

Economic History Association

Review

Reviewed Work(s): China Maritime Customs and China Trade Statistics, 1858-1948 by
Thomas Lyons

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Apart from Trevor Bell and Nkosi Madula, the approach adopted by all the other authors is very similar, and might be described as descriptive economics. There are brief accounts of the relevant internal and external developments, and of the introduction and application of major government policies, accompanied by numerous tables and a commentary on the data. The chapter by Bell and Madula stands apart because of its more rigorous methodology, and offers an excellent exploration of the reasons for the poor performance of the manufacturing sector, and for its failure to make the required transition from import-substituting to export-orientated industrialization. The volume thus provides much useful information and some interesting explanations for specific developments, but only Bell and Madula approach their subject by formulating hypotheses and attempting to test them in ways that would be familiar to readers of this *Journal*.

The other significant weakness from the perspective of someone looking for an explanation of why the South African economy has declined are the omissions in the coverage. In particular, the volume lacks a detailed treatment of the critical developments that occurred during these decades in the labor market. These included dramatic shifts in the relative pay of black and white workers, the steady upward mobility of black workers into skilled and semi-skilled occupations previously reserved exclusively for whites by legislation and custom, changes in capital intensity, and the rise in unemployment. One might also suggest that the adverse effects on economic growth of various Apartheid policies, such as the deliberate neglect of investment in human capital for 80 percent of the population, deserve more attention as contributory causes of poor economic performance. Above all, the volume needs a coherent overall analysis to explore in depth what has changed since earlier phases of relatively successful growth, and why the South African economy declined in this latest period.

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China Maritime Customs and China Trade Statistics, 1858–1948. By Thomas Lyons. Trumansburg, NY: Willow Creek Press, 2003. Pp. 184. \$34.95.

The rich and high-quality trade statistics published by the China Maritime Customs over a continuous span of 90 years, stand as an outstanding contrast to the confusion and contention that often characterize quantitative studies of the nineteenth- and twentieth- century Chinese economy. Whereas for some, the Maritime Customs, an organization entrusted by the Imperial government but controlled and managed by the Western elite bureaucrats, remains as the embodiment of Western efficiency and transparency, for others, it symbolizes that very cause of China's downfall in the modern era: Western colonialism.

Controversies notwithstanding, scholarly estimates on Chinese national trade statistics from the 1860s to the 1940s were on much firmer ground than any other aggregate production or consumption statistics, thanks largely to the Maritime statistics. The recent contribution by Thomas Lyons is intended to serve as a guide to the voluminous China Maritime Customs statistics, but more importantly, to utilize the rich port-specific and commodity-specific trade statistics to throw light upon questions concerning China regional economic development (p. 2).

The book consists of two parts with a CD ROM of statistics of tea trade for Fujian province. The first part, chapters 1, 2, and 3, provides an introduction to the origin and evolution of the Maritime Customs Organization, the sources, types of its publications, and the format of its statistics. Scholars have long cautioned that changing geographic coverage, shifts in definitions and uses of different prices for evaluating trade as well as changing statistical format could cause serious pitfalls and inconsistencies in using Maritime statistics to derive national time series of trade statistics. Lyons's presentation on these issues, aided by sum-

mary boxes, maps, and illustrations using actual tea trade statistics in Fujian province, is sufficiently detailed and refreshingly lucid.

The second part, which begins with chapter 4, is a case study of the tea trade of Fujian province based on Maritime port and commodity-specific statistics. With an introduction of the source and format of Fujian tea trade statistics in the Maritime publications, the chapter carefully reconstructs the time series tea exports for three main ports in Fujian province as well as Taiwan, which was ceded to Japan after 1895. The author then proceeds to show the marked inconsistencies in two existing tea export statistics of Fuzhou in comparison with his reconstructed series. Chapter 5 of the second part combines the port-specific trade data to derive tea export time series data for the entire Fujian province for the period between the 1860s and 1940s. Using his trade data as well as other supplementary information, Lyons makes an estimate of the total tea output of Fujian province in the 1910s and 1930s. The chapter ends with a descriptive and graphic illustration of regional flows of tea trade and production in Fujian province.

The accompanying data CD in excel spreadsheets contains the original tea trade data culled from the Maritime publications as well as the step-by-step reconstructions of the time series data illustrated in the text. Each folder of data files also has a PDF file with detailed source and explanatory notes. Undoubtedly, the meticulous care and procedural transparency that Lyons has maintained for constructing the data and statistics is exemplary for future quantitative studies of Chinese economic history.

In view of the historical interest in China's macro-regions as well as the current burgeoning literature on China's regional inequality and convergence, the regional emphasis in the book is most welcome and timely. Unfortunately, the book's relentlessly narrow focus on the tea trade of Fujian province may not appeal to a wider readership. At the end of the book, little was said of the possible linkages, potential biases, or statistical correlations among the tea trade statistics at the port-specific, provincial level and the national level. Neither was there any mention of whether or how the methodology and findings of the case study of Fujian tea trade may be applicable to studies of other commodities or other regions of China. This is clearly a disappointment given the high level of intellectual discipline displayed throughout the book, and given that the title of the book as well as the information provided on its back cover, seem to suggest that the book would be a more general study of Maritime custom statistics and that the data CD that would cover trade statistics beyond the tea exports of Fujian province.

Thus, much work still remains to be done for future scholars to explore the rich statistics on commodities, ports, destinations, volumes, and value-added in the Maritime Customs publication, which, given careful data compilation and statistical analysis, could bring to light some of the fundamental long-term issues and debates on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese and world economies such as the evolving patterns of intra- and interregional trade, the changing structure of trade and comparative advantages, and much more. Hopefully, this book serves as a stimulus for future research with more ambitious visions and scope.

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Nugget Coombs: A Reforming Life. By Tim Rowse. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. x, 419. £50.00.

Economist, central banker, trade diplomat, university chief, arts administrator, environmentalist, and, finally, outspoken advocate for Australia's indigenous people: H. C. "Nugget" Coombs was one of the most influential Australians of the twentieth century. This