

Slavery, Dependency, and Obligation in the Early Modern Malay Archipelago: Towards a Refashioned 'Slave Mode of Production'

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Introduction

In the year 1660, the Reformed minister and Dutch East India Company (V.O.C.) agent Philip Baldaeus visited the famine-struck city of Nagapattinam in southeast India and recorded what he witnessed. "The streets were covered with emaciated and half-starved persons," Baldaeus wrote, "who offered themselves to slavery for a small quantity of bread... several thousands were transported to Batavia."¹ As this vignette illustrates, Batavia (present-day Jakarta, Indonesia), the fledgling capital city of the Dutch empire in Asia, was an eager purchaser of slaves and was deeply embedded into the diverse Indian Ocean and intra-Asian slaving systems. Keen on exploiting the Malay Archipelago for their spices with the largest profit margin possible, the V.O.C. would come to rely on slavery and other forms of unfree labor for their colonial-commercial project, importing between 200,000 and 300,000 slaves into the city of Batavia alone during the 17th and 18th centuries.² This Dutch-led slaving network is identified by historian Markus Vink as the "most expansive of its kind in the history of Southeast Asia."³ In this paper, I will explore slavery in the Malay Archipelago during the period of V.O.C. rule (1602-1800) in order to answer the following questions: how and where were slaves acquired and to what purposes were they put? In responding to these questions, I aim to answer the larger question of whether or not there existed a 'slave mode of production' in the Malay Archipelago.

Refashioning a 'Slave Mode of Production'

The Malay Archipelago (present-day Indonesia, Malaysia, East-Timor, and Papua New Guinea) is home to a multitude of different religions, cultures, and ethnicities, and has been influenced over centuries by various foreign powers like China, the Islamic world, and European

¹ Leonard Andaya, "Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia," in *Narratives, Routes and Intersections in Pre-Modern Asia*, ed. Radhika Seshan (London: Routledge Press, 2017) 95-96.

² Remco Raben, "Cities and the Slave Trade in Early-Modern Southeast Asia," in *Linking Destinies: Trade, Towns, and Kin in Asian History*, ed. Peter Boomgaard (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 135.

³ Markus Vink, "'The World's Oldest Trade': Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in Seventeenth Century," *Journal of World History* Vol.14, No.2 (2003) 132.

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colonialism, all of which have had dramatic impacts on the development of slavery in the area. Because of this, scholars of slavery have identified the archipelago as a “peculiarly fruitful place to examine the interaction of different concepts of servitude – Islamic, Indic, Chinese, and modern European, as well as a range of indigenous forms – and thus to delineate the most useful boundaries of slavery as a global concept.”⁴ In light of the plethora of slaving and servitude systems present in the Malay Archipelago, various models and systems of slavery can be explored within these diverse contexts. One conceptualization of slavery in particular, Paul Lovejoy’s notion of a ‘slave mode of production’, has been used as a common analytical framework in comparative slave studies. In the context of the Malay Archipelago, however, the resounding consensus of historians argue that this concept is not applicable. For example, the fifteen contributing scholars to the edited volume *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia* all agree that a ‘slave mode of production’ did not exist in this corner of the world.⁵ To understand why this has become the consensus, we must turn our attention to the meaning of a ‘slave mode of production’ as defined by Lovejoy to see what Southeast Asian scholars are arguing against.

Lovejoy’s ‘slave mode of production’ is first and foremost a theoretical framework rooted in structuralist economic history. For him, a ‘slave mode of production’ can be identified when the “economic structure of a particular society included an integrated system of enslavement, slave trade, and domestic use of slaves.”⁶ Furthermore, this system only takes into account what historians have termed ‘chattel slavery’, and subordinates the social, cultural, and religious aspects of slavery to their use in economic production, particularly in relation to an export trade, and focuses only on the exploitation of slave labor on a large scale, “on plantations, in mines, and in the harvesting or gathering of wild products.”⁷ In this strictly economic definition, many forms of slavery, bondage, and dependency are sidelined, and the political economy of a region becomes the main area of research, rather than the lives of the historical actors in question. It is against this conceptualization that Southeast Asian scholars are rebelling.

That being said, however, there is a growing movement of scholars that aim to incorporate a ‘slave mode of production’ into a wider

⁴ *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983) 2.

⁵ *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency*, Reid, 23.

⁶ Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2011) 10.

⁷ Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2, 268.

framework that recognizes the importance of socio-cultural analysis to the study of slavery. Myrsini Manney-Kalogera, for example, argues that a historical study of slavery “must necessarily move past purely labor-based economic definitions, exploring slavery’s social function and its role as an agent of political change, and conversely, stability.”⁸ In this understanding, a ‘slave mode of production’ is not only producing and reproducing economic structures and products for export and consumption, but also cultural norms, social units, and political legitimacy and continuity. It is a goal of this paper to situate the history of slavery in the Malay Archipelago within this refashioned framework of a ‘slave mode of production’.

In order to help explain the many different positions of servitude that this paper will address, I must first define the concepts of dependency and obligation in the context of the Malay Archipelago rather than conform to a generalized, self-contained definition of a slave. Kanjeng Koentjaraningrat, an indigenous Indonesian scholar who is often considered ‘the father of Indonesian anthropology’, argues that native cultures in the archipelago have an “excessively vertical orientation,” in human and social relationships. Moreover, he asserts that the basis of indigenous society is, in his own words, “the awareness that a relationship of authority of high over low exists, accepted by the latter, and likewise, the realization that high and low need each other in their striving for higher standing.”⁹ Because of this widely held understanding of social relations, the dichotomy of ‘slavery’ vs ‘freedom’ is not applicable, as every living being was considered a part of a “hierarchical scale of relative obligations,” that included princes, merchants, peasants, debt-bondsmen, and even forms of chattel slavery.¹⁰ Obligation and dependency permeated all elements of society and culture in the Malay Archipelago. These vertical relationships of obligation between a higher and a lower were so widespread and essential to the culture of the archipelago that the terms used to define a polity or community were *huluntuhan* in Malay and *kawula-gusti* in Javanese, both compound words literally meaning “subject-lord.”¹¹ These relationships of obligation and dependency were thus constitutive of the very foundation of socio-political order in the Malay Archipelago.

⁸ Myrsini Manney-Kalogera, “The Beautiful Camellia and the Vile Adventuress: Female Slavery, Patronage, and Society in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire,” (2019) 2.

⁹ *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency*, Reid, 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹¹ Leonard Andaya, “Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia,” In *Narratives, Routes and Intersections in Pre-Modern Asia*, Radhika Seshan eds (London: Routledge Press, 2017) 89.

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Not only were these relationships of obligation and dependency deeply ingrained into the culture, but they were often polyvalent and intersectional. For example, in smaller, decentralized and tribal societies in the archipelago, all people – ‘free’ or ‘bonded’ – were dependent on, and owed a permanent obligation (often in the form of a few but specific number of days labor) to the local *orang kaya* (village headman), who himself was often obligated to the spiritual leaders of the tribe. Entering into a debt-bondage relationship, however, “was a more demanding form of dependency than an ordinary patron-client relationship, but it was regarded as temporary and reversible.”¹² This demonstrates how there were many overlapping bonds of obligation in the society of the Malay Archipelago, some permanent, others temporary; some intensive, others moderate. What we would call a ‘free man’ was rather just someone in relationships of lesser obligation, while those we would call a ‘bondsmen’ or ‘slave’ was someone in relationships of greater obligation.

In light of this, this paper will take a holistic approach to what constitutes ‘unfree labor’ or ‘slavery’ to include concepts like serfdom and debt-bondage as practiced by indigenous groups, as well as more conventional notions of ‘chattel slavery’ as practiced by some elements of Dutch society in the archipelago. By exploring how one’s place on this relative scale of obligation impacted their lives and how this dynamic scale helped create economic, cultural, and social structures, a clearer picture of slavery and dependency in the Malay Archipelago can be reached. It is my contention that this clearer picture will show how during the period of V.O.C. rule, the Malay Archipelago was home to a refashioned ‘slave mode of production’ that takes into account diverse forms of dependency and the multitude of cultural, social, and economic purposes that these dependents served.

Slavery and the Slave-Trade in the Pre-Colonial Malay Archipelago

When the Dutch first arrived in the Malay Archipelago in late 16th century, they discovered that they would face steep competition with pre-existing powers, both local and foreign, in the spice market and the slave market. In fact, a thriving regional slave trade existed before the arrival of Europeans and “persisted after Europeans relinquished the practice,” illustrating how “Europeans never monopolized this economic activity [slave-trading] in Asia.”¹³ Of the various foreign groups, the earliest outside group to trade in slaves in the archipelago were the Chinese,

¹² Leonard Andaya, “Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia,” 87.

¹³ Rik van Welie, “Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire: A Global Comparison,” *New West Indian Guide*, Vol. 82, No. ½ (2008) 68.

followed by merchants and princes from the Islamic world, and eventually Europeans. These outside groups would affect indigenous forms of slavery in differing ways, with the Dutch colonial project exercising the largest influence on local traditions of bondage and dependency. In analyzing indigenous and Dutch forms of slavery, I will keep in mind the framing questions stated at the outset of this paper: how and where were slaves acquired and to what purposes were they put?¹⁴ Through an exploration of pre-European slavery, we can see the cultural importance of bondage and dependency in the early modern Malay Archipelago and explore how the social, cultural, and economic uses of 'unfree' peoples represents a refashioned 'slave mode of production'.

When the Dutch first arrived in the 16th century, the Malay Archipelago was in a state of flux. The Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit Empire which had tenuously united the many islands and cultures of the archipelago had collapsed into ruin, and the numerous Sultanates that would rise to take its place had not yet begun their period of centralization and expansion. Thus, the Dutch came at an opportune time of decentralization and instability that allowed them to influence affairs and developments in the archipelago and enabled the local slave-trade to thrive. While the Dutch would come to have a large impact and introduce some new forms of economic production, it is widely argued by historians that the Dutch "interacted with and conformed to already existing forms of slavery rather than imposing their own system of servitude."¹⁵ As a consequence, it is the scholarly consensus that "slavery in the European colonies owed more to the Southeast Asian environment than to European legal ideas."¹⁶ With this in mind, it is therefore essential to understand indigenous forms of slavery and dependency before a discussion of foreign influence on slavery in the Malay Archipelago can take place.

The unstable nature of political states in the pre-colonial archipelago means that it could be considered broadly as a 'slaving zone', a term coined by Jeffrey Flynn Paul. As Benjamin Miller explains, a 'slaving zone' is "politically decentralized, and often the sites of internecine and interminable war between many groups and small-time rulers," where slaving can thrive and these zones often become the

¹⁴ My aim is not essentialize or reduce these cultures to an assumption about their ways-of-life, but rather to characterize broadly the different ways in which members of these groups practiced particular forms of bondage and slavery in the Malay Archipelago.

¹⁵ Richard B. Allen eds., *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 2014) 98.

¹⁶ *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency*, Reid, 18.

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victims of slave-raiding from larger neighbors.¹⁷ In the case of the Malay Archipelago, this neighbor was the Kingdom of Siam, which was the largest regional importer of Indonesian slaves during the 16th century within Southeast Asia.¹⁸ The Khmer Angkor state, as well as smaller, centralized states based out of the Philippine islands, also turned to the Malay Archipelago as a source of slave labor.¹⁹ While this illustrates an important element of the pre-colonial regional slave trade, the internal island to island slave trade within the archipelago itself represents the largest exchange in Indonesian peoples.

Within the archipelago, forms of slavery and bondage are often referred to by historians as 'open systems', wherein bondsmen and slaves could be more easily assimilated into dominant populations, often gaining membership into clan- or familial-structures.²⁰ This 'open system' is a symptom of the 'scale of relative obligations' discussed earlier, in which a slave or bondsman, even one from outside established structures, is given a place within the interconnected web of dependency and obligation and thus considered a member of the host society. In 'open systems' like the Malay Archipelago, the cultural, social, and political roles of slaves and bonded peoples often outweigh their economic uses.

To return to the framing questions of this paper, how would one become a 'slave' or 'bondsman' in the open system of indigenous slavery in the Malay Archipelago? Unlike many other areas, "the number of war captives who were enslaved were relatively small" and the desired reward from common raids was most often ransom rather than labor.²¹ When slave raiding did take place, it was often done by coastal elites against "primitive upland tribes" or against the inhabitants of other islands.²² Still, as I mentioned before, the goal was almost always ransom, so captives were never taken far from their homeland. Commonly, indigenous tribes would establish their own mutual fund into which all members contributed, "which was used for the payment of ransom and hence prevent the loss of valuable inhabitants."²³ Captives who could not

¹⁷ Benjamin Miller, "The Mediterranean as a Slaving Borderland, 1450-1650," (2019) 2.

¹⁸ Allens, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, 99.

¹⁹ Andaya, "Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia," 97.

²⁰ Allens, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, 104.

²¹ Andaya, "Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia," 90.

²² Peter Boomgaard, "Human Capital, Slavery, and Low Rates of Economic and Population Growth in Indonesia, 1600-1910," in *The Structure of Slavery in the Indian Ocean, Africa, and Asia*, edited by Gwyn Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2004) 88.

²³ Andaya, "Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia," 90.

be ransomed, on the other hand, were often employed within the household of their captor, wherein the most fortunate amongst them would be incorporated into the 'scale of relative obligations', and thus the dominant society, through marriage or adoption.²⁴

The most common way for one to enter into slavery in the Malay Archipelago was through debt-bondage. Debt-bondage was widespread for a variety of reasons including "frequent climatic anomalies, a cultural propensity for gambling, and high interest rates."²⁵ Gambling, evidently, was culturally accepted, and particularly common in relation to cock-fighting, which would continue to create a supply of willing bondsman. This became so pervasive that "men who wanted to gamble would carry a special rope with them to the gambling arenas as an indication that their gambling debts could be paid, if necessary, through their own debt bondage."²⁶ This peculiar custom highlights how debt-bondage was considered a feasible way of life and represented a regular position within the 'scale of relative obligations'.

The widespread use and cultural acceptance of debt-bondage within the archipelago could often lead to the appearance of rather unique forms of slavery. For example, in some cultures in the eastern archipelago, if someone was unable to afford the bride-price payments necessary to acquire wives, he could "enlist a wealthy *maduan* (translated as master or owner) to pay the costs, becoming his *koi* or bondsman. The children of marriages so contracted are described as belonging to the *maduan*, and he can also repossess the wife he provided if his bondsmen fail to carry out their obligations to him."²⁷ Forms of obligation and dependency like this illustrate the important cultural uses of slavery that are ignored in Lovejoy's definition of a 'slave mode of production'. In this case, debt-slavery leads directly to the continued production of societal stability and of new family-units, ensuring the continuity of a clan or tribe.

If debt-bondage was the most common way in which an Indonesian would become a slave, to what uses were these bondsmen put in pre-colonial societies? The simple answer is that in indigenous societies in the Malay Archipelago, bondsmen and slaves worked in the same

²⁴Andaya, "Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia," 90.

²⁵ Boomgaard, "Human Capital, Slavery, and the Low Rates of Economic and Population Growth in Indonesia," 88.

²⁶ Kerry Ward, "Slavery in Southeast Asia, 1420-1804," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Part II: Slavery in Asia*, edited by David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 173.

²⁷ *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, Reids, 9.

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manner as those who were in relationships of lesser obligation. As noted earlier, in most cases, all peoples were obliged to the tribal headmen for labor. Anthony Reid argues that slavery among indigenous Indonesians represented “junior membership of the household, doing all its most menial jobs, yet closely bound in intimacy to it and sharing its triumphs as well as its disasters.”²⁸ Bondsmen and slaves would most often participate thusly with their masters in their household economy, whether that means fishing, farming, or hunting. The labor practices of both ostensibly ‘free’ and ‘enslaved’ workers was something that Antonio Galvao, a Portuguese explorer and administrator took particular note of in his *Historia das Molucas*. In his accounts, he noticed everywhere that agricultural lands were tilled by both ‘freedmen’ and ‘slaves’.²⁹ Galvao also provided an account of the type of obligated labor that all members of a society owed to local headmen. He wrote that “when they [the indigenous society] have to do some important work, e.g., to besiege towns, to move temples, royal palaces, and other similar things, all of them assemble and they divide themselves into shifts for months, weeks, or days.”³⁰ This type of work, which may be called corvee or statue labor, and was required of all living within a village, represents the many ways in which the ‘relative scale of obligations’ was enacted through labor. More importantly, it shows how obligated labor had a variety of uses, both culturally and economically productive.

The V.O.C. and Dutch Slavery in the Malay Archipelago

The V.O.C. was created in 1602 in order to build a Dutch monopoly of the spice-trade, and by 1619 they had founded their Asian capital of Batavia on the island of Java. Batavia would quickly become the slave-trade capital of the Indian Ocean, as Muslim, Chinese, South Asian, indigenous, and European merchants flocked to the city to buy and sell in humans. By 1749, 61% of Batavia’s population was comprised of slaves.³¹ As discussed earlier, the Dutch grafted themselves onto preexisting slave trading networks and relied on Chinese and Muslim merchants to meet their demands for labor, while also introducing new forms of bondage. The following section will explore how and where the Dutch acquired their slaves and to what uses they were put. By blending preexisting forms of dependency and bondage with European ideas of slavery, the

²⁸ Reid, *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, 9.

²⁹ Antonio Galvao, *Historia das Molucas*, ed. and trans. Hubert Jacobs, S.J. (St. Louis: Jesuits Historical Institute, 1971) 133.

³⁰ Galvao, *Historia das Molucas*, 75.

³¹ Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, 101.

Dutch created a refashioned 'slave mode of production' in the Malay Archipelago.

The history of Dutch slavery under V.O.C. rule can largely be divided into two periods that correspond to where slaves were acquired: the external period and the internal period, with the change happening in the second half of the seventeenth century. As witnessed in the opening vignette of this paper, South Asia was a large supplier of slaves for both Batavia and the V.O.C. as a whole. Hendrick Brouwer, Governor-General of the V.O.C., described India and, in particular, the Coromandel Coast (Southeast India) as the "left arm of the Moluccas [spice islands]." He made this distinction not just because of its prominence as source of slaves, but also "because [he had] noticed that without the textiles of the Coromandel, commerce is dead in the Moluccas."³² This reliance on India, and the larger Indian Ocean world, as a source of slaves and textiles constitutes the first period of Dutch of slavery in the archipelago, which would last for the first fifty to sixty years of the V.O.C.'s presence in Southeast Asia. It has been estimated that in the 17th century alone, the Dutch exported some 100,000 slaves from South Asia.³³

In most cases, however, it was not the Dutch that would capture and transport these slaves, but rather important regional players in the Indian Ocean world. The Arakanese state of Mrauk-U in present day Myanmar, for example, supplied tens of thousands of slaves to Batavia during the first half of the 17th century.³⁴ During these early years, other areas in the Indian Ocean world also helped provide slaves for the V.O.C. Occasionally, the Dutch would send merchants to Africa, and particularly Madagascar, in an effort to purchase slaves when populations from India were lower than expected. Due to the high attrition rate of slaves during the course of the voyage from Africa to the Malay Archipelago, however, Africa was generally abandoned as a possible source of slaves for Batavia.³⁵ One noted example of the Dutch use of African slaves in Batavia was as a form of police-force. A.R.T. Kemasang explains how "to help maintain these laws, and internal policing in general, the Dutch initially used Africans, mainly from Angola and Mozambique. Their 'ruggedness and physical strength' were used to keep the population

³² George D. Winius and Marcus P.M. Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified: The VOC and its Changing Political Economy in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991) 13.

³³ Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, 87.

³⁴ Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, 92.

³⁵ Andaya, "Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia," 95.

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intimidated.”³⁶ Eventually, when the demand for slaves skyrocketed in the later 17th century, the Dutch would look away from South Asia and the Indian Ocean and instead turn to the archipelago itself as their major source of slaves.

The internal period of the Dutch slave trade began with a series of important Dutch conquests in the mid to late 17th century. The capture of the wealthy city-state of Malacca in 1641 and the conquest of the most prolific local slave traders within the Sultanate of Makassar in 1667 entrenched Dutch power in the archipelago and allowed them to more efficiently exploit local supplies of labor. The Sultanate of Makassar, whose population was comprised of approximately 71% enslaved peoples, granted the V.O.C. access to the eastern ends of the archipelago, which Islamic rulers and Chinese merchants had been using as a source of slaves for centuries.³⁷ Historian Leonard Andaya identifies the Dutch conquest of Makassar as the most “crucial turning point in the slave trade within the Malay-Indonesian archipelago,” as the Dutch took over both their slaving and spice-trading networks.³⁸ After these Dutch advances, slaves local to the archipelago, including Indonesians, Malays, and Papuans, would become the overwhelming majority of European-owned slaves in the V.O.C. In fact, around 3,000 slaves annually passed through Makassar on their way to Batavia during the 18th century.³⁹ During this time period, it became clear that it was “impossible to separate the trade in slaves from the overall commercial pattern in the Archipelago,” as the internal, inter-archipelagic trade in spices and other goods became enmeshed with the Dutch demand for slaves.⁴⁰ The coalescence of trade in spices and in humans into one network would prove to be an important step in the creation of V.O.C. economic structures and a step towards the formation of a refashioned ‘slave mode of production’.

This local, inter-archipelago slave trade, like the larger Indian Ocean trade, relied on preexisting networks and non-European merchants to meet the demands of Batavia. Within the Malay Archipelago, Chinese merchants often served as the glue that held the regional slave trade together, and the Dutch would come to greatly rely on the Chinese both as free-citizens of Batavia and as slave dealers. In

³⁶ A.R.T. Kemasang, “How Dutch Colonialism Foreclosed a Domestic Bourgeoisie in Java: The 1740 Chinese Massacres Reappraised,” *Review: Fernand Braudel Center*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1985) 62. Cited from: (De Haan, 1935: 358, 668)

³⁷ Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, 101.

³⁸ Andaya, “Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia,” 96.

³⁹ Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, 98, 103.

⁴⁰ Raben, “Cities and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Southeast Asia,” 135.

fact, the Chinese constituted the largest ethnic group of the free civilian population of Batavia.⁴¹ Approximately half of all slave imports into Batavia were handled by Chinese merchants, and they held a monopoly on the slave trade with the Hindu island of Bali.⁴² Balinese slaves traded by Chinese merchants constituted approximately 24% of the total slave population in Batavia⁴³, and Balinese women were praised by both the Dutch and the Chinese as beautiful and dutiful marriage partners.⁴⁴ This cooperation between Dutch and Chinese merchants would be essential to the creation of a successful Dutch colonial state in the Malay Archipelago.

Due to the high number of Chinese merchants living in Dutch cities, the Chinese developed their own unique forms of slavery within the V.O.C. Unique to the Chinese trade in slaves was the desire for women. Kerry Ward explains how “Chinese men who lived permanently in the trading entrepôts were mostly unable to procure wives from China during the early modern period because of the prohibitions against [female] travel and emigration”, thus creating a demand for female slaves for marriage.⁴⁵ Children born of Chinese men and enslaved local women were considered free and legitimate, which helped localize Chinese trading communities and become “acculturated to the local society over generations.”⁴⁶ The Dutch too would come to participate in this practice. Leonard Blusse explains how “Asian women with European status, who as wives to Company servants and free burghers, ensured the continuity of the Dutch local presence in general and the preservation of private fortunes in particular.”⁴⁷ This trade in slave wives represents another important cultural aspect of slavery that Lovejoy’s chooses to leave out of his definition of a ‘slave mode of production’. This form of slavery, however, was essential to the production of a stable society, as these women literally produced the next generation of merchants and settlers. By creating continuity as well helping produce a process of creolization, this socially and culturally productive form of slavery was an essential part of bondage and dependency in the Malay Archipelago during V.O.C. rule.

⁴¹ Leonard Blusse, *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women, and the Dutch in VOC Batavia* (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1986) 10.

⁴² Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, 102.

⁴³ Andaya, “Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia,” 97.

⁴⁴ Welie, “Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire,” 69.

⁴⁵ Ward, “Slavery in Southeast Asia,” 179.

⁴⁶ Ward, “Slavery in Southeast Asia,” 179.

⁴⁷ Blusse, *Strange Company*, 10.

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Turning our attention now to what purposes slaves served, we can see the many ways in which slave labor was utilized some that would be considered 'economically productive' in Lovejoy's definition, and other ways associated more with the social and cultural role of slaves. In the early years of V.O.C. rule in the archipelago, corresponding to the external period of slave importation from South Asia, there existed two forms of officially sponsored Company slavery: 'chained' and 'unchained'. 'Chained' slaves, who could be legally kept in irons, were a diverse population made up of prisoners of war or "those undergoing sentences of punishment."⁴⁸ These slaves were kept within the castle's walls under guard and were used for the most labor intensive public works like digging canals and galley service. 'Unchained' slaves, on the other hand, could not be kept in irons, were made up of mostly high-skilled laborers from India, and were treated similarly to Dutch laborers. These 'unchained slaves' "worked the same hours as skilled European and Chinese labourers and were paid a kind of wage which included two sets of clothes a year and forty pounds of rice plus fish, salt, and half a rijksdaalder a month... [they] were allowed to marry free women, and their children were given schooling."⁴⁹ These 'unchained' slaves can be seen as fitting into the forms of bondage and dependency practiced by indigenous groups and as a part of the V.O.C.'s own 'relative scale of obligation', reflecting the creolization of slavery in the Malay Archipelago.

As the V.O.C. progressed into their internal period of slavery, drawing on local Malay, Indonesian, and Papuan sources for slaves, the way in which slaves were utilized also changed. As Batavia began to import more slaves from the eastern reaches of the archipelago, a new status of *Kuli* slaves was created by the Dutch authorities. Like 'chained' slaves, the workers were mostly used for unskilled labor, such as public building projects, tending to gardens, and loading and unloading ships. On the other hand, they were similar to 'unchained' slaves in that they could not be held in irons and were allowed to live amongst the general population.⁵⁰ Overall, however, these Company slaves who worked in both skilled and unskilled labor represented only the minority of slaves in V.O.C. territories, as slaves owned by private individuals (both Dutch and Chinese) vastly outnumbered their Company owned counterparts. In 1687, for example, only 1,430 of the 26,071 slaves in Batavia were owned by the V.O.C.; the rest were in the hands of the free

⁴⁸ Reid, *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency*, 249.

⁴⁹ Reid, *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency*, 249.

⁵⁰ Reid, *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency*, 250.

citizens of the city.⁵¹ These privately owned slaves would come to live very different lives than those owned by the Company.

The vast majority of privately owned slaves in the V.O.C. were employed as domestic servants in the service of European and Asian burghers, serving as maids, artisans, and valets.⁵² As one could expect, domestic slaves would come to represent the power and social status of individuals. In order to rival the “privilege of Asian potentates,” the Batavian elite would try accumulate large retinues of personal slaves to regale themselves “in a style which befitted the Company’s status as an Asian power.”⁵³ Thus, the most common use of privately owned slaves was to “display (and if necessary defend) the wealth and status of the owner.”⁵⁴ A young and wealthy Batavian woman described a household of slaves in the following terms:

Three or four youths, and as many maids, accompanied herself and her husband whenever they left the house... they had a slave orchestra which played on the harp, viol, and bassoon at mealtimes... the remaining slaves were employed in various household, cellar, and buttry duties, and as grooms, cooks, gardeners, and seamstresses.⁵⁵

Moreover, officers of the V.O.C. would receive a number of personal slaves automatically as “personal allotments... as a part of their conditions of rank.”⁵⁶ These personal slaves thus represented conspicuous consumption and were used to establish a political hierarchy within V.O.C. territories, something not considered ‘economically productive’ in the view of Paul Lovejoy. In the view of a refashioned ‘slave mode of production’, however, the vital role that enslaved wives and domestic servants played in the production of societal structures and political authority would constitute an important part of the social formation, thus highlighting the centrality of slavery to the V.O.C.

⁵¹ Andaya, “Slavery and the Dutch East India Company in Seventeenth-Century Island Southeast Asia,” 97.

⁵² Welie, “Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire,” 72.

⁵³ Andaya, *The World of Maluku*, 42.

⁵⁴ Reid, *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, 17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁶ Phillip Winn, “Slavery and Cultural Creativity in the Banda Islands,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2010) 377.

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Conclusion: A Refashioned 'Slave Mode of Production' in the Malay Archipelago

In regards to slave labor in the V.O.C., the scholarly consensus is that Dutch owned slaves were "almost never involved in commercial agriculture for the European market. In the Indian Ocean World, commercial production remained squarely in the hands of indigenous societies."⁵⁷ In Lovejoy's framework, the export of pepper, cloves, and nutmeg (the archipelago's principal exports) would have to have been produced by slaves in order to qualify as a 'slave mode of production'. For this reason, most scholars have argued that a 'slave mode of production' did not exist. Historians, however, do recognize one exception that proves this rule. This exception is the tragic case of the Banda Islands, where almost the entire native population was massacred or deported by the Dutch in 1621, reducing the island population from 15,000 to only 1,000.⁵⁸ The V.O.C. authorities then redistributed the land to Dutch landowners, who formed plantations, or *perkens*, where chattel slaves labored under brutal conditions to grow and produce nutmeg. The Banda Plantations have often been compared to the plantation systems found in the Atlantic world, and historian Vincent Loth refers to the Banda Plantations as "nothing less than a Caribbean cuckoo in an Asian nest."⁵⁹ Most historians agree that the Banda Plantations represent the only example of a classic 'slave mode of production' in the Malay Archipelago, and it is viewed as an anomaly rather than the norm.

If we look, instead, for a refashioned 'slave mode of production' wherein slavery is not simply reduced to its economic function but recognized for the important role it plays in the production of culture, social stability, and political authority, we can see how both Dutch slavery and indigenous forms of bondage and dependency were, in fact, productive. In indigenous societies, the role of the 'relative scale of obligations' meant that almost all peoples were bonded or dependent on another. Those with greater obligations, like debt-bondsmen or prisoners of war, were just as involved in the economic production of indigenous societies than those of lesser obligation, including in the production of spices. Overall, bondage and dependency formed the most essential element of indigenous social order, and it was vital to both economic and cultural production.

In both indigenous and colonial societies, slave-wives served crucial social functions in the reproduction of familial units. For example,

⁵⁷ Welie, "Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire," 78.

⁵⁸ Winn, "Slavery and Cultural Creativity in the Banda Islands," 367.

⁵⁹ Welie, "Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire," 81.

Gert Oostindie and Gert Paasman argue that “because of the influence of Asian and Eurasian women and their slaves, who raised children... Malay was often spoken in the family circle. Every European staying in the East Indies for a period of time began to live like a mestizo to a greater or lesser extent.”⁶⁰ In this case, slave wives and enslaved maid servants helped produce the dominant, creolized culture of the V.O.C. Furthermore, the small armies of personal slaves that V.O.C. officers and wealthy free burghers amassed were crucial to the establishment of political authority and social status in Batavia.

Beyond their social and cultural function, the role of slaves in the maintenance of the economy was also essential. While they may not have been involved in the production of goods for export like indigo, rice, or spices, slaves were found in all other segments of the economy. They unloaded ships packed with valuable commodities, dug the canals upon which the city of Batavia was built, and participated in numerous skilled labors like smithing and weaving. In this way, while they were not employed in production, they were still essential to the greater productive processes in general, which is an important element of Lovejoy’s classical ‘slave mode of production’.⁶¹ Therefore, if we take a holistic view of slavery, bondage, and dependency in the Malay Archipelago during the rule of the V.O.C., it becomes clear that a refashioned ‘slave mode of production’ existed that was deeply rooted in its Southeast Asian context, as slaves, bondsmen, and obligated peoples formed the cultural and economic backbone of both indigenous and Dutch society.

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⁶⁰ Gert Oostindie and Bert Paasman, “Dutch Attitudes Towards Colonial Empires, Indigenous Cultures, and Slaves,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* Vol. 31, No. 3 (1998) 351.

⁶¹ Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 268.

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