



ASIA MAIOR

Vol. XXXVI / 2025

**Asia in 2025:
Great power rivalry, contested politics,
and global disorder**

viella



CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI “CESARE BONACOSSA” - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

ASIA MAIOR

The Journal of the Italian think tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989

Vol. XXXVI / 2025

Asia in 2025: Great power rivalry, contested polities, and global disorder

viella

Asia Maior. The Journal of the Italian Think Tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989.

Copyright © 2026 - Viella s.r.l. & Associazione Asia Maior

ISBN 979-12-5701-257-1 (Paper) 979-12-5701-258-8 (Online)

ISSN 2385-2526 (Paper) ISSN 2612-6680 (Online)

Annual journal - Vol. XXXVI, 2025

This journal is published jointly by the think tank Asia Maior (Associazione Asia Maior) & the CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli Extra-europei "Cesare Bonacossa", University of Pavia

Asia Maior: The Journal of the Italian Think Tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989 is an open-access journal, whose issues and single articles can be freely downloaded from the think tank webpage: www.asiamaior.org.

The reference year is the one on which the analyses of the volume are focused. Each *Asia Maior* volume is always published in the year following the one indicated on the cover.

Paper version	Italy	€ 50.00	Abroad	€ 65.00
Subscription	abbonamenti@viella.it www.viella.it			

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-chief (direttore responsabile):

Michलगuglielmo Torri, University of Turin.

Co-editors:

Axel Berkofsky, University of Pavia;

Filippo Boni, The Open University;

Diego Maiorano, The University of Naples «L'Orientale»;

Marco Pinfari, University of Pavia;

Elena Valdameri, ETH Zürich;

Consulting editors:

Elisabetta Basile, University of Rome «Sapienza»; Kerry Brown, King's College London;

Peter Brian Ramsay Carey, Oxford University;

Rosa Caroli, University of Venice;

Jaewoo Choo, Kyung Hee University (Seoul, South Korea);

Jamie Seth Davidson, National University of Singapore;

Ritu Dewan, Indian Association for Women Studies;

Laura De Giorgi, University of Venice;

Hewison, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill;

Lucia Husenicova, University Matej Bel (Banská Bystrica, Slovakia);

David C. Kang, Maria Crutcher Professor of International Relations,
University of Southern California;
Rohit Karki, Kathmandu School of Law;
Jeff Kingston, Temple University – Japan Campus;
Mirjam Künkler, Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study – Uppsala;
Noemi Lanna, University of Naples «L'Orientale»;
James Manor, School of Advanced Studies – University of London;
Aditya Mukherjee, Jawaharlal Nehru University;
Mridula Mukherjee, Jawaharlal Nehru University;
Giulio Pugliese, European University Institute, Fiesole;
Parimala Rao, University of Delhi;
Guido Samarani, University of Venice;
Marisa Siddivò, University of Naples «L'Orientale»;
Eswaran Sridharan, Institute for the Advanced Study of India, University of
Pennsylvania;
Arun Swamy, University of Guam;
Akio Takahara, University of Tokyo;
Edsel Tupaz, Harvard University alumnus, Ateneo de Manila University and
Far Eastern University;
Pierluigi Valsecchi, University of Pavia;
Sten Widmalm, Uppsala University;
Ather Zia, University of Northern Colorado.

Book reviews editors:

Elena Valdameri, ETH Zurich (Review-editor- in-chief);
Teuku Reza Fadeli, Universitas Indonesia (UI), Jakarta.

Graphic project:

Nicola Mocchi, University of Florence.

Before being published in *Asia Maior*, all articles, whether commissioned or unsolicited, after being first evaluated by the Journal's editors, are then submitted to a double-blind peer review involving up to three anonymous referees. Coherently with the spirit of the double-blind peer review process, *Asia Maior* does not make public the name of the reviewers. However, the reviewers' names – and, if need be, the whole correspondence between the Journal's editors and the reviewer/s – can be disclosed to interested institutions, upon a formal request made directly to the Editor in Chief of the journal.

Articles meant for publication should be sent to Michelguglielmo Torri (mg.torri@gmail.com), Filippo Boni (filippo.boni@open.ac.uk), Diego Maiorano (dmaiorano@unior.it); book reviews should be sent to Elena Valdameri (elena.valdameri@gess.ethz.ch).



ASSOCIAZIONE ASIA MAIOR

Steering Committee: Filippo Boni, Marzia Casolari, Matteo Fumagalli, Michelguglielmo Torri (President).

Scientific Board: Guido Abbattista (Università di Trieste), Domenico Amirante (Università «Federico II», Napoli), Elisabetta Basile (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Luigi Bonanate (Università di Torino), Claudio Cecchi (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Alessandro Colombo (Università di Milano), Anton Giulio Maria de Robertis (Università di Bari), Thierry Di Costanzo (Université de Strasbourg), Max Guderzo (Università di Siena), Giorgio Milanetti (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Paolo Puddinu (Università di Sassari), Adriano Rossi (Università «L'Orientale», Napoli), Giuseppe Sacco (Università «Roma Tre», Roma), Guido Samarani (Università «Ca' Foscari», Venezia), Filippo Sabetti (McGill University, Montréal), Gianni Vaggi (Università di Pavia).



CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli extra-europei
"Cesare Bonacossa" - Università di Pavia

Steering Committee: Axel Berkofsky, Alfredo Ferrante, Marco Gardini, Marco Pinfari, Maria Sassi, Pierluigi Valsecchi, Massimo Zaccaria (President)



viella

libreria editrice

via delle Alpi, 32

I-00198 ROMA

tel. 06 84 17 758

fax 06 85 35 39 60

www.viella.it

CONTENTS

IX Foreword

MICHEL GUGLIELMO TORRI, *Asia in 2025: The unravelling of the Asian order in the pincer of great power pressure and domestic strain*

Articles

- 1 FLORA SAPIO, *China 2025: «Focus our energies on doing our own things well»*
- 25 VERONICA STRINA, *China's 2025: Forging a new global role*
- 53 MARCO MILANI & ANTONIO FIORI, *Korean peninsula 2025: Political transition and strategic consolidation*
- 87 RAYMOND YAMAMOTO & MARCO ZAPPA, *Japan 2025: External shocks, domestic turbulence and the rise of Takaichi Sanae*
- 131 STEFANO PELAGGI, *Taiwan 2024-2025: Constraint, adaptation, and the cross-strait equilibrium*
- 155 THAN KIÜ, *Hong Kong 2025: Conditioned continuity under National Security*
- 173 ENRICO GLORIA, *The Philippines 2024-2025: Feuding families, weak institutions, and the limits of Philippine democracy*
- 193 EMANUELA MANGIAROTTI & NÜR RAFEEDA DAUT, *Malaysia 2025: ASEAN chairmanship under the Madani framework*
- 209 TEUKU REZA FADELI, *Indonesia 2025: The «Red-and-White» project and the consolidation of executive dominance*
- 267 CHRISTINE CABASSET, *Timor-Leste 2025: The 11th ASEAN member and new challenges*
- 285 FABIO FIGIACONI, *Vietnam 2025: Tô Lâm's powerplay and the limits of bamboo diplomacy*
- 299 CAROLINE BENNETT, *Cambodia 2025: Resilience in the face of economic and geopolitical insecurity*
- 319 PAUL CHAMBERS, *Thailand 2025: A year of insecurity and transition*
- 341 MATTEO FUMAGALLI, *Myanmar 2025: The military eschews off-ramping and fights back, as the polycrisis carries on*
- 361 AMIT RANJAN, *Bangladesh in 2025: Under the shadow of «Monsoon Revolution»*
- 389 DIEGO MAIORANO & RAGHAW KHATTRI, *India 2025: Economic paradoxes, political recovery, and the battle for electoral integrity*
- 411 IAN HALL, *India 2025: Turbulence and turmoil in foreign policy*
- 431 PUSPA SHARMA, *Nepal 2024-2025: Political upheaval, economic challenges and mixed foreign relations*
- 453 GULBIN SULTANA, *Sri Lanka 2025: Maiden year of the NPP administration*

477	MARCO CORSI, <i>Pakistan 2025: Internal governance challenges, security perils and foreign policy crosswinds</i>
499	ANAHITA MOTAZED RAD, <i>Iran 2024-2025: Strategic retrenchment amid regional setbacks and systemic pressures</i>
521	CARLO FRAPPI, <i>Azerbaijan 2025: Foreign policy behaviour in a fragmenting Eurasian order</i>
	<i>Special articles</i>
543	DAVID SCOTT, <i>Naval Hegemony and Deterrence: Aircraft carrier strategies and power projection in Asian waters</i>
559	SARA BERLOTO & NICOLÒ FASOLA, <i>From Monopoly to Dual Patronage: The evolution of Russian and Chinese influence in Central Asia (1991-2025)</i>
585	HAMIDEH SABERI, «We did not make a revolution to go backwards»: <i>The Iranian women's uprising of march 1979 and its systematic erasure from historical memory</i>
601	ENRICO BARTOLOMEI, «Colonialism of a Dual Nature»: <i>Fayez A. Sayegh, the Palestine Research Center and a Palestinian genealogy of the settler colonial paradigm</i>
625	<i>Reviews</i>
653	<i>Appendix</i>

AN ECONOMIC EMPIRE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: FRENCH STRATEGY IN ASIA
AND THE JOURNALS OF BOUTIN (1782-1786)

Éric Schnakenbourg

CRHIA, Nantes Université
Eric.Schnakenbourg@univ-nantes.fr

Massimiliano Vaghi, *Claude-François-Parfait Boutin en Inde et aux Mascareignes (1782-1786). La France en Asie à l'époque de la révolution américaine*, Sesto San Giovanni, Mimésis, 2024, 220 pp. (ISBN: 978-8869764196).

Massimiliano Vaghi is currently one of the leading specialists on French policy and presence in India in the eighteenth century, a subject to which he has devoted several studies, including *La France et l'Inde: commerces et politique impériale au XVIIIe siècle* (Mimésis, 2016). In his new book, he offers an edition of the journals of Claude-François-Parfait Boutin, who travelled in the Indian Ocean between 1782 and 1786. This source shows that, despite the reduction of the French presence in India to five trading posts after 1763, the French continued to take an interest in India, even though the British had clearly become the leading European power in the region.

There was at this time, however, no question of reviving a colonial war on the subcontinent; rather, the aim was to rethink France's role on the scale of the wider Indian Ocean region. It is precisely within this perspective that the ideas of Claude-François-Parfait Boutin should be understood. He advocated relying on the Mascarene Islands (Bourbon and Île de France, now Réunion and Mauritius) to develop an economic system that would serve as a foundation for restoring the French presence in India. This outlook must be seen in the broader context of the American War of Independence and Great Britain's loss of its thirteen North American colonies. Boutin clearly perceived that this major shift within the British Empire would lead the London government to refocus its attention on the Indian Ocean.

Massimiliano Vaghi's book opens with a lengthy contextualisation of the situation in India and the Mascarene Islands in the mid-eighteenth century. The author first provides a very thorough historiographical overview, effectively tracing the evolution of research in this field in recent years. He shows clearly how the final decades of the eighteenth century were long neglected by French historiography, as they were marked by a sense of decline following the defeat in the Seven Years' War. However, he also notes that recent studies have reassessed the French presence and its role in the Indian Ocean in a more positive light. It is within this renewed historiographical context that the edition of Boutin's journals takes its place.

Claude-François-Parfait Boutin, born in 1759 into a family of the robe nobility, embarked at Cádiz in 1782 to join the French troops in the East Indies under the command of the Marquis de Bussy. At that time, the Mascarene Islands were closely linked to the French establishments in India, and much thought was given to how these bases might develop synergies and help strengthen the French presence in the Indian Ocean. When the American War of Independence broke out, the government at Versailles decided to send an expedition to India, thereby helping to extend the conflict on a global scale. The explanation provided for the motivations behind this expedition, however, leaves the reader somewhat unsatisfied, especially when compared to the level of detail offered elsewhere on points of lesser importance for understanding Boutin's writings. Nevertheless, it is clear that, in French thinking, the Indian theatre formed part of the vast stage of the war against Great Britain that had begun in America. Readers unfamiliar with French policy in India will no doubt find of interest the pages that Massimiliano Vaghi devotes to Bussy's diplomacy in India and to the military events. The lengthy contextual section (pp. 17-101) includes passages that are highly useful for understanding Boutin's travel journals, while the contribution of other sections – such as the one on contemporaries' perceptions of the Franco-Anglo-Indian wars (*La perception des guerres franco-anglo-indiennes par les contemporains* (and not « contemporaines »). – appears less evident.

Boutin's journals are preserved at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris. They consist of four sections: "*Voyage from France to the Indies*" (1782-1783), "*Voyage from the Isle de France to Pondicherry*" (1785), "*Voyage from the Isle de France to Bourbon*" (1785), and "*Tour of the Interior of the Isle de France*" (1786). Boutin's adventure began on 11 May 1782 with his departure from Paris for Spain by land. He embarked at Cádiz as part of a convoy that left Spain on 16 July. After a month-long stop at the Cape of Good Hope, Boutin set sail again and arrived at Porto Novo on 17 March 1783. He then provides a detailed description of the Battle of Cuddalore and the subsequent engagements in June 1783.

Thereafter, Boutin travelled throughout the Indian Ocean, spending a year and a half on the Isle de France before moving on to Bourbon, which he describes in detail, including its different regions, its agriculture, and its inhabitants, whom he observes – regretfully – to be of mixed descent, born of unions between white settlers from France and Black populations. His final journal is a description of the Isle de France, in which Boutin once again displays his curiosity, particularly in his observations of nature. He notes above all that the island was insufficiently exploited due to a lack of enslaved labour. Boutin's observations clearly show him to be a man of the Enlightenment, endowed with wide-ranging curiosity. This aspect might perhaps have deserved further development. The journal ends somewhat abruptly, prompting questions about its original intended purpose.

Boutin's journals are of interest in three main respects: first, for the information they provide on navigation; second, for their account of military episodes in India during the final year of the American War of Independence; and third, as travel narratives offering descriptions of the Mascarene Islands. Boutin does not, however, address broader political considerations, leading Massimiliano Vaghi to wonder to what extent he was aware of the major international issues at stake. The principal contribution of Boutin's writings lies in his observations and reflections on the economic potential of the Mascarene Islands, which could have made possible the reconstitution of a French empire in the Indian Ocean that would be more economic than political in nature.

Although the source itself is undeniably valuable, the volume as a whole suffers from a general weakness in its use of the French language. One notes linguistic errors, confusion between masculine and feminine forms for certain words, misspelled proper names (Rousselot de Surgy, not de Sourgy, p. 85), and above all inconsistent capitalization – for example, the systematic use of “Océan indien” instead of the correct form “océan Indien.” One may also point to some surprising assertions, such as: «[Au XVIIIe siècle] l'Européen...conquiert l'espace asiatique et le rend sujet aux lois et aux canons occidentaux»? (p. 103). Despite these reservations, Massimiliano Vaghi's book remains a valuable contribution to our knowledge of French policy in the Indian Ocean in general and, more specifically, in the late eighteenth century – a period largely neglected by French historiography.