

FRAGRANT FRONTIER

Global Spice Entanglements
from the Sino-Vietnamese Uplands



SARAH TURNER
ANNUSKA DERKS
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THE SINO-VIETNAMESE UPLANDS

Edited by **Sarah Turner**
Annuska Derks
Jean-François Rousseau

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Preface and acknowledgements

This collection has emerged from collaborative research projects that the three editors have developed over the past fifteen years, which all the contributing authors have been part of, at different times. Our interest in these three specific spices – star anise, black cardamom, and ‘cinnamon’ (probably actually *C. cassia*) – has been constantly reinforced as we spend time in the Sino-Vietnamese uplands with local ethnic minority communities, attempting to better understand local livelihoods and the impacts of agrarian change, cash cropping (along with cash booms and busts), extreme weather events, and ever-shifting state policies. The complex dynamics in these uplands have motivated us to draw on a range of ethnographic approaches to embark on this project. We hope that this collection will go some way to demystifying the contemporary spice trade that originates from the Sino-Vietnamese uplands, through our explorations into the commodity chains and entanglements that move these spices to kitchen tables around the world.

We sincerely thank the hundreds of farmers in the Sino-Vietnamese uplands with whom we have held lengthy discussions and whose livelihood experiences are at the heart of this book. We are incredibly grateful for their insights, time, and patience. A large debt of gratitude is also owed to all the local traders, intermediaries, marketplace workers, street vendors, urban residents, wholesalers, exporters, and state officials (at many different levels of government) in Vietnam and China, for their time and enthusiasm for our work. We also thank the overseas importers and retailers who took part in interviews.

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The fieldwork of a number of graduate students at McGill University has contributed to underscoring the research in this collection. We are very grateful for the intellectual input of (in alphabetical order) Christine Bonnin, Sarah Delisle, Mélie Monnerat, Dylan Putzel, Patrick Slack, Kate Trinci, and Claire Tugault-Lafleur. We are also appreciative of the insights of Matthew Parsfield from the University of Zurich.

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Fundamental to the success of this collection has been the hard work and patience of all the contributors. Their research and ongoing enthusiasm for intellectual debate and critical reflection on these topics have provided the foundations for this endeavour and we hope our discussions will continue for many years to come.

Sarah Turner, Annuska Derks, Jean-François Rousseau

Accompanying virtual spice StoryMaps

Please explore the three virtual ‘StoryMaps’ that we have designed for the spices we focus on here. These visually depict the commodity chains and actors that star anise, black cardamom, and ‘cinnamon’ are entangled with, from upland ethnic minority cultivators in the fragrant frontier of the Sino-Vietnamese uplands to global consumers. They can be viewed at: <https://spicetrade3.wordpress.com/story-maps/> or at these links/QR codes:



Star anise: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9ec88b7f62d74ba588561ee7cbf43eba>



Black cardamom:
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/86ccb014eed74ff1a7e4f6deafd0d7f8>



‘Cinnamon’ (*C. cassia*):
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/cb55d2dd5b1f4abdb62a8d18c4f0609b>



Contributors

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Patrick Slack is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Geography, McGill University, Canada. His current research focusses on longitudinal ethnic minority livelihoods and borderland territorialisation schemes in northern upland Vietnam, in addition to how contemporary state actors at provincial and district levels tailor national rural development programmes to meet perceived local needs. His master's investigated intergenerational ethnic minority livelihood change in a northern Vietnamese borderland district with an emphasis on black cardamom cultivation and livelihood diversification.

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