

The First British Trade Expedition to China

Captain Weddell and the Courteen Fleet in Asia and Late Ming Canton

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Hong Kong University Press
The University of Hong Kong
Pokfulam Road
Hong Kong
<https://hkupress.hku.hk>

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ISBN 978-988-8754-10-6 (*Hardback*)

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound by J&S Printing Co., Ltd. in Hong Kong, China

Contents

Prologue	1
1. The British in Seventeenth-Century Luso-Dutch Asia	14
2. Enter the Interlopers: Genesis of the Courteen Association, Rival of the English East India Company	34
3. From the Downs to Goa to Melaka, April 1636–June 1637: Mishaps and Breakthroughs along the Way to China	48
4. Welcome to China with Portuguese Characteristics: The Courteen Fleet in Macao Purgatory, July–August 1637	70
5. The <i>Dragon</i> Enters the Tiger: The Courteen Fleet in the Bogue and Pearl River Estuary, August 1637	83
6. Captives at Canton: The Crisis of the Courteen Fleet at the Bogue, September–October 1637	93
7. Negotiation and Liberation: Restoration at Canton and Trade at Macao, October–December 1637	107
8. Lessons Learned: The “Anglology” of the Ming?	130
9. Lessons Learned: The Sinology of the Courteens?	157
Epilogue: The First British Trade Expedition to China: A Precursor of the Opium Wars?	176
Appendix: Key Chinese Officials in Ming Documents with English Renderings by the Courteens	185
Bibliography	187
Index	195

Prologue

In late autumn 1637, an English sea-captain at Macao, John Weddell, was compelled to sign a pledge promising both the Chinese and Portuguese that he would never return to China. Captain Weddell kept his word for almost two years. In the spring of 1639, aboard the *Dragon*, he embarked upon the return voyage to England from the Malabar coast of India. Sailing into the ocean towards the Cape of Good Hope: that was the last anyone heard from him. Frances Weddell, with her daughter Elizabeth, would wait again, no doubt patiently, but this time in vain, for the return of husband and father. Some consolation might have been derived from the return of her son Jeremy, who made the voyage to China in the fleet commanded by her husband, but came back to England in another ship, the *Sun*. What happened to the *Dragon* and Captain Weddell “in parts beyond the sea” remains a mystery. After a few more years of waiting, Frances would have to conclude that her husband had been slain by pirates at sea, maybe ambushed by some marauding Dutch, or merely swallowed by the stormy ocean he had crossed multiple times.

While most have never heard of this Englishman and his family from four centuries ago, we may all recognize that we are living in a world still dominated by their language and civilization. We inhabit a planet that was subject to the British Empire, whose foundations were laid by the exertions of such sea-captains as John Weddell. Long before reaching the coast of Ming China in 1637, Captain Weddell had sailed into remote seas and exotic bays and traversed unmapped territories and rivers. Long before launching attacks upon fleets and storming forts and villages in the Pearl River Delta of southeast China, Weddell had successfully commanded ships in naval battles in the Persian Gulf and fought skirmishes along the Malabar coast south of India’s Mughal Empire. Absent the audacity and panache of such pioneers; omitting the hardships endured and sacrifices suffered by the likes of Weddell and his family, it is unlikely that the British Empire would ever have arisen. Likewise would it be improbable that we would find that imperial progenitor Weddell’s language spread and thriving all over the twenty-first-century world, if not for those globe-spanning and routinely fatal ventures of him and his British contemporaries of the early seventeenth century.

By the time Weddell had received his first commission as a captain for the East India Company (EIC), ventures to India and the Far East were far from extravagant

luxuries or quixotic schemes. Governments in Europe, particularly the Habsburg ones, were funding armies and navies with wealth gained from commerce involving Asia. As Alison Games has pointed out: “Nation, region, and the world were all intertwined in this period, as European states and kingdoms struggled for dominance in Europe and turned to overseas holdings to finance or reinforce that power. The power of a state within Europe was necessarily connected to that state’s ability to project itself beyond the region.”¹ In the 1630s, and for several prior decades, the Portuguese were the only Europeans permitted by the Ming government to reside and trade directly in China. If the post–Zheng He, oceanic-averse Ming Chinese refused to trade with *all* foreigners, that would have been one thing. But to let such Iberians reap massive profits—and fund armies and navies in the European theater—could not be countenanced by Dutch, British, French, or any other Europeans who could be adversely affected by richer, more powerful Spanish and Portuguese. As the seventeenth-century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes formulated the logic in 1640: “It is also a law of nature, *that men allow commerce and traffic indifferently to one another*. For he that alloweth that to one man, which he denieth to another, declareth his hatred to him, to whom he denieth; and to declare hatred is war.”² Ming Chinese in Guangdong trading exclusively with the Portuguese would be hostility to the excluded British; it was indirectly a policy of bellicosity.

The religious dimension and ramifications of overseas enterprise were also conspicuous, most broadly in the form of a threat to the northwestern European Protestant cause posed by the mighty Roman Catholic, Iberian Habsburg dynasty. The counter-reformational danger served to animate Dutch and British overseas ventures as a way of depriving that dynasty of the wealth—from Mexico and Peru or Asia—that would fund campaigns against them, the Protestant heretics.³ This consideration obviously applied no less to the East, whether China, the Philippines, or Japan, or from Goa to Melaka to Macao to Manila to Nagasaki. The Elizabethan and Jacobean imperial impresarios Hakluyts and Samuel Purchas were quite deliberate and methodical in articulating a program to promote trade and colonization in order to fortify Protestant rulers and subvert the Roman Catholic monarchs of Spain.⁴ To gain profits from Chinese commerce would be, accordingly, a religious, that is, Protestant-contra-Catholic, imperative: to preserve and further the Reformation against Counter-Reforming Habsburgs, with their dynamic and

1. Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.

2. Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, Part I, Chapter XVI, Section 12.

3. For one spectacular example, take the 1628 Dutch seizure of the Spanish treasure fleet in the Caribbean which would enable the United Provinces to fund a massive campaign to dispossess Habsburg Philip IV of parts of the Spanish Netherlands.

4. “Hakluyt’s message of oceanic imperialism [in *Principall Navigations*, 1599] conquered the reading public with such triumphant ease because the public mind was now ready to accept it.” Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480–1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 248. Such a bibliographic conquest required a Protestant public mind.

multilingual squads of Jesuit missionaries already stationed in the Americas, Macao, Manila, and Nagasaki—to ensure that the orthodox form of Christianity would be the one that first reached and sustained the natives scattered all over the lands and oceans remote from Rome, Lisbon, Madrid, London, and Amsterdam.⁵

If we agree with Games that “by the middle of the seventeenth century, England had transformed itself from a weak kingdom on the margins of Europe, one struggling to participate in the major overseas opportunities of the period, to a nation able to vie with and sometimes to defeat Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish rivals in their competition for new territory and coveted commodities,”⁶ then to John Weddell, Nathaniel Mountney, and Thomas Robinson much credit must be given. Mountney and Robinson were also veteran East India Company (EIC) employees whose vast experience, business acumen, linguistic facility (particularly Portuguese and Malay), and knowledge of Asia led to their assignment in the first British trade expedition to China. The gritty Captain Weddell and these immensely talented, linguistically nimble, and resourceful “factors” (commercial agents): their expedition launched from the Downs in the spring of 1636 was a pioneering effort to bring the Stuart British into a position to compete with those other European peoples in the Far East—most especially, if over-ambitiously, to break into the China-Japan silk-silver trade in which Iberians and Dutch (the latter more as interlopers and pirates) had been participating very profitably. Weddell and all the other captains, mariners, and merchants aboard the Courteen fleet that reached the Pearl River estuary in the summer of 1637 were among the men who transformed England from a marginal European island-kingdom to a key player around the world.⁷ The Weddell expedition would contribute to the extension of the oceanic frontier of the inchoate British Empire. But it was a mere beginning, to be sure. Less vaguely, with the long-range in view, this venture launched in 1636 can be recognized as a preliminary China imperial reconnaissance mission of a global endeavor that would lead to the establishment of Hong Kong in the nineteenth century. Moreover, some aspects of this expedition led by Weddell bear strong resemblance to circumstances and features of the Opium Wars that took place two hundred years later in the same area of the Pearl River, the Bogue (虎門 Humen), leading to Canton (Guangzhou).⁸

As that English couple John and Frances Weddell illustrates, the transformation of a marginal, insular European nation into the capital of a global empire exacted

5. The Hakluys and Purchas were less concerned with another, less denominational, religious dimension: the more Iberian-waged Christian-Muslim war from Africa all the way to Melaka.

6. Games, *Web of Empire*, 289.

7. The perplexing phenomenon of a small island-state like England punching so effectively above its weight across the globe is similar to that which prompts Tonio Andrade to raise his question: “The Spanish and the Dutch managed to establish colonies on an island [Taiwan] just a hundred miles from the empire of China, which, with its 150 million inhabitants, was a hundred times larger than the Dutch Republic. How did people from these small European countries establish colonies on an island that had already aroused the interest of merchants from the two most powerful states of East Asia?” *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University, 2008), 2.

8. This notion of the 1637 expedition in China as a sort of precursor of the Opium Wars is elaborated fully in the Epilogue.

much hardship, pain, and sacrifice. Perhaps the only thing that could temper those was the sober anticipation of them: sickness, injury, loss, and death were to be frequent. In the seventeenth century, in whichever hemisphere, high mortality and reasonable probability of failure accompanied ventures of trade, conquest, and colonization. The pioneering Portuguese had a saying: “A India mais vão do que tornam.” More seek than return from India. By the Lusitanians, epically eulogized by poet Camoens, made famous by such navigators as Vasco da Gama and maritime *conquistadores* as Afonso de Albuquerque, vessels embarking for the East were likened to coffins: *tumbeiros*.⁹ Those British acquainted with the EIC experiences in Asia in the first decades of the seventeenth century were no less capable of noticing the macabre resemblance of containers—and appreciating another Portuguese maxim: “If you want to learn how to pray, go to sea.”¹⁰ Scurvy was a staple of voyages to India and beyond. Lack of critical nutrients (particularly vitamin C) was the concomitant of the dearth of fruit, vegetables, and meat.¹¹ Malaria was also a constant peril. That disease was to decimate Captain Weddell’s crew when the fleet was off the Malabar coast of India in the spring of 1637—the *Sun*, commanded by Richard Swanley, would suffer the most: of the 132 who set sail on that ship from England in the spring of 1636, 52 had died of sickness by the end of the China sojourn, in January 1638. A further four drowned. In addition to scurvy and malaria, “the bloody flux” of dysentery (intestinal contamination) and yellow/dengue fever were prolific killers of British and other Europeans desperate or courageous enough to voyage around the Cape of Good Hope to the East.

As one of our most eminent authorities on the British Empire in Asia, P.J. Marshall, has summarized: “To most Europeans, Asian conditions seemed menacingly unpredictable. Ships were at the mercy of typhoons, unknown diseases suddenly carried off men, wars and famines could bring trade to a standstill, and merchants were believed to be harried by capricious and tyrannical governments.”¹² Serious and lethal risks had to be routinely undertaken and devastating hazards often run if a global empire was to be achieved. Weddell, Mountney, Robinson, and their colleagues were among those who braved these perils, in a pioneering or “experimental” spirit. Games characterizes the century of 1560–1660 as one of experimentation: “Only with much loss of life and great difficulty did the English learn what kinds of exploitative or extractive activities might succeed in different parts of the world and in different ocean basins, each with their own distinctive existing and

9. It has been estimated that not even one-third of Vasco da Gama’s crew returned to Portugal in 1499.

10. That fatalities were alarmingly routine aboard the EIC ships, it suffices to browse several volumes of William Foster’s *English Factories in India*, where they are casually related nearly every other page.

11. “From the 14th century to the 19th, the range of foodstuffs which could be preserved for use at sea remained the same: salt beef and pork, beer, pease, cheese and butter (all in cask), biscuit, and salt fish. . . . In the best circumstances it appears that in this period victuals could not be relied upon for more than 3 or 4 months.” N.A.M. Rodger, “Guns and Sails in the First Phase of English Colonization, 1500–1650,” in *The Origins of Empire*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87.

12. P.J. Marshall, “The English in Asia to 1700,” in *The Origins of Empire*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 266.

emerging commercial networks, rivalries, and indigenous populations.”¹³ The first British trade expedition to China illustrates this truth as opulently as any other venture of that Tudor-Stuart century. Besides this experimental quality of the Courteen enterprise, we are also warranted in emphasizing the improvisational aspects of this British endeavor to establish commercial relations with the Ming Chinese. After categorizing the pioneering, discovery-replete sixteenth century as “an age of first contacts,” Timothy Brook classifies the seventeenth as one of *second contacts* and *improvisation*: “It was a time when people had to adjust how they acted and thought in order to negotiate the cultural differences they encountered. It was a time not for executing grand designs, but for improvising. The age of discovery was largely over, the age of imperialism yet to come. The seventeenth century was the age of improvisation.”¹⁴ The China expedition of the Courteen Association serves to illustrate and validate that generalization as well. As we watch the quick-thinking, opportunistic, and resourceful Weddell, Mountney, and Robinson recruiting and seizing native pilots and interpreters as their fleet proceeded from Aceh (Sumatra) to Macao and from there to the Bogue, we may certainly recognize many instances of improvisation. Embarking for the East in 1636, Weddell, Mountney, and Robinson were the farthest things from “China hands”—upon arrival at Macao the Portuguese scoffingly referred to them as “novices.” None had been in China. None could speak a syllable of Chinese, or decipher the simplest character. Their audacious experiment and improvisation would begin a process that would plant the name of Victoria in the Pearl River Delta.

The trio of ex-EIC employees had been disgruntled enough to switch their allegiance and carry their talents over to an upstart, interloping rival of that older company: the Courteen Association. As L.H. Roper recently noted: “the consistent neglect or dismissal of the Courteen Association in the historiography of the Anglo-British Empire is curious.”¹⁵ All the more odd does the oversight appear when just this one, the Weddell expedition of that organization of adventurers, has been described by another scholar, John Appleby, as “an audaciously ambitious attempt to challenge the trading monopoly of the East India Company in Asia.”¹⁶ Of course it is far from unreasonable that the EIC has received the lion’s share of attention from

13. Games, *Web of Empire*, 14.

14. Timothy Brook, *Vermeer’s Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (Bloomsbury: London, 2007), 21.

15. L.H. Roper, *Advancing Empire: English Interests and Overseas Expansion, 1613–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

16. John Appleby, “William Courteen,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB). The neglect also manifests itself in glaring inaccuracies printed even very recently. Publication of typical inaccuracies in treatments of this expedition to China may be seen in the recent book by Adele Lee, *The English Renaissance and the Far East: Cross-Cultural Encounters* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018). She represents the China expedition as both an EIC and a Courteen venture—when the EIC in London was doing everything it could to strangle the Courteen enterprise in the cradle. This lobbying of the EIC against the Courteen Association is covered in Chapter 2. Note that “Courteen” and “Curten” are variant spellings found alongside “Courteen” in the seventeenth century; and some scholars since then have used “Courtenians” and “Curtenians” instead of my preferred usage, “Courteens,” for its directors, managers, and personnel.

scholars interested in the origins or early (and fitful) development of the British Empire, as that company was to become almost synonymous with Asian empire; or that rivals of the EIC, many of whom spent most of their careers as investors and employees of the EIC, have suffered proportionate neglect. Not surprisingly, episodes involving such “interlopers” (as they were called by resentful EIC employers or ex-colleagues) have been relegated to footnotes of the volumes devoted to histories of the EIC. So far, then, it would be apt enough to summarize that the Courteen Association, and its China venture, has constituted merely footnotes in the annals of the EIC—diverting annotations about interlopers; the dubious when not treacherous exploits of commercial traitors and defectors. Nor could one deny that it makes decent sense to regard the rival Courteen Association as some sort of heretical or bastard sect of the EIC.¹⁷

Yet another avenue available to us in accounting for the historiographical neglect of the Weddell expedition to China is the geographical shift in British imperial focus that was taking place when his fleet left England in 1636. For example, exciting, dramatic, tragic colonizing endeavors in the Atlantic and Caribbean were undertaken in the first decades of the century. These have subsequently outshined and served to obscure some remarkable exploits in the East. Unlike English “factories” (entrepôts and trading stations) in the East—whether at Surat, Aceh, or Banten—such colonies attracted fairly considerable migrations of British.¹⁸ Furthermore, in Asia, from about the 1620s to 1680s, concentration on China and Japan would steadily decrease: “For all the wide dispersal of its operations across Asia, the [East India] Company’s trade in the first decades of the seventeenth century was mainly focused on two areas: the Indonesian archipelago and India.”¹⁹ If the Weddell expedition had been more successful at Macao and Canton, things might have been different. Thus, the disappointments and shortcomings of that expedition are very important in any explanation of its neglect in the historical annals. From that perspective,

17. That would be an impression warranted upon reading the classic and still not superseded K.N. Chaudhuri, *The English East India Company: The Study of an Early Joint-Stock Company, 1600–1640* (London: Frank Cass, 1965). Recently, in *A Business of State: Commerce, Politics, and the Birth of the East India Company* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), Rupali Mishra has provided a well-informed account of the Courteen Association, but not an adequate discussion of its China expedition as commanded by Weddell, nor that expedition’s origin in the (Anglo-Portuguese) Goa Convention of 1635. In view of his much wider “macro” and chronological scope, as well as more narrow geographical focus, it is not surprising that David Veevers mentions the Courteen Association and Weddell only in passing in *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

18. “Small forays at Sagadahoc (1607), Bermuda (1609), Guyana (1609), Newfoundland (1610), and Plymouth (1620) were soon overshadowed in the 1620s and 1630s by intense colonial activity in the Caribbean and on the North American mainland and by the large-scale migration from England that sustained those ventures.” Games, *Web of Empire*, 146. Thus, naturally, L.H. Roper’s monograph on seventeenth-century British imperial endeavor, *Advancing Empire*, deals mostly with Atlantic affairs: that is where substantial colonial activity was taking place. As Holden Furber noted long ago: “The interest of the English court and gentry, and a sizeable body of merchants, in colonizing activity in the Caribbean, in Virginia, and Ireland diverted capital and brains from East India trading.” *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600–1800* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 78.

19. Marshall, “English in Asia,” 270.

neglect may be judged deserved—that is, there was not enough success to be better remembered.

Just as important in explaining the historiographical gap is the fact that the expedition's richest and, by far, most informative record suffered exceptional neglect. An impressively detailed and meticulous account of this venture was written by one of its principal factors, Peter Mundy. The section of his journal that covered his voyage to China as a merchant and linguist of the Courteen Association was only published after World War I. The third volume of *The Travels of Peter Mundy* was published in 1919. Some time after Mundy's death in around 1667 his journal had fallen into the hands of the Worths. From them this global-roaming merchant's manuscript containing his China experience was probably purchased by the legendary bibliophile, Thomas Rawlinson (1681–1725). When the Rawlinson MSS were sold, in 1734, Mundy's journal seems to have landed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. There its first editor and publisher Richard Temple found it in the twentieth century.

Several decades before Temple commenced his enormous editorial toil, in 1846, William Desborough Cooley had founded the Hakluyt Society to publish unprinted and rare accounts of medieval and early modern travels and voyages. Temple rendered invaluable service in editing the handsome, map- and illustration-rich multi-volume edition of Mundy's travel journals for that publication series.²⁰ In the Mundy *Travels* volume pertaining to China, Temple's editorial industry was marvelously wide and deep—covering not only related English but also Portuguese and Spanish and a few Dutch documents. That conscientious work of Temple is debt-inducing in all would-be Courteen historians—myself at the forefront. However, readers seeking a smooth, continuous, and chronological narrative of the China expedition will find themselves often drowning or at least losing their bearings and sense of sequence in copious and discursive footnotes—where the thread can be lost even by the grimly focused, vigilant, and earnest. At the core of this book is a much more consolidated and coherent narrative than that assembled in the Hakluyt Mundy volume.²¹

When Temple introduced the volume of Mundy which recorded the British experience in China in 1637, he noted: “So far as I am aware, beyond the references in Mr. Foster's *English Factories*, Mundy's narrative of his China voyage as a factor in Weddell's ill-fated expedition financed by Sir William Courteen, has received no serious attention from any author except Mr. James Bromley Eames (*The English in China*) who, however, does not seem to have consulted the original MS. or was

20. *The Travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608–1667, Vol. III: Travels in England, India, China, Etc., 1634–1638* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1919). This volume contains Temple's transcription of the MS Rawlinson A.315 still preserved at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. I should say Temple-supervised transcription, as in the preface he vouched for the accuracy of E. G. Parker's labor. Nineteenth-century-executed copies of this manuscript are now in the British Library, London.

21. In Chapter 9, I further discuss Mundy, Temple, and related bibliographical matters, as well as offer additional tribute to both. It is there that I also make the case for regarding Mundy as the first English sinologist, *avant la lettre*.

dependent on an inaccurate copyist for his extracts.”²² A century after Temple’s remark, not so much has changed. While various historians and writers, Western and Chinese, have consulted the Hakluyt-packaged, Temple-edited Mundy, they have not used and exploited much of his journal, let alone all the other English and European (chiefly Portuguese) documents that yield a rich narrative of the first trade expedition to directly access the Canton market. The older and rival EIC was not in a position to observe the Courteen fleet in China, but correspondence conducted before they reached and after they left informs us, if often only second-hand, of some important details. All students of the early EIC and Courteen Association are enormously indebted to William Foster for the *English Factories* volumes as noted by Temple. From EIC records we also learn much about the genesis of the Courteen Association and some biographical details of its directors, leadership, mariners, and factors.²³

Most of the Courteen personnel, beyond the trio introduced above, were quondam EIC employees. Besides Peter Mundy, another ex-EIC merchant, members of the Courteen fleet, including its commander, Weddell, and chief factors (and brothers) Nathaniel and John Mountney, as well as Thomas Robinson, left records and accounts of their experience in China in 1637; to wit:

1) Account of the voyage of Weddell’s fleet from the 14/24 April 1636 to 6/16 April 1637 (summarized in *Calendar of State Papers*, Dom. Chas. I. CCCLI, No. 30), most likely written by Nathaniel or John Mountney or Thomas Robinson—I attribute to Nathaniel Mountney. This covers the expedition from embarkation at the Downs (April 1636) to its passage through the straits of Melaka (April 1637); I refer to this account as “Voyage of Captain Weddell’s Fleet, April 1636–April 1637.”

2) Account of the expedition from the Straits of Melaka 6/16 April 1637 to shortly after departure from China in 4/14 February 1638; which was preserved at the India Office in Temple’s time and cited by him as *Marine Records*, Vol. LXIII; now preserved in the British Library. While quoted and labeled as “Continuation” by Temple, I will refer to it as the “Voyage of the Weddell Fleet.”

3) Weddell’s own account of the expedition which in Temple’s time was preserved at the India Office as O.C. 1662. I will refer to it as “Weddell’s China Narrative, O.C. 1662.”

4) A report by Nathaniel Mountney to the Courteen Association, 19/29 December 1637, MS. Rawl. A.299, written just after all trade in China had been concluded. I will refer to this as: Mountney, Rawlinson A.299.

22. Mundy, III, Preface, vii.

23. As noted by William Foster: “At the beginning of July 1637 we lose the invaluable aid of the Company’s records, for the volume containing the minutes from that point to July 1639 is unfortunately missing.” Ethel Bruce Sainsbury and William Foster, eds., *Calendar of the Court Minutes of the East India Company, 1635–1639* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), xxiv.

5) Notes by Thomas Robinson and the Mountneys outlining the prospects of trade in China, Aceh, and Bhatkal in 1637 (PRO, C.O. 77/6, No. 49); which I refer to as “Notes on the Prospects of Trade in China.”

6) Set of miscellaneous documents by multiple authors preserved at the Bodleian Library, as MS. Rawlinson, A.399, transcribed and referred to as the “Courteen Papers” by Temple. I will cite them simply as “Rawlinson A.399.”

Mundy’s and the accounts of his colleagues (as listed above) are far from identical and even contain some important discrepancies—as will be noted throughout my narrative and discussed in Chapters 8 and 9. The journal of Mundy is by far the most detailed and reliable—although there were some important episodes in China that Mundy and Weddell had no opportunity to observe with their own eyes. For example, the experience of the Mountneys and Robinson as captives in Canton (narrated in Chapters 6 and 7) could only be told second-hand by Mundy and Weddell. We are forced to rely on Mountneys and Robinson (and Chinese and Portuguese documents) to relate some significant incidents involving the British in Canton. In case of conflicts between English accounts, Mundy’s is the one most worthy of trust and the one to which I have usually accorded benefit of the doubt. Throughout his editing of the multi-volume journal, Temple, an exceptionally conscientious and painstaking editor, repeatedly praised the widely traveled and savvy Courteen merchant for accuracy and disciplined, punctilious, and non-embellishing journalism.²⁴

Neglect of the first British trade expedition to China—or at least the absence of a book devoted solely to telling and analyzing its complicated story—is also to be ascribed to the challenge of gathering and mastering all the non-Courteen, non-English sources. As the Portuguese were ensconced in Macao in the coastal province of Guangdong (where Canton—Guangzhou—is capital) decades before this expedition was launched, it is not surprising to find many informative records left by the Lusitanians who greeted the British newcomers. Particularly rich are the *Livros das Monções*, the documents known to English scholars as “Books of the Monsoons.” They comprise royal and other official correspondence and dispatches between Lisbon and the Portuguese viceroy stationed at Goa, headquarters of the *Estado da Índia*.²⁵ As this viceroy supervised (if none too effectively) the Portuguese enclave of Macao, the Weddell expedition is treated in great detail in some documents of this collection. The Hakluyt Mundy editor Temple was able to procure English translations of all the germane Portuguese letters, reports, agreements, and notes extant

24. On several occasions C.R. Boxer praised Mundy’s sangfroid disposition and noted his consistent reliability and accuracy—whether reporting on matters and events in India or China. Some indicative specimens from just one Boxer book: “the perceptive Peter Mundy”; “Mundy was an exceptionally balanced and judicious observer.” *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 50.

25. For description and assessment of the *Livros das Monções* see the appendix in George B. Souza, *The Survival of Empire: Portuguese Trade and Society in China and the South China Sea, 1630–1754* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and C.R. Boxer, “A Glimpse of the Goa Archives,” in *Portuguese Conquest and Commerce in Southern Asia, 1500–1700* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985).

in Lisbon and Goa. Thus, the would-be narrator of Weddell's China expedition may employ what Temple reproduced generously as "Lisbon Transcripts, Books of the Monsoons," in the relevant volume of Mundy's journal.²⁶ These Portuguese documents are of inestimable value for, as Temple emphasized, neither originals nor copies of the correspondence between the British and the Portuguese and Chinese authorities at Macao and Canton are to be found among the English records.²⁷

The most extensive and recent account by a Portuguese scholar, Rogério Miguel Puga, available in English translation and employing all these Portuguese primary sources, is a chapter in his *British in Macau, 1635–1793*.²⁸ As the title alone would suggest, Puga's purpose, within the scope of a two-century survey, was not to offer a comprehensive account of the 1637 British-Portuguese-Chinese encounter and interactions as initiated by the Courteen interlopers—let alone to explain in much detail how Weddell's fleet was conceived, funded, and organized. The brief narrative and discussion of the Weddell sojourn at Macao which Puga does provide is not informed or supplemented by any of the available Ming primary sources; nor does he grapple with such vexing things as discrepancies between: 1) British vs. Portuguese; and 2) British vs. British (e.g., Mundy vs. Weddell) accounts. Puga's objective did not permit him the luxury of digging deep and turning over every stone to write his rendition of the first British trade expedition to China—no matter how much it revolved around Macao. Similarly, Temple's brief account (much less any other summary of this expedition available in English published since) did not wrestle with all the issues and problems which arise from minute examination and comparison of all the English and Portuguese documents. No less importantly, and, again, like Puga, Temple and all the other English authors of more recent summaries have made no attempt to apply or incorporate the Chinese records—though, as discussed briefly below and at much greater length in Chapter 8, these records are not as abundant as the European ones. None of the English-writing chroniclers, narrators, or commentators on the Courteen China expedition has utilized (or cited and quoted) Ming sources in an attempt to shed further light on British dealings and communications with the Portuguese and Chinese at Macao and Canton. My account is the first English one to utilize and reflect the Ming records as well as all the English and Portuguese primary sources.

As should be clear from considering Chapter 1, when Weddell's fleet arrived in the Pearl River estuary in the summer of 1637, the Dutch were already well and advantageously established across the Taiwan Strait in Zeelandia, southwest

26. Temple supervised Leonora de Alberti's Portuguese-English translations of documents from R.A. Bulhão Pato, ed., *Documentos remetidos da Índia*, 5 vols. (Lisbon: Academia Real das Ciências, 1893), Vol. IV.

27. Mundy, *Journal*, ed. Temple, III, 159, n. 3.

28. Rogério Miguel Puga, *The British in Macau, 1635–1793* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University / Royal Asiatic Society Great Britain and Ireland, 2013); this is the English translation by Monica Andrade of what was originally published in 2009 by Centro de História de Alem-Mar (CHAM), FCSH-New University of Lisbon, and by Centro Cultural e Científico de Macau (Lisbon, Portugal) as *A Presença Inglesa e as Relações Anglo-Portuguesas em Macau (1635–1793)*.

The British in Seventeenth-Century Luso-Dutch Asia

Direct trade between the English and Portuguese can be documented at least as early as the time of King John I of England (1199–1216). The patent roll of the fourth year of his reign refers to commerce between the Atlantic neighbors. King John's fourteenth-century successor, Edward III, expanded opportunities for merchants by signing a commercial accord with the cities of Lisbon and Oporto in 1359. The English king followed up, in 1373, by forging a political alliance with King Fernando of Portugal (1367–1383). This proved crucial for the defense of Portugal against its aggrandizing Iberian neighbor in the east of the peninsula. In 1384, during the Castilian siege of Lisbon, English ships arrived in time to reinforce the Lusitanians. After the siege had been broken, hundreds of English archers played a major role in the Battle of Aljubarrota (1385). The outcome of the battle secured not only the throne of King John (João) I of Portugal (1384–1433) but preserved the small kingdom as an independent nation.¹ That monarch brought the insular English and coastal Portuguese into a long-term alliance by the Treaty of Windsor in 1386.² In the following century much larger numbers of English merchants traveled to the bustling entrepot of Lisbon, where they acquired substantial privileges from King Afonso V (1438–1481). By the end of the fifteenth century, some of this English merchant contingent, including their wives and children, had settled in Portugal.³ It was also during that century that the royalty of the two nations, the houses of Lancaster and Avis, became intertwined by marriage. The illustrious Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal, the Infante Dom Henrique, was a nephew of the English King Henry IV. That prince's role in paving the way to Portuguese imperial grandeur in the sixteenth century is legendary—if now diminished by some debunking by scholars of the last few decades.

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1. L.M.E. Shaw, *The Anglo-Portuguese Alliance and the English Merchants in Portugal, 1654–1810* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 5–6; Malyn Newitt, *Portugal in European and World History* (London: Reaktion, 2009), 43–46; Anthony Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: From Beginnings to 1807*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 120–21.
 2. Signed 9 May 1386, the Treaty of Windsor was renewed by monarchs of both countries until 1499.
 3. “Although their community in Lisbon was small, by the early seventeenth century, the English were the most prominent of the merchant communities in Portugal.” Games, *Web of Empire*, 100.

As Tudor England became more able and committed to emulating the navigational prowess and the commercial and colonial dynamism of the Lusitanians, conflict arose.⁴ Piratical raids by the English upon the Iberians plying their trade along the west coast of Africa prompted the Portuguese King Sebastian to incite reprisals against England, and he issued an edict to prohibit all English ships from visiting Portuguese ports, and banning textile and other imports from England. By the middle of the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), England, as a Dutch aider-and-abettor, had become an open (if not firmly committed) enemy of the Habsburg Spanish king, Philip II. This powerful Iberian monarch, ruler of a world empire, exerted himself to thwart any reconciliation between neighboring Portugal and England. But by the end of 1576, Elizabeth and the King of Portugal had signed a treaty to render amicable relations between the two seafaring nations. That treaty was rendered a nullity only four years later, however. In 1578 King Sebastian was slain in the Battle of El Caser-el Kebir. When Sebastian's heir, and uncle, died in 1580, it was Philip II of Spain who inherited the crown to become concurrently Philip I of Portugal. While the coastal European realm of Portugal was nothing vast, its empire was global by this time. Philip II/I inherited an opulent assortment of overseas possessions from Brazil to Africa, from Hormuz in the Persian Gulf to Goa in India, to Melaka on the Malay peninsula, and Macao in China. At Macao on the southeast periphery of Ming China, seventy miles from the provincial capital, Canton (Guangzhou), the Portuguese had established a prosperous commercial enclave in 1557, just a year before Elizabeth acceded to the throne of England.⁵

It was not the Lusitanians so much as an Italian who had sparked the global imagination of the Tudor English. Italians, just as much as any Iberians, had kindled in the English notions of unknown or remote lands of abundant gold and silver, minerals, spices, and commercial opportunity. Christopher Columbus was among the multitude of Europeans who believed the stories about China told by Marco Polo. Fantasies of China derived from the tales of the Venetian Polo stirred in his head as he plotted a voyage to the fabulous land conjured by a mixture of fact and fiction.⁶ The Genoese Columbus was to carry aboard the *Santa Maria* a copy of Polo's account of the Far East. Like other Europeans, the English relished

4. For English interest in commerce in Guinea and the west coast in the late fifteenth century, see P.E.H. Hair and Robin Law, "The English in Western Africa to 1700," in *The Origins of Empire*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 245; for the importance of the Guinea trade in the development of English maritime ventures and clashes between England and Portugal from the mid-sixteenth century, see John W. Blake, *West Africa: Quest for God and Gold, 1454–1578* (London, 1977); and Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder*, 101–15.

5. For the establishment of Macao in the 1550s, C.R. Boxer reviews all the Portuguese and Chinese documents in *South China in the Sixteenth Century: Being the Narratives of Galeote Pereira, Fr. Gaspar da Cruz, O.P., and Fr. Martin de Rada, O.E.S.A. (1550–1575)* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1953), xxxiii–xxxvii. More recently John Wills offered a refined and authoritative summary, *China and Maritime Europe, 1500–1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 35–40.

6. Columbus learned the names of "Cathay" (north China) and "Cipango" (Japan) from the Venetian Marco Polo. For sources accessed by Columbus, see Valerie Flint, *The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Lessons Learned

*The “Anglology” of the Ming?*¹

At least in the mind of Nathaniel Mountney, the most salient thought as the remnant of the Courteen fleet, the *Dragon* and *Sun*, sailed away from Ming Guangdong was that the British had been outmaneuvered and out-bribed by the wily Portuguese. The conduct of the Chinese may have been nothing beyond what he and Captain Weddell had expected. But before more closely examining the views and attitudes of the departing British (and the now much relieved Lusitanians at Macao), we shift our focus to the perspective and analysis of the Chinese, as revealed in and inferred from the Ming records and reports about the British and Portuguese actions of June–December 1637. Such Chinese primary sources to illuminate the British fleet’s sojourn are not numerous and detailed enough to answer all the questions we could raise. The demise of the dynasty just six years later, with the suicide by hanging of its last emperor, Chongzhen, in 1644, helps explain the incomplete annals. In his authoritative survey, Wilkinson summarizes: “In the Ming there were at least 300 provincial and prefectural archives. Most of their contents were destroyed in the fighting at the end of the dynasty. Nothing of them remains today.”² That the dramatic and tumultuous six months of the Courteens in 1637 is not fully illuminated by Ming records does not occasion a great deal of surprise given such facts as that the Dutch invasion of Macao in 1622 did not leave a trace in surviving registers.³ Further, in the 1620s and 1630s, as the Ming government in Beijing was forced to concentrate more and more of its attention on northwest domestic and foreign (Manchurian) threats in the northeast, so disregard and neglect of major events and affairs in Guangdong would have been natural if not necessary. Such inattention would help explain any gaps in Ming records pertaining to the activities of maritime

1. “Anglology” is my awkward term contrived for the purpose of juxtaposition to “sinology,” the subject of the next chapter. Readers of the foregoing chapters will be in no danger of making the faulty assumption that “anglology” has something to do with angels, whose science is called *angelology*.

2. Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 890; as Wolfgang Franke explained: “Owing to the downfall of the dynasty, no veritable records were compiled for the last [Chongzhen] emperor.” *Cambridge Ming*, vol. 8, 746.

3. John Wills, *Cambridge Ming*, vol. 8, 351. However, unlike the Dutch invasion of Macao in 1622, the Chinese engagements off Fujian with Hans Putmans and the VOC at Liaoluo Bay, Jinmen, next to Xiamen, in 1633 are described in some detail in Chinese records, as used by Tonio Andrade in his recent books.

“red barbarians” like the British—who spent six months in China but did so on the Ming’s southeast periphery.

As the Chinese scholar of Ming foreign policy Wan Ming has acknowledged, the absence of information in the Chinese sources on the events before the major clashes in September and October 1637 forces us to rely on English and Portuguese ones. Even in the case of September and October we depend upon those European sources for some key meetings and incidents—even those involving high-level Chinese officials. As both of those Western sources, while in conflict on some points, similarly refer to such meetings and incidents, it is implausible that these latter were fabrications—no matter how absent their traces in Ming documents. The most important and complete Chinese record that has survived is badly damaged in the portion that would shed light on the key events of July and August—including the bold and pioneering probe of the pinnacle *Anne* up the Pearl River.⁴ That record is a compilation of documents from the Ministry of War (兵部).⁵ Both Wan and, more recently, Lawrence Wong have used that key document, as well as the published official Ming historical annals, to shed light on the mandarins and their attitudes and conduct vis-à-vis the British and Portuguese.⁶ The other highly informative Ming source is the collection of memorials and reports penned by Zhang Jingxin, who was governor of Guangdong and Guangxi (兩廣總督 Liangguang zongdu) in 1637. These writings, composed during and after the Courteen visit of that year, have been edited and presented with erudite commentary by Tang Kaijian and Zhang Kun.⁷ Among these and other Chinese historians, the British expedition lasting half a year is known as the “Bogue Incident” (虎門事件 Humen shijian) or more loosely and colorfully, “Incident at the Mouth of the Tiger.”⁸

As we approach our review of Chinese primary documents, which expose facts, names, and details unavailable in the English and Portuguese accounts, let us briefly recite some of the key claims and notions articulated by those Europeans. Obviously, the British, at their first entry into China, could never have been certain of which level of Ming and Guangdong government authority they were dealing with. From the Chinese, Portuguese, and Ethiopians (via Macao), they must have haphazardly picked up various titles and rough knowledge of hierarchy which they

4. Wan, “First Direct Clash of China and Britain,” 58.

5. 兵部題《失名會同兩廣總督張鏡心題》殘稿(明清史料乙編, 第八本)(上海: 中央研究院歷史語言研究所, 商務印書館, 1936).

6. Wong, “The Bogue Incident.”

7. Tang and Zhang, “Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi.”

8. English “Bogue” comes from the Portuguese Boca do Tigris, which literally translates the Chinese place name 虎門: 虎 *hu* (tiger) and 門 *men* (mouth, gate). As dozens of Chinese proverbial sayings (諺語 *yanyu*) and idioms (成語 *chengyu*) employ the tiger as a metaphor, British-in-the-Bogue would yield a rich harvest of tropes in the poetically inclined. The eminent sinologist and authority on the Southern Ming, Lynn Struve, proved unable to resist the charm in one of her titles: *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers’ Jaws* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

had not learned before arrival in July.⁹ As the drama unfolded over the next six months, they had both native and non-native Chinese recruits and conscripts from around the Pearl River estuary to assist them in figuring out who was who, and who reported to whom. They referred to officials generally as “mandarins,” and it turns out they did identify, however vaguely, and distinguish some of the most powerful officials in Guangdong, representing them with variant spellings—and ranking them, from highest to lowest:

1. Tootan/Toutan
2. Chadjan/Chamjan
3. Quan Moan/Quan Mone¹⁰
4. Haitao/Haitau/Hitow/Hittow/Hoyto¹¹
5. Campeyn/Champain/Champaine/Champen/Champeyn/Champin/
Cheompee/Chompee

As the British supposed, it was to the latter, the “champin,” that the Portuguese-fluent intermediary “Paulo Noretta” reported: “Champain, his master.” Mundy applied to Noretta a title above interpreter (*jurabassa*): “mandarin *tonpuan*.”¹²

Besides Noretta, the man they took to be a Portuguese-speaking “petty mandarin,” the Courteens interacted and communicated most extensively with the officials they labeled “champin” and “haitao.” They had minimal or no direct exposure to the authorities higher than the latter: to those whom they called “Chadjan” and “Tootan.” These latter high-ranking officials in Guangdong came onto the scene, to the provincial capital, Canton, only in September or later. The Courteens took

9. It would be difficult to figure out which, if any, terms the Courteens had learned, pre-China arrival, from the sinological scholarship contributed by other Europeans (principally Italians, Iberians, and Dutch)—as translated and published in such collections as Hakluyt’s and Purchas’s in the decades preceding the Weddell expedition. Peter Mundy, for example, had read some of that Hakluyt- and Purchas-purveyed sinology.

10. In Mundy/Courteen orthography: “qu” was kw/gw sound (as in “quandary”); in early seventeenth-century English maps of China, “Quangsi” stood for Guangxi and “Queichiu” for Guizhou. For maps representing Ming place-names in such fashion, see Batchelor, “Selden Map Rediscovered.” The sixteenth-century account of China by Martin de Rada used “Quanton” for Canton/Guangdong. See Boxer, *South China*.

11. In the Portuguese documents we find the additional spellings, “aitao” and “aytao.” Disappointingly, with the exception of the “aitao,” the Portuguese sources usually refer to the Chinese officials vaguely as “mandarins.” In one place the City of Macao in its letter to Charles I refers to “a Mandarin from a neighboring village [in the Bogue] of Lantao” and another place “the aforesaid Mandarin of Lantao.” The Portuguese also mention “Taquxi, who is governor of seaports among the Chinese, sent us a *chapa* commanding us to summon the Commander [Weddell] on shore in order to negotiate with him and with us for the surrender (which the Aitao desired) of the prisoners who were then in Canton.” City of Macao to Charles I, 24 December 1637, *Lisbon Transcripts, Books of the Monsoons*, book 41, fol. 220. As noted below, Mundy seems to refer to this official with the spellings “Tacazzee” and “tacassy.” As the City of Macao relates in detail, this official came to Macao to do the bidding of the “haitao” in arranging with the Portuguese and British for the Courteens in Canton to be released: “the Taquexi who had come to settle this business by order of the Aitao.”

12. “Mandarin tonpuan, the bearer thereof, otherwise called Paolo Nurette (it is the same who came to parley with us): 21/31 August 1637, Mundy, *Travels*, vol. 3. For “interpreter” Mundy occasionally used *jurubassas*, a Malay word often applied to bilingual Chinese Christians born in Macao. It came more broadly to cover mestizos and Eurasians who spoke Chinese and Portuguese. C. R. Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the Tropics: The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia and Luanda, 1510–1800* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 46n5.

the “Chadjan” (also “Chamjan”) to be “the supervisor general.”¹³ “Tootan” (also “Toutan”) they took to be “viceroy of this province of Canton”: Mundy noted, “Our mandarin [Noretta] came again and said the *Tootan* who is viceroy of this province of Canton, being new confirmed, was going in circuit to visit his government.”¹⁴ Subordinate to the “Tootan,” the “Quan Moan” (also “Quan Mone”) was the official the Courteens understood to be “the subordinate viceroy for trade”: “from a message from Hitow, Champen, &c., they were required in friendly manner to proceed no further, but to repair aboard, with promise of all assistance in the procuring of licence from Quan Moan, the subordinate viceroy for trade.”¹⁵ Specific reference to other, lower-ranking officials can also be found among the Courteen records. For example, in the Bogue they identified the “mandarin of Lantao,” “who is governor of all the towns and villages hereabouts, as also of their junks.” The British also referred to the “mandarin of Casa Branca.” This was most likely the Ming official who, residing just north of Macao in Xiangshan (香山), directly monitored and supervised the Portuguese enclave and presided over controversies and affairs involving Chinese inhabitants of Macao. We also find recorded in Mundy’s journal, while he was in Macao with Weddell to negotiate the release of the factors, a “*Tacazzee*, being a certain degree of mandarin, who now and at other times sat about our business.”¹⁶

The British captains and merchants gained at least a superficial understanding of how these various officials functioned and related to each other within the hierarchy of civil and military branches. Under both the “Tootan” and “Chadjan,” the “haitao” Nathaniel Mountney understood to be the “lord treasurer” or “lord chancellor,” while Weddell described this official as “the chief justice for the city of Canton.”¹⁷ Subordinate to him, they understood, was the “champin”: “the admiral of the forces both by sea and land,” “Admiral of the Seas,” “Admiral General,” and “lord admiral”; Weddell styled him both “general of the city of Canton” and “General of the Province by sea”—it was this official whom Paulo Noretta claimed was directly

13. This official is most probably what Galeote Pereira had represented in his sixteenth-century account as “*Chaem*, that is a visitor, as it were, whose office is to go in circuit, and to see justice exactly done.” Contemporary translation of Richard Willes in Boxer, *South China*, 6.

14. This is likely the official mentioned in the sixteenth century by Galeote Pereira (trans. of Richard Willes): “There is also placed in each [shire/province] a *Tutao*, as you would say a governor.” In other Portuguese accounts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we find such similar spellings as “Tutão,” “Tutam,” and “Tutan.” Boxer, *South China*, 6 and 89n1.

15. Mountney, “Voyage of the Weddell Fleet.” From this line I surmise that they understood “hittow” and “champin” to be subordinate to the “Quan Moan.” As noted above, when the British wrote “Quan Moan” it was with the “qu” representing the “gw/kw” sound as in “quandary”—not the pinyin *quan*, which is a sort of “ch” sound as in Massachusetts.

16. 30 November / 10 December 1637, Mundy, *Travels*, vol. 3.

17. Mountney, Rawlinson, A.299; “Weddell’s China Narrative, O.C. 1662.” In his sixteenth-century account, Gaspar da Cruz referred to this officer: “To this *Aitao* pertaineth to command the soldiers, and all that is necessary of shipping, victuals, and all other provision against enemies and against pirates. And to this belong also the business of foreigners in cases which belong not to the Revenue.” Gaspar da Cruz, *Treatise* (1569), in Boxer, *South China*, 154.

Epilogue

The First British Trade Expedition to China: A Precursor of the Opium Wars?

The Pearl River Delta, setting for all the activities of the British in China in 1637, was the same location where the initial battles of the First Opium War (1839–1842) took place two hundred years later. The identical venues of engagements and hostilities by land and sea invite comparison between the (Caroline) British in China in 1637 and the (Victorian) British in China in 1839. Just as the British in 1637 had encountered Chinese interested in conducting trade with them outside the official Macao-Canton channel, so in the decades leading up to that Opium War there were plenty of Chinese involved with the British in profiting illegally and handsomely from traffic in the prohibited drug. As the British Chief Superintendent of Trade in China Charles Elliot and subordinate officers sent to Canton to deal with the opium crisis had to make on-the-spot decisions and spontaneous adjustments without first consulting the government in London, so Captain Weddell and the leaders of the Courteen fleet could consult neither their company supervisors in London nor the government of Charles I and his Privy Council at Whitehall before choosing fateful courses of action. The situation may have been more stressful for Weddell, as presumably he had to exercise more discretion and, thus, bear more responsibility for outcomes. After all, in Victorian Britain, the House of Commons *did* debate the China crisis before Lord Melbourne's Foreign Secretary Viscount Palmerston authorized aggressive action to be taken in the Pearl River estuary. On the other hand, Weddell might well have acted with less apprehension of scrutiny.

As the Ming administrations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries struggled to crack down on piracy and illicit trade on the southeast coasts, so the Qing governments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries struggled to enforce prohibitions against traffic in opium.¹ Just as trade in that drug was enriching too many Qing officials and merchants, so illegal trade with non-Portuguese foreigners like the “red-barbarian” British could profit too many Ming officials and merchants to

1. For the illicit traffic at Lintin Island (内伶仃島 Neilingdingdao), where the opium clippers flocked in the decades before the Anglo-Chinese War broke out and where the Courteen fleet was anchored in 1637, see Peter Perdue, *The First Opium War: The Anglo-Chinese War of 1839–1842* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 4. For the utter inability of the Qing navy to do anything about this traffic at Lintin, see Peter Ward Fay, *The Opium War, 1840–1842: Barbarians in the Celestial Empire in the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century and the War by Which They Forced Her Gates Ajar* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 46.

render the *haijin* (海禁) policy determined in Beijing easily implemented in remote Guangdong or Fujian. The enforcement of the proscription was only intermittently sustained and inconsistently effective. The British in 1637 were able to find locals in the Pearl River Delta to sell them commodities and provisions. When their silver dollars would not persuade, the Courteens resorted to force. Commerce and combat were mingled in a most uneasy arrangement. In the *Bogue* in September, as related by Peter Mundy:

We took a junk with our boats and brought her aboard. She had only in her a few timbers, planks, a *harquebus a croc*, bamboo spears and a little rice, which was all handed in to the admiral with some of their people, who in submissive manner fell on their knees when they came aboard. The said junk was manned with English with some Chinois to scull her, and sent ahead to intercept others that should pass as not mistrusting. Also the *Sun's* skiff was sent ashore to try if they could buy any cattle, provision (*which may seem strange to surprise and take and to seek trade and refreshing from the same people at the same time*); but contrariwise they had some skirmish with the country people, whereupon our boats were sent to succour them; so at last all came well off and returned in safety.²

Similarly, and as noted in Chapter 9, Captain Weddell observed that there were Chinese in the area willing to undertake disguise to defy the government and engage in illicit trade. In late September, as the commander himself related: “Divers boats and junks would come and sell us sugar at easy rates; but they came by stealth.”³

Even after major hostilities of the First Opium War had commenced in 1839, the Victorians found Chinese to supply them with sustenance and provisions. In November 1840, for example, the British fleet commanded by Elliot anchored on the eastern flank of the *Bogue*. A spontaneous, hovering riverside market sprang up to purvey victuals—even while the Chinese vendors were putting themselves at the peril of punitive action by local mandarins. As Julia Lovell colorfully relates: “When the names of this impromptu comprador community were taken down by a group of police spies, the businessmen besieged and set fire to the police boat. ‘These poor wretches were literally roasted alive, their persecutors preventing their escape with long bamboos,’ recalled an English lieutenant. ‘What a most extraordinary nation this is! . . . They will trade with you at one spot, while you are fighting, killing and destroying them at another!’”⁴ More than two centuries after the Courteen fleet had departed China, it was still the case that commerce and combat, trade and scuffles, would oddly combine. The British would carry both handfuls of coins and handfuls of guns. Nor had the linguistic aspect of Sino-British relations changed appreciably between the arrival of the subjects of Charles I in 1637 and the war waged by Victoria’s men two hundred years later. The Courteen fleet steered into the *Bogue* by Weddell carried not one merchant or mariner who could speak a syllable or

2. 13/23 August 1637, Mundy, *Travels*, vol. 3; emphasis added.

3. “Weddell’s China Narrative, O.C. 1662.”

4. Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China* (London: Picador, 2011), 127.

write a stroke of Chinese. Thus, the British had to grope for stones to cross the river—摸著石頭過河 (*mozhe shitou guohe*). To moderns like ourselves, Weddell and Nathaniel Mountney may appear shockingly insouciant as they confronted the colossal language barrier—or linguistic Great Wall. But the British and their fellow Europeans elsewhere in Asia and Africa in the seventeenth century were well-accustomed to doing business, at least initially, without knowing a word of the commercial counterpart's language. On Madagascar, June 1638, on the *Sun's* return voyage to England, Mundy reported a typical case of effective bartering: "For our matter of trading with these people, being only for provisions, there needs not much interpreters, for the utterance of booes, baees, is as good language for bullocks and sheeps as the best; and so for the rest with the help of signs."⁵

No matter how big a handicap linguistic deficiency was for the British in India in the first half of the seventeenth century, commerce was prosecuted on a considerable scale. From the ignorance of native languages, errors, even serious blunders, were not infrequently committed. It was normal in the first decades of the seventeenth century to embark on ventures and errands armed with little to no linguistic competence whatever. Finding himself in India serving the EIC in March 1633, Mundy complained of his predicament: "Yet with all these hard conditions am I thrust out alone, with little [knowledge of the] language, having nobody that I can trust or cares to take any pains to ease me to look after the Company's goods, to help to compound the unreasonable demands of carters, cammelers, etc., to decide their quarrels, differences, to persuade them to reason."⁶ Prior to their arrival in China in 1637 the Courteens had to cope with communication obstacles. On the Malabar coast in the spring of that year, off Cannanore, Captain Weddell anchored while Mundy and a detachment explored an island at its entrance. They failed to get information, as their interpreters "could not be understood by the country people." Even when interpreters could be obtained, they were only unsafely relied upon.

As for the Bogue and the Pearl River Delta, even the old "China hands," the Portuguese at Macao, were vulnerable to and suffered from mistranslations. Having been settled in the Ming realm for several decades, these Iberians had acquired Luso-Chinese bilingual facility, contacts, and resources. But during the British sojourn, as the captain-general of the Lusitanian enclave, Domingos da Camara de Noronha, complained: "The Procurador of this city presented a petition to one of the Chinese mandarins . . . but the interpreter who translated it into the Chinese tongue added what he pleased to it, calling the subjects of your Majesty [Charles I] by an insulting name. This being a way these interpreters sometimes have of working evil to us." So even if the Courteens had been better furnished than merely veteran

5. Mundy, *Travels*, vol. 3, 374.

6. Mundy, *Travels*, vol. 2, 281. Instances of William Methwold, EIC president at Surat, bemoaning scarcity of linguistic ability in the company's personnel in India can be found in Foster, *English Factories, 1634–1636*, 208, 272. William Fremlen, successor of Methwold, did possess some facility to avoid "gross tricks [being] practiced upon us." Methwold himself was notably gifted in foreign tongues; and appreciation of his prowess in the Surat post is provided by Furber, *Rival Empires*, 67–68.

linguist-factor Thomas Robinson, they may still have been abused and confounded as the Portuguese often seem to have been. Would the British enterprise in China in 1637 have run much more smoothly, more peacefully and profitably, had Weddell's fleet possessed its own competent and scrupulous Sino-Portuguese interpreter?

In light of events and aspects of the First Opium War, one could still doubt that the Caroline British would have fared much better with even a top-notch team of translators and interpreters of, say, Matteo Ricci-caliber. At any rate, a century and a half after Captain Weddell departed China and disappeared in the Indian Ocean, little change could be noticed. When Lord Macartney's embassy arrived in 1793, under more extensive royal aegis and possessed of more imperial confidence, the only one among the dozens of British who could communicate a little in Chinese was Thomas Staunton, twelve-year-old son of Sir George Staunton, Macartney's right-hand man. Staunton had recruited four Roman Catholic priests to serve as interpreters—two from Macao. At the time of the First Opium War, a few decades hence, linguistic impediments were still considerable. Sino-British relations of the 1830s would have to contend with the reality that communication functionality was nearly nil. As Lovell informs us: "A question mark hangs over the competence of Lin Zexu's translators. When Lin showed a version of his letter to Queen Victoria, rendered by his chief interpreter, to a crew of shipwrecked Englishmen, one member of his audience reported that he could 'scarcely command my gravity . . . some parts of it we could make neither head nor tail of.'"⁷

While few in our day have heard of Captain Weddell and his exploits in the Bogue in 1637, plenty of Westerners and Chinese are familiar with controversial incidents and clashes of the Anglo-Chinese wars of the nineteenth century. Even before the first major battles of that conflict took place, there was an incident almost identical to one that occurred during the Weddell expedition. At the beginning of September 1839, the British Captain Elliot asked Chinese naval officers in the straits between what is now Hong Kong and Kowloon to let them purchase provisions. Having been rebuffed, British warships opened fire on war junks anchored off Kowloon. That was just a tiny skirmish before violence escalated and full-scale battles broke out. They did so two months later, early November 1839, at the First Battle of Chuanbi (Chuenpee), exactly where Weddell had taken to the offensive—where the Courteen commander had bombarded and then stormed a fort in the Bogue. Mundy, eye-witness in August 1637, reported how smoothly and safely the British assaulted and neutralized the fort at or near Anunghoy (阿娘鞋 Aniangxie):

Then from the platform they began to discharge at us also near a dozen shot before we answered one. By their working we perceived what good gunners they were and how well they were fitted, for many of their own shot dropped down out of the mouth of the piece close under the wall. Others were shot at random haphazard quite another way, giving fire to them with wet vents even as the pieces lay on the

7. Lovell, *The Opium War*, 75.

Index

- Abbot, Maurice, 42, 43, 43n40
Abdy, Anthony, 43
Acapulco, 113, 113n30
Aceh (Achin), 5, 6, 11, 57, 65, 65n64, 65n65, 66, 66n69, 67, 67n72, 126, 127, 127n78, 169, 169n38
Adams, William, 19, 20, 20n26
Afonso V (Avis), 14
Africa, 15, 36n10, 37, 86, 178
Agra, 40n30
Ahmad Shah II, 66n66
Ahmadabad, 55n33, 58n45
Ala-uddin Shah, 66n69
Albuquerque, Afonso de, 4, 22, 66, 183
Aljubarrota, Battle of, 14
Amboina, 24, 24n40, 26, 171
America, 3, 25, 37, 44n45, 113
Amsterdam, 3, 57, 175n58
Andoyna, Juan Lopez de, 113, 122, 126, 151
Andrade, Antonio de, 27n56
Anglo-Dutch Defence Fleet, 23, 23n37, 24, 25, 25n42
Anglo-Portuguese accord: *See* Goa Convention of 1635
Aniangxie (Anung-hoi), 75, 75n24, 84, 84n8, 87, 88, 103, 105n62, 179
Anjouan, 49, 49n11, 50
Annam (Vietnam), 128
Anne (Courteen), 41n35, 48, 48n4, 50, 50n13, 54, 54n27, 62, 66, 67, 68, 70, 74, 74n21, 75, 75n22, 75n24, 75n25, 76, 77, 77n34, 78, 81, 83, 85, 95, 100, 106, 107, 122, 124, 131, 134, 134n18, 164, 171, 173
Anne (EIC), 23n37
Antonio (Ethiopian), 86, 86n13, 106, 117, 174
Arabia, 61
Arabian Sea, 23
Aranha, Francisco Carvalho, 109
Aranjo Darros, Francisco de, 98n33, 118n45
Aston, Walter, Lord Aston, 34
Atlantic Ocean, 6, 14, 17, 37n12, 48n2
Aubrey, John, 172n47
Augustinians, 152
Avis, House of, 14
Azores, 48n2

Baba Rawat (Babarat), 63, 63n60, 64
Banda Islands, 24
Banten (Bantam), 6, 20, 20n23, 23, 25n42, 30n65, 38, 40, 40n31, 40n32, 52, 52n20, 65, 73n14, 78n38, 151n84
Barbados, 37
Barbary, 36, 48, 48n5
Barker, Christopher, 106
Baron, William, 127
Batavia: *See* Jakarta
Bayley, William, 49n11, 65n63
Bear, 19
Bear's Whelp, 19
Beijing, 11, 13, 20, 31, 119, 119n48, 120, 130, 138, 145, 152, 153, 157, 160, 164, 167n29, 177
Beira-Baixa, 120n54
Bengal, 167
Benjamin, 19

- Bhatkal, 57, 58, 58n41, 58n43, 58n44, 60, 61, 61n52, 63, 63n58, 63n59, 65, 66, 67n72, 127
- Biscayne, 113
- Bishops' Wars, 165
- Bocarro, Antonio, 32
- Bocarro, Manuel Tavares, 29
- Bodleian Library, Oxford, 7, 172, 174n55
- Bogue (Humen, Boca do Tigre, Tiger's Gate), 3, 5, 31, 74, 75, 75n22, 76, 77, 78, 78n36, 80n47, 81, 83, 83n3, 89, 90, 91, 93, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 99n37, 100, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 110, 111, 111n19, 115, 116, 117, 118n45, 124, 131, 131n8, 132n11, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 138n39, 140, 141, 142, 144, 145, 145n60, 147, 149, 150, 152, 153, 154, 159n4, 161, 166, 167, 171, 177, 178, 179, 180, 182
- "Bogue Incident" (Humen shijian), 131, 150
- Bombay (Mumbai), 13
- Bonnell, Samuel, 36, 37, 37n11, 37n12
- Bornford, Henry, 30, 31, 32, 33, 51n16, 55, 55n33, 163
- Bort, Balthasar, 147
- Bourbon, House of, 29
- Bourne, Richard, 66
- Braganza, 120n54
- Braganza, House of, 13
- Bramhall, John, 13n35
- Brazil, 15
- British, 2, 6, 17, 18, 19, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 36n8, 44, 46, 54, 55, 56, 57, 64, 65n64, 66, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73n14, 75n25, 76, 77n32, 78, 78n36, 78n39, 79, 79n40, 80, 81, 85, 87, 88, 88n12, 90, 91, 92, 93, 93n3, 94, 95, 96, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 106, 107, 107n4, 109, 110, 110n14, 112, 112n26, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 118n44, 118n45, 119, 119n49, 120, 120n50, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 127n78, 129, 130, 131, 132n11, 133, 134, 134n18, 135, 136, 136n32, 137, 138, 138n38, 138n39, 138n41, 139, 139n44, 140n47, 141, 142, 143, 144, 144n57, 145, 145n60, 146, 147, 148, 149, 149n79, 150, 150n82, 151, 151n85, 153, 154, 155, 157, 158, 159, 159n4, 160, 160n6, 161, 162, 163, 164, 164n20, 165, 166, 166n24, 167, 167n28, 168, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 183
- British Empire, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 183
- British Isles, 167, 170
- Calicut, 58, 58n42, 62, 66
- California, 44n45
- Cambodia, 68
- Camoens, Luis de, 4
- Campeche, 169n36
- Canary Islands, 48
- Cannanore, 54n30, 58n44, 62, 63, 63n60, 178
- Canton (Guangzhou), 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 21, 29, 30, 30n66, 31, 31n71, 32, 33, 46, 71, 72, 73, 74, 74n19, 74n20, 75, 76, 76n27, 76n31, 77, 77n32, 78n39, 80, 80n43, 80n44, 81, 83, 83n2, 83n3, 84, 84n9, 85, 87, 89, 90, 90n30, 90n31, 91, 92, 93, 93n1, 93n3, 94n7, 95, 95n9, 96, 96n18, 97, 97n29, 98, 99, 100, 100n41, 100n43, 101, 102, 102n52, 103, 103n55, 104, 105, 106, 108, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 116, 117, 118, 118n44, 119, 119n48, 120, 120n50, 120n53, 121, 122, 122n59, 124, 125, 126, 128, 132, 132n10, 132n11, 133, 134, 135n28, 136, 137, 138, 138n41, 140, 141, 144, 145, 147, 149, 150, 151, 152, 152n86, 153, 157, 161, 163, 164, 164n20, 165, 166, 167, 167n28, 167n29, 168, 169, 169n38, 171, 176, 180, 181
- Cape of Good Hope, 1, 4, 11, 49, 49n6, 170
- Caribbean, 2n3, 6, 27n57, 37, 168n35
- Carmarthen, 171n44
- Carter, John, 38, 38n16, 38n17, 48, 49n6, 50n13, 66, 73n14, 74, 74n21, 75, 76, 76n31, 77, 77n34, 81, 83, 85, 100, 109, 111n18, 112n22, 115, 127, 134n18, 144, 158, 171
- Castile, 99
- Catalan Revolt, 13

- Catherine of Braganza, 13
 Cavendish, Thomas, 16
 Ceylon, 54
 Chandragiri, 60n46
Charles, 35, 35n3, 38, 41
 Charles I (Stuart), 13, 26, 28, 29, 34, 35, 35n6, 36, 36n7, 36n10, 37, 37n13, 42, 43, 43n40, 44, 44n44, 44n45, 45, 45n47, 45n49, 45n50, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 53n21, 53n24, 56, 63, 64, 67n72, 70, 71, 71n8, 76, 85, 86, 88, 98, 99, 99n37, 108, 109, 117, 120, 128, 132n11, 140, 145, 151, 153, 155, 158, 160, 162, 163, 165, 166, 170, 170n41, 171, 172, 176, 177, 178, 182, 183
 Charles II (Stuart), 13
 Chatham, 75n24
 Chen, Bangji, 136n32
 Chen, Qian, 12, 135, 135n25, 136, 136n30, 136n32, 137, 138, 138n38, 138n39, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145
 China, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16, 18, 18n15, 19, 20, 21, 24, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 38, 41, 44, 44n44, 45, 45n49, 46, 52, 55, 57, 58n41, 63n58, 63n60, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 68n81, 72, 76, 78, 80, 83n3, 86, 98, 99, 99n37, 100, 109, 114, 116, 117, 118, 120, 123n60, 126, 127, 128, 131, 132n9, 132n10, 135n26, 141, 142, 147, 148, 149, 150n82, 152, 152n86, 152n87, 157, 158, 158n2, 159, 160, 160n9, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166n28, 167, 168, 168n35, 169, 169n36, 169n38, 170, 170n39, 171, 171n42, 172, 172n47, 172n48, 173, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 182
 Chirakall, 62, 63n60
 Chocolate, 113
 Chongzhen emperor, 13, 30, 30n68, 31, 72, 76, 94, 98, 99, 114, 118, 120, 120n50, 126, 130, 130n2, 137, 138, 141, 143, 152, 153, 161, 163, 165, 167, 181
 Christianity, 3
 Chuanbi, 75, 75n22, 84, 84n8, 179, 180, 181, 182
 Chuanbi (Chuenpee), Battle of, 179
 Church of England, 41n33
 Clobberly, William, 48n2
Clove, 20
 Cochinchina (Vietnam), 68, 164
 Cochin, 26, 34, 58n42, 58n44, 62, 66, 71, 123, 128
 Cochinchina (Vietnam), 68, 164
 Cocks, Richard, 20, 20n27, 21, 41n36, 114n34
 Coen, Jan Pieterszoon, 23, 25n45
 Cogan, Andrew, 169n38
 Coke, John, 43, 43n41
 Columbus, Christopher, 15
 Comoro Islands, 49
 Cooley, William Desborough, 7
 Cooper, Jakob, 50n14, 54n27, 56, 56n35, 57
 Copland, Patrick, 41, 41n34
 Cornwallis, Charles, 36n8
 Cornworth, Andrew, 66, 66n70
 Coromandel, 40n31
 Cottington, Francis, 34, 36n8, 43, 43n41
 Counter-Reformation, 2
 Courteen Association, 5, 6, 7, 8, 34, 37n14, 38, 39, 39n20, 39n23, 40, 42, 43, 44, 44n45, 44n46, 45, 45n50, 46, 48, 50, 51, 57, 58n44, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 148, 155, 158, 160, 163, 165, 167, 169, 171n43, 172, 172n49, 176, 183
 Courteen, Peter, 37
 Courteen, William, 7, 12, 37, 37n12, 37n13, 37n14, 38, 40, 42, 43n41, 44n46, 45n47, 45n50, 48n2, 58n44, 63n58, 128, 171n43, 172n49
 Cruz, Gaspar da, 133n17, 174n55
 Daoguang emperor, 180, 181
 Darell, John, 172n45
 Dawes, Abraham, 37n12
 Deccan, 58n40
 Deshima, 72, 72n13, 74, 78, 123, 124n64
Discovery (Courteen), 48, 48n4, 48n5
Discovery (EIC), 169n38
 Digby, John, 36n8
Dolphin, 30n65
 Dominicans, 152
 Downs, 3, 45, 48, 48n5, 49, 61, 62, 63n58, 173

- Dragon*, 1, 13, 48, 48n2, 49, 49n11, 50n13, 51, 53, 54n27, 54n30, 56, 62, 66, 67, 68, 70, 72, 74, 77, 78, 81, 83, 88, 88n20, 91, 98, 99n38, 101, 106, 107, 109, 111n18, 113, 115, 127, 127n78, 128, 130, 147, 150, 158, 168, 170, 171, 171n43, 180
- Drake, Francis, 16, 183
- Duanzhou, 135n28
- Dudley, Robert, 19
- Dutch, 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 27n57, 28, 29, 29n63, 29n64, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 41, 44, 46, 50n14, 54, 55, 56, 57, 62n56, 63, 63n59, 63n60, 65, 65n65, 66, 67, 67n74, 68, 68n80, 68n81, 73n14, 77, 81, 123, 123n62, 123n63, 124, 124n64, 126, 127, 127n78, 128, 130, 130n3, 132n9, 139n44, 145, 147, 148, 149n79, 150, 151, 151n85, 152, 152n88, 153, 153n89, 154, 154n91, 158n2, 164n20, 165, 166, 167, 167n29, 170, 171, 182
- Dutch East India Company (VOC), 11, 19, 21n28, 23, 24, 25, 25n43, 26, 27, 29, 36, 42n39, 44, 50n14, 54n27, 56, 56n35, 57, 65, 68, 68n80, 88n12, 128, 129, 130n3, 147, 149, 158n2, 167, 168n35
- Dutch Republic, 3n6
- Dysentery, 4, 124, 124n67
- East China Sea, 46
- East India Company (EIC), 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 19, 20, 21n28, 22, 23, 24, 25n43, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 30n66, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 37n13, 37n14, 38, 39, 39n20, 39n23, 39n25, 39n26, 40, 40n29, 40n31, 40n32, 41, 41n35, 41n36, 42, 42n39, 43, 43n40, 44, 44n43, 44n46, 45, 45n47, 45n50, 46, 48n2, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54n30, 55, 55n33, 57, 57n39, 58, 58n44, 60, 63, 63n58, 64, 65, 66n69, 67n72, 68n78, 71n8, 151n84, 163, 164, 166n28, 167, 167n28, 168, 172, 172n46, 172n48, 172n49, 178, 178n6, 181
- Eden, Richard, 17n12
- Edinburgh, 13n35
- Edo, 20
- Edward III (Plantagenet), 14
- EIC: *See* East India Company
- El Caser-el Kebir, Battle of, 15
- Elizabeth I (Tudor), 15, 18, 19
- Elliot, Charles, 176, 177
- Elliot, George, 179, 180, 181
- England, 1, 3, 4, 6, 15, 27n56, 28, 29, 34, 41, 41n36, 42, 48, 48n5, 49, 60n47, 61, 62, 63n58, 75n24, 117, 127, 141n48, 148, 151n85, 169, 169n38, 171, 173, 178, 181
- English Channel, 29, 29n64, 35, 48
- Escalante, Bernardino de, 17n12
- Espinhel, Domingos Dias, 98n33, 118n45
- Estado da India, 9, 16, 22, 26, 30, 51, 55, 56, 64n62, 66
- Ethiopia, 86, 106, 131
- Europe, 2, 3, 26, 29, 42, 56, 62, 96n20, 148, 149, 152, 159, 160, 169, 174n55
- Falcon*, 23n37
- Fernando I (Burgundy), 14
- Fitch, Ralph, 18
- Folangji, 30, 153, 154n90
- Fort Agoada, 50, 55
- Fortune, John, 61
- Foster, William, 8
- Fowke, John, 48n2
- Frampton, John, 17n12
- France, 29, 29n63
- Franciscans, 123, 152
- Francisco (Portuguese slave), 103, 103n55
- Fremlen, William, 54n30, 172, 178n6
- French, 2, 3, 29n63, 42n39, 48, 80
- Fujian, 17n12, 20, 21, 24n38, 25, 25n46, 26, 26n48, 26n49, 68, 68n81, 80, 80n47, 86, 86n13, 101, 103, 104n56, 106, 109, 130n3, 135n26, 136n32, 140, 143n54, 146n62, 147, 151, 152, 165, 177
- Fuzhou, 152n88
- Gama, Vasco da, 4, 58, 66
- Ge, Zhengqi, 12, 137, 137n33, 137n35, 138, 138n38, 141, 145, 145n60, 153, 154, 161n11
- Giles, H.A., 174n54

- Glascock, Henry, 39, 40n29
 Goa, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 27n56, 28, 28n62, 29, 34, 42, 44n44, 45n49, 46, 48n1, 49, 49n8, 50, 50n13, 50n14, 51, 52, 53, 53n22, 54, 54n27, 55, 55n32, 55n34, 56, 56n35, 57, 58, 62n56, 64, 65, 66, 70n2, 71, 72, 78, 99, 107, 128, 153, 158, 162, 166
 Goa Convention of 1635, 6n17, 27, 27n52, 27n56, 28, 28n61, 28n62, 34, 35, 37n14, 42, 44, 44n44, 45n50, 46, 49, 51, 53, 54n28, 64n62, 65, 71, 72, 78, 99, 107, 109, 112, 139n44, 153
 Gombroon (Bandar Abbas), 23, 38, 52
 Gomes, Gaspar, 30, 57
 Great Wall, 146
 Grey, Simon, 95, 96, 100, 102, 102n52, 118n44, 121
 Guan, Tianpei, 180, 181
 Guangdong, 2, 9, 11, 26n48, 33, 38, 46, 80, 95n9, 103, 114, 130, 131, 132, 132n10, 133, 134, 135n29, 136, 137, 137n33, 138, 140n47, 142, 143n54, 144, 146, 146n62, 147, 149, 150, 151, 151n85, 157, 158, 159n4, 160, 161, 163, 164, 166, 166n24, 167n28, 168, 168n35, 170, 171, 173, 174, 177, 181
 Guangxi, 131, 132n10, 137, 147
 Guinea, 15n4
 Guizhou, 132n10
 Gujarat, 22, 23n37, 63

 Habsburg, 2, 13, 15, 26, 29, 29n63, 36, 36n8, 79, 127, 139n44, 152, 153, 162
 Haijin, 30n68, 141, 164, 177
 Hainan, 68, 128, 164, 165, 165n22, 183
 Haixinsha Island, 120n53
 Hakluyt, Richard, 2, 3n5, 17, 17n12, 18, 18n16, 132n9, 173
 Hakluyt Society, 7, 172n47, 175
 Hall, Edward, 38, 38n19, 48, 61
Hart, 40n31, 52n20
 Hatch, Arthur, 41, 41n35, 41n36, 99n38, 109, 111n18, 115
 Hawley, Henry, 40
 Hengdang Islands, 86n14, 111n19, 180n11
 Hengqin Island, 70n1, 73
 Henrietta Maria, Queen, 53
 Henry IV (Lancaster), 14
 Henry, Prince, "the Navigator," 14
 Hill, John, 61
Hinde, 166, 166n28
 Hirado, 18n14, 20, 21, 22, 38, 41, 73n14, 114n34
 Hobbes, Thomas, 2
 Hollanders: *See* Dutch
 Hondius, Hendrik, 173, 173n52
 Hong Kong, 3, 95, 113, 118, 164, 165, 166, 173, 179, 183
 Hong Kong Disneyland, 113n28
Hope, 28n60
 Hopkinson, Joseph, 27n56
 Hormuz, 15, 22, 23n36, 25, 28, 34, 58
 Howard, Thomas, Earl of Arundel, 37
 Hudson, Mr., 41n35
 Hume, David, 183
 Humen Pearl River Bridge, 86n14

 Iberians, 2, 3, 11, 15, 18, 24, 26, 123, 132n9, 152, 159, 173
 Iemitsu shogun (Tokugawa), 123, 124n64
 Ieyasu shogun (Tokugawa), 20, 20n26, 68
 Ikkeri, 57, 58, 58n40, 60, 64
 India, 1, 4, 6, 11, 15, 18, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 34, 38, 39, 40, 40n29, 40n31, 41n35, 42, 44, 45n47, 46, 48n1, 50, 51, 52, 54, 57, 60, 64, 65, 71, 96n20, 99, 103, 103n55, 127, 127n78, 128, 159n4, 166, 167, 169, 173, 178, 178n6
 Indian Ocean, 12, 22, 23, 170, 171, 179
 Indonesian archipelago, 6, 22, 24, 29, 65, 67
 Irish Sea, 171n44
 Iskandar Muda, 65, 65n64, 66, 66n66, 66n69
 Iskandar Thani, 65n65, 66, 66n66, 126
 Istanbul, 40n29
 Italians, 16, 18, 132n9, 152, 154n90, 155, 159, 173

 Jakarta (Batavia), 23, 24, 24n38, 25n42, 26, 32, 40, 56, 57, 65, 68n81, 129

- James I (Stuart), 18, 19, 20, 20n26, 21, 22, 24, 26, 36, 36n8, 37n13, 42, 65n64
- Japan, 2, 3, 6, 15n6, 18, 18n14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30n68, 31, 31n71, 32, 38, 41, 41n34, 41n36, 44, 45n49, 46, 52, 68, 71, 73n14, 74, 78, 78n39, 79, 79n40, 80n44, 103, 103n55, 107, 107n3, 107n4, 108, 112, 114n34, 115, 118, 123, 123n62, 123n63, 124, 124n64, 149, 151, 152, 153, 153n89, 154, 159n4, 164n20, 169, 170, 170n39
- Java, 20, 20n23, 23, 24, 24n38, 39, 52, 65, 66
- Jesuit, 3, 17, 18n15, 54n28, 66, 67n76, 68, 68n77, 71, 78, 78n38, 109, 111, 116, 117, 117n40, 123, 152, 155, 159, 160, 160n6, 173
- Jie, Bangjun, 138n39
- Jilong (Keelung), 79n42
- Jinmen, 130n3, 147
- John I (Plantagenet-Angevin), 14
- John I (Avis), 14
- Jonas*, 23n37, 28, 28n62, 29, 35, 38, 38n19, 41
- Kanara, 58n43, 64
- Katherine*, 13, 38, 48, 48n2, 49, 49n6, 50, 50n13, 54n27, 62, 66, 67, 68, 70, 73n14, 74, 77, 98, 100, 101, 109, 115, 126, 127, 127n78, 168, 170, 171, 171n43, 180
- Kibikida, 21n29
- Knipe, Edward, 66
- Kowloon, 179
- Kynaston, Thomas, 36, 37, 37n11, 37n12
- Kyushu, 19, 20
- Lambeth Palace, 43n40
- Lancaster, House of, 14
- Lancaster, James, 65, 66n69
- Lantau Island (Dayushan), 113, 113n28, 118, 121, 123, 126
- Laud, William, 43, 43n40, 43n41
- Levant Company, 48n2
- Li, Dan, 20, 20n27, 21, 21n28, 21n29, 41
- Li, Yanqing, 134n18, 136n32
- Li, Yerong (Paulo Noretti), 12, 108, 110, 110n14, 115, 116, 117, 117n41, 117n42, 132, 132n12, 133, 134, 135, 136, 136n30, 137, 138, 138n38, 138n39, 140, 141, 143, 145, 145n60, 156 (Figure 8.1), 168
- Li, Zicheng, 13
- Liaoluo Bay, 130n3, 147
- Liefde*, 19
- Lin, Xinhua, 138n39
- Lin, Zexu, 179, 181
- Linhares, Conde de, Dom Miguel de Noronha, 27, 27n54, 27n56, 28, 28n61, 28n62, 29, 30, 30n66, 32, 42, 45n50, 49, 55, 55n33, 72, 73, 73n14
- Linschoten, Jan Huygen van, 17, 18n14, 20n24
- Lintin Island (Neilingdingdao), 95n11, 107, 114, 115, 176n1
- Lisbon, 3, 9, 10, 14
- Liverpool, 181
- London, 3, 16, 16n11, 17, 20, 24, 34, 35, 36, 37, 37n12, 40, 42, 50, 52, 57, 127, 158, 160, 167, 172, 175n58, 176
- London*, 29, 30, 30n65, 30n66, 31, 32, 34, 42, 51n16, 55, 55n33, 57, 68n78, 72, 73, 98n35, 163, 164, 166
- Louis XIII (Bourbon), 29n63
- Lychee, 71, 97, 97n28
- Macao, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 26n48, 28, 28n59, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 38, 38n17, 42, 51, 51n16, 55, 55n33, 57, 64, 67, 67n76, 68, 68n77, 68n78, 70, 70n2, 71, 72, 73, 73n14, 74n20, 74n21, 75n23, 76, 76n29, 77, 77n32, 78, 78n35, 78n36, 78n38, 78n39, 79, 79n40, 79n42, 80, 80n43, 80n47, 81, 83, 86, 86n13, 91, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 98n32, 98n33, 98n35, 99, 100, 103, 103n55, 104, 105, 107, 107n3, 107n4, 109, 109n9, 110, 111, 112, 112n26, 113, 114, 115, 115n39, 116, 117, 117n43, 118, 118n44, 118n45, 119, 120, 120n50, 120n54, 121, 122, 123, 123n59, 123n62, 124, 124n64, 125, 126, 127, 128, 128n85, 130, 130n3, 131, 132n11, 132n12, 133, 134, 134n20,

- 135n29, 137, 139n44, 140, 144, 145, 146, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 157, 158, 158n2, 159, 160, 161, 161n11, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 168, 169, 169n36, 169n38, 170, 172, 172n50, 173, 176, 178, 179, 182, 183
- Macartney, Lord, George, 179
- Madagascar, 36n9, 49, 169n38, 170, 178
- Madras, 38n19
- Madre de Dios*, 17
- Madrid, 34, 35, 36n7, 36n8
- Madrid, Treaty of (1630), 26, 27n51, 28, 34
- Makassar (Macassar), 39, 40, 78n35
- Malabar, 1, 4, 22, 25, 26, 34, 45n49, 51, 54, 54n30, 55, 57, 58, 58n40, 58n42, 58n45, 61, 62, 63, 63n58, 63n60, 64, 65, 66, 67n72, 71, 126, 127, 128n85, 169, 178
- Malaria, 4, 61, 62
- Malay (language), 3, 132n12
- Malaysian peninsula (Malaysia), 15, 22, 26, 29, 65, 66, 66n66, 67
- Manchu: *See* Qing
- Mandeville, John, 16
- Manila, 2, 3, 11, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 26n48, 68, 70n2, 79, 79n42, 80n43, 103, 103n55, 111, 113, 113n30, 118, 122, 123, 128, 151, 152, 152n87, 154, 162, 165
- Mars*, 65n63
- Martini, Martino, 175n58
- Martyres, Francisco dos, 49, 50
- Mary*, 40n31, 48n1, 49n11, 52n20
- Mascarenhas, Filippe, 55, 55n32, 55n34, 56, 62n56, 65
- Masulipatam, 167, 172
- Matthes, Bento de, 117n40
- Melaka (Malacca), 2, 3n5, 11, 15, 19, 26, 27, 29, 34, 46, 56n35, 57, 63n60, 65, 66, 67, 67n74, 67n76, 68, 68n77, 71, 73, 78, 78n38, 103, 109, 123, 124n64, 126, 127, 128, 129, 166
- Melbourne, Lord, William Lamb, 176
- Mendoza, Juan Gonzalez de, 17, 141, 141n48, 142, 174n55
- Methwold, William, 27, 27n56, 28, 28n61, 28n62, 29, 30, 34, 35, 42, 49, 50, 51, 51n16, 52, 54n30, 55, 55n33, 58, 58n45, 68n80, 72, 172, 178n6
- Mexico (New Spain), 2, 16n11, 40n32, 169n36
- Michelbourne, Edward, 19, 42
- Milward, Martin, 48n4, 50n13
- Ming, 2, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 26, 26n49, 29, 30, 30n66, 30n68, 31, 33, 46, 68, 70n1, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 77n32, 78, 78n36, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89, 89n22, 90, 91n32, 92, 93, 93n3, 94, 94n7, 95, 97, 98, 98n35, 99, 99n37, 100, 101, 102, 103, 103n54, 103n55, 104n57, 104n58, 104n59, 105n63, 106, 108, 109, 110, 110n13, 111, 111n19, 112, 112n26, 113, 114, 114n34, 115, 115n39, 116, 117, 117n42, 118n44, 119, 119n49, 120n50, 120n54, 121, 122, 122n59, 123, 124, 125, 125n68, 126, 130, 130n2, 131, 132, 132n10, 132n11, 133, 134, 134n18, 134n20, 135, 135n29, 136, 137, 138, 138n38, 138n41, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 143n54, 144, 144n57, 145, 145n60, 146, 146n62, 146n63, 147, 147n69, 148, 149, 149n78, 149n79, 149n80, 150, 151, 151n84, 151n85, 152, 152n88, 153n89, 154, 154n90, 154n92, 155, 157, 158, 158n2, 159, 159n4, 160, 160n6, 160n9, 160n10, 161, 161n12, 162, 163, 164, 164n20, 165, 165n22, 166, 167, 168, 173, 175, 176, 178, 180, 181, 182, 183
- Moluccas, 57, 113
- Mongols, 146
- Monson, William, 35
- Montanus, Arnoldus, 175n58
- Morocco, 48n5
- Moulton, Robert, 53, 56, 62, 171
- Mountney, John, 8, 9, 12, 39, 39n24, 39n26, 70, 71, 74, 75, 76, 76n28, 76n31, 77, 77n34, 81, 85, 87, 91, 93, 93n1, 93n2, 94, 95, 96, 100n41, 102, 102n52, 104, 104n57, 104n59, 114, 114n34, 118, 118n44, 119, 119n48, 120, 120n52, 121,

- 122, 124, 125, 126, 128, 134, 136, 137, 149, 152, 159, 170, 171
- Mountney, Nathaniel, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 28, 28n60, 28n61, 28n62, 29, 35, 37, 39, 39n26, 40n29, 41, 45, 46, 49, 49n11, 50, 51, 52, 53, 53n21, 54, 57, 58n41, 61, 61n50, 62, 65, 65n65, 66, 67, 67n72, 70, 70n2, 72, 77, 79, 80, 88n21, 90n31, 91, 92, 95, 96, 97, 98, 100, 100n41, 102, 102n52, 104, 104n56, 104n57, 104n58, 104n59, 114, 114n34, 118, 118n44, 119, 119n48, 120, 120n52, 120n54, 121, 122, 123n62, 124, 125, 125n68, 126, 127, 130, 133, 134, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 149, 152, 153, 158, 159, 160, 160n9, 161n12, 163, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 170n39, 171, 172n48, 173, 178, 182, 183
- Mountney, Richard, 39n26
- Mughal Empire, 1, 22, 27n54, 40n30, 58, 159n4
- Mun, Thomas, 43
- Mundy, Peter, 7, 8, 9, 12, 40, 40n29, 40n30, 40n31, 45n47, 48n2, 48n5, 49, 49n8, 55, 60, 61, 62n56, 63n60, 68n77, 70, 71, 74, 74n19, 75n25, 77n34, 78n35, 80n47, 83n3, 86, 86n13, 86n14, 87, 88, 88n21, 90n31, 92, 95, 96, 101, 101n49, 102, 105n62, 109, 111n18, 111n19, 113, 113n29, 113n30, 114, 115, 117, 117n40, 117n41, 118n45, 120n50, 123, 123n60, 124n64, 125, 126, 126n77, 127, 132, 132n9, 132n10, 132n11, 132n12, 133, 134, 139, 143, 148, 151n84, 158, 159, 160n6, 164, 165, 167, 169n36, 170n39, 171n43, 172, 172n47, 172n50, 173, 173n51, 173n52, 173n53, 174, 174n54, 175, 175n56, 175n58, 177, 178, 179, 180
- Nagasaki, 2, 3, 20, 68, 72n13, 124n64
- Nanjing, 181
- Napier Island (Ershadao), 120n53
- Nemesis*, 181, 183
- Netherlands, 29, 29n63, 151n85
- “New Christians” (Cristão-Novo), 120n54
- Nieuhof, Johannes, 175, 175n58
- Nine Islands (Jiuzhoudao), 83
- Ningbo, 21
- Noretta, Paulo: *See* Li, Yerong
- Noronha, Domingos da Camara de, 64, 70, 70n2, 71, 72, 73, 77, 78, 79, 79n40, 98, 98n33, 99, 107, 107n3, 108, 109, 110, 110n13, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 115n39, 118n45, 120n54, 127, 128, 128n86, 134, 139n44, 144, 151, 157, 158, 158n2, 160, 161, 168, 170, 178
- Noronha, Manuel da Camara de, 70n2
- North Sea, 29n64
- Nuijts, Pieter, 89n22
- Ogilby, John 175n58
- Olivares, Count-Duke of, Don Gaspar de Guzmán, 36
- Onor, 58n43
- Opium Wars, 3, 120n53, 150, 176, 177, 179, 180, 181, 183
- Oporto, 14
- Ottoman Empire, 40n29
- Pacheco, Luiz Pais, 98n33, 118n45
- Pacific Ocean, 19, 113
- Palmerston, Viscount, Henry John Temple, 176
- Palsgrave*, 41n36
- Parke, Robert, 17
- Parr, Christopher, 113, 115
- Peacock, Tempest, 20n26
- Pearl River, 3, 11, 32, 71, 74, 75n25, 76, 77, 77n32, 81, 83, 85, 87, 89, 90, 91, 93, 97, 98, 100, 105, 110, 120, 121, 131, 134, 134n18, 135, 138n39, 142, 144, 145, 147, 149, 157, 159n4, 171, 173, 180
- Pearl River Delta/estuary, 1, 3, 5, 10, 12, 25, 31, 32, 67, 71, 73, 74, 74n21, 76, 77, 79, 80n43, 81, 94, 95, 101, 107, 113, 122, 123, 126, 132, 139n44, 143, 147, 150, 150n82, 153, 157, 160, 161, 161n11, 163, 164, 165, 167, 171, 172, 173, 176, 177, 178, 181, 183
- Pennington, John, 63n58
- Pereira, António, 27n56

- Pereira, Galeote, 17n12, 133n13, 133n14
 Pereira, Jose Pinto, 55, 55n33
 Persian Gulf, 1, 15, 22, 23, 23n37, 38, 52
 Peru, 2
 Pescadores Islands (Penghu), 25, 25n46, 151, 152, 165
 Philip II/I (Habsburg), 15, 152n87
 Philip III/II (Habsburg), 26
 Philip IV/III (Habsburg), 2n3, 13, 27, 27n57, 28, 28n62, 29, 31, 34, 36, 44, 46, 53, 53n25, 57, 63, 64, 64n62, 71, 79, 79n40, 98, 99, 99n37, 109, 111, 127, 153, 162
 Philippines, 2, 11n30, 16, 19, 21n28, 24, 25, 44, 79, 123, 152n88
 Pindar, Paul, 37n13, 45n47
 Pires, Catherine, 70n2
 Pires, Estevan, 98n33, 118n45
Planter, 38, 48, 48n5, 49n11, 50n13, 54n27, 55, 60, 60n47, 61, 62, 62n56, 63n58, 171
 Polo, Marco, 15, 16, 172n47
 Pope, Alexander, 182
 Porter, Endymion, 35, 35n6, 36, 36n7, 36n8, 36n9, 37, 37n11
 Portugal, 13, 14, 26, 27n56, 49, 50n14, 53, 58n43, 120n54
 Portuguese/Lusitanians, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 42n39, 44, 46, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 63, 63n59, 63n60, 64, 65, 65n64, 65n65, 67, 67n74, 68n81, 70, 71n8, 72, 72n13, 76n29, 77n34, 78, 78n35, 78n36, 78n39, 80, 80n43, 80n44, 80n47, 81, 85, 86n13, 91, 92, 93n3, 94, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 103, 103n55, 105, 106, 107, 107n4, 108, 109, 109n9, 111, 113, 114, 115, 118, 118n45, 119, 119n48, 120, 120n50, 121, 122, 122n59, 123, 123n62, 124, 124n64, 124n67, 125, 126, 127, 128, 128n85, 129, 130, 131, 132n11, 135n29, 137, 138, 138n41, 139, 139n44, 140n47, 144, 144n57, 146, 149, 150, 151n85, 152, 152n86, 152n88, 153, 154, 154n90, 155, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 161n11, 161n12, 162, 163, 164, 164n20, 166, 168, 170, 172, 173, 178, 179, 182, 183
 Procurador of Macao, 72, 72n11, 79, 79n41, 157, 178
 Proenca, Matheu Ferreira de, 98n33, 118n45
 Protestant, 2, 19, 23, 24, 30, 67, 78, 152, 153
 Purchas, Samuel, 2, 3n5, 16n11, 18, 18n16, 41n36, 120n53, 132n9, 173
 Putmans, Hans, 88n12, 130n3, 158n2
 Qing (Manchu), 12, 13, 130, 146, 147, 150, 154n91, 157, 166, 167, 175, 176, 180, 181, 182
 Qishan, 181
 Quanzhou, 20, 21n28, 25n46, 80n47
 Rada, Martin de, 132n10
 Ramos, Manuel, 30n66, 31, 32, 33
 Rastell, Thomas, 27n56
 Rawlinson, Thomas, 7
 “Red barbarians” (*hongyi, hongmao*), 11, 26n49, 30, 77, 116, 117n40, 128, 131, 135, 137, 138, 144, 150, 151, 152, 153, 155, 160n10, 163, 165, 176, 182
 Red Sea, 22
 Reformation, 2
 Reijersen, Cornelis, 25
 Reimão, Paulo, 27n56, 54, 54n28
 Ricci, Matteo, 17, 159, 174, 175n58, 179
 Rich, Robert, Earl of Warwick, 37n14
 Richardson, Mr., 48n4
 Richelieu, Cardinal, 29n63
 Ripon, Elie 175n57
 Riquel, Fernando, 152n87
 Robinson, Benjamin, 28n61
 Robinson, Thomas, 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 39, 40, 49, 53, 56, 60, 61, 62, 70, 71, 74, 75, 76, 76n28, 76n31, 77, 77n34, 81, 85, 89, 90, 91, 93, 93n1, 93n2, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99n38, 100, 100n41, 100n44, 102, 102n52, 114, 118n44, 119, 120, 121, 122, 124, 124n67, 125, 126, 128, 134, 136, 137, 149, 152, 158, 159, 170, 171, 179

- Roboredo, Bartholomeo de, 67n76, 68n77, 78, 78n38, 109, 110, 110n14, 111, 112, 113
- Roe, Thomas, 22
- Roebuck*, 36
- Roman Catholic, 2, 152, 155, 179
- Rome, 3, 17
- Romero, Alonso Garcia, 79n42
- Royal James*, 23, 23n37, 38n19
- Russia, 149
- Safavid Persia, 22, 25, 27n54, 61
- Saint John Island, 165
- Samaritan*, 36
- Sande, Francisco de, 152n87
- Santa Maria*, 15
- Sao Joao de Deus*, 53n25
- Saris, John, 18n14, 20, 21, 41
- Scottish, 42n39, 165
- Scottish East India Company, 42, 42n39
- Scottish Prayer Book, 13
- Scurvy, 4
- Sebastian I (Avis), 15
- Selden, John, 16n11
- Semedo, Alvaro, 175n58
- Senado da Camara (of Goa), 53n25
- Senado da Camara (of Macao), 12, 71, 78, 79n40, 99, 107, 107n3, 108, 109, 111, 112, 112n26, 113, 115, 118, 128, 157
- Seville, 17n12
- Shah Abbas, 22, 25
- Shakespeare, William, 12, 182
- Shenzhen, 95, 95n12, 173
- Sherburne, Edward, 43n40
- Ship Money, 35, 36
- Shunzhi emperor, 167n29
- Siamese, 135n29
- Silva, Pero da, 32, 33, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 55n33, 57, 63, 63n59, 64, 64n62, 65, 67, 68n80, 70n2, 71, 79n40, 98, 128n86, 158, 158n2, 160, 161, 162, 166, 168, 170
- Silveira Aranha, Antonio da 98n33, 118, 118n45, 128n86
- Singapore, 67, 68n78
- Smart, John, 127
- Sötern, Philipp Christoph von, 29n63
- Sousa, Leonel de, 135n29
- South China Sea, 68, 127
- Spain, 2, 13, 15, 26, 28, 29, 34, 36, 36n7, 36n8, 40n29, 113n29, 127
- Spanish, 2, 3, 11, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27n57, 42n39, 44, 67n76, 78, 78n38, 79, 79n42, 80n43, 109, 110, 111, 113, 118, 122, 124, 126, 128, 139n44, 151, 152n87, 152n88, 154n90, 155, 162, 164n20, 165, 169n36
- Spanish Netherlands, 2n3, 29
- Spice Islands, 19, 23, 24, 39, 57
- Star*, 38n19
- Staunton, George, 179
- Staunton, Thomas, 179
- Sumatra, 39, 57, 65, 66, 66n69, 67, 67n72, 127
- Sun*, 1, 4, 48, 48n2, 49, 49n11, 50n13, 53, 54n27, 60, 61, 62, 67, 67n76, 68, 70, 77, 78n38, 81, 89, 95, 98, 101, 102n52, 106, 109, 113, 115, 125, 126, 127, 127n78, 128, 130, 139, 158, 169, 169n38, 170, 171, 177, 178, 180
- Surat, 6, 20n23, 22, 23, 27, 27n54, 27n56, 28, 28n60, 30, 30n65, 31, 32, 34, 35, 38, 40, 40n29, 40n30, 40n31, 41, 42, 45n47, 49, 49n11, 52, 52n20, 54n30, 55, 57, 58, 58n44, 63, 65n63, 164, 168, 172, 178n6
- Swallow*, 38, 38n16
- Swally (off Surat), 30n65
- Swan*, 40n31
- Swanley, Richard, 4, 38, 45n47, 48, 49, 61, 67n76, 77, 81, 89, 95, 109, 111n18, 112n22, 113, 115, 125, 126, 144, 158, 169, 171, 171n44
- Swiftsure*, 63n58
- Symonsen, Cornelius, 129
- Taipa Island, 73, 77, 79, 80, 83
- Taiwan (Formosa), 3n6, 10, 11n30, 21n28, 25, 25n46, 26, 26n48, 46, 68, 68n81, 79n42, 88n12, 145, 147, 149n79, 151, 151n84, 152, 158n2, 165, 167, 168n35, 175n57

- Taj Mahal, 40n30
 Tea, 86, 86n12
 Telles de Meneses, Francisco, 53n22
 Temple, Richard Carnac, 7, 8, 9, 10, 172n47, 173n53, 174n54, 175
 Thirty Years' War, 13, 26, 29, 29n63, 44, 152
 Thompson, Maurice, 37n12
 Tiger Island, 75, 86n14, 97, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 105n62, 106, 111n19, 124
 Timor, 32
 Treaty of Defence (1619), 24, 25
- Unicorn*, 38, 38n17, 73n14, 74n21
 United Provinces of Netherlands, 2n3, 29, 44
Utrecht, 54n27
- Van Dam, Peter, 61
 Van Diemen, Anthony, 129
 Vernworthy, Anthony, 40, 40n32, 53, 61
 Victoria, Queen, 179, 181
 Vijayanagar, 58, 60n46, 61n49
 Vira Bhadra, nayak of Ikkeri, 57, 58, 60, 60n46, 60n47, 61, 63n59, 64
 VOC: *See* Dutch East India Company
- Wang, Bo, 135n29
 Wangtong: *See* Hengdang Islands
 Wanli emperor, 19, 21, 146n63
 Webb, Charles, 91, 93, 95, 96, 102, 102n52, 104, 118n44
 Weddell, Elizabeth, 1
 Weddell, Frances, 1, 3
 Weddell, Jeremy, 1
 Weddell, John, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 22, 23, 23n37, 25, 27n56, 28, 28n62, 29, 34, 35, 35n3, 37, 38, 38n19, 40n29, 41, 41n34, 45, 45n47, 45n50, 46, 48, 48n1, 48n2, 49, 49n6, 49n11, 50, 51, 52, 53, 53n21, 54, 54n30, 55, 55n32, 55n34, 56, 57, 61, 61n50, 62, 62n56, 63, 63n58, 63n59, 65, 66, 67, 68n80, 70, 71, 74, 75n23, 77, 78, 79, 80, 80n47, 81, 83, 84, 84n9, 85, 87, 88, 88n20, 88n21, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94, 95, 96, 96n16, 97, 97n29, 98, 99, 99n38, 100, 101, 101n49, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 111n18, 112, 112n22, 113, 114, 115, 115n39, 117, 117n43, 118, 119n48, 120n50, 121, 122, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 130, 132n11, 133, 134, 135, 139, 143, 144, 145, 145n60, 147, 148, 149, 150, 154, 155, 158, 159, 160, 163, 165, 166, 166n24, 167, 168, 170, 170n39, 171, 171n42, 172, 172n48, 173, 176, 177, 178, 179, 181, 182, 183
 Weiyuan Island, 75n22, 84n8
 West Indies, 27n57
 Westminster, 24
 Whitehall, 35, 43, 176
 Wickham, Richard, 20n26
 Willes, Richard, 17n12, 133n13, 133n14
 Wills, Matthew, 29, 30, 30n65, 31
 Windebank, Francis, 35, 43n41, 45
 Windsor, Treaty of, 14
 Woollman, Thomas, 95, 113
 Wye, George, 61
 Wylde, Richard, 40
- Xiamen, 20, 130n3, 147
 Xiangshan (Casa Branca), 133, 137, 139
 Xu, Guangqi, 160n6
- Yang, Yuan, 138n39
 Ye, Gui, 138n39
 Yellow/Dengue fever, 4
- Zeeland, 37
 Zeelandia, 10, 25, 68, 145, 151
 Zhang, Jingxin, 12, 131, 136, 136n31, 137, 137n35, 138, 138n38, 138n39, 141, 145, 145n60, 146n62, 147, 151n85, 153, 154, 161n11
 Zhang, Qi, 136n32
 Zhang, Xianzhong, 13
 Zhangzhou, 80n47
 Zhaoqing, 135n28
 Zhejiang, 21, 25, 26, 143n54
 Zheng, Chenggong, 135n26, 147n72
 Zheng, He, 2

- Zheng, Jing, 147, 147n72
Zheng, Jinguang, 12, 135, 135n28, 136, 137,
137n33, 137n36, 138, 139, 140, 141,
144
Zheng, Zhilong, 135n26, 147, 147n72
Zhu, Yuanzhang, 175