

Capture, Bondage, and Forced Relocation in Asia (Conference Report)

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Story of Ramayana carved on sandstone wall of Angkor Wat

CAPTURE, BONDAGE, AND FORCED RELOCATION IN ASIA

Claude Chevaleyre



Dr. Claude Chevaleyre

is leader of the Research Group "Beyond Slavery: Dependency in Asian History" at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies. At the crossroads of Chinese studies and labor history, his research

addresses the global history of human bondage in early-modern China (between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries). It covers two main research fields: a first aspect explores the articulations and interactions between norms, concepts and practices of bondage. A second aspect of his research concerns human trafficking in early-modern China and East Asia. Both aspects of his research are interrelated and converge in an overarching interest for the semantics of dependency. By looking at these phenomena from China and Eastern Asia, Chevaleyre's research also questions the singularity of Western experiences, as well as the relevance of categories elaborated from Western historical contexts as universal concepts to think dependency as a global phenomenon.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ÉCOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE DE LYON
MARCH 13–14, 2019

In March 2019, an international conference entitled "Capture, Bondage, and Forced Relocation in Asia" was organized at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon (France) by Claude Chevaleyre (Center for Scientific Research/Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies) and Jennifer Gaynor (State University of New York at Buffalo).

Funded by the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, the Linnaeus University Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies, and the Crafoord Foundation, the conference gathered more than twenty-five international specialists on slavery, human trafficking and forced labor in early-modern Asia and the Indian Ocean World (including four members of the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies). It was also one of the events selected to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the French National Center for Scientific Research.

The Lyon conference was not the first academic event devoted to the study of bondage dynamics, slaving and trafficking in early-modern Asia and the Indian Ocean World. Over several years, a wide network of historians has gradually formed around workshops, conferences and digital humanities projects to reassess the place and history of slavery and trafficking in this broad area extending from the eastern coasts of Africa to the Far East.

A kick-off workshop held at the International Institute of Social History in 2016 (the proceedings of which were published in March 2019 in a special issue of the *International Review of Social History*) was soon followed by an international conference organized by Jeff Fynn-Paul (Leiden University) and Richard Allen (Framingham State University) in June 2017 at Leiden University. With keynote lectures by Anthony Reid (Australian National University) and James Warren (Murdoch University), the Leiden conference was a first attempt to broaden the scope of the history of "Slavery in Asia and in the Indian Ocean world" by moving beyond the colonial framework to integrate the continental and East-Asian experiences. The Leiden conference underscored the necessity (as well as the chance) to continue in this direction, and a third workshop was organized in September 2017 in Kalmar (Sweden) by Hans Hägerdal (Linnaeus University, Växjö), expanding both the network and the scope of the contributions.

These first three conferences and workshops also underlined that, in contrast to the Atlantic world, a comprehensive and detailed insight into the scope, structure and patterns of the Asian slave trade is still lacking, with some regions remaining largely unexplored. Out of this concern emerged a series of projects in digital humanities that aim to reconstruct and quantify slave trade and human trafficking voyages in early-modern Asia.

An initial workshop, designed to provide the first steps towards the creation of an integrated database on slave trading in the interconnected parts of maritime Asia and their hinterland was then held at the International Institute of Social History in September 2018. Gathering scholars working mainly (but not exclusively) with European archives, and with the insightful and amicable participation of David Eltis (The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database), the workshop laid the foundations of a pilot project hosted by the International Institute of Social History, and the guidelines for future collaborations.

THE LYON CONFERENCE WAS THEREFORE DESIGNED TO FULFILL THREE OBJECTIVES:

- ▶ To continue the conversation initiated in the preceding workshop and conferences;
- ▶ To follow up with the advance of the database project;
- ▶ To expand the inquiry into bondage-related practices to continental and non-colonial Asian areas.

With regard to the first objective, the papers presented provided original input on slaving, resistance and forced relocation throughout colonial spaces, as well as promising new research questions and projects.

These included Kate Ekama's (Stellenbosch University) study of the dynamics of emancipation, manumission and the internal slave trade in the British Cape colony based on auction records; Alexander Geleen's (International Institute of Social History) use of placards to explore the regulation of slave mobility in Batavia; and Patricia Souza de Faria's (Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro) investigation of the characteristics of slavery in the "State of India" centered on Goa. The conference highlighted the potential of digital humanities to help mapping and quantifying human trafficking and slave trading in early-modern Asia. Samantha Sint Nicolaas (International Institute of Social History) presented preliminary insights of her work on the existing datasets collected by the International Institute of Social History, while Fei Si-yen (Penn State University) introduced her promising research on human trading in late-imperial China using the LoGarT research tool developed by the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science.

As for the ambition to go toward a truly connected history of slaving in Asia, the program has kept its promises. Besides a complete panel on slaving practices in Indonesia (Hans Hägerdal, Emilie Wellfelt (Stockholm University) and Jennifer Gaynor (University of Buffalo and State University of New York)), new inputs were sourced from contributions to the history of slavery in late-imperial China (Fei Si-yen and James Fujitani (Azusa Pacific University, California)), while Jeannine Bischoff (Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies) and Lisa Hellman (Free University of Berlin) presented challenging papers on human transactions in Tibet and on the life cycles of Swedish captives across Central Asia and beyond, respectively.

The Lyon conference paved the way toward an improved understanding of the local and transnational dynamics that allowed for the social uprooting of individuals and their reinsertion into contexts of enslavement and dependency. The scholarly network formed out of this conference and its forerunners has reached a critical mass that now permits us to consider new means of continuing the dialog and to disseminate the results of individual and collective research.

As a word of conclusion, we would like to honor the memory of Joseph Calder Miller (1939–2019), distinguished T. Cary Johnson Jr. Professor of History at the University of Virginia, who passed away only a few days before the conference started. Joseph C. Miller had been an active participant in our previous workshops and conferences and had kindly accepted, once again, to join us in Lyon. Those who had the opportunity to meet him in the past years will miss his enthusiasm, his kindness, and his challenging and always caring observations.

* Further Reading: Free and Unfree Labor in Atlantic and Indian Ocean Port Cities (1700–1850). *International Review of Social History* 64, Special Issue 27 (2019).