing early-modern Japanese worldviews in encountering foreigners, and specifically demonstrates the role of gift-exchange in such encounters. He reveals how ships were mainly viewed as godly domain, in which normal human relations were suspended, so that fishermen and villagers could ignore normal land-based Japanese customs in dealing with outsiders in a maritime environment.⁴ The Archive of the *Ōzuchi shihairoku* 大槌支配録 (*Administration Records of Ōzuchi*) mentions a Dutch expeditionary ship sailing into the bay of Yamada 山田, a prosperous but somewhat isolated fishing community, where most foreign contact took place at sea.⁵ The local exchanges resulting from this encounter are described in documents belonging to the sanctuary of the Satō 佐藤 family of Yamada, and mention villagers and fishermen coming on board the Dutch ship and trading fresh fish for drinks with the “red-haired strangers” (i.e. the Dutch), which had never visited before and thus caused a reason to feast. People from all over the bay came to look at the ship, and exchanged all kinds

3 Cf. particularly Toby 1991, Kang 2010.

4 Cf. Hesselink 2000, 49f.

5 Hesselink 2000, 36f, 50.

of objects with the strangers, such as tobacco pipes and small hatchets, mentioning it was difficult to say how many things were exchanged. Meanwhile, the Dutch served as excellent hosts in serving out arak and food, tradable goods from the hold, and making music on fiddles and flutes.⁶ In sharp contrast, Tokugawa officials disguised themselves to spy on the Dutch and invented a guise to catch them, leading to a diplomatic incident.⁷

According to Hesselink, these peculiar circumstances point towards a clash of official Tokugawa and local worldviews concerning foreign interactions in the first half of the Seventeenth century.⁸ At the very least, this 1643 expedition shows that different varieties of interaction and exchange took place in Japan, carrying multiple consequences. In this article, I propose to consider such exchanges in the community of Hirado, and to take a closer look at instances of ambiguous exchange between its English and Chinese residents.

In aforementioned English sources some specific formulae or expressions keep returning in descriptions of exchange, such as “Customs of the Country” or “Nifon Catange (Japan fation)” and sentences such as “I entertained them as best I could”, indicating a certain “ethnological” awareness of gift-customs. This in turn raises questions on the different channels through which their authors could learn about such customs: besides information gathered beforehand from instructions of past travellers, they mostly got their information through some “gatekeepers”, or persons who were familiar with customs and introduced them. This could specifically include Japanese officials and customs officers, other Europeans who had established experience in Japan, or foreigners who were already present for a longer time, such as the Chinese. In the early history of European-Japanese contact, the Japanese daimyō mostly served as such gatekeepers of tribute to the shōgun or higher lords, a role which was often taken up by the Chinese landlords on the more local level of Hirado.

1.1 Foreign Gifts in Aristocratic Japan

The gift-context in Tokugawa Japan primarily concerned aristocratic tribute, where it was obligatory for European ambassadors as well as feudal daimyō

6 Hesselink 2000, 36f.

7 Hesselink 2000, 42ff.

8 Hesselink 2000, 37.

of Japan to travel in courtly embassies to the capital of Edo, in order to present ceremonial gifts to the shōgun and his dignitaries, in a context of “much Ceremony, Feasting, and receiving of Presents”.⁹ In the English diaries of Saris and Cocks, we find that similar practices of giving, although somewhat less ceremonial, also occurred on a local level in Hirado. One could argue that practices of giving formed an essential part of social interaction in a daily environment, without which settling and dealing with social and cultural life, as an evident prerequisite for economic interaction, would have been considerably more difficult. Practices of giving formed a vital part of social interaction, both through the act of giving and through the meaning of the gifts themselves, as they affirmed a certain identity or social rank.¹⁰ The affirmation of differentiated identity as embodied in significant objects such as armour, mostly occurred in aristocratic environments and was strongly tied to what was perceived as the country’s customs, as follows from Saris’ journal:

The seventh 1613 was spent in fitting up of the presents, and providing little Tables of slit deale of that Country (which smelleth verie sweet) to carrie them upon, according to the custome. The eighth, I was carryed in my Pallankin to the Castle of Surunga (where the Emperour kept his Court) and was attended with my Merchants and others carrying the presents before me. [...] I was met by two grave comely men the one them Codsikedona, the Emperours secretarie; the other Fungo dono the Admirall, who led me into a faire roome matted, where we sat down crosse-legged upon the Mats. Anon after they lead mee betwixt them into the Chamber of Presence, where the Emperours chaire of State, to which they wished me to doe reverence. [...] Then they returned back again to the place where before they did sit, where having stayed about one quarter of an houre, word was brought, that the Emperour was come forth. Then they rose up and led me betwixt them unto the doore of the roome where the Emperor was, making signes to me that I should enter in there, but durst not looke in themselves. The presents sent from our King to the Emperour, as also those which (according to the custome of the Country) I gave unto the Emperour, as from my selfe, were placed in the said roome upon the Mats very orderly, before the Emperour came into it.¹¹

Saris also described the significance and aristocratic connotations of martial gifts such as armour and weapons. Here we should take into account that the receiving of such gifts is tied to the rank of the receiver. The shōgun would not easily communicate with a merchant, whereas turning his con-

9 Cf. Caron and Schorten 1663, 38f.

10 This idea is developed from a perspective based on Mauss 1970, in De Winter 2013 (forthcoming).

11 Saris and Purchas 1625, 460.

versation partner into a ranked soldier by attributing him with a fitting gift, opened possibilities of communication:

Towards evening, the king sent two varnished Armour for a Present to our King. Hee sent likewise a Tatch or long sword (which noe may weare there but souldiers of the best ranke) and a Waggadash for a present to my selfe.¹²

Another category of giving consisted of “curiosities” or exotic articles, usually sent as special gifts. Sometimes noblemen did not hesitate to overstep the boundaries of protocol, by requesting such presents, which were also given out as matters of rank to certain important aristocrats, ambassadors and daimyō:

The King sent me word that a nobleman from Xaxma [i. e. Satsuma 薩摩] was com to Firando and desired to vize our English howse and to goe aboard our shipp, and that he was a man of accompt, and therefore wished me to use hym respectively; which I did in showing hym the howse and making him a colation [...] The nobleman of Xaxma sent to have a sample of gallie pottes, jugges, tuns, podingers, lookingglasses, table bookes, chint bramport, and combarbands, with the prices. Upon good consideration we sent these things following for a present to the 2 nobleman of Xaxma, understanding they are kyn to the king and greate men In those partes, viz: 2 looking glasses, 2 pere tablebookes, 12 gallepottes, 2 green jugges, 2 green posset pottes, 2 gren tunns, 4 single comberbandes haere, 2 single peeeces chint bramport. Which present they tooke in good part, and returned me answer per Mr. Eaton that, yf we would have any busynes with the King of Xaxma, we should fynd they were men that could doe something and would not be forgetfull both for their entertaynement at English howse as also aboard the shipp; and that which bownd them the more, the sending these present unto them of things they had never seene the lyke before, and therefore would not want to signifie so much to the king their master. And sowne after they sent me thankses per 2 of their men, and eather of them sent me present of banketing box with furneture of trenchers, dishes, and other mattres, for 5 men to eate with, after Japon fation.¹³

Apart from the courtly environment, exchange of gifts also occurred with tradesmen or common people, as we have already seen in the case of the Yamada-bay encounter. In such cases exchange consisted mostly of food and alcohol, which were also the most common type of gifts in aristocratic environments, and not so much of curiosities or prestigious items. Exchanges with local people in Hirado are found throughout European ac-

12 Saris and Purchas 1625, 464.

13 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 146ff.

counts, and for various reasons such as the inauguration of a voyage, baptism of a child, special festivals or to affirm personal relations:

We set the mastes of our junk the Sea Adventure this day; at the doing whereof were 3 or 400 men persons, al the neighboures, or rather all the towne, sending their servantes, and came themselves (them that were of accountance) and brought presents (nifon catange), after Japon maner, of wyne and other eating comodety, aboard the junk, wishing a prosperouse voyage, all the offecers havinge each one a present of littell barso of wyne.¹⁴

And finally presents were also sent without an immediately obvious reason, perhaps as a token of respect, good will or generosity:

Sticamon Dono sent me 2 duckes and a dish of peares for a present. He is a comedian or a jester to geve delight to the King.¹⁵ Or: The Japon barber Rapado sent me a present of a basket of oringes.¹⁶

1.2 Timing and Hospitality

Another important aspect of giving was its timing in the context of hospitality, in particular concerning special occasions and celebrations such as New Year. The following fragment demonstrates this, while also revealing an English insight concerning a separate conceptual categorisation, in which the chief merchant clearly distinguished “a present” from “a custom” within the actual discourse. This shows the importance of “custom” in its own terms, as significant in establishing and maintaining friendly relationships between English merchants and Japanese aristocracy, where it is specified that relations were established through custom and not through presents:

February 11 (Shonguach 10) Capt. Camps and I went vizet Torazemon dono, and carid a present because of the new year telling hym we did not present it for a present, but for a custom of the new yeare, not to goe emptie handed to a man of his qualletye and our espetiall friend.¹⁷

Another detailed description on New Year’s presents gives us a nice view on how exchange, linked to a specific celebration, took place throughout all different communities in Hirado:

14 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 79.

15 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 77.

16 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 93.

17 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. II, 242.

Oyen Dono came to vizet me and brought me 5 fans for a present, wishing us a good new year. And after dyner Torazemon Dono sent me word that Cpt. Speck ment to vizet the kyng to wish hym a good new year, and gave me counsell to doe the lyke, this day being held a happie day, and taken in kynd parte by them which were vizeted. So I went and carid a jar of conservs, not to goe emptie handed. And sowne after came Cpt Speck with a cheane of gould about his neck [...] And I think there were above 1000 Japons at same tyme to vizet the king. I thought at first ther would have called in Capt. Speck before me, which yf they had, I would have retorned home without seeing the king. But in the end I was called in and y present of 2 barsos wyne, 2 fyshes, and jar conservs present, for which the king gave me thankes with many complementall wordes that he held my visetation that day in much esteem, and so drank to me and to the rest. And, at our going out, Capt. Speck entred, his present being a barrill wyne and fysh, with a long table or present bord; filled with trenchars, gocos, and tobacco boxes, China maky ware. The China Capt sent to borrow a jar conserves of me, which I sent unto hym; and his littel doughter came and brought me a present of 2 maky standingcups and covers, her father being present. [...] Also Yasimon Dono and the smith came to vizet me, and brought each on a bundell paper and a fan; as divers neighbours brought fans, nifon catange.¹⁸

1.3 Introducing an Anthropological Perspective on Gifts in Hirado

In a wider historical-anthropological definition, which is also very appropriate for the Hirado-context, the Comaroffs suggests that history consists of encounters and interactions in social environments, which are characterised by processes of exchange, embodied in human action through material and symbolic practices. This formed continuous relations of power and production leading to a history of processes of interaction in an ambiguous environment with rules, rituals and relations that can be contradictory, in their local and global dynamics.¹⁹ For seventeenth century Hirado, this means that concrete encounters of gift-exchange and hospitality were embedded in a customary social environment, where those rules governing such interaction were primarily embodied by the Matsuura 松浦 daimyō, but extended throughout its different communities. Seen as a continuous process of forming relations, some stability occurred through evolving cycles of giving between these different communities, making it a continuously present aspect of social life. For the remainder of this article, it is of particular im-

18 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. II, 7f.

19 Definition developed on the basis of a South-African case in Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 95-98.

portance to investigate one of the elements that made Hirado into an “ambiguous environment with contradictory rules and relations”, which is perhaps best demonstrated by the ambiguity of Chinese-English interaction.

2 Specific Chinese-English Interaction in Hirado

After having sketched the general dynamics of giving in the context of English-Japanese interactions in seventeenth century Hirado, we will now consider the specific presence of Chinese merchant-pirates in these interactions. English-Chinese interactions in seventeenth century Japan form a peculiar case, since both groups were in a sense strangers in a host country. Their relations should be placed in the framework of a much wider interaction featuring Japanese aristocracy, with whom the giving of tribute and suitable status-presents formed an evident part of local as well as courtly culture. Within this context, the particular positions of both Chinese and Europeans in public Japanese perception remained that of strangers. This was clearly demonstrated in English travel diaries, often indicating that common Japanese people designated Europeans as “Chinese” or “Korean”:

we arrived at Osaca: heere we found the people very rude, following us, crying Tosin, Tosin [唐人], that is, Chinaes, Chinaes; others calling us Core, Core, and flinging stones at us; the gravest people of the Towne not once reproving them, but rather animating of them, and setting them on.²⁰

2.1 Chinese Interactions: Similarities and Differences with “Japanese Custom”

The Chinese community had an important place in Hirado as friends of the daimyō, neighbours, landlords and traders. Concerning Europeans, an ambiguous kind of exchange took place: on the one hand consisting of customary exchange practices like those sketched above, carrying no notable differences with English or Japanese exchange or hospitality, but we can also discern a scam under the guise of friendly exchange. In the remainder of this article, we should try to understand this complex relationship, and consider how it can lead to adjusting some conceptual categories concerning giving and fraud.

²⁰ Saris and Purchas 1625, 471.

The original agreement between the English settlement and the Chinese community is found in Saris' journal, where the Chinese are described as landlords, also indicating the "fashion of the Countrey" in furnishing:

The foureteenth and fifteenth, we spent with giving of Presents. The sixteenth, I concluded with Captaine Audassee,²¹ Captaine of the China quarter here, for his house, to pay 95 ryals of eighth for the Monson of six moneths, he to repaire it at present, and wee to repaire it hereafter, and alter what we pleased: he to furnish all convenient rooms with mats according to the fashion of the Countrey.²²

The English chief merchant also described occasions of Chinese hospitality, occurring in a similar way as with Japanese nobility. The Chinese hospitality usually included a banquet and some forms of entertainment like music, Japanese kabuki-theatre, or Chinese theatre. They often invited the daimyō or Europeans to these occasions, receiving them according to Japanese customs. This occasionally demonstrates a kind of trans-cultural appreciation of aesthetics and products concerning the substance of the meals and forms of theatre as well, probably due to the limited availability of other types of entertainment. Later on, the English would also hold similar parties for which they would then book Japanese entertainment:

The China Capt. Envited the king and the nobles to dyner, and feasted them both day and night with a China play: and after, they bid them selves his gestic again to morrow, to have the caboques, or women plaiers of Japon.²³

And the Chinese also invited English merchants in the same way, again according to Japanese custom:

We were envited to Capt. Whaw, the China, to dyner, where we were extraordinarily enttertayned, with musick at our entry, with the lyke at first, second, and therd course, where there wanted not wyne of all sortes, and each one a dansing beare to serve us, nifon catange. I gave the China Capt. 2 letters of favour more to the English shipping they met at sea.²⁴

Next to such aspects of hospitality, the exchange of gifts also occurred along the same pattern as with Japanese daimyō, primarily concerning exchange of food, items and information:

21 At this meeting, which took place in establishing English affairs in Japan in 1613, Audassee was the name Saris gave to Li Dan – Andrea Dittis

22 Saris and Purchas 1625, 446.

23 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 228.

24 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. II, 19.

Our host of the China howse at Langasaque came to vizet me, and brought me a present of a live phaisant cocks and 10 loves of bread. The China Capt. Whow wrot me he understood our junckes were arived at Goto.²⁵

Again, just as in the interactions sketched above and according to Japanese custom, specific exchanges of gifts took place on festive occasions, such as the construction of a new house, to which all neighbours offered the China captain a gift:

28 dec. The China Capt. built or reard a new howse this day, and all theneighbours sent hym presents, nifon catange. So I sent hym a barill morofack, 2 bottells Spanish wine, a drid salmon, and a halfe a Hollands cheese; and after, went my selfe with the nighbours. Where I saw the ceremony was used, the master carpenter of the kinge doing it, and was as followeth: First they brought in all the presents sent and sett them in ranke before the middell post of the howse, and out of eache one took something of the best and offred it at the foote of the post, and powred wyne upon each severall parcel, doing it in greate humiletie and silence, not soe much as a word spoaken to all the while it awas a doing. But, being ended, they took the remeander of the presentes, and soe did eate and drink it with much merth and jesting, drinking themselves drunken all or the most parte. They tould me they beleevd that a new howse, being hallowed in this sort, could not chuse but be happie to hym which dwelled in it, for see their law taught them, ordained by holy men in tymes past.²⁶

Of course the reverse also occurred, in that Chinese brought their neighbours gifts on Japanese holidays, according to regional customs. Again the exchange consisted of fish and alcohol:

8 june. This day was a Japon feast, being the 5th day of the 5th month, called by them Gunguach gorioire. The China Cap. sent me 2, small barsos of wine and 2 fishes for a present this Japon feast, and the fatt China telior and buton maker sent me 1 barso and 2 fyshes. And I sent the China Capt. A salmon and a phan.²⁷

Throughout the sources cited above, we find many further fragments concerning English exchanges with Chinese in Hirado, taking place in a similar way. However, the following fragment reveals a somewhat deeper motivation for exchange, based on an elaborate Chinese scheme. Again it acknowledges the use of giving in establishing friendship, in this case for utilitarian reasons as well as trade aspirations:

25 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. II, 27.

26 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 92f.

27 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 140f.

I sent to China Capt., Andrea Dittis, a present, this being their new years day, for a new years gift, viz.: 1 silk kerremon of them Gonrok Dono gave me; 1 pce red silk cheremis to his eldest daughter; 1 damask kerremon to his youngest dougter; 1 bottell Spanish wyne to hym selfe. More, I sent to [...], his kinsman, 1 silke kerremon, which Gonrok sent me. These presents I sent to hould frendshipp, hoping to get traffick into China, this Niquan being employed therein.²⁸

2.2 Chinese Identities in Giving: Pirates, Smugglers or Traders?

It is of considerable importance to look at the specific identities of some of the Chinese involved in the exchanges, before making a further analysis of the way certain gift-exchanges concealed a system of cheating. Besides belonging to a shared community, most Chinese mentioned in the English diaries all belonged to one organisation led by the “China Captain”. *Kapitan Cina* was a Malay-Portuguese title which indicated the recognized leader of a Chinese community, acting on behalf of this community as a whole, as a preferred figure for cross-cultural communication.²⁹ The implications of the organisation’s group identity for the exchanges in Hirado, and its evolution, will be treated further below. This paragraph will sketch the specific identity and careers of the few important, traceable Chinese figures involved in exchange with Europeans.

The most important figurehead of the Chinese community, who was involved in English interactions and cultivated close relationships with them, was the “China Captain”, also known to the Europeans as Andrea Dittis or Captain Audassee, a famous Chinese merchant originating from Quanzhou 泉州 in Fujian, with the Chinese name Li Dan 李旦 (d. 1625). He originally carried out his business from Manila before moving to Hirado, where he became the head of the local Chinese community, and landlord for the English settlement.³⁰ He served as intermediary with the Southern Ming government until 1630, for the Dutch as well as the English. After that period, his organisation would grow into a powerbase, which would later be transformed into the maritime Zheng 鄭 clan “empire”.³¹ He can be considered as the instigator or inventor of a complex scheme for cheating the English foreigners, as further examined below. However, he had also cheated the Dutch on Taiwan in a similar way, by misappropriating funds and illicitly

28 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. II, 139.

29 Cf. Ooi 2004.

30 Cf. Iwao 1958. Cf. also Carioti 2007.

31 Cf. Blussé 1989, 45ff.

pirating junks.³² Clements characterises him as a scoundrel and supreme conman, who directed an underworld network of smugglers and criminals. While he was the pillar of Japan's Chinese community, and a personal friend of the Matsuura daimyō, his "brothers" or associates ran his smuggling empire from Manila and Macao.³³

One of his brothers, the above-mentioned captain Whow, alias Li Huayu 李華宇, acted as such an agent in Nagasaki, while another brother who was still living in China acted as the final link in the trade link with China. Finally Niquan, who was mentioned in the last fragment, was nobody else but Zheng Zhilong 鄭芝龍 (in Japanese: Tei Shiryū; 1604–1661), also known as Nicholas Iquan Gaspard to the Europeans, who later took over Li Dan's business networks to form them into the powerful maritime Zheng 鄭 organisation.³⁴ This organisation can be considered as a loose confederation of privateers and pirates, which would de-facto come to rule South China.³⁵ Similar to Li Dan, Clements characterizes Zhilong as "a crook who murdered and bribed his way to the top of South China's largest criminal organisation".³⁶ In summary, his career progressed from that of an "uncommon bandit" or pirate with exceptional qualities of leadership, to cooperation with the Southern Ming, from which he received a rank of nobility and a position as regional commander in Southern China.³⁷ It should also be mentioned that a second Iquan was mentioned in the English sources. Better known as Augustin Iquan or Li Guozhu 李國助, he was the son of Li Dan and also operated between Taiwan and Japan from 1618 to 1633.³⁸ After the death of Li Dan, he struggled for leadership of the organisation, against Zhilong and Yan Siqi 顏思齊 (?–1625), apparently controlling part of the fleet and seeking alliance with the Satsuma daimyō.³⁹ Yan Siqi or Yan Zhenquan 顏振泉, a

32 Cf. Goodrich and Fang 1976, 874.

33 Cf. Clements 2004, 16-19; another important source on Li Dan is Iwao 1958.

34 Cf. Iwao 1958, Cf. also Carioti 2007.

35 Clements 2004, 5.

36 Clements 2004, 16.

37 Cf. Struve 1988, 666f.; For more on Zhilong, also Cf. Blussé 1990.

38 Other persons or powers that were active around that time include Li Kuiqi 李魁奇 and Zhong Bin 鍾斌, Liu Xiang 劉香 (also known as Janglawu or Janglouw 劉香老), who gradually came to power in the early 1630s when he was working with Li Dan's son Li Guozhu.

39 Cf. Goodrich and Fang 1976, 874. Both Li Dan and Yan Siqi cooperated well with a Ming official named Xu Xinsu 許心素 (?–1628), or Simsou, who represented them in Amoy 廈門 in order to engage in trade with the VOC.

mysterious pirate, called Pedro China by the Westerners, was an important figure in this organisation. He was closely associated with Li Dan, ran a pirate base in Taiwan and also served as Iquan's employer on Manila. He, too, was a central figure for organised Chinese piracy on Taiwan.⁴⁰

2.3 A Complex System of Cheating: A Ten-Year Chinese "Long Con"

So far we have sketched certain dynamics of giving in Hirado, all more or less occurring in the same way. This already formed a complex series of interaction between two communities, in which the Chinese held more experience in the region and were better acquainted with its customs, and in which the English were more ignorant. For them it was already important in itself to maintain good relations with the Chinese, in order to get access to the environment with which they were much more familiar, using them as brokers with Japanese aristocrats, and also in the perspective of trade aspirations into China. Apart from that, one might also consider the aspect of good personal acquaintance and connection.

However, the tendencies charted above are just tips of the iceberg: the complexity of gift-interactions is increased upon considering the elaborate deception the "China captain" organised, the reasons for which might partially be explained in looking at the identity of the Chinese community in Hirado, which might have held some ties or similarities to the earlier phenomenon of "*wokou* piracy". The cheating or confidence trick perpetrated by the Chinese occurred quite quickly after the English presence was established, and consisted of a "promise" from the "China Captain" that certain gifts were to be sent to his relatives or associates who would diplomatically establish a link with China, in order to provide trading opportunities and access to Chinese markets.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the genuinely friendly and cultural contact between English and Chinese as sketched above, this situation continued for about ten years. Possibly the received gifts were eventually divided under members of Li Dan's Chinese community in Japan and elsewhere, or might just as well have been handed out to fictitious family members. The gifts mostly consisted of precious metals, or otherwise valuable materials such as demonstrated in the following fragment, in which the chief mer-

40 Cf. Andrade 2008, par. 11-17.

chant gave out a pair of valuable knives, a looking glass, two ivory sundials resembling a compass, a treasured gold ring with embedded diamond, which he bought in France, hoping that it would be of good cause:

And I gave my peare knives to the China Capt. To send to his brother (or rather kinsman) in China, upon hope trade; as also he had looking glasses for the same purpose, bought of Dutch,⁴¹ and 4 pec. Chowters [...] with knyves; and it is thought fit to give him 50 Rs. 8 To the man who carrieth the letter, to pay his charges per way, and to send a greate Gould ring of myne with a white amatist in it, cost me 5 ll. Str. In France. This ring to be sent to one of these 2 men, named Ticham Shofno, an euenuje. God Grant all may come to good effect. Amen. Amen. Also 2 ivery son dialles, cumpas lyke, delivered hym.⁴²

However, somewhat later the China Captain returned the ring and even brought some extra presents, perhaps feeling he overstepped certain boundaries in requesting such a particular present, but nonetheless keeping the scam going:

The China Capt., Andrea Dittis, returned to Firando from Goto, and brought me back a Gould ring delivered hym the 17th September last, to have byn sent for a present to an euenuke in China, valued as it cost 51 str.; but uppon better consideration, not haveing two ringes, and 2 principall men employed about the affares, they thought it best to buy 4 cattans or Japan sables, and to send 2 to eache one. Also the China Capt. Gave me a musk cod for a present, and was sent from a China unknown to me. And he doth assure me on his life that our pretence to gett trade into China cannot chuse but com to good effect; which God grant.⁴³

In further fragments concerning this deceit, valuable textiles and gold bars were given to the leaders of the Chinese community, Li Dan and Capt. Whaw, and their associates. The English diaries clearly reveal the strategic importance of giving to specific people involved in trading opportunities, and its ties to “official legitimacy”:

Marche 6. – I went to Capt Whowes with Andrea Dittis, the China Capt., and Capt. Adames, where we translated one of the Kinges Matis. Letters into China, dated in Westminster Pallace, the 10th january 1614, ans 12th yeare of His Matis. Rayne of Great Brittany, France and Ireland; wherof I took 3 coppies in Chinas. One was sent to China with the said letter, and other send for England, and the therd to keepe my selfe. I gave Fingo Shiquan, the China, a letter of favour and an

41 For the Dutch activities in Hirado cf. *Inventaris van het archief van de Nederlandse Factorij in Japan te Hirado [1609–1641] en te Deshima, [1641–1860] 1609–1860.*

42 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 58.

43 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 67.

English flag in his junk. [...]. Also I sent the rest of a pece of straw culler baies for a present to a China called Lanquin Niquan,⁴⁴ he coming the other day to vizet me with a present, and is of the place neare unto that we hope to enter for trade. And I paid the China notory for translating the kinges letter.⁴⁵

As the cheating unfolded, it included the continuous lending of big cumulative sums of capital to the Chinese merchants, each time with the explicit mention of trade hopes into China. Free loans were given out for longer periods, a practice which was already present during the establishment of the English community in Hirado under Saris, but progressively became more expensive:

I lent the China Capt., Andrea Dittis, viz., 2 bars Gould of 55 tais per bar, [etc.] to be repaid within 8 or 10 dayes, at his retorne from Goto, whether he is bownd to buy matters out of 2 China junkes ther arrived. This I doe in respeck I hope of trade into china, which now I stand in more hope of then eaver.⁴⁶

Demonstrating how well the deception fitted in next to the usual dynamics of giving in Hirado, one can read that the Chinese also gave exotic counter-gifts, such as oranges, a bow of goldfish and letters “sent from China”. Within such an encounter, however, the English again lent them a substantial sum:

The night past Andrea Dittis returned from Langasaque, and brought me a letter from Capt. Whaw, his brother, whoe sent me a jar of oranges, with a littell fishpond (or jar) with live fish in it, and bought 15 pigeons for me, cost 1 tay 5 condrens. [...]. And upon hope of trade into China I lent capt. Whaw, the China Capt. At Lanagsaque, 5000 taies, I say five hundred tais in plate of bars.⁴⁷

And along the lines of usual gift customs, rare and particularly valuable presents were requested. Captain China often provided advice for specific presents to be given, even if those presents were destined for his own use, or that of his organisation. One fragment mentions Captain China requesting a kimono, which was received from the shōgun himself, either for its value or as an act of boasting within the confines of the deception. Another revealing aspect is that, eventually the gifts were given out “because they were

44 This Lanquin Niquan was most probably Li I-Kan, the son of Li Dan, as mentioned above.

45 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. II, 58.

46 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 23.

47 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 119.

Chinese”, showing how the mere reason of identity was adequate enough to grant the most expensive kinds of gifts:

I gave one of my best keremons, which the emperour gave me, to the China Capt., he asking it to send into China about busynes. And the Chinas came to the English howse with a hobby horse, or rather a tiger play, with actes of activety, many of them coming together. So it was thought fyt to send them something. [...]. There was a bar plate, containing 4 tais 2 condriens, geven to the Chinas tiger players, in respect they were Chinas and sent to the English howse. [...]. The China Capt. Invited all the English to supper this night, where we were well feasted. [...] Yewkyn Dono of Shashma sent me a present of 2 birdes, viz. Wood pigions, larkes, thrushes, and gren plovers, with 2 barsos wyne.⁴⁸

Finally, the English chief merchant’s diary also offers us a glance at the extension of the China captain’s organisation, and all those involved in the Chinese con:

I sent presentes as followeth, viz.: To Fingo Shiquan, the rich China, 2 tatta. Yello bayes, 1 fowling peec. To Goquan, other rich China, 2 tatta. Yello bayes, 1 fowlingpeec. To Capt. Whow, China Capt. Brother, 1 fowling peec. These men are emloyd about getting trade into China. To Goto Zhozabra Dono, mynt man, 2 tatta. Yello bayes. To Chimpow, capt. Junk which Ed. Sayer goeth in, two tatta. Yello bayes, 2 barsos wyne, 2 fyshes. And an ould China called Shi-quan sent me two barsos wyne, egges 50, oranges 30, diet bread a platterfull. And from a China which went to Kagalion, 2 barsos wyne, 5 bundelles sea-weed. And I gave this China an English flag and a letter of favor, at request of China Capt. Also I sent a present to a China called Chintay. [...]. I went to Capt. Whowes with Andrea Dittis, the China Capt., and Capt. Adames, where we translated one of the Kings Matis. Letters into china [...] wherof I took 3 copies in chinas. One was sent to China with the said letter, another to send for England, and the therd to keep to my selfe. I gave Fingo Shiquan, the China, a letter of favour and an English flag in his junk.⁴⁹

To summarize the extent of gift-based interaction between English and Chinese in Hirado, there basically appeared to be two streams of interaction: one fitting within Hirado’s usual customs of gift exchange, as “custom of the country”, and a second one concerning the cheating of fictitious promised trade into China, which served as the China Captain’s way of extracting ever more valuable gifts. Especially the phrase “in respect that they were Chinas” demonstrates how the fact of repeated giving in

48 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. I, 235.

49 Cocks 1615–1622, Vol. II, 21.

the context of this scam had become a part of an identity, as a regular fact of daily interaction. This leads us to conclude that both sides somehow didn't mind carrying on this lavish giving and spending during ten years, as it would eventually only prove to be a problem from an institutional point of view, otherwise this aspect of interpersonal relations was normalised along the usual lines of exchange.

Now that we have seen how cheating and deception took place, and the extent of the organisation involved in it, we should shortly consider whether the China Captain, Li Dan, was little more than a sophisticated pirate or smuggler who was seeking to cheat the English chief merchant, as has usually been claimed. Or as Clements summed it up:

Cocks continued to wine and dine the captain, and though he was reciprocated with matching Chinese hospitality, his chances of ever securing better trade for the East India Company were extremely remote. He did, however, get a number of very nice goldfish out of their friendship.⁵⁰

The question then remains what the specific purpose of this elaborated system of cheating could have been, if it can be tied to the Chinese captain's identity and the Chinese community's presence in Hirado. In considering this context, we might begin formulating an answer to this question.

3 The Identities of Hirado's Chinese Community

3.1 Identity and Evolution of a Chinese Maritime Organisation: Pirates, Traders, Smugglers and Rebels

The Chinese-English interactions we have sketched so far have revealed a peculiar mix of both fraud and friendship, fitting in a specific framework of customs. There lies a certain difficulty in untangling different aspects of fraud or friendship, so we can say that the categories for distinguishing them are blurred, much in the same way as the Chinese community's identity itself. Therefore, instead of unravelling these threads, we should attempt to understand how they are woven together and enabled the conditions for the scam to continue during a ten-year period. This only seems possible in looking beyond an economic perspective, towards certain cultural and social-aspects of this behaviour, as well as by looking at the structure of the Chinese organisa-

50 Cf. Clements 2004, 20.

tion and its motivations, through which we can begin to understand its role in Hirado and in the scam. The particular identities of several of the principal figures involved in the scam have been sketched above, and have shown a strong characterisation as smugglers and pirates. This section will briefly consider the organisation as a whole, its development, and its underlying motives.

The Zheng clan, as Zhilong would develop it, consisted of an expanded kinship group in which most of its numerous members carried animal nicknames,⁵¹ some of them already involved in Li Dan's organisation as appears from the English diaries. The Southern Ming, to which Zhilong belonged, carried out large-scale illicit trade between China and Japan. The Zheng organisation was the best organised group among the pirate-merchants who carried out this trade, also due to their good ties with Japanese lords such as the Shimazu clan of Satsuma.⁵² The development of the Zheng clan can be revealing about Li Dan's earlier organisation as well. According to Patrizia Carioti, the transformation of this organisation formed part of a centralising tendency in Chinese maritime activities, including a unification of pirate and smuggler-groups under both Li Dan and Zheng Zhilong, where the creation and development of a centralised organisation was partly possible due to the capital 'extorted' from English and Dutch.⁵³ This means that the scam underlying part of the English-Chinese interaction would have formed part of the organisations wealth, explaining at least one possible motivation for the scam, apart from pure personal profit.

Angela Schottenhammer considers the Zheng fleet as a rebellious organisation against the Manchu, carrying a clear political agenda, in which Hirado was a node in a network spreading from Manila to Taiwan. The organisation was also centrally involved in a network of trading firms from Hangzhou and Amoy, which was actually being controlled from Fujian, where official traders were grafted on a secret network of Zheng-capital and participated in the smuggling of arms, materials for shipbuilding and silk.⁵⁴ So it would seem that we can clearly consider the Zheng-organisation, and Li Dan's as its predecessor, as rebellious traders as well as smugglers. As we have seen, some considered them primarily as pirates,⁵⁵ which is mostly

51 Clements 2004, 46.

52 Cf. Struve 1988, 699f.

53 Cf. Carioti 2011, 53.

54 Cf. Schottenhammer 2008, 290.

55 As we also find in Clements 2004 or Blussé 1989.

dependent on the point of view. From a Japanese perspective, Linhart considers Zheng Zhilong as a merchant and freebooter, who used his trading activities as means for financing his resistance against the Manchu or Qing dynasty.⁵⁶ Ultimately, the presence of such a Chinese organisation in Hirado was not a coincidence, as Linhart as well as Clulow have described a long-standing link with piracy dating back to the fifteenth century, when the notorious pirate Wang Zhi 汪直 [also 王直],⁵⁷ posing as a Chinese Confucian scholar, had found beneficial refuge with the Matsuura-daimyō in Hirado. His “Wang Zhi”-network spread from Hirado and the Gotō 五島 Islands towards South Korea and China, and was considered as belonging to the “*wakō*” 倭寇.⁵⁸ The Matsuura daimyō themselves had started out as disreputable seafarers or pirate family, having risen in social rank.⁵⁹ In considering this “pirate legacy” in Hirado, the activities of Li Dan’s organisation might actually have been a kind of continuation of “piracy” in Hirado under the Matsuura-domain, placing his activities in between the “*wakō*” heritage and the beginning of the “Zheng organisation”. Just like the ambiguity of the exchange itself, this shows multiple perspectives from which the organisation and its goals can be judged. Li Dan’s scam with the English could then be considered either as a piratical scheme aimed towards personal profit, or as a financial boost to an expanding organisation, whose legacy would later finance a political or rebellious struggle, or both at the same time. Moreover, such considerations can be equally valid for other pirate- or smuggling organisations in South-East Asia. Along those lines, Robert Antony has pointed out that the actions and motivations of such organisations can not be distinguished very firmly, as there was no sharp distinction between legitimate and illegitimate actions, but rather some sort of gradual continuum of (il-)legality. The community in which such a continuum is situated was very diverse, consisting of sailors, fishermen, traders and samurai as well as pirates or smugglers.⁶⁰ It is quite likely that the Chinese community in Hirado was just as diverse.

56 Cf. Linhart 2008, 332.

57 Wang Zhi was known in Japan by the corresponding reading of his name, Ōchoku, or by the even more pregnant name of “King of Huizhou” 徽州. He headed a piratical organization of sizeable dimensions and also had bases on the coasts of Kyūshū, among which Hirado was the most important.

58 Linhart 2008, 314f.

59 Cf. Clements 2004, 19.

60 Cf. Antony 2010, 8f.

3.2 Motivations for Simultaneous Cheating and Exchange between Chinese and English

The different considerations of Li Dan's organisation can point towards multiple motivations for running his scam, although all of them can be located in the sphere of economic activities. Roderich Ptak has emphasized the role and importance of non-economic activities in trade, an important perspective, which helps us to understand the functioning of Li Dan's community in Hirado as well. He points out that merchants gained access to valuable information through power structures in which they were involved, enabling them to pocket additional profits and fulfil other aspirations. Because of this, the merchant's community also profited from donations and cultural enrichment.⁶¹ This was also the case for Li Dan's community, who were involved in power structures through general practices of giving and hospitality, which could be labelled a non-economic activity as it concerned social exchange instead of trade. And the aspects of giving, which included donations, clearly led to some cultural enrichment for his community. This also indicates that more dimensions than the economic have to be taken into account. One such dimension acknowledged by Ptak, which we might label a cultural dimension, is the influence of Confucian family ethics and its moral apparatus: Ptak mentions that Chinese overseas communities tried to maintain connections to home, primarily motivated by personal ties of community and the calculated wish of maintaining a good reputation (*mianzi* 面子). In such a context, selfishness and unfilial behaviour would mean loss of face and by consequence also of commercial prestige.⁶² The aspect of communal ties was already quite clear, as Li Dan's community consisted of "brothers" and family members. But the same logic concerning good reputation might have played an important role in the gift-exchange with the English on both the levels of the scam and of the genuine relations. In this sense, we could consider the scam as a lucrative means of increased income, where further gift-relations maintained good personal ties of community. And the general gift-relations had to be maintained in good order, because it could otherwise mean loss of commercial prestige and reputation, which might even have been at least as important as the financial gains from the scam.

61 Cf. Ptak 1998, 31ff.

62 Ptak 1998, 42.

The English could also have had good reasons for remaining in the scam instead of terminating it. It would be too easy to dismiss the chief merchant as a naïve person, as some scholars have done. Despite the high cost of the scam, and perhaps an idle hope of trade into China, he might have felt to receive more on the level of prestige and social relations, which the economic cost was worth. Thus, I strongly differ with Clements and Mulder's viewpoints about Cocks' "total ignorance of language and customs of Japan",⁶³ against which there are several arguments: during in the course of his ten year stay in Japan, he progressively started using more and more Japanese words and eventually even adopted a Chinese or Japanese calendar in his diary, and we should also take his cumulative experience of numerous exchanges into account. Games has already proven Richard Cocks to have been a great experimenter, carrying a social status that exceeded any rank which he could possibly hold in England, who reflected the world of reciprocity in which he was embedded: he developed a great familiarity with Hirado's multi-cultural customs and embraced Japanese rituals of giving.⁶⁴ From such a perspective, one could read his diaries as demonstrating a process of gradual acculturation and learning on handling intercultural encounters and adopting specific "cultural traits", all this being far removed from claims of "total ignorance". I would rather propose that his prime focus was not on commerce but on establishing a quasi-permanent way of life in the community of Hirado, for which the costly participation to customs of giving was required. These customs consisted of different kinds of exchange carrying different motivations, which were often difficult to unravel, so for him it was rather a question of accepting these customs without accurately distinguishing them. Finally, I claim that this whole dynamic of giving and the longevity of the scam can be clarified without resorting to superficial explanations, by taking a critical historical-anthropological view, which can illuminate both this topic and our conceptual apparatus.

63 Cf. Mulder 1985, 114.

64 Cf. Games 2008, 114f.

4 Tentative Conclusions and Conceptualisations

4.1 Theoretical Considerations and New Openings

The proposition for an anthropological re-conceptualization of exchange in a theoretical framework will lead to a tentative conclusion, which can in itself form a starting point to re-conceptualize the ways in which we aim to disentangle historical subject matter. In doing this, we shall first take another look at the historical-anthropological conceptualisation of exchange formulated by the Comaroffs, as we have already done, but now in the specific perspective of the Chinese scam. Relations of power existed for both sides of the encounter, as the Chinese were landlords and cultural brokers for the English, but since it concerns a scam, we might say that relations itself were in some sense unequal. As a process of interaction, the scam developed over time in becoming more expensive, while personal relations simultaneously intensified. The central part of the definition as applicable to this case proved to be its ambiguity, as we could discern at least two processes of giving as coexistent. What is more important, is that these also appear to be contradictory: as the general customs of giving served to establish and maintain good personal relations, a scam would be expected to work against this and to destroy the personal contact over time. However, it can theoretically be considered as a kind of dialectic, in which both opposing tendencies can co-exist. The only precondition for this is that it was only possible to do so within the community of Hirado, where such exchanges were customary and acceptable, eventually even becoming part of the community's identity. Concerning motivations, it seems quite possible that non-economic mechanisms took primacy over the financial perspective on either side of the exchange. These non-economic motivations are explained through the notion of local customs, as a common social use which had to be adapted in order to share an identity in Hirado's community, where giving was used to consolidate interpersonal relations.

Some anthropologists have explained the dynamics and sociological functions of giving very well.⁶⁵ However, in the case of the Chinese-English scam, they fail to help us unravel the logic according to which the

65 Some aspects of the seminal work of Mauss 1970 are valuable, as well as Blau 2004 on the practice of giving in establishing different social relations.

ambiguity of different exchanges could co-exist, which would usually break the system as they have conceptualised it. However, there are at least two possible theories through which this can be reconsidered: Either as some kind of “logic of practice” in Bourdieu’s sense, according to which practical processes can have mutually incoherent properties depending on the relational context of which they form part.⁶⁶ A slightly different perspective proposes to see it as a processual social dialectic in which oppositional practices, taking place within the same process of interaction, are considered mutually transformative.⁶⁷ The fact that Li Dan was cheating the English does by no means make general exchanges and practices less valid. It is rather a simultaneous occurrence of positive social relations and fraud, both tendencies evolving together over a period of ten years. Therefore, I propose not to look at these relations as a mere piratical way of “cheating” naïve foreigners, but as mutually opposing tendencies inside one process of cultural interaction on the local scale of Hirado.

Theoretically, this case then opens up the possibilities for a logical reconsideration of exchange-processes through giving, and its creation of identities in seventeenth century maritime Asia. The limited scope of this article has not been sufficient to properly treat this, so I hope it will inspire its readership to find a fresh way of reading the source material, in re-conceptualizing the questions which such cases pose to our historical logic. It has aimed to apply a culture-historical approach to a global economic context, by focussing on an empirical case in which the history of specific exchanges served as central focus. It has shown that our categorizations as well as explanatory models can have some difficulty in explaining “blurred categories”, such as occur in human exchange-relations or in judging aspects of piracy. It can be interesting to investigate such questions from an interdisciplinary or even a dialectical perspective, which could embrace a wider range of social and cultural aspects of exchange, and its different nuances in a 17th century maritime environment such as Hirado.

66 Cf. Bourdieu 1984, 145-148.

67 Cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 122.

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