

The Private Side of the Canton Trade, 1700–1840

Beyond the Companies

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Introduction

Paul A. Van Dyke and John E. Wills Jr.

Between 1750 and 1840, the world became more prosperous, more crowded, and more interconnected. State-centred patterns of distribution of resources, which were typical of many forms of empire and of the mercantilist orders of early modern Europe, were destabilized by these changes. New orders that gave more scope to private initiatives, including the new nations in the Americas and the new forms of organization, consumption, and production in Great Britain and its colonies, grew rapidly.¹ The harnessing of steam power, especially for shipping, shaped these changes, but affected the Indian Ocean and the Pacific only after about 1830.² From early in the 1700s, and more rapidly from about 1750, growth of trade in sailing ships shaped a world of growing population, ‘domestication’, ‘consumerism’, and a variety of new political forms.³ The mechanisms of monopolistic trading companies and imperial sharing of power, which worked best with stability or slowly changing volumes, came under increasing strain. Revolutions, new states, and anarchic break-outs of individual trade were among the consequences. New consumer goods from distant lands were everywhere: Indian textiles, coffee, tea, chocolate, spices, sugar, and many more. After 1800, new trades and resources around the Pacific, from furs

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1. For one set of guidelines into the many kinds of reading that can be brought to bear on these themes see John E. Wills Jr., ‘What’s New? Studies of Revolutions and Divergences, 1770–1840: A Review Article’, *Journal of World History* 25, no. 1 (2014): 127–86.
 2. The first steamship to arrive in China was the *Forbes* in 1830. Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 46. In Wei Yuan 魏源, *Hai Guo Tu Zhi* 海國圖志 (1841) no. 52, vol. 12, p. 93, there is mention of a steamer (*huo lun chuan* 火輪船) arriving in the Pearl River Delta from India in 1828. According to the foreign sources, this reference is incorrect. We know the names of all the foreign steamships operating in Asia at this time, and there is no reference to one arriving in China before the *Forbes*. The *Hai Guo Tu Zhi* was compiled over many years and the authors did not have access to foreign records to cross-reference their information so it is understandable that they did not get everything correct. Steamers were operating in India before 1830, but not in Chinese waters. We thank Peter Purdue for bringing this reference to our attention.
 3. C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 1–198.

to whales to trepang, came into play largely beyond the reach of states, empires, and monopolistic companies.

Guangzhou, which foreign visitors called ‘Canton’ and we will too, was an important vortex of these changes. In the late 1700s, all the tea thrown into Boston Harbor or sipped from fine porcelain at Parisian soirées where royal scandals were retold and revolutionary ideas proclaimed, had been shipped from Canton. In sharp contrast to the trades in the Indian cotton goods that were worn in Boston, London, Paris, and many more places, where the expansion of Atlantic purchases led to very active supervision of production in India, we know of no European trader before 1800 who even visited the tea-growing areas in China. Tough-minded, realistic officials in constant communication with capital grandees and the great emperors; extremely well-organized, diligent, and honest growers, processors, and merchants; and foreign merchants who came to respect the reliability of their Chinese counterparts and to enjoy the fine quarters, food, and shopping during their stay in Canton all contributed to this set of mutually advantageous arrangements.

We have seen remarkable advances in Chinese understanding of the Canton Trade. When Wills first visited Guangzhou in 1985 he found, as elsewhere in China, a lot of energy going into the study of local and regional history, but only small steps towards studying the Canton Trade; foreign languages, foreign libraries and archives, and foreign histories all seemed daunting. Many scholars and institutions have contributed to the remarkable advances since that time, including major scholars based in Guangzhou, using archives and collections from around the world, and organizing international conferences like the one that produced these chapters.

Earlier generations of European and American scholars of the Canton Trade had good reasons to focus on the trade of the great companies and to leave the private trades for later study. European archives preserved magnificent sets of those companies’ reports on trade, providing an abundance of information in uniform and systematic formats, and summarizing a very large part of the actual movements of goods. The companies tried to keep track of, and to report on, the trade of their competitors, so their records shed light on the other companies and on private traders, including Armenians, Parsees, Jews, Greeks, and South Asian Muslims as well as Chinese. Private Europeans in India—especially the British—became increasingly more active in the China trade in the late eighteenth century. Loans to Chinese merchants, coming from the companies and from networks of company servants and private traders, were an important part of the dynamics of the trade on which much research still remains to be done.

Company records tend to be impersonal in tone, written by committees to be read by committees. We are thankful for company servants who wrote in more personal veins, like William Hickey, who is discussed in Wills’ essay. As we uncover more private writings, we find Charles de Constant’s harsh criticisms of the Chinese in their most corrupt times, the Swedish triangle uncovered by Lisa Hellman, and a host of hints, including Wills’ discussions of Poivre and Osbeck, of the importance

in these relations of ‘natural history’, of European fascination with exotic plant life, a theme splendidly developed in Fa-ti Fan’s *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire, and Cultural Encounter*.⁴ The export of Chinese seeds and plants included many efforts to take tea plants and Chinese tea-production techniques to India, ending in the world-changing success of Robert Fortune just after the First Opium War (1839–1842).⁵

The companies’ records give us details about the private permission trade, which employees were allowed. These data have been used extensively in the early studies mentioned above. However, trade figures about private persons in China who were not connected to the companies are few and far between.

The permissions trades surely were important for upscale goods like fine teas, top-end porcelain, and the many different export-art objects that were available to purchase in Canton. The companies rarely traded in these items. As Maria Mok shows so well in her chapter, paintings, lacquerware, porcelain, lifelike small portrait statues, and much more were mostly purchased on private accounts and were so important in cultural interchange. We get hints of a more relaxed life for those who stayed over the off-season in Macao (circa February to June). As Godden and numerous other scholars have shown, the East India Company’s records contain many detailed lists of the items that employees purchased in Canton as part of the permissions trade. Many of these lists have survived from as far back as the early eighteenth century, and some of them have been published.⁶

The great diversity in the trade begins to show its many faces in Van Dyke’s chapter, where we find ‘Moors, Greeks, Armenians, Parsees, Jews and Southeast Asians’ brought together in piecemeal fashion but with some important implications. The traditional means of defining the trade according to national flags displayed on ships has skewed our understanding of what was actually happening. Many of the private individuals who were financing those voyages were based in India or Southeast Asia. They hired Europeans to carry their cargos and to command their ships. Customs officials in China—as well as historians in the present day—have logically assigned the trade of those ships to the flags they displayed. This has kept the real owners in the shadows. Until we have more stories of these ‘ambiguous faces’, we will never understand the influence they had on the commerce.

Schopp brings together for the first time a discussion of the private French trade in China from 1698 to 1833. The French were among the earliest of the Europeans

4. Fa-ti Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire, and Cultural Encounter* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

5. For a smart and lively summary, see Sarah Rose, *For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World’s Favorite Drink and Changed History* (New York: Penguin, 2010). Much remains to be done in the full use of Fortune’s lively descriptions of his adventurous trips to China’s ‘tea country’.

6. G. A. Godden, *Oriental Export Market Porcelain and Its Influence on European Wares* (London: Granada, 1979). There are quite a few lists of permission goods contained in Godden’s book.

to open the China trade to private enterprise. This was partially owing to the limited duration of the various French East India companies and the gap between the second and third companies, and the often strained relations between the court of Versailles and merchants. Schopp shows that Sino-French trade began with private traders to whom the French East India Company leased its monopoly on a limited basis. She also demonstrates that for the years from 1770 to 1785, there was no French East India Company operating in China, and the trade was carried on entirely by private individuals. From 1770 to 1778, forty private French ships arrived at Whampoa, averaging a little more than four ships per year. As Van Dyke points out in his chapter, this influx of private French ships tipped the balance to the point that the private trade began to rival the company trade at Canton.

On the opposite side of these exchanges were, of course, the Chinese merchants. Mok's chapter gives us a lively account of the Chinese shopkeepers in Canton and their uncanny ability to lure customers through their doors. While some foreign visitors saw these men in a rather negative light, Mok shows quite convincingly that the majority of the visitors probably went away pleasantly satisfied with their purchases and shopping experience. Repeat sales, maintenance of quality, competitive pricing and good customer relations were all very important to these entrepreneurs in order to remain competitive. We sometimes forget that the hundred or so Chinese shopkeepers that catered to the foreign community at Canton were also private traders.

In order to pass the days, weeks, and months in Canton and/or Macao, one needed something more than just work. For many men, socializing and companionship were just as important as taking care of business. Lisa Hellman takes a look at the love life of one of the Swedish traders during his stay in China in the 1750s and early 1760s, and at the problems and concerns he faced outside of his trading activities. In her chapter and in Goldstein and Cox's chapters, we find that fortunes begotten from the China trade could disappear just as fast as they were acquired—if the money was not invested wisely.

The continued growth of the China trade in the late 1700s and early 1800s depended on the provision of credit to Chinese merchants and producers; it already was a major factor in the 'debt crisis' of 1755–1760. Jessica Hanser follows some of the private British traders based in India, and their operations in China in the 1760s and 1770s. The British plunder of India gave Englishmen and Scots new money to lend and new impatient attitudes in dealing with debtors. Chinese borrowing was at high rates of interest. High interest and high risk often went hand in hand, and when the latter gained prominence over the former, then private foreign investors were faced with considerable losses. Dealing with these private concerns in Canton was no small matter for Chinese officials, because the foreigners did all they could to mobilize forces to apply pressures on the administration of trade to honour the debts.

After the Americans entered the China trade in 1784, private trade gained a big boost. As Van Dyke shows, with the influx of Americans and the growing number of private ships arriving from India, the balance between company and private ships

turned in favour of the latter from 1788 onwards. Goldstein and Cox both present examples of Americans involved in the China trade. Goldstein shows that Nathan Dunn was so impressed by the Chinese and his experience in Canton that when he returned to the United States, he opened a museum devoted to educating people about China. While this will be old news to persons familiar with the history, the contrast between Dunn in Goldstein's chapter and Warren Delano in Cox's chapter provides a more balanced understanding of the private trading experience in China.

On the one hand, Dunn much disliked the opium trade and continually spoke out against it. On the other hand, Warren Delano made much of his fortune by selling opium to the Chinese. Both of them returned home with a fortune of about \$200,000, but gotten from very different means. The growth of the import of opium, almost always a private trade, was a further major factor leading from the functional mutual accommodation of the 1770s to the disasters of 1839–1842. Cox follows Delano's story up to the First Opium War, and shows how he and his associates dealt with the clamp-down on the opium trade.

What these stories show is that all of these men were welcomed at Canton as private individuals. They traded alongside the large East India companies, with equal access to the market. The products that private traders handled might be restricted in other ports that they visited, which could affect their purchasing decisions in Canton. However, while they were in China they were free to sell and purchase whatsoever they desired, so long as the items were legal. Monopolies that controlled prices, commodities and access to markets were not allowed in Canton, and everyone (except Russians and Japanese who had treaties to trade in other Chinese ports) was guaranteed equal privileges to the trade without prejudice to a person's nationality, religion or ethnicity.

In fact, it could be argued that one of the inherent problems of the trade was that it was not regulated tightly enough. Foreign investors poured money into Canton in order to take advantage of the profits that could be made from the difference between the interest rates inside and outside of China. Many foreigners were investing in the Canton junk voyages to Southeast Asia as well, which could produce profits of upwards of 40 percent per annum. While this money helped to finance growth, and kept the trade moving forward, it led to many Hong merchants going broke. Officials only gained knowledge of these activities after the fact, when they reached crisis proportions, and the government had to step in and deal with the problems that emerged. And because it was so easy to trade in contraband before 1836, with little risk of getting caught, there grew a very substantial trade in opium, which eventually led to war and the collapse of the trade altogether. All of these problems could have been avoided had there been better monitoring of these activities. The many examples that are presented in the chapters that follow show that Canton did indeed live up to its reputation, as Milburn stated:

The commerce of Canton, immense as it is, is carried on with an astonishing regularity, and in no part of the world can business be transacted with so much ease and dispatch to the foreign merchant.⁷

We end our study by looking forward to more of the work of our colleagues represented in this volume, as well as to finding more available data on the private traders. We are just beginning to understand their importance for the financing of the growing Canton trade, and for the intricate personal and cultural exchanges of an age of divergences.

7. William Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, 2 vols. (London: Black, Parry, & Co., 1813; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1999), 2: 473. See also the quote in the 1831–1832 British Parliamentary debates, where it is stated that ‘Greater facilities are given to trade in the port of Canton than in almost any port in the world’, 1831–2 *Parliamentary Debates and Papers. Reports from Committees: eighteen volumes. Appendix to Report from Select Committee*, p. 462. See also the quote at the end of Maria Mok’s chapter. There are quite a few other quotes like this in the Canton trade literature.

French Private Trade at Canton, 1698–1833

Susan E. Schopp

Recent studies of private merchants in the Canton trade (circa 1700–1842) have confirmed the importance of their role in the commerce, which includes not only the eras of the various European East India companies but also periods of exclusively private trade. This chapter explores the forms of private trade in which the French engaged; identifies distinctive features of that trade; places the trade in the overall context of France's China trade; argues that private traders were a legitimate part of Sino-French trade at the very start; and provides brief biographical sketches of traders who were active during the period from 1770 to 1785, when France became the first nation having an East India company to abolish the company's monopoly and to open overseas trade, including that with China, to the private sector.

The Forms of Private Trade

The French private trade at Canton took several different forms. The first, which was distinctive of the first *Compagnie des Indes* ([French East] India Company), consisted of trade conducted by members of the private sector to whom the *Compagnie* leased its China trade monopoly.¹ The second was that conducted by persons who were not in the employ of an East India company and/or not assigned to a Company ship. These merchants may be divided into two groups: legitimate and illegitimate. To the legitimate group belonged individuals who were active during eras when trade was open to the private sector. The illegitimate group consisted of interlopers, who were active during an era when their nation had an East India company, but who lacked the company's permission to trade. They were therefore regarded as violators of the company's monopoly.

The third form of private trade was the 'privilege' trade (known in French as *port-permis*, and not to be confused with the term *privilege*, indicating a trade monopoly). The privilege trade was carried out by persons in the employ of an East India

1. The name of the French East India Company, as it is generally called in English, underwent several changes in the course of its history (for example, *Compagnie française pour le commerce des Indes orientales*, *Compagnie des Indes orientales*, *Compagnie française des Indes*, etc.). All French-to-English translations in this chapter are the author's.

company and sailing on one of the company's ships, and was one of the perquisites (or 'perks') of company ship officers and crew.

The fourth form of private trade was non-Europe (or 'country') trade (*commerce d'Inde en Inde*), which by traditional definition was carried out in regions east of the Cape of Good Hope—that is, in the same regions where the East India company monopolies applied. This geographical limitation was intended to prevent direct competition with the Europe trade carried out by those companies. In actual practice, however, the distinction between Europe and non-Europe trade could be blurry. Depending on the era, this fourth group, whose members were buying and selling on their own account, could include company employees operating with the company's permission, as well as individuals operating independently of an East India company.

1698–1718: Private Sino-French Trade under the First Compagnie

Direct maritime trade between China and western Europe became possible in 1684, when the Kangxi emperor lifted the Qing dynasty's ban on both outbound and incoming seagoing trade.² The Canton trade was subsequently open to all nations (except Russia and Japan), and was governed by regulations established by the Chinese authorities.

The French entered the trade fourteen years later with the voyage of the 500-ton *Amphitrite* to Canton in 1698. The Compagnie's trade monopoly applied to the vast region stretching eastward from the Cape of Good Hope around the globe to Cape Horn—that is, from the Indian Ocean and the seas of East Asia across the Pacific Ocean all the way to the straits of Magellan and Lemaire (the latter just southeast of Tierra del Fuego). The monopoly thus extended to all the major seas and oceans except the Atlantic.³

For the next two decades after *Amphitrite* set sail on her first voyage to China, Sino-French trading voyages were carried out not by the Compagnie itself, but by

2. Gang Zhao, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684–1757* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 1. The lifting of the ban followed the Qing conquest of Taiwan in 1683.

3. The royal edict creating the Compagnie specified the extent of the monopoly: 'Déclaration du Roi portant établissement d'une Compagnie pour le commerce des Indes orientales, 1 Sept 1664': Article 27 'La dite Compagnie pourra naviguer et négocier seule, à l'exclusion de tous nos autres sujets, depuis le Cap de Bonne Espérance, jusque dans toutes les Indes et mers orientales, même depuis le détroit de Magellan et Lemaire, dans toutes les mers du Sud pour le temps de cinquante années consécutives, à commencer du jour que les premiers vaisseaux sortiront du Royaume, pendant lequel temps il est fait très expresses défenses à toutes personnes de faire la dite navigation et commerce à peine contre les contrevenants de confiscation de vaisseaux, armes, munitions et marchandises applicables au profit de la dite Compagnie'. France and Dernis, *Recueil ou collection des titres, édits, déclarations, arrêts, règlements et autres pièces concernant la Compagnie des Indes orientales établie au mois d'août 1664: Précédé d'un Avertissement historique . . . par le sieur Dernis* (Paris: Impr. Boudet, 1755), 1: 60, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1102726?rk=85837;2> (accessed 15 February 2017).

private traders with whom the Compagnie signed limited agreements, thereby leasing its monopoly. There already existed a precedent for a similar practice in French trade in the Indian Ocean. In an effort to ease the financial burden on the Compagnie, in 1681 the Compagnie's mastermind, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, announced the decision to allow private merchants to engage in the East India trade, paying to use Compagnie ships to transport their private-trade goods. The new policy was made official by a judgment dated 6 January 1682, and the Compagnie was given the right to terminate it in five years.⁴ Two private merchants, Robert Pocquelin and Vitry-la-Ville, were the first to take advantage of the new arrangement, sending goods on the two Compagnie vessels *Heureuse* and *Royale* to Surat in the spring of 1682 and paying freight and other fees. When the return cargoes were sold after the ships returned to France, they realized a 300 per cent profit.⁵

For the China voyages, the agreements signed by private merchants with the Compagnie specified the terms of trade, and typically included one or more of the following: the permitted destination (China); the time period during which the voyage must be carried out; the number of voyages allowed; and a provision for payment to the Compagnie of a certain percentage of the proceeds from the sale of the cargo. For example, the 1698 agreement that *Amphitrite's* Jean Jourdan signed with the Compagnie allowed him to fit out two successive voyages. It also required him to take two Compagnie clerks on each of those voyages, and to give the Compagnie 5 per cent of the profits realized from the sale of the trade goods. The agreement also let Jourdan, upon the return of each of the two vessels to France, make use of the Compagnie port facilities at Port-Louis and of its sales rooms at Nantes.⁶

Carrying out the agreements, however, did not always go smoothly. Voyages could be unprofitable; whereas the first voyage of *Amphitrite*, for example, yielded a 50 per cent dividend to investors, the ship's second voyage (1701–1703) incurred a considerable loss.⁷ On other occasions, problems arose when partners found

4. See Paul Kaepelin and François Martin, *Les origines de l'Inde française. La Compagnie des Indes orientales et François Martin: étude sur l'histoire du commerce et des établissements français dans l'Inde sous Louis XIV, 1664–1719* (Paris: A. Challamel, 1908), 134–37. Pocquelin was also a director of the Compagnie, while Vitry-la-Ville became a director sometime between 1677 and 1684.

5. Jules Sottas, *Une escadre française aux Indes en 1690. Histoire de la Compagnie royale des Indes Orientales, 1664–1719* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1905), 72; Kaepelin, *Les origines de l'Inde française*, 139. For a very brief reference in English, see Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1976), 204.

6. For further details pertaining to the agreements, see Philippe Haudrière, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2005), 27–28, and Marion Veyssièrre, 'Les voyages français à la Chine: Vaisseaux et équipages, 1720–1793' (Diplôme d'archiviste-paléographe, Ecole nationale des chartes, Paris, 2000), 68–80.

7. On *Amphitrite's* first voyage to China: E. W. Dahlgren, *Les relations commerciales et maritimes entre la France et les côtes de l'Océan Pacifique (commencement du XVIIIe siècle)* (Paris: H. Champion, 1909), 148, and for the second voyage, see p. 156. The loss amounted to 100,000 écus.

themselves in serious disagreement, as was the case in the 1702 voyages of the *Chancelier* and *Saint-François*. The voyages were sponsored by the Compagnie de la Chine of Paris and the Compagnie de la Chine of Saint-Malo. But while China was the focus for the former, the principal interest of the second, led by the Saint-Malo merchant Noël Danycan, was the Pacific, then known as the ‘mer du Sud’ (Southern sea).⁸ That Danycan established himself in Saint-Malo was not surprising; mariners from that city were instrumental in expanding French knowledge of navigation across the Pacific, and Danycan had founded the Compagnie royale de la mer du Sud (Royal Company of the South Sea) in 1698 to trade along the coasts of Chile and Peru.

Nevertheless, the first Compagnie continued for the duration of its existence to rely on private traders for its China voyages. The last departure from France was that of the *Comte Amelot* in 1715, and the last ship to return to France was that of the *Comte de Toulouse* in 1718.

As in other European East India companies, the French company was subject to restructuring over the course of its history, and the year after the return of the *Comte de Toulouse*, one of the most major reorganizations occurred. By the Edict of Reunion of May 1719, the Compagnie des Indes was subsumed into the Compagnie d’Occident, which was subsequently renamed the Compagnie des Indes and is regarded as the second of the three French East India companies.

1719–1769: Private Sino-French Trade under the Second Compagnie: Privilege and Non-Europe (‘Country’) Trade

The new second Compagnie began to exercise its China trade monopoly within a year of the 1719 reorganization. In March of 1720 it fitted out the vessels *Maure*, *Prince de Conti*, and *Galatée* and sent them to China.

For the next half century, legitimate Sino-French private trade took the form of privilege trade (*port-permis*) and non-Europe trade. The *port-permis* allowed the officers and crew of Compagnie vessels to purchase a certain quantity of goods in China on their own personal account and have them shipped home to Europe at no extra charge.⁹ Although the privilege trade has often been treated as simply a perquisite (or ‘perk’) of the captain and crew of an East India company ship, it constitutes a form of trade that qualifies as private, although its place in the history of that trade has often been overlooked.

8. Dahlgren, *Les relations commerciales et maritimes*, 152–62. For a detailed study of the role of Saint-Malo, see André Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo: une élite négociante au temps de Louis XIV*, 2 vols. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1997).

9. These voyages are those of ‘Europe’ ships; that is, vessels that were fitted out in Europe and that made the round-trip voyage to China and back. They are to be distinguished from ‘country’ ships, which traded within the region(s) stretching eastward from the Cape of Good Hope.

The amount or volume of privilege goods that an individual was allowed was determined by his rank; the higher the rank, the greater the allowance.¹⁰ In the case of the English and initially the Swedish, the allowance was stated in tonnage, while in the case of the French and later of the Swedes, it was stated in sums of money.¹¹ As for the Dutch, their regulations specified, in addition to the types and quantities of goods permitted, the exact dimensions of the chests in which private-trade merchandise was to be carried.¹²

The French Regulations of 1733 (*Règlements touchant la marine de la Compagnie des Indes*), which set forth the rules for the Compagnie's shipping operations, listed the amounts in piastres according to rank. The captain, for example, was allowed 3,300 piastres, while an ensign ad honores was permitted 55.¹³ The piastres had to be purchased in Europe.¹⁴ This required the individual to have the means to buy them 'up front'—a requirement that often necessitated borrowing. In the case of large loans, the interest rate was high, and rose higher during times of war. The lender would later be reimbursed for the funds advanced and enjoyed a share in the profit.¹⁵ The piastres were carried on board the vessel, and upon the ship's arrival at her destination, were turned over to the director of the Compagnie's *comptoir*, or trading station. At Canton, they were turned over to the *Conseil de direction*, or governing council.¹⁶ The Conseil then used the piastres to purchase the desired trade goods, which were subsequently transported home to France at no charge, along with the cargo purchased on the Compagnie's account.¹⁷

The goods were sold, as the regulations required, at the Compagnie's annual sales auction in Lorient, along with the cargo purchased on the Compagnie's account.¹⁸ Afterward, the individual received cash for the sale of his goods; payment was usually made some four months after the sale.¹⁹

10. Livres replaced piastres as the currency quoted in 1739. Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 393. For a comparison with other compagnies, see Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident: le commerce à Canton au XVIIIe siècle 1719–1833*, 3 vols. and Album (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1964), 234.

11. In 1748, the Swedes instituted the practice of 'privilege money'. Christian Koninckx, *The First and Second Charters of the Swedish East India Company (1731–1756): A Contribution to the Maritime, Economic, and Social History of North-Western Europe in Its Relationships with the Far East* (Kortrijk, Belgium: Van Ghemert, 1980), 327.

12. Jaap R. Bruijn, *Commanders of Dutch East India Ships in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, Suffolk [England]: Boydell Press, 2011), Chapter 12.

13. *Règlement touchant la Marine de la Compagnie des Indes, arrêté en l'assemblée d'Administration du 16 septembre 1733* (Paris: L'Imprimerie royale, 1734), 19.

14. Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 392.

15. Philippe Haudrère, email message to author, 26 January 2017.

16. *Règlement touchant la Marine*, 1734, 20.

17. *Règlement touchant la Marine*, 1734, 21.

18. *Règlement touchant la Marine*, 1734, 21.

19. *Règlement touchant la Marine*, 1734, 21.

It was through the *port-permis* that the real money of a voyage could be made, for wages were relatively low. The Regulations of 1733 set the captain's monthly wage, for example, at 100 livres for the period when he was in port on the Compagnie's account immediately before and after the voyage, and at 200 livres while he was at sea; for a first lieutenant, at 60 livres in port and 120 livres at sea; for a chaplain, at 15 livres in port and 30 at sea.²⁰

The *port-permis* system underwent occasional modifications during the 1730s and 1740s, including the amounts allocated.²¹ There also existed for officers a second or 'small' (*petit*) *port-permis* of a much lesser amount. A captain's allowance, for example, was 300—not 3,300—piastres.²² Members of the crew (as opposed to the officers) were entitled to an advance for the purchase of tea in China; the advance was equivalent to approximately two months' wages. Once again, the amount was in proportion to the individual's rank. For a master caulker and a sailmaker, for example, this amounted to 12 piastres each; for a cooper, 8 piastres; for a seaman, 6 piastres; for a soldier, 3 piastres; and for a ship's boy, 2 piastres.²³ The Canton Conseil was charged with handling the purchase of goods, which were subsequently transported to France along with the Compagnie's cargo.²⁴

The third form of legitimate French private trade was the non-Europe (or 'country') trade, which like the privilege trade, was a form of private trade that was practiced not just by the French, but by other East India companies as well. Unlike the privilege trade, however, where the goods were carried on a company's Europe ships, the merchandise was transported on non-Europe ships—that is, on vessels that were active only east of the Cape of Good Hope. Furthermore, the goods were prohibited from being traded in Europe, where they would have constituted direct competition with the company. Thus, the non-Europe trade was a type of regional commerce that was carried out at ports in the Indian Ocean and Asia, but not in Europe. In actual practice, however, the distinction between non-Europe and Europe traders, and between non-Europe and Europe vessels, was sometimes a fuzzy one. This issue is not limited to the French; it was characteristic of other European nations having East India companies, too.²⁵

20. *Règlement touchant la Marine*, 1734, 16–18.

21. Modification was not unique to the French; the privilege system in other nations also underwent changes.

22. *Règlement touchant la Marine*, 1734, 22–23. Officers of vessels sailing to Pondicherry and Bengal were also granted the same amount. On the elimination of the smaller *port-permis*, see Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 393.

23. *Règlement touchant la Marine*, 1734, 23–25.

24. *Règlement touchant la Marine*, 1734, 25.

25. A good example of the blurry line between private trade and company business as illustrated by individuals working for the Swedish East India Company may be found in the activities of two Swedish traders, Johan Abraham Grill and Michael Grubb. See the chapter in this volume by Lisa Hellman.

Regional and coastal trade in Asia predated the arrival of the Europeans, and was thus neither new nor European in origin. The French and other Europeans made use of routes that already existed, while also creating new routes of their own.²⁶ French non-Europe trade in India may have existed, on a very small scale, as early as 1700.²⁷ Furthermore, two French ships coming from Surat are recorded as arriving at Canton [Whampoa] in 1700.²⁸ This, however, pre-dates the era of the second Compagnie. French non-Europe ships arrived at Canton every decade of the second Compagnie's existence, from the 1720s through the 1760s, though with the possible exception of the 1740s, there were only one to two arrivals per decade.²⁹ The majority sailed from Pondicherry, which was the Compagnie's main establishment east of the Cape of Good Hope. A few others arrived from other ports; one came from Isle de France (Mauritius), one from Surat, and one via Siam (Thailand) and Tringano (in Malaysia).³⁰

One of the distinctive developments in the French non-Europe trade occurred in the 1720s. Under the second Compagnie, the Compagnie itself was initially responsible for both the Europe and non-Europe trade.³¹ In 1722, however, financial pressures led it to open its non-Europe trade to its employees, with several restrictions. The employees were forbidden to use Compagnie vessels to ship their goods, and they were prohibited from trading in ports where the Compagnie had a presence or *comptoir*.³² Thus Canton, while open to the Compagnie's Europe trade, was at first off-limits to French private traders.

This restriction was subsequently removed, however, and French non-Europe trade to Canton is considered to have begun with the vessel *Saint-Joseph*, which departed Pondicherry for China in 1724.³³ The management of the French

26. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 769.

27. Lakshmi Subramanian, ed., *The French East India Company and the Trade of the Indian Ocean: A Collection of Essays by Indrani Ray* (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1999), 94–95.

28. Two vessels identified simply as 'French' in British records arrived in China from Surat in August and September 1701, respectively. Susan E. Schopp, 'The French in the Pearl River Delta: A Topical Case Study of Sino-European Exchanges in the Canton Trade, 1698–1840' (PhD diss., University of Macau, 2015), 269; and Paul A. Van Dyke, 'Unpublished ship list'.

29. Manning, *Fortunes à Faire: The French in Asian Trade, 1719–1748* (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Variorum, 1996), 236; Schopp, 'The French in the Pearl River Delta', 269; Van Dyke, 'Unpublished Ship List'.

30. Pondicherry (India) and Alfred Martineau, *Correspondance du Conseil supérieur de Pondichéry et de la Compagnie (1726–1730)* (Pondicherry: Société de l'histoire de l'Inde française, 1920), Vol. 1; Dermigny, *La Chine et l'occident*, 780–81; Manning, *Fortunes à Faire*, 236; Alfred Martineau, 'Quatre ans d'histoire de l'Inde française, 1726–1730', *Revue de l'histoire des colonies françaises* (3rd trimestre 1919): 5–72; Schopp, *The French in the Pearl River Delta*, 242–64; and Van Dyke, 'Unpublished ship list'.

31. Alfred Martineau, *Dupleix et l'Inde française, 1722–1741* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1920), 37.

32. Martineau, *Dupleix et l'Inde française*, 37, 43. Employees were required to ship on Moorish (Indian) or Armenian vessels.

33. The 1723–1724 *Saint-François* may have visited Macao, but what happened to her has yet to

establishment at Pondicherry, known as the governing council (*Conseil supérieur*), was responsible for fitting her out.³⁴ However, in addition to carrying goods on the Compagnie's account, she was allowed to carry goods of private traders as well, as freight.³⁵ She thus served simultaneously as a Compagnie and a private-trade ship.

This arrangement, however, did not prove profitable to the Compagnie, so in 1728 it discontinued the practice. The Europe vessels subsequently resumed departing from, and returning to, France.³⁶ Regional trade between Pondicherry and Canton became the domain of private vessels in the non-Europe trade.

Fluidity of a vessel's identity was not limited to the 1720s, however, as the case of the 1771 *Marquis de Narbonne* showed. She was initially fitted out in France for a voyage to Isle de France (Mauritius) as a Europe ship. But after arriving at Isle de France, she was then consigned on a private basis to Canton, thus becoming a non-Europe vessel.³⁷ At other times, the Europe-to-non-Europe transformation took place in conjunction with overwintering. If a ship failed to depart before the change of the monsoon, she busied herself in regional trade until the monsoon changed again in her favour and the prevailing winds enabled her to make the voyage westward to Europe.

Beginning in the 1760s, the non-Europe trade developed rapidly, and its growth is closely related to the considerable rise of the private Europe trade that occurred in the latter decades of the century.³⁸ This growth coincides with the increasing importance of trade with China, as can be seen when one identifies which routes were dominant in the non-Europe trade before, and then after, the mid-eighteenth century. In the first half of the 1700s, it was possible to identify three routes of importance in non-Europe trade: (1) routes leading westward from India across the Indian Ocean; (2) routes along the coast of India; and (3) routes heading eastward from India to Southeast Asia and, to a lesser degree, to China.³⁹ From the 1760s,

be determined. Manning found only one recorded arrival at Canton in the years 1723–1727 of a French vessel from Pondicherry: that of the *Saint-Joseph*. Manning, *Fortunes à Faire*, 186.

34. Martineau, 'Quatre ans d'histoire', 29–30; Martineau, *Dupleix et l'Inde française*, 43; Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 780; Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 230. Martineau gives the starting date for the Compagnie ships to depart from Pondicherry as 1726, but in fact, the first voyage from Pondicherry, that of the *Saint-Joseph*, departed for Canton in 1724. See Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 780; Manning, *Fortunes à Faire*, 186; and Van Dyke, 'Unpublished ship list'.
35. Martineau, *Dupleix et l'Inde française*, 43; and Manning, *Fortunes à Faire*, 82, and 185.
36. Martineau, *Dupleix et l'Inde française*, 43; and Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 230, and 699.
37. Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France (ANOM): C.1.11, ff 100r–103r; *Bulletin de la Société des archives historiques: Revue de la Saintonge et de l'Aunis* 19, no. 2 (1899): 104; and Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 843, and 856. Dermigny notes that this practice was quite legal.
38. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 770.
39. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 781.

however, the route from India to Canton, which had previously been the least significant, became all-important.

1770–1785: The First Period of Wholly Private Sino-French Trade

In 1769, France became the first of the nations having an East India company to suspend its company's trade monopoly and to open its entire East India and China trade to all French subjects.⁴⁰ This initial period of fully open trade lasted until a short-lived third *Compagnie* was created in 1785. During these fifteen years from 1770 to 1785, the management of the French establishment at Canton assumed several different forms to handle this private trade. Under the *Compagnie*, the *comptoir* had been managed by a *Conseil de direction*, or governing council, that consisted of a head and four supercargoes; they reported to the *Compagnie's* directors in Paris and to the *Compagnie's* shipping director at Lorient. Though not part of the *Conseil*, the Canton staff also included two clerks (*commis*), two junior clerks (*sous-commis*), and a surgeon (*chirurgien*).

After the *Compagnie's* loss of its monopoly in 1769, the *conseil* form of management was carried over to a new *Conseil royal*, or royal council, whose creation was ordered by the French monarch, Louis XV. The members of the new *Conseil*, which consisted of a head and three supercargoes, were one fewer in number than the *Compagnie's* *Conseil* and were also paid lower salaries than their predecessors. The persons who composed the new *Conseil* continued to work as private traders. Their additional staff consisted of three clerks and a surgeon.

The *Conseil* continued to function until 1776, but was plagued with problems; so in February of that year, the king ordered the creation of a consulate to look after French interests.⁴¹ Consulates were not new; indeed, French consular history dates back to twelfth-century trade with Italy.⁴² Furthermore, precedents already existed

40. The trade monopoly was suspended by an act of the *Conseil d'Etat* (Council of State): 'Arrest du Conseil d'Etat du Roi, Concernant le Commerce de l'Inde, Du 13 Août 1769', *Recueil de pièces utiles pour l'instruction de l'affaire de la Compagnie des Indes*. Place of publication not identified: n.p., n.d., <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1042673v?rk=21459;2> (accessed 15 February 2017). The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed increasing challenges to the legitimacy of the various East India companies.

41. See Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve, formerly known as the Archives des Affaires Etrangères (AAE), La Courneuve, France: 15MD Chine 16, f°11r-18v. See also Henri Cordier, 'Le Consulat de France à Canton au XVIIIe siècle', *T'oung Pao* 9 (1908): 50. 'C'est pour suivre le même plan que l'on propose à Sa Majesté d'ériger aussi en Consulat le Conseil de Direction que la Compagnie des Indes entretenoit ci-devant à Canton, et de composer ce Consulat d'un Consul et d'un Chancelier pour rendre la justice à ses sujets, et maintenir la paix et la bonne harmonie entre eux et les sujets des autres puissances de l'Europe qui y font le commerce conformément au projet d'ordonnance cy joint'.

42. Anne Mézin, *Les consuls de France au siècle des Lumières (1715–1792)* (Paris: Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Direction des archives et de la documentation, 1998), 3.

in the form of French consulates in the Levant. An even closer model existed in the French consulate at Surat, north of Bombay.

On 20 October 1776, Pierre-Charles-François Vauquelin, a 24-year veteran of the *Compagnie*, was appointed consul; he arrived in China in the autumn of the following year. In addition to the consul, the staff was to include a vice-consul, a chancellor, and an interpreter, though at any given time, one or two of these offices might not be filled. The consulate continued to exist until 1785, when it was rendered redundant by the creation of the third and last French East India Company.

Meanwhile, in 1779, French trade at Canton was interrupted by France's support of the thirteen North American colonies in their fight for independence from Britain; there were no voyages to China during the years 1779–1782. Trade resumed in 1783 when the French monarch, Louis XVI, was informed that the supply of goods from India and China to the ports of his kingdom was insufficient to meet both the domestic and foreign demand. He authorized a trading expedition under the prominent Saint-Malo merchant Pierre-Jacques Grandclos-Meslé.⁴³ Four ships, supplied by the French navy, departed in the spring of 1783, arriving at Whampoa in late August and early October that same year. An additional four vessels, acting independently and not part of the authorized expedition, also arrived at Whampoa to trade in early September, early October, and mid-November.⁴⁴

Table 3.1 shows the number of French vessels calling at Canton in the first period of wholly private trade (1770–1785). France's commercial activity, including that in the Canton Trade, was disrupted during periods of warfare. This is evidenced in the absence of voyages from 1779 to 1782, when France was supporting the patriot cause in the American Revolution.

Profiles of French Private Traders at Canton, 1770–1785

The French private traders at Canton, like their predecessors in the *Compagnie's* employ, constituted a small, privileged elite. The majority came from Brittany, primarily from Nantes, Saint-Malo, and Lorient, or the surrounding areas.⁴⁵ A number of them, such as Mr. Thimothée or Pierre-Charles-François Vauquelin, had previous experience as employees of the *Compagnie des Indes*; they had already worked as merchants or clerks or served as supercargoes, usually in China, but occasionally in other *Compagnie* locations as well. Thimothée already had some twenty years'

43. Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve, France: 8MD Asie 17, ff°132r–133r, Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat du Roi, concernant le commerce de la Chine, du 2 février 1783 (1). Also reproduced in Henri Cordier, *La France en Chine au dix-huitième siècle: documents inédits publiés sur les manuscrits conservés au dépôt des affaires étrangères, avec une introduction et des notes* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1883): 167–69.

44. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 1021–22.

45. These characteristics often apply to non-Canton French traders, whether private or not, and to employees of the *Compagnie*. See Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 543, for further detail, including a breakdown that includes non-Canton traders.

Table 3.1 Number of French Private Vessels Calling in China by Year, 1770–1785

Year*	Ships	Year	Ships	Year	Ships	Year	Ships
1770	2	1774	7	1778	4	1782	0
1771	3	1775	3	1779	0	1783	8
1772	3	1776	5	1780	0	1784	4
1773	6	1777	7	1781	0	1785	1

* The year shown is the year of arrival at Whampoa.

Sources: British Library (BL): IOR G/12 China Factory Records; SHDL (Service historique de la Défense, Lorient) <http://www.memoiredeshommes.sga.defense.gouv.fr>: *Présence française dans le monde: Compagnie des Indes, Armements des navires* (accessed 2013–2016); Dermigny 1964; Van Dyke, 'Unpublished ship list'; Veysseyre 2000. In addition to the vessels noted above, in 1775, a fourth vessel, the warship *Etoile*, loaded an export cargo at Whampoa. BL: IOR G/12/58, 1775.09.06, pp. 71–72.

experience in the China trade by 1770. Vauquelin, who first came to China in 1749, had also served as a Compagnie administrator of the Isle Bourbon (Réunion) in the Mascarenes.⁴⁶

The French Canton traders typically had a relative, usually a father or uncle, who had ties to the Compagnie or to a related sector. Among those with relatives having ties to the Compagnie was Paul-François Costar, who was the son of a former secretary-general of the Compagnie.⁴⁷ The younger Costar became an assistant to Thimothée in 1771 when the latter was promoted to head of the new royal Conseil; Costar was later appointed chancellor of the consulate after the 1782 resignation of Jean-Charles-François Galbert. Private trader Charles-Henri de Vigny was related to former supercargo Joseph-Julien Duvelaër. Duvelaër had started his career with the Compagnie in Pondicherry in the mid-1720s, and then moved to Canton, where he subsequently spent almost three decades.⁴⁸ His brother, Pierre, also served the Compagnie in India and then China. The experience of the relatives was often, though not necessarily, in China. François Terrien, for example, arrived in Canton in 1774 and had an uncle who was a coffee-plantation owner in Saint-Domingue.⁴⁹

Other private traders had relatives in sectors such as shipping or banking. The brothers Gilles and Hipolyte Sebire offer a prime example. As sons of Saint-Malo merchant Dominique-François Sebire, they were also nephews of Guy Jean Dessaudrais Sebire, one of Saint-Malo's most important merchants and shipowners.

46. Service historique de la Défense, Lorient (SHDL): 2P 34-I.11.

47. ANOM: C.1.13, f°144; also cited in Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 867n1.

48. ANOM: C.1.10, ff°9r–12v, and 28; Martineau, 'Quatre ans d'histoire', 29, and 31; and Haudrière, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 550.

49. Hervé du Halgouët, 'Pages coloniales. Relations maritimes de la Bretagne et de la Chine au XVIIIe siècle. Lettres de Canton.' *Mémoires de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne* 15 (1934): 331–441. See 385–86.

The latter, with his business partner Le Breton du Blessin, fitted out eight vessels that departed France for Canton between 1771 and 1776.⁵⁰

Blood relatives were not the only type of tie that characterized French Canton traders; another was marriage into families with a history of Compagnie employment or activity in related sectors. For example, François Rothe's second wife, Jeanne Hay, was the sister of Canton trader Joseph-Marie Hay and of Compagnie ship officer Michel Hay.⁵¹

A smaller number of traders shared the distinction of belonging to families with Irish Jacobite ties. As Jacobites, the families had supported the cause of James II of England and VII of Scotland, whose support of Roman Catholicism led to his deposition by William of Orange in 1688. At the time, the French monarch was James's cousin, Louis XIV, and a number of the Jacobites sought refuge in France, both then and during subsequent waves of persecution. Examples of traders in this group include François Rothe, his brother Edmond, and the Hays.

The following biographical sketches introduce seven of the individuals who took a major part in Sino-French private trade during the period 1770–1785. The sketches are intended to illustrate the range of experience and backgrounds that private traders brought to Canton, and are presented in alphabetical order by the trader's surname: Julien Bourgogne, Charles de Constant, François and Edmond Rothe, Gilles Sebire, François Terrien, and Mr. Thimothée.

Julien Bourgogne arrived in China in the 1770s.⁵² Bourgogne was a native of Lorient and had connections to the Montigny family, who were also of Lorient, and to whom he was related by blood. The Montignys had a strong presence in the Canton trade, especially in the latter half of the 1700s. François-René de Montigny du Timeur arrived in China in 1745 and remained for over three decades; his younger brother, Montigny de Montplaisir, was there from 1752 to 1783.⁵³ Montigny

50. Additional partners joined Dessaudrais Sebire and Le Breton du Blessin for the two voyages in 1776 and 1777. Paul Paris-Jallobert, *Anciens registres paroissiaux de Bretagne: Saint-Malo*, Fasc. 7, Vol. 8 (Rennes: Plihon et Hommay, 1901), 382; Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 848–50, 863; and Veyssière, 'Les voyages français à la Chine', 104.

51. ANOM: C.1.12, f°37r.

52. Charles-Samuel de Constant and Louis Dermigny, *Les mémoires de Charles de Constant sur le commerce à la Chine* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1964), 48n5, and Marie-Sybille de Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières: l'expérience de Charles de Constant, négociant des loges de Canton* (Paris: H. Champion, 2004), 48n55. Both Dermigny and Vienne believe Bourgogne to have arrived around 1772, while Paul A. Van Dyke stated in email correspondence with the author on 26 January 2017 that the earliest references he found in the British and Dutch records to Bourgogne's presence in China and/or Macao were early 1777. From that year to 1792, Bourgogne appears numerous times in those records. Van Dyke also found that Bourgogne was not mentioned in any of the lists of foreigners in China before 1776. The omission of his name from these lists, which were assembled by the Dutch each year at the end of the season, suggests that Bourgogne may have arrived in China with the ships in late 1776 or 1777.

53. Montigny du Timeur arrived in China on the 1745–1746 *Philibert*; see SHDL: 2P-II.12. See also SHDL: 1P 305 L. 70, f° 95, as well as Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 868. Regarding Montigny de Montplaisir, the younger brother, the dates of his employment in China are

du Timeur also had private-trade interests in both the Ile de France (Mauritius) and the Ile Bourbon (Réunion).⁵⁴

Bourgogne served as an agent for some of the most important figures in the merchant and shipping communities in Lorient. (This type of agent is not to be confused with the *agent royal*, or royal agent, that was later appointed in 1786; see below). Among the individuals who entrusted Bourgogne to handle large sums of money for the purchase of trade goods at Canton were François Rothe (below) and Foucaud, two major fitters-out of ships employed in the French Canton trade. Both men had been clients of Montigny du Timeur, who together with Charles-Henri Vigny, owned a trading firm in Canton and served as agents for most of the major shipowners and merchants in Lorient and Saint-Malo, including Dessaudrais Sebire, Beaugeard, François Rothe, and Foucaud.⁵⁵ In 1777, Montigny returned to France to live. He ultimately left his share of the management of the trading company to Bourgogne, who inherited his clients in France and thus became their agent.⁵⁶

In addition to his activities as agent, Bourgogne was among those who lent money to Hong merchants in Canton; his name appears on the list that Philippe Vieillard, who was then the French consul, drew up in 1785 of individuals who had lent money to Canton Hong merchants.⁵⁷ Bourgogne's activities extended beyond the French community, as his dealings with the Imperial Company in 1783 show. The Imperial Company, or *Société impériale asiatique de Trieste et Anvers*, was founded in 1775 by William Bolts and Charles de Proli. Though nominally Austrian, it served as a cover for a multitude of private traders (in this case, interlopers) who represented a range of nationalities, especially British. It is not to be confused with the earlier Ostend Company (1722–1732), although the two are related. The multilingual Bolts was a former employee of the English East India Company in India, and worked for the Company for about a decade (1759–1768) before resigning and then being expelled; he subsequently became a private trader.⁵⁸ Proli was a banker from Antwerp; his father, who was also a banker, had been one of the backers of the Ostend Company. The short-lived Imperial Company (1775–1785) sent eight vessels to Canton in the years from 1779 to 1785. One of them was the *Prince de Kaunitz*, which was formerly the French merchantman *Superbe*; the *Superbe* had made a trading voyage to Canton in 1774.⁵⁹

given as 1752–1783 in Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 550n80. See also SHDL: 1P 305 L.70, f°95. Montigny de Montplaisir subsequently worked for the third Compagnie des Indes in the late 1780s; see Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 868n4.

54. ANOM: C.1.11, f 67.

55. For further detail, see Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 871.

56. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 874.

57. ANOM: C.1.15, ff 69–70; and Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 899.

58. N. L. Hallward, *William Bolts: A Dutch Adventurer Under John Company* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 4, 67, and 93.

59. There were two vessels bearing the name *Prince de Kaunitz*; this is the larger of the two, rated at 1200 or 1300 tons. Dermigny gives the figure of 1200 tons for the larger *Kaunitz*, and 500

The *Prince de Kaunitz* arrived at Canton in 1779 with a handful of inexperienced individuals, including the adolescent Charles de Constant, to carry out trade; they turned to Julien Bourgogne for assistance.⁶⁰ In 1780, Bourgogne joined forces with a Scot, John Reid, to form a private-trading business in Canton.⁶¹ Reid was the younger brother of Andrew Reid, who had served as supercargo on a previous voyage of the *Prince de Kaunitz*.

Charles de Constant was born in Geneva; his family members were French Huguenots who had fled France for the Netherlands and Switzerland, respectively, in the sixteenth century. His entry into the China trade came through an uncle who worked for the Imperial Company. The uncle obtained an appointment as an apprentice for the young Charles, who arrived in Canton for the first time in 1779 and spent most of the next thirteen years there. During his first two periods of residence (1779–1782 and 1783–1786), he was associated with the Imperial Company, and in the third (1789–1793), with the French.

In the latter post, he was the last of the French company's employees to serve at Canton in that company's long history. His voyages to and from China reflect the multinational nature of his experience, for as has already been noted, he arrived in Canton for his first stay in China on the Imperial Company's ship *Prince de Kaunitz*. Then in 1786, at the end of his second period of residence in China, he sailed on the English East India Company ship *Atlas* to return to Europe. In 1789, he returned to China on the French ship *Dauphin*, and returned home for the final time on the *Etrusco*, which was initially registered under the Tuscan flag.

Lively, sociable, and quick with a pen, de Constant recorded his observations of people, places, cultures, and customs, as well as of trade goods and business practices. In the latter, his experience working for the Imperial company as well as for the French gave him a wider knowledge than employment in just one company would have allowed.

Although the commercial guide to Canton that he envisaged writing was never realized, his correspondence to family and friends, and as well as his notes and observations on business, contain a wealth of information that sheds light on life in the Canton hong and on trade between China and western Europe during most of the years between 1779 and 1793. His descriptions of his colleagues are valuable, despite—or perhaps because of—their subjective nature, as few such personal details exist elsewhere.⁶² Regarding Julien Bourgogne, for example, whom he considered a

tons for the smaller one, while Veyssi re notes 1300 tons for the *Superbe*. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 965 and 967; and Veyssi re, 'Les voyages fran ais   la Chine', 274.

60. De Constant and Dermigny, *Les m moires de Charles de Constant*, 1964: 342.

61. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 968.

62. Two other sources of comments on individual traders are the personal correspondence of Fran ois Terrien (Archives d partementales de Loire-Atlantique, Nantes: E 1245) and of Pierre-Louis-Achille de Robien (Archives d partementales des Yvelines, Montigny-le-Bretonneux: E 3056).

good friend, he notes that he was very helpful and was well regarded by the other Europeans in Canton, but that he had the tiring ability to talk without saying anything. He also noted that Bourgogne consumed large quantities of tobacco that took a long time to prepare.⁶³ The correspondence also reveals transformations over time in de Constant's attitude toward China. The hope and sense of adventure and discovery that shine through his early letters gradually gave way to disappointment, criticism, and resentment of China and her people.

François Rothe provides a notable example of a trader who rose from an entry-level position with the Compagnie to its highest ranks, and who subsequently made a successful transition to private trade in the period from 1770 to 1785. His life illustrates how a trader could capitalize on his earlier experience with the Compagnie and on his connections to the shipping and banking sectors.

Born in Wexford, Ireland, around 1700, Rothe arrived in France by 1730, having fled Ireland as a Jacobite. His family belonged to a branch of one of the most eminent in the Irish aristocracy.⁶⁴ He entered the service of the Compagnie des Indes in 1730, starting out as a clerk and soon rising in rank. In 1735 he became a principal merchant at Canton, a post he retained until 1739. In that year, he sailed home on the Compagnie ship *Penthièvre*,⁶⁵ and then in November married Catherine MacHugh.⁶⁶ He returned to Canton on the 1741 *Duc de Chartres* as a supercargo.⁶⁷ From 1741 to 1754, he was a first supercargo, and served as the head of the Canton Conseil.⁶⁸ He had ties to the Indian Ocean private trade network as well; his 1753 voyage to Pondicherry was only one of a number of intra-Asian voyages that he made.⁶⁹

After returning to France to live in 1754, he became a *directeur surnuméraire* in charge of the Compagnie's sales at Lorient.⁷⁰ In 1758, he remarried; his new wife was Jeanne Anne Hay, the sister of the Canton traders Michel and Joseph Hay.⁷¹ Two years later, in 1760, he was named director of the Port of Lorient, and served in that capacity until 1764. When the Compagnie lost its trade monopoly in 1769,

63. De Constant and Dermigny, *Les mémoires de Charles de Constant*, 48.

64. Patrick Clarke de Dromantin, *Les réfugiés jacobites dans la France du XVIIIe siècle: L'exode de toute une noblesse "pour cause de religion"* (Pessac: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2005), 446.

65. SHDL: 2P 28-I.13.

66. The marriage ended with her passing ten years later, in 1749. Thierry Claeys and Yves Durand, *Dictionnaire biographique des financiers en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Editions SPM, 2009), 2: 913–15.

67. SHDL: 2P 29-II.20.

68. ANOM: E 358.

69. ANOM: C.1.10, f°81r.

70. ANOM: E 358.

71. Claeys and Durand, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 2: 921; Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 361; and Haudrière, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 136. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 361n10 asks whether the captain of the *Gloire* was part of the Hay family; ANOM: E 358 provides an affirmative reply.

he quickly became active in the private sector, fitting out the ships *Dauphin* in 1773, *Superbe* in 1774, and the *Sévère* in 1775.⁷²

Rothe's younger brother, *Edmond Rothe*, arrived in France in 1730 and spent ten years in Paris as well as several months in Spain conducting business.⁷³ In 1743 he sailed to Canton, where he remained until 1758.⁷⁴ He served as supercargo on the 1770 *Pondichéry*, which was fitted out by his brother, François. Like his brother, he obtained French nationality. He died in 1772.⁷⁵

Gilles Sebire was a member of a well-connected family of merchants from Saint-Malo. The second of seven sons of merchant Dominique-François Sebire, he had two brothers, Hipolyte and Jean-Baptiste, who were also traders at Canton.⁷⁶ Their uncle, Guy-Jean Dessaudrais Sebire, was one of Saint-Malo's most prominent merchants, and between 1771 and 1776 fitted out eight vessels for Canton with his business partner Alain Le Breton de Blessin.⁷⁷

Despite his connections, Gilles Sebire was not spared the consequences of changes in alliances between merchants and traders acting as their agents. In 1777, as was noted in connection with Julien Bourgogne (above), the merchant Montigny returned to France from Canton.⁷⁸ Montigny had previously assigned his share of the profits of the cargo of the two ships *Duc de Fitz-James* and *Pondichéry* to the six clerks in the Canton comptoir; among them were Sebire and François Terrien. When Montigny suddenly changed his mind and assigned his share to one of his relatives, Bourgogne, Gilles Sebire, and the other clerks found themselves written out of the agreement—and thus the profits—altogether.

Efforts to recover their shares proved unsuccessful. Sebire returned to France later that same year. At the time of his departure, he was one of three French nationals living in the French hong.⁷⁹

He returned to China in 1783, making the outbound voyage from France on the Imperial Company's ship *Comte Zinzendorf*.⁸⁰ Traveling on the same vessel was Charles de Constant, who was Gilles's junior by a little more than a decade.⁸¹ During

72. Rothe fitted out the *Superbe* and the *Sévère* with partners René Foucaud and Pierre Bernier.

73. Claeys and Durand, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 2: 914.

74. Claeys and Durand, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 2: 914; and GeneaNet, Prométhée: 'Dans ses lettres de naturalisation (A.N. P. 2595 ff°123–25), il dit être arrivé en France en 1730, avoir vécu à Paris 1730–40, avoir fait du commerce en Espagne, avoir embarqué en 1743 avec son frère François directeur de la Compagnie des Indes pour faire le commerce en Chine 1743–58. De retour en France fin 1758'. <http://gw.geneanet.org/pierfit?lang=fr&p=edmond&n=de+rothe> (accessed 15 January 2017).

75. <http://gw.geneanet.org/pierfit?lang=fr&p=edmond&n=de+rothe> (accessed 15 January 2017).

76. Paris-Jallobert, *Anciens registres paroissiaux*, 382.

77. They were joined by additional partners in fitting out the last two vessels. See Alain Romain, *Saint-Malo au temps des négriers* (Paris: Karthala, 2001), 210.

78. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 873.

79. Cordier, 'Le Consulat de France', 58.

80. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 56.

81. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 56; de Constant and Dermigny, *Les mémoires de*

the voyage, the more experienced Gilles readily tutored the younger man in mathematics, geography, and accounting, knowledge that the latter would need in the trade at Canton.⁸² In 1785, just two years later, the then-acting French consul in Canton, Philippe Vieillard, proposed Sebire as his deputy, but the position went instead to Paul-François Costar.⁸³

François Terrien offers an example of a young neophyte in the private trade. He arrived in Canton for the first time at the age of 21 in late 1774, with no prior experience working for the *Compagnie des Indes*. Unlike Gilles Sebire, who was only two years his senior and who came to Canton the same year, Terrien lacked Sebire's strong personal connections, although he did have a relative who was active in French trade in the Caribbean.⁸⁴ A number of Terrien's letters home to his cousin Augustin Dubréseuil, who was his confidant, have survived, and they reveal a young man plagued with homesickness and preoccupied with the difficulties of making a fortune. His chief pleasure in Canton was reading the books that his cousin sent him from France.

To make the fortune that lured both private and company traders to China, a trader needed funds, whether his own or borrowed from others, in order to purchase goods. Family and close friends were one source; members of the business community and shipping sector were another. Terrien had arrived in Canton with 2,510 *livres* in silver and goods, and quickly began to worry that the sum would not last him to the end of the year (1775) for living expenses, much less to build the basis of a fortune.⁸⁵ He was not alone in writing home and asking for money to invest; the need for funds, coupled with specific requests for money, were a recurring theme in personal correspondence. In 1768, for example, *Compagnie* trader Pierre-Louis-Achille de Robien commented in a letter to his brother, 'Who here [in Canton] has this amount of his own? Very few. Almost everyone works with money other than their own and makes only a 5% profit. One must have a considerable amount of money for this modest sum to produce significant wealth'.⁸⁶ In December 1789, Charles de Constant wrote home, 'I wish that you could get me some money', and then went on to explain how to go about sending it to him.⁸⁷

Charles de Constant, 109.

82. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 56.

83. Cordier, 'Le Consulat de France', 65.

84. Du Halgouët, 'Pages coloniales', 386.

85. Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique: E 1245. Letter dated Canton, 1 January 1775. 'J'ai apporté avec moi 2.510 livres en argent et en effets et je ne sais pas si cela me suffira pour me défrayer jusqu'à la fin de 1775'.

86. Archives départementales des Yvelines: E 3056. Letter dated Canton, 6 January 1768. 'Quel est celui qui a icy cette somme en propre? Très peu de personnes. Presque tous travaillent sur d'autres fonds que les leurs et ne retirent sur les dits fonds que 5 p%. Il faut avoir de bien gros fonds à faire valoir pour que ce modique somme puisse vous faire un capital considérable'.

87. De Constant and Dermigny, *Les mémoires de Charles de Constant*, 77. Dated 6 December 1789. 'Je désire bien que vous ayés réussi à me procurer quelque argent'.

As Terrien discovered, in addition to funds, a trader needed supporters, who were often major shipowners or fitters-out or merchants from Lorient or Saint-Malo. The more important the backer, the more lucrative the opportunities a trader was likely to have after arriving in Canton, while young men arriving with lesser backing scrambled to find additional funds to invest. Terrien explained in a letter to his cousin shortly after he arrived in Canton:

The supercargoes are obligated in some way to receive the young men whom the ship-owners send them. Now you know that a nephew of Mr. Dessaudrais Sebire arrived last year. Mr. de Vigny brought with him a young man who had been mentioned to him before he knew that I was persisting with my plan to go to China. Mr. de Robien, whose home I wouldn't enter for all the gold in the world, has two young people, one of whom is a protégé of Mr. Rothe, and the other was left to him by Mr. Dumont [a former Canton supercargo].⁸⁸

Following a pattern that was common among both Compagnie employees and private traders, Terrien spent more than one period of residence in China. He made a trip home to France in the late 1770s, then in 1783 returned to Canton, where he remained after the creation of the third Compagnie des Indes in 1785. But unlike most of his compatriots, he never returned home to France to live. In 1787, he committed suicide in Canton. Charles de Constant attributed his death to the miseries that Terrien suffered as a result of the temporary bouts of insanity and the accompanying unreasonable behaviour of Mr. Desmoulins, who at the time was the head of the French *comptoir* at Canton.⁸⁹

Mr. *Thimothée* served in Canton under both the second Compagnie and as a private trader.⁹⁰ His brother served for 25 years as head of the Compagnie's archives in France, while his nephew came to Canton in 1768 as an *enfant de langue* to learn Chinese.⁹¹ At the time of the suspension of the Compagnie's monopoly in 1769, Thimothée was a member of the Canton *Conseil de direction* (governing Council). He was the only member of that Conseil to stay on and to become a member of the new *Conseil royal*, and became head of the latter in 1772.⁹²

His years with the Compagnie seem to have been relatively uneventful. This changed, however, in the early 1770s, when the Conseil found itself plagued with

88. Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique: E 1245. Letter dated Canton, 1 January 1775. 'Les supercargues sont obligés en quelque façon de recevoir les jeunes gens que les armateurs leur envoient: or, vous saurez que l'année passée il vint un neveu de M. Dessaudrais Sebire. M. de Vigny avait amené avec lui un jeune homme dont on lui avait parlé, avant qu'il sut que je persistais dans le projet de passer en Chine. M. de Robien, chez qui je n'eusse pas entré pour tout l'or du monde, a deux jeunes gens dont l'un est protégé de M. Rothe et l'autre lui a été laissé par M. Dumont. Voilà déjà quatre jeunes gens fort au fait'. The nephew was Gilles Sebire.

89. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 275.

90. His surname appears in the French documents with variant spellings ('Thimothée' and 'Thimotée').

91. ANOM C.1.11, f°47r; C.1.13, f°4r, and ff°40r–41r.

92. ANOM: C.1.11, ff° 87v–89r.

dissension, which arose largely from jealousy on the part of one of its members, de Robien.⁹³ In November of 1774, Thimothée resigned, and left Canton the following January to return to France.

Two years later, when the Canton consulate was created in 1776, Thimothée was appointed consul. But he turned down the position, citing among his reasons the low remuneration, and noting that he knew from experience that he would need to draw from his own fortune to fully cover the necessary expenses.⁹⁴ In 1769, the last year that the Compagnie des Indes was still in possession of its trade monopoly, the salary of the head of the Compagnie's Canton Conseil was 12,000 livres.⁹⁵ Since then, however, salaries had gone steadily downward, and the amount now being offered the consul was just half of what it had been in 1769: namely, 6,000 livres.⁹⁶ It was, nevertheless, slightly higher than the 4,000 livres that the head of the royal Conseil had been offered in 1771.⁹⁷

So in 1776, Thimothée declined the appointment of consul. The position was subsequently filled by Pierre-Charles-François Vauquelin, who served until his death in 1782. The post once again became vacant, and Thimothée applied for it. But his application was unsuccessful, and his career in the China trade was effectively over.⁹⁸

Post-1785: The End of the Compagnie and the Return to Private Trade

In 1785, to the dismay of the private sector, a new Compagnie des Indes was created. But the new company was short-lived. In April 1790, an act of the Assemblée nationale (French National Assembly) stripped it of its trade monopoly, and three years later, in 1793, the Compagnie itself was abolished.

Meanwhile, in 1786, the year following the creation of the third Compagnie, the king ordered that an *agent royal*, or royal agent, be posted at Canton, along with an interpreter. The royal agent is not to be confused with the Canton-based commercial agents (such as Julien Bourgogne and others) of the period from 1770 to 1785, who acted on behalf of merchants and shipowners in France. The function of the royal agent was to 'be limited to informing me [the French monarch] of what goes on in China in political affairs and in commercial matters, and to carry out the orders that will be given to him'.⁹⁹ The agent was completely separate from the Compagnie.

93. ANOM: C.1.12, ff°87r-91r, and 111r-149r.

94. Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve: 8MD Asie 16, f°83; and f°186.

95. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 866.

96. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 867n5. See also Cordier, 'Le Consulat de France', 55.

97. ANOM: C.1.11, f°110v.

98. In the end, no consul was appointed; instead, Philippe Vieillard was named vice-consul. Cordier, 'Le Consulat de France', 59.

99. The king's instructions concerning the agent were as follows: 'Son service se bornera à me rendre compte de ce qui se passera en Chine tant pour les affaires politiques que pour celles

The abolition of the third Compagnie in 1793 marked the end of trade under a French East India Company. Subsequent French trade with China once again became, and this time remained, private. The return to private trade was delayed, however, by domestic events in France and the Napoleonic wars. With the exception of three non-Europe vessels that called at Canton in 1802–1803, Sino-French trade was halted for the next two-and-a-half decades (1793–1818).¹⁰⁰

Trade resumed in 1818 with the voyage of *Fils de France*, an 810-ton ship that was owned by the merchant Thomas Dobrée of Nantes.¹⁰¹ There then followed a period of seven years (1819–1825) with no voyages. In 1826, however, the *Fils de France* came once again to Canton. Her arrival, along with that of a second vessel the same year, was soon followed by additional voyages. Between 1826 and the end of the Canton Trade period in 1842, fifty French merchant vessels called in China.¹⁰² The number of arrivals per year ranged from one in 1831, 1832, and 1834 to as many as eight in 1833, and included at least one ship—the *Héros* from Le Havre—that circumnavigated the globe.¹⁰³

Conclusion

Private trade played a legitimate and important role in the French Canton trade at the very start, when merchants in the private sector were responsible for French commercial voyages to China. During the years of the second Compagnie des Indes (French East India Company), when the Compagnie ceased leasing its China-trade monopoly and took over the responsibility for voyages to Canton, private trade was practiced in the form of privilege (*port-permis*) and non-Europe ('country') trade. The period of wholly private trade that followed the suspension of the second Compagnie's monopoly in 1769 marked the first time that a nation possessing an East India company suspended that company's monopoly and opened trade in China and elsewhere to the private sector. The large number of merchant voyages from France to Canton during this fifteen-year period (1770–1785) shows that private

du commerce, et à exécuter les ordres qui lui seront adressés.' Quoted in Henri Cordier, 'La mission de M. le chevalier d'Entrecasteaux à Canton en 1787: d'après les archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères'. In *Bulletin de géographie historique et descriptive* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1911), 3: 411–12.

100. The three vessels were *Diana*, *Saint-Jacques*, and *Paix*.

101. Archives municipales de Nantes: 8Z 403–11, 502, and 508.

102. BL: IOR G/12/241, G/12/245, G/12/247, G/12/251, and G/12/254; *The Canton Register* 1836.02.16, 1836.08.09, 1836.09.27, 1836.10.25, 1836.12.13, 1837.09.05, 1837.09.19, 1837.10.03, 1837.10.17, 1837.10.31, 1837.11.14, 1837.11.21, 1837.12.05, 1838.10.30, 1838.11.20, 1839.01.29, 1839.02.12, 1839.04.16, 1839.07.02, 1839.10.22, 1840.06.09, 1840.09.22, 1840.11.03, 1840.12.08, 1841.02.16, 1841.03.23, 1841.10.12, 1841.12.14, 1841.12.28, 1842.01.04, 1842.02.22, 1842.07.12, and 1842.11.29. In addition to the 50 merchantmen, there were three arrivals of French frigates between 1838 and 1842.

103. Edmond Le Netrel, *Voyage of the Héros: Around the World with Duhaut-Cilly in the Years 1826, 1827, 1828 & 1829*, trans. Blanche Collet Wagner (Los Angeles: Glen Dawson, 1951).

traders were capable of taking advantage of the new opportunities offered. In the number of vessels sent to China, they rivalled, or even surpassed, the Compagnie's record for years when France was not at war. Although a third Compagnie was created in 1785, its abolition eight years later (1793) marked the end of the era of the company model. Private trade, and the individuals who conducted it, proved to play a significant role as a catalyst in the changes of attitudes toward, and conditions of, trade—an evolution of thought and of trading patterns that was a major factor in the demise of the East India companies, not only in France but in other European nations as well.

Where the Chinese government was concerned, it was unimportant whether the French nationals came as representatives of the Compagnie or as individuals seeking a fortune of their own. Provided that they were engaged in some form of legitimate trade, they were allowed to go upriver and to stay at Canton as long as they had a ship in port.

Conclusion

Paul A. Van Dyke

When we look at each of the individual chapters in this volume, it is often difficult to envision the importance of these private traders to the commerce as a whole. For the most part, their operations were miniscule compared to the large volumes of goods that each of the European East India companies purchased in China annually. The importance of the companies to the trade is much easier to qualify and quantify owing to the massive volumes of records that they left behind for us to examine. It is thus understandable that those enterprises have commanded most of the attention of scholars in the past; their work now constitutes many dozens of publications. It was, in fact, necessary for those studies to be done first, before we could begin to understand the roles that private investors played in the trade.

Taken as a whole, the micro studies presented here reveal some very significant contributions. First and foremost is that all of the men were welcomed in China regardless of the size or volume of their trade. As several of the chapters have shown (Hanser, Van Dyke, Schopp, and Hellman), China's open policy made it possible for private traders to channel large amounts of foreign capital into that market. Even though some of the companies such as the EIC tried to limit these private exchanges in Canton, it proved impossible to stop them because Qing officials guaranteed that all private traders would have access to the market that was equal to what the companies enjoyed. Despite the EIC's objection to these private traders, as time progressed, the large companies—like the Hong merchants—became increasingly more dependent on investments from these individuals to finance their operations in China.

As Mok shows in her chapter, the Chinese shopkeepers also had great freedom in carrying out their trade. The market was very competitive, which meant that quality of service and products became even more important over time, as the trade continued to grow. While it has been shown in recent studies that the Chinese Hong merchants were discouraged by Qing policies from leaving Canton and from expanding their operations abroad—which probably affected shopkeepers as well—those men nonetheless had great freedom to carry out their trade in China. The day-to-day business was left entirely up to the individual proprietors to manage, with little or no interference from government. Merchants might be asked to make

contributions to officials from time to time, but how they conducted their businesses on a daily basis was left entirely up to them. Government officials only interfered in the conduct of trade if complaints emerged from customers, such as being cheated or treated unfairly.¹

With these chapters being added to the historiographical literature, we can now say unequivocally that all of the East India companies, including the French, English, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Ostend, Imperial, and Prussian would have been very hard pressed had they not had access to private capital to finance their operations. Their trade with China would have certainly been much hindered without those investments, to the point that fewer ships would have been dispatched. Some of the smaller companies would probably have quit the trade much earlier without the investments from private individuals. As those private interactions grew, China became the avenue through which Asian-based Europeans sought to transfer their funds back to Europe. If China had restricted private traders' access to its market as the large monopolistic companies had done in the ports they controlled in India and elsewhere, the flow of money across Asia and between Asia and Europe, would have been greatly hindered.

Although it has been argued that the high interest rates in China were detrimental to the Hong merchants and possibly to the sustainability of the trade in the long term, the attraction of earning profits from arbitrage channelled an enormous amount of foreign money into China, which in turn financed its growth.² Thus, in addition to the companies and the Hong merchants, we could rightfully say that the Canton trade in general would have turned out very differently without those private contributions. While there was money to be made in the commodity and usury sectors, not everyone came out successful in the long term. Hanser shows how dozens of Englishmen lost on their investments with Hong merchants. However, for many of those men the losses they incurred probably did not ruin them (even though they may have claimed this outcome). Many of the losers were undoubtedly hard pressed owing to the Hong merchants' inability to repay their money, but because it was common practice not to invest all of one's funds in one source, the losses were likely to have been only a fraction of their total wealth.

Several examples in this volume show that a fortune could be lost just as quickly as it took to gain it. Grubb, Dunn, and Delano all lost their fortunes after they left China, owing to unprofitable investments and other factors. Some men, such as

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1. For the relationship between the Qing government and the Chinese Hong merchants and shopkeepers, see Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade*, Vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011); and Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Success and Failure in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade*, Vol. 2 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016).
 2. For many examples of how high interest rates in China contributed to the growth of the Canton trade, see Van Dyke's books. Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005; reprint, 2007); Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, Vols. 1 and 2.

Basilion, Metree, and de Constant, lost their fortunes as the result of war; others faced loss from the risks of sea, as shown in Hellman's chapter. Thus, even though there was money to be made in the China trade, there were risks involved, which might vary from one year to the next depending on the political situation in Europe and/or Asia at the time.

Schopp shows in her chapter that expenses could be very high in Canton, which meant that a large amount of money was needed up front, before one could engage directly in the trade. Van Dyke shows many individuals going to China from India and elsewhere, some of whom only had small amounts of goods to trade. But it needs to be kept in mind that those persons also needed money up front, over and above their investments in trade goods, in order to pay the rents and living expenses in Macao and Canton and their passages to and from China. If they ran short of money, then they might have to borrow from one of the foreign commission merchants operating in China until they sold their goods and acquired more funds. Or they might ask friends or relatives outside of China to send them money, in which case there would be a long delay.

Wills, Goldstein, and Hellman show us that a lot of non-commercial activity emerged as a by-product of the trade. There were a great number of intellectual exchanges with China. European botanists were eager to study the plants of Asia, and did much experimenting with different varieties. While the Qing government's openness to outsiders was predominantly commercial in nature at this time, and was not extended to missionaries, there were religious men who were employed in various aspects of the trade. The Swedish chaplain Pehr Osbeck wandered the countryside in his spare time to document the plants and animals he encountered; the American Nathan Dunn ordered and received a huge collection of artefacts concerning Chinese life and culture, which had nothing to do with the trade; the Swedes Grubb and Grill nurtured female companionship in Macao; and throughout the chapters we see a lot of socializing going on between groups and between foreign traders and Hong merchants. There were also excursions to the famed Fa-ti gardens and boat races in which both foreigners and Chinese participated. All of these activities point to a very lenient administration that allowed for pleasure and interactions outside of the day-to-day activities of trade. While the restrictions on the foreign community could vary from one year to the next and/or from one official to the next, on the whole, Qing officials understood that there needed to be room for socializing in order to make the trade viable in the long term.

As far as the experience of shopping in Canton is concerned, Mok shows us that the overwhelming majority of the foreign customers probably left China very satisfied with their purchases. While some men such as John Francis Davis had a rather low opinion of the Chinese shopkeepers, this was not the view of other customers. The great expansion of the trade itself and the increase of foreign visitors over time is testimony to Canton's popularity in global commerce. There were plenty of other places in the world where those men could go, but they invariably returned to

Canton. In fact, Mok shows us that shopkeepers tried to generate goodwill among patrons in order to build a good reputation within the foreign community and thereby increase their pool of repeat-customers. The Qing government's open policy of ensuring that everyone had equal access to the market (with the exception of the Russians and Japanese), combined with the accommodating and competitive spirit of the Cantonese merchants, earned the city the reputation of being a place where 'there is no part of the world where cargoes may be sold and bought, unloaded and loaded, with more business-like speed and activity'.³

It is these positive aspects of the trade that we have heard so little about from the history books of the twentieth century, mostly because that narrative has often been drowned out by the business activities and complaints of the large companies, by discussions of opium smuggling, and by the many reasons for the Opium Wars. There are exceptions, but previous scholars in general were not interested in what made the trade successful, but rather what led to its decline.⁴ This approach—perhaps unintentionally but invariably—encased the history within a negative narrative. When failure is your ultimate goal, then you automatically look for all of the contributing factors that brought that about, such as unfair policies, overbearing restrictions, arrogant and greedy officials, unjust exactions, etc., all of which generate a negative impression. There is no room for discussions of positive things with such an approach, because those aspects do not support the desired outcome.

When we look at the individual and private experiences within the commerce, however, we begin to see a much different picture. The policies and practices of Qing officials' involved in managing the trade and the foreign community in Canton often showed great leniency and latitude for compromise. Hoppo, governor generals and other top officials in Canton might make use of harsh words and maintain strict demeanours in order to give the outward appearance of being an authoritarian ruler, but many of their actions (or inactions) show incredible patience when dealing with problems arising from the trade and/or within the foreign community. While there were some very strict officials who tried to force the foreigners into compliance such as Commissioner Lin Zexu, he and others like him were not representative of the Qing administration as a whole. From all of the examples presented here and in other recent studies that have been done on the trade, we see that forbearance was an underlying factor influencing the implementation of many of Qing's policies. This theme has only recently come to light and is one that we are only now beginning to understand.⁵

3. *The Saturday Magazine* (June 1838), Supplement, p. 250, quote by Mr. Macculloch.

4. For example, Christiaan Jörg's publication tends to be very positive, and he is not the only one. For one example, see Christiaan J. A. Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), which has some very lively accounts of social interaction in Canton.

5. For example, it has been recently shown that the management of the foreign factories in Canton actually became much more lenient over time, with foreigners purchasing, owning,

Cox shows us with his example of Warren Delano that contrary to what we normally read in the history books (that the trade was very restrictive), Qing policy may have been too lax in the management of the trade. There was so much freedom to engage in all types of commerce, including smuggling, that a huge contraband business emerged that ran parallel to the legal trade. As Hanser, Goldstein, Hellman, and Cox show, there were so few risks involved in trading opium before 1836, that many people were attracted to it. Officials on all levels were involved in opium. If officials had monitored and regulated the day-to-day transactions more closely, they could have been more successful in curbing these illegal transactions, before they reached crisis proportions.

Dunn refrained from trading in opium and returned home with a fortune that was about equivalent to what Warren Delano had earned from his opium business. If the risks of getting caught had been greater, Delano would likely have also turned to a more legitimate commerce. Moral convictions only worked with a small minority of traders. The majority of them needed something else to keep them away from smuggling, such as high risks that threatened profits and/or a high probability of getting caught, being charged and punished. Before 1836, there were no such effective deterrents in place.

While these chapters only represent a tiny fraction of the hundreds of private traders who ventured to China to try their luck in the trade, they nonetheless bring us one step closer to filling a void in our understanding. We now know that the private traders were central to both the success of the companies and to the Canton trade in general. Of course, they were also central to its eventual downfall and demise as well. As more studies are done on these men, we will likely learn many more new things about their interactions and the roles they played in the rise and fall of that commerce.

renovating and/or constructing their own buildings from the ground up. By the early 1800s, foreigners were even opened hotels and saloons in the foreign quarter to service the foreign community. Although all of this activity was illegal, it was tolerated because it helped to maintain peace and harmony within the foreign community. In the first half of the eighteenth century, such activities were unthinkable, but by the late eighteenth century, there was great leniency shown to foreigners in all of these activities. Paul A. Van Dyke and Maria Kar-wing Mok, *Images of the Canton Factories 1760–1822: Reading History in Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015). See also Paul A. Van Dyke, 'The Hume Scroll of 1772 and the Faces behind the Canton Factories', *Review of Culture*, International Edition No. 54 (2017), 64–102, which has more discussion about foreign ownership and management of the buildings.

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