

Sino-French Trade at Canton, 1698–1842

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Introduction

On October 15, 1740, much to the surprise of onlookers, a three-masted European square-rigger arrived unexpectedly at Whampoa, 20 kilometers (12 miles) downriver from Canton (Guangzhou). It was too late in the season for such vessels to sail the usual route northward through the South China Sea; the southwest monsoon was ending, and the winds were not favorable. In this era ships typically arrived in China between June and September, before the transitional period between monsoons set in. Yet here, undeniably, was the 700-ton French East India ship *Jason*. How had she done it?

In fact, she had not followed the usual route at all, but had pioneered a new one that freed her from the restrictions imposed by the monsoons. The new route took her eastward from Pulo Sapata, off the south coast of Vietnam, and across the South China Sea toward the Philippines. After proceeding northward up the west coast of the island of Luzon, she then, near the island's northern tip, turned and pursued a northwesterly course back across the South China Sea toward Macau and the Pearl River Delta.

It was a completely unexpected feat, and all the more astounding because it was the outcome not of advanced planning, but of sudden necessity. Her captain had intended to follow the traditional route, sailing northward through the South China Sea. But contrary winds and calms had delayed *Jason's* arrival at Pulo Condore (Côn Sơn, near the Mekong River Delta), and made her too late to pursue the usual course.

The suggestion of the new route is credited to her supercargo, or business agent, Julien-Joseph Duvelaër, who had previously made several voyages between Canton and Manila for the French East India Company, henceforth referred to as the “Compagnie.”¹ The route was noted by the renowned eighteenth-century French hydrographer Jean-Baptiste-Nicolas-Denis d'Après de Mannevillette in his instructions for sailing to China. In the event that “an unforeseen accident prolongs the crossing, or a too-late departure only allows vessels to reach Pulo Condore at the end of the westerly monsoon,” he cited *Jason's* route as an example to follow.²

D'Après de Mannevillette and his French colleagues were not the only ones, however, to remark upon *Jason's* achievement. English East India Company employees, always mindful of their competitors and especially of the French, also took note:

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1. To distinguish the French East India Company, *la Compagnie [française] des Indes [orientales]*, from the English and other East India companies, the French company will most often be referred to as “the Compagnie.”
 2. Après de Mannevillette, Jean-Baptiste-Nicolas-Denis de, *Instructions sur la navigation des Indes orientales et de la Chine: Pour servir au Neptune oriental* (Paris: Chez Demonville, 1775), 524–526.

Messrs Duvelair & Valarmé, Supra Cargoes from France, arrived here, having quitted their ship the *Jason* near Macao. They made the Coast of Sumatra 120 leagues to the Westward of Java, and then bore away for the Streight of Malacca, in the passing through of which they were 40 Days. When they had got as far as Pulo Sapata, they met with Strong Northerly winds, and thereupon stood to the Eastward, ‘till they made the Philippine Islands. They then found Easterly winds, and strong Northerly currents, and by keeping that Coast in sight, as long as they could before they stood over to the Coast of China, they had the good fortune to make the Lima Islands, and to reach this place in fifty days from Malacca. This ship’s Arrival is thought to be owing to the cheif [*sic*] Mons. Duvelair, who having made several Voyages from hence to Manilla, and being well acquainted with that Coast, induc’d them to take that Route, by which means they have saved their passage in this late season of the Year, contrary to the expectation of every body here.³

While this was not the first time that an alternate route had been used to reach China, this particular route was previously unknown. Soon not only the French but other nations as well were following *Jason*’s example. Far more than being simply the pioneering of a new sea route, however, *Jason*’s departure from what had been the norm is just one of a number of ways in which the French distinguished themselves during the era of the Canton Trade (c. 1700 to 1842)—distinctions that manifested themselves both in France, in the structure of the French East India Company and its governance (see Chapter 2), and on the ground in Canton.

In addition to providing an overview of France’s participation, both company and private, in that trade, *Sino-French Trade at Canton* shows that the French did indeed constitute a separate model, quite distinct from those of the two other major companies, the British and the Dutch, and that to write the French off as simply a smaller, inferior version that failed to measure up to another nation’s model overlooks not only France’s own contributions, but also the significance of national characteristics and conditions in shaping a nation’s trade with China.

A knowledge of the Sino-French experience also contributes to the correction of a handful of long-held misconceptions about the Canton Trade. First, it adds to the evidence shown in recent scholarship that the administrative system of the Canton Trade was quite sophisticated and well-tailored to the conditions of the Pearl River Delta.⁴ This is very different from the negative assessment of H. B. Morse, who believed the Canton Trade to be poorly managed and obstructive to the advancement of commerce. Secondly, it shows that an accurate understanding of the Canton Trade requires including multiple nationalities and networks instead of relying on the experience and archival records of a single nation.

In the global expansion of trade that occurred during the eighteenth century, China played a vital role as the source of commodities that were avidly sought after by merchants and consumers alike. France, which was then one of the two most important western world powers, was a key participant in this trade. Yet the French have often been dismissed by scholars as little more than “also-rans” who were eclipsed by the other great European power of the century, the British.

3. BL: IOR G/12/48, entry dated October 2, 1740.

4. In addition to Paul A. Van Dyke’s *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), examples of recent scholarship include: *Mr. Smith Goes to China: Three Scots in the Making of Britain’s Global Empire* ([New Haven]: Yale University Press, 2019), in which author Jessica Hanser examines Britain’s imperial expansion and global network of trade through the lives of three Scottish private traders; Lisa Hellman’s *This House Is Not a Home: European Everyday Life in Canton and Macao 1730–1830* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), which analyses the everyday life of Swedish East India Company employees in Canton on the basis of ethnicity, class, and gender; and Benjamin Asmussen’s “Networks and Faces between Copenhagen and Canton, 1730–1840” (Copenhagen: Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies, Copenhagen Business School, 2018).

There may be a number of reasons for the absence of book-length studies dedicated wholly to the Sino-French experience in Canton. First, in addition to the perception of France as largely an “also-ran” that failed to measure up to the British or to the Dutch, there was the difficulty—even the impossibility—of carrying out multi-archival research prior to the late 1950s. Not until several years after the 1954 defeat of the French at Điện Biên Phủ did French archival holdings relating to Asia begin to be inventoried on a broad scale. Second, the loss of the archives of the first and second Compagnies has sometimes given rise to an erroneous suspicion that surviving archival records are insufficient in number or nature to warrant or to enable a study. Third, there was the dwindling of appeal of French colonial history after the end of the Second World War.

Where the survival of documents is concerned, it is true that the archives of the first two French East India companies have not survived, a loss that is deeply regrettable. But it would be a great mistake to think that too few records remain to carry out any significant studies whatsoever. On the contrary, there is a wealth of material available in archives spread around France; this is thanks, in large degree, to the way in which French overseas trade was structured. Additionally, outside France, the records of other East India companies also contain useful material.

In addition to the archives of the third French East India Company (1785–1793), a voluminous collection of correspondence (1658–1863) received by the secretary of state of the navy (the French naval minister) from East and Southeast Asia on French trade and politics is preserved at the Archives nationales d’outre-mer (ANOM) in Aix-en-Provence. So also are instructions from the secretary of state of the navy to the French *comptoir*, or commercial post, in Canton, together with a considerable body of general correspondence from that post.⁵ The correspondence contains much that is of interest, including decisions of the Compagnie’s administration in Paris and its instructions to—and replies from—the staff in Canton; personnel files; and a wide variety of reports, such as records of annual French operations in China, minutes of meetings of the Canton Conseil (governing council), descriptions and prices of trade goods, cargo lists, information on ship arrivals and departures, difficulties incurred both during and after the trading season, lists of French nationals at Canton, and suggestions for improvements to French operations, to name but a few.

At Lorient, the Service historique de la Défense (SHD) maintains records of the Port of Lorient relating to shipbuilding, ship repair and reconstruction, fitting-out and laying up, and other topics directly concerning both vessels owned by the second Compagnie (1719–1769) and a number of those from the 1770–1785 period of private trade. The records owe their survival to the efforts of Geneviève Beauchesne, then the curator of the Port of Lorient archives, and her staff, who moved a great number of records to safekeeping before most of Lorient was destroyed by Allied forces targeting the Germans’ Keroman submarine base during World War II.

Logbooks for the Compagnie’s China and other voyages are maintained at the French National Archives in Paris. While most of these date from the years of the second French East India Company (1719–1769), there are also a few logs from the era of the first Compagnie (1698–1719), as well as from the early years of the 1770–1785 period of private (open) trade.

Correspondence and other documents dating from 1770 to the early 1800s that pertain to private trade and to the French consulate in Canton may be found in the diplomatic (foreign affairs) archives just outside Paris at La Courneuve. Collections in departmental and municipal

5. The C.1 series of records at ANOM also includes documents on French activities relating to Cochinchina, Pegu (Myanmar/Burma), and Siam (Thailand). A number of the records pertaining to Cochinchina are also of interest to the study of French trade in Canton.

archives, especially in Brittany, as well as in private collections, complement the documentation available at the national level, while records of births, marriage, and burial may be found in parish registers, which are maintained in public archives around France. Some are also kept at ANOM, where the French colonial archives and the records of the third French East India Company are housed.⁶ A number of records may also be viewed online.

With regard to secondary sources on the French experience at Canton, two monumental studies are essential to understanding the context of that experience: the first, by economic historian Louis Dermigny, and the second, by historian Philippe Haudrère. Following an introduction treating how China and the West perceived each other from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, Dermigny's four-volume *La Chine et l'Occident: Le commerce à Canton au XVIIIe siècle* (1964) examines in near-encyclopedic detail the Canton Trade and its role in the global trade of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While the primary sources are almost entirely either French or English, his study includes the range of European companies and individuals trading at Canton, as well as Americans, Armenians, Parsis, and Chinese merchants and officials. Philippe Haudrère's equally significant two-volume *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle* (2nd edition, 2005) offers a highly detailed and comprehensive history of the second (1719–1769) and most successful of the three French East India companies in virtually all its aspects, and is the bible for studies of the second Compagnie. It also includes a summary of the first Compagnie as well as of earlier French efforts in overseas trade.

Other useful studies on the French East India companies include *Les Compagnies des Indes*, edited by René Estienne (2013, 2017), on the history of the French companies, their predecessors, their voyages, settlements, and trade goods; it is also valuable for its many images of documents and artifacts relating to the French East India and China trade. A much older work is Henry Weber's *La Compagnie française des Indes (1604–1875)* (1904). Studies of the individual first and third Compagnies include Marie Ménard-Jacob's 2016 *La première Compagnie des Indes. Apprentissages, échecs et héritage 1664–1704*, which examines the role and legacy of the agents of the French *comptoirs* (trading stations) in India during the first four decades of the first Compagnie, while Paul Kaepelin's *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)* (1908) focuses on the history of the Compagnie's trade and establishments in India from 1665 to 1719; it is of note for details of early French interest and activity in intra-Asian trade. The third and last Compagnie is the subject of J. Conan's "La dernière Compagnie française des Indes: Privilège et administration" (1939) and his detailed study *La dernière Compagnie française des Indes (1785–1875) avec la liste des principaux actionnaires de cette Compagnie* (1942).

Gérard Le Bouëdec's 1994 *Le Port et l'Arsenal de Lorient, de la Compagnie des Indes à la Marine cuirassée: Une reconversion réussie (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)* and his more recent *Lorient, Ville portuaire: Une nouvelle histoire des origines à nos jours*, written with Christophe Cérino, offer a detailed history of the port of Lorient. Additionally, his numerous articles offer insights into the sea- and trade-related activity of Lorient's inhabitants, while his 1999 *Les Bretons sur les mers* traces Brittany's maritime heritage.

The most valuable work on ships and voyages to China is Marion Veysseyre's thesis "Les voyages français à la Chine: Vaisseaux et équipages, 1720–1793" (2000), which provides a

6. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence; Archives nationales, Paris site; Service historique de la Défense, Lorient; Archives diplomatiques, La Courneuve (formerly the Archives des Affaires étrangères); Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine, Rennes; Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique, Nantes; Archives départementales des Yvelines, Montigny-le-Bretonneux.

meticulously detailed study of the China-trade ships, voyages, and officers of the second Compagnie. It is equally valuable for its correction of the numerous errors and omissions in earlier efforts by Madrolle, du Halgouët, and others to identify voyages. However, it has never been published. Claudius Madrolle's *Les premiers voyages français à la Chine: La Compagnie de la Chine, 1698–1719* (1901) and Paul Pelliot's *Le premier voyage de "l'Amphitrite" en Chine* (1930) explore the first French merchant voyages to China. Pelliot is also valuable for correcting mistakes made by Madrolle. Early French voyages to the Pacific, including those to and/or from China via Cape Horn—voyages that are especially associated with navigators from Saint-Malo—are the subject of E. W. Dahlgren's 1907 "Voyages français à destination de la mer du Sud avant Bougainville (1695–1749)" and his *Les relations commerciales et maritimes entre la France et les côtes de l'océan Pacifique (commencement du XVIIIe siècle)* (1909). Essential to understanding the role of Saint-Malo merchants and ship owners in the China trade during the era of the first Compagnie des Indes is André Lespagnol's *Messieurs de Saint-Malo: Une élite négociante au temps de Louis XIV* (1997).

Writings that focus specifically on the Sino-French experience include Henri Cordier's "Les marchands hanistes de Canton" (1902); "Le consulat de France à Canton au XVIIIe siècle" (1908); and *La France en Chine au XVIIIe siècle: documents inédits. Publiés sur les manuscrits conservés au dépôt des Affaires étrangères avec une introduction et des notes* (1883), which reproduces a number of unpublished documents in the diplomatic (foreign affairs) archives from the years 1770–1783 and which provides an overall view of the French experience at Canton during most of the first period that France's overseas trade was open to all French subjects. Though Sino-French interaction is not the sole theme of Cordier's "La mission de M. le Chevalier d'Entrecasteaux à Canton en 1787, d'après les archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères" (1911), "La mission Dubois de Jancigny" (1916), or *Mélanges d'histoire et de géographie orientales* (1922), these nevertheless contain some relevant content.

Personal journals and correspondence are valuable for the candid views they provide. Two works present extensive excerpts from the papers of Charles de Constant, who worked first for the Imperial (Austrian) East India Company and then for the last French East India Company: Louis Dermigny's 1964 *Les mémoires de Charles de Constant sur le commerce à la Chine* and Marie-Sybille de Vienne's *La Chine au déclin des Lumières: L'expérience de Charles de Constant, négociant des loges de Canton* (2004). A third title, *Récit de trois voyages à la Chine (1779–1793)* by Philippe de Vargas, is considerably shorter, but includes some excerpts that do not appear in the other two. Besides diaries and correspondence, Constant's memoirs are valuable not only for his personal reflections, but also for the material that he intended to publish as a guide to how business was carried out in Canton.

Incidents from another French trader's time at Canton, as glimpsed through some of his personal correspondence, are used in P. Huard and Wong Ming's 1963 article "Pierre-Louis-Achille de Robien, chevalier de Robien dit 'le Chinois' (1736–1792)." Biographical sketches of a number of private traders of Breton origin are woven into Hervé du Halgouët's *Pages Coloniales. Relations maritimes de la Bretagne et de la Chine au XVIIIe siècle. Lettres de Canton*, a 1934 study of maritime relations between Brittany and China.

With a few exceptions, French private trade during the Canton era has largely been ignored until recently; as can be seen from the above, company trade has attracted the lion's share of scholars' attention. "French Private Trade at Canton, 1698–1833," my chapter in *The Private Side of the Canton Trade, 1700–1840: Beyond the Companies* (Paul A. Van Dyke & Susan E. Schopp, eds., 2018) provides a brief overview of private Sino-French trade at Canton.

Works in English on the Sino-French experience are relatively few in number. Essential to an understanding of the structure, functioning, and evolution of the Canton Trade as a whole is Paul A. Van Dyke's *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (2007). It is one of his many published writings that have significantly advanced our understanding of the Canton system; all are available in English.⁷

Works relating to shipping include Philippe Haudrère's chapter "The 'Compagnie des Indes' and Maritime Matters, c. 1725–1770" in *Ships, Sailors and Spices: East India Companies and their Shipping in the 16th, 17th, and 18th Centuries*, Jaap R. Bruijn and Femme S. Gaastra, eds. (1993), and Jean Boudriot's four-volume *The 74-Gun Ship* (1986) and *John Paul Jones and the Bonhomme Richard: A Reconstruction of the Ship and an Account of the Battle with H.M.S. Serapis* (1987), translated by David H. Roberts.⁸

Also in English, though China is not the principal subject, are Catherine Manning's *Fortunes à Faire: The French in Asian Trade, 1719–48* (1996) and Donald C. Wellington's *French East India Companies: A Historical Account and Record of Trade* (2006). Manning's work, which focuses on French commercial activity with India, is of particular interest for the insights it offers into French intra-Asian trade with China during the first two-and-a-half decades of the second Compagnie. Wellington's book provides a more general history of the French East India Company and its trade, but has little to offer on China.

Three articles that I wrote focus specifically on Sino-French topics: the above-mentioned chapter "French Private Trade at Canton, 1698–1833" (2018); "French Sea Routes to Canton, 1698–1792" in *Beyond the Silk Roads: New Discourses on China's Role in East Asian Maritime History*, Robert J. Antony and Angela Schottenhammer, eds. (2017); and "The French as Architectural Trendsetters in Canton, 1767–1820" in *Review of Culture*, International edition 45 (2014).

In conclusion, *Sino-French Trade at Canton, 1698–1842* fills a gap in the existing scholarship on the Canton trade. It presents major aspects of the French experience and explains how that experience evolved over time, from the earliest moments of interest to the arrival of the first French merchant vessel at Whampoa in 1698, to the end of the Canton System in 1842. It puts a "human face" on trade between the Chinese and the French through its use of candid personal writings as well as of official documents. Furthermore, it is the first book-length work devoted exclusively to the French at Canton, though it is by no means exhaustive. It also identifies the French as offering a distinctive model of Sino-European trade, separate from those of the two other major East India companies, the British and the Dutch. *Sino-French Trade at Canton* presents a new approach with considerable new information and is essential to deepening our understanding of early modern global trade.

7. As of this writing, Van Dyke's latest work, *Whampoa and the Canton Trade: Life and Death in a Chinese Port, 1700–1842* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020), had not yet been published, but is certain to further understanding of this important port.

8. Although *The 74-Gun Ship* concerns warships, it is pertinent because it contains additional detail that supplements what is offered in Boudriot's work on the French East India Company's ships; the latter shared many features with the king's ships. It is also worth noting that *Bonhomme Richard* was the former French East Indiaman *Duc de Duras*.

The Voyage and Sea Routes

Over the course of the near century-and-a-half (1698–1842) of French participation in the Canton Trade, at least 265 French merchant vessels called in China. The great majority were Europe ships, departing from, and returning to, France. A much smaller number served the country trade.¹ Detailed sailing instructions spelled out the sea routes from Europe to Asia and back, as well as ports in between, and provided information on such topics as winds, currents, and tides; descriptions of landmarks and details of navigational hazards; and locations for obtaining fresh water and provisions, to name just a few.

“When sailing from Lorient or from one of the other ocean ports of France, you must first shape your course so as to pass about twenty-five or thirty leagues from Cape Finisterre. This distance is sufficient in any season whatsoever; you can even double that cape at a closer distance, depending on the circumstances; but from its latitude you will always steer for the island of Madeira.”²

So began the voyage to China. Depending on the era, the conditions encountered en route, and the number of ports of call and length of stay at each, the one-way voyage to China via the Cape of Good Hope could take as little as five-and-a-half months (though six to nine months was more typical), and the round trip, from exactly one year to as long as slightly over four. Via Cape Horn, the one-way voyage could take from eighteen months to over four years, and the round trip, from slightly over four-and-a-half years to nine years. In the eighteenth century, a round-trip voyage of about a year and a half via the Cape of Good Hope, with a stay in China that varied from two to five months, was typical. In the nineteenth century, the stay in China could be as short as three to four weeks, though two months was not unusual, and both the Cape of Good Hope and, to a lesser degree, the Cape Horn routes were used. (See Appendix 1.)

The route as well as the timing of a voyage was heavily influenced by the earth’s wind systems, which determined the directions in which the ships could—or could not—sail. As one of the eighteenth-century books of sailing instructions put it, “it is essentially necessary for the navigator to have a thorough knowledge of the direction of winds as chiefly prevail through the whole extent of those seas which he is obliged to pass over.”³

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1. The cost of trade at Canton was a deterrent to French country vessels as it required considerable capital, not only because of cargo duties, but also because the port fees levied on a ship were based on her dimensions rather than on her carrying capacity. As a result, the duties for a smaller ship could be prohibitively high relative to her tonnage. For a more detailed explanation, see Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 314–316; Manning, *Fortunes*, 182–183; Van Dyke, *Canton Trade*, 26–30.
 2. Jean-Baptiste-Nicolas-Denis d'Après de Manneville, *Instructions sur la navigation*, 7.
 3. Joseph Huddart and Jean-Baptiste-Nicolas-Denis d'Après de Manneville, *The Oriental Navigator, or New Directions for Sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, &c. &c. &c.* (London: Robert Laurie and James Whittle, 1801), 18.

For ships sailing via the Cape of Good Hope, besides the westerlies, the trade winds, and the infamous doldrums (the intertropical convergence zone) of the Atlantic, there were the monsoons to reckon with. The southwest monsoon, which blows from late spring to mid-autumn, carried vessels through the Indian Ocean and South China Sea to China, while the northeast monsoon, blowing in the opposite direction from late autumn to mid-spring, took them back through those same waters. It was well not to sail too close to the end of the monsoon season, however, for the transitional periods between monsoons—the months of May and November—were marked by unstable winds, whose strength and direction were subject to unpredictable variation, and were accompanied by storms and typhoons.⁴

There was also the matter of ports of call and the length of stay at each, as well as of mastery of the sea routes. Of the twenty-seven departures from Europe during the era of the first Compagnie (1698–1719), more took place in January (seven) and March (five) than in the other months of the year, which saw between one and three departures each. Between 1720 and 1769—that is, under the second Compagnie—there were eighty-eight departures from Europe, the greatest number of which took place in December (twenty-eight) and January (fourteen), followed by November (twelve), February (ten), October (eight), March (seven), April (six), and June, August, and September (one each). Over the decades, the date of departure gradually grew later; eight of the ten in February occurred between 1762 and 1769. From 1770 to 1792—that is, from the beginning of the first open-trade era to the last French Europe voyage of the eighteenth century—the favored month of departure for the sixty-three vessels was later still: March. Of the fifty-three whose month of departure is known, the majority took place between January and March: eleven in January, five in February, and sixteen in March. April saw nine; May, one; July, two; October and November, one each; and December, seven.⁵ (See Appendix 1.)

In the years of the Compagnie, vessels' arrivals at, and departures from, China were closely tracked by the Canton Conseil, which was responsible for keeping the Compagnie's directors in France informed of the vessels' movements. Of the twenty-one Europe vessels whose month of arrival during the era of the first Compagnie (1698–1719) is known, the greatest number (eight) arrived in July; this was followed by March (five), June (three), September (two), and May, November, and December (one each). Among the three country vessels, one arrived in July; a second, by late July; and a third, in September. (See Appendices 1 and 2.)

During the period 1720–1793, the great majority of the 171 arrivals in China, including both Europe and intra-Asian vessels, took place in the summer and early autumn. During the era of the second Compagnie (1720–1769), ninety (85.7%) of the 105 arrivals occurred between July and September. August saw the greatest number (thirty-six), followed by July (twenty-eight) and September (twenty-six). The concentration shifted slightly during the first era of private trade (1770–1785); of the 53 arrivals, the most took place in September (twenty-four), followed by August (fifteen) and then October (ten), enabling these three months to account for 92.4% of the total. The concentration changed again, slightly, in 1786–1792, during the third Compagnie's existence; September saw six arrivals; October, four; and November, two.

In 1802–1803, there were three arrivals: one each in April, August, and September. The pattern changed noticeably, however, between 1818 and 1842: vessels arrived year-round. Of

4. Huddart and d'Après de Manneville, *The Oriental Navigator*, 5, note, "There is generally a month or two of unsettled weather about the change of the Monsoon, (near land, especially) subject to heavy gales of wind, which, though of short duration and often of small extent, are dangerous to shipping from the sudden shifts to some other quarter, that makes the sea run cross, and wreck the vessels."

5. These figures include both vessels consigned to China from the outset and those that after reaching Isle de France were reconsigned or independently opted to continue to China. For sources of figures in this and the several following paragraphs, see Appendices 1 and 2.

a total sixty-three arrivals, the month is known for fifty-six of them. Thirty-six (64.2 %) fell between July and November: five in August, seven in September, ten in October, and eight in November. December, January, and February saw six each; together they constituted 32%. The remaining eight were divided among March (three), April (two), May (one), and July (two). (See Appendix 1.)

There existed alternative routes through the South China Sea that freed sailing vessels from the restrictions imposed by the monsoons; one such route, inaugurated by the 1740 *Jason*, took ships across the South China Sea, up the west coast of the island of Luzon in the Philippines, and then back across the South China Sea to Macau.⁶ The search for alternative routes increased from the 1750s onward, with significant consequences for the Canton trade as a whole, as ultimately, vessels became able to arrive at virtually any time of year.

For the return voyage to Europe, the timing of departures from China likewise reflected the influence of the monsoons. The celebrated eighteenth-century hydrographer and former Compagnie ship captain Jean-Baptiste-Nicolas-Denis d'Après de Mannevillette, whose 1745 *Neptune orientale* became the bible of sailing instructions for much of the century, advised vessels to depart China between mid-November and mid-February.⁷ There were also winds off the coast of South Africa to consider. It was well to double the Cape of Good Hope no later than mid-May, when the winds turned contrary. D'Après de Mannevillette made the reason clear: "Although ships can easily at all seasons double the Cape of Good Hope, coming from the westward into the eastern seas, they find not the same facility at their return. The winds from W.N.W. to S.W. that rage violently about this cape in the months of June, July, and August, and more frequently than at any other period of the year, expose the ships which attempt to double it at that season, to the loss of a great deal of time in tacking, besides the unavoidable accidents which almost always attend a long continuance at sea in tempestuous weather."⁸

Between 1720 and 1755, all but one of the sixty-one departures of Europe ships occurred during the three months of November (fifteen), December (thirty), or January (fifteen). During those same years, more than half the ships arrived back in France during the month of July (thirty-one, or 56.3%); the next closest month was August, with eight. Between 1758 and 1792, the eighty China departures for Europe for which the month is known were concentrated in December (twenty-two, or 27.5%) and January (forty-nine, or 61.2%). The remaining nine occurred in February. Among those vessels, the month of return to France is known for sixty-one. July saw twenty-seven (44.2%) returns, while the next closest month, June, saw twenty (32.7%). (See Appendix 1.)

Sea Routes

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the majority of East India ships heading for China sailed via the Cape of Good Hope, a route that is well known in scholarship on the East India and China trade. The French were no exception—at least from 1698 to 1702 and after

6. D'Après de Mannevillette, *Instructions sur la navigation*, 524–526; Huddart and d'Après de Mannevillette, *The Oriental Navigator*, 476; d'Après de Mannevillette recommended departing between mid-November and mid-February, "for although your business would permit you to sail at the beginning of the eastern Monsoon, the winds are still so changeable, that you had better wait till they are a little settled"; Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 259–260. Additional later routes may be found in Van Dyke, "New Sea Routes to Canton in the 18th Century and the Decline of China's Control over Trade," in *Studies of Maritime History* 1 (2010): 57–108.

7. D'Après de Mannevillette, *Instructions sur la navigation*, 527–528. See also Chapter 4 [of *Sino-French Trade*].

8. D'Après de Mannevillette, *Instructions sur la navigation*, 551–552; the English translation is from Huddart and d'Après de Mannevillette, *The Oriental Navigator*, 631.

The French Hong: Daily Work Life and Operations

Life at the Hong

Daily life at the French hong was shaped by the calendar of the trading season. Each year, before the supercargoes departed Canton at the end of the season, one of their duties was to write a detailed account giving full particulars of all that had happened that year. These letters were then deposited with the French Jesuits in Macau, to be collected at the beginning of the next trading season by the arriving supercargoes. “Within half an hour of setting foot on land, a supercargo is instructed in everything that was done the previous year, by the very detailed letters containing all the enlightenment that they [the departing supercargoes] can give to their successors.”¹ Despite the sardonic tone of the writer, the letters were indeed detailed, and together with the instructions that were given by the Compagnie’s directors, prepared the newly arrived traders for the business that lay ahead.

The work load was busiest at the beginning and end of the trading season, with lulls in between. In 1789, Charles de Constant noted that he had been so busy since his arrival that he had little time to devote to his own private trade, and none whatsoever for pleasure.² “Our business consists of purchasing, selling, and selecting trade goods, and finally, accounting to the Compagnie for all our operations: bookkeeping, correspondence, the *caisse* [cashier’s office], the warehouse, deliveries and receipts, negotiations, contracts—this is what constitutes the major part of our activity.”³

1. ANOM: COL C.2.32, ff° 218r–v. “un Subrecargue, demie heure après Etre descendu à Terre, est Instruit de tout ce qu’on fait ceux de l’année précédente, par les lettres circonstanciées et détaillées contenant toutes les lumières qu’ils peuvent donner à leurs successeurs, les quelles lettres conformément aux ordres de la Cie, ils laissent entre les mains des Jésuites établis à Macao.” So wrote Charles-Robert Godeheu, the son of a Compagnie director and who later became a director himself, in a report to the directors in Paris after he served in China in 1735. Instead of maintaining residence in Canton, Godeheu favored having supercargoes sail to and from China with the ships, as he believed that residence procured no particular advantage to the Compagnie, but was rather in the interests of the individual supercargoes. The directors were persuaded, and in December 1737, they wrote to the Canton *comptoir*, notifying its staff that they had decided to have their traders travel with the ships; to which end they would choose men who were “wise and experienced in the trade.” The Compagnie later resumed the practice of having a *comptoir*.
2. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 273: Letter from Charles de Constant to Samuel de Constant, dated Canton in China, October 6, 1789: “Depuis mon arrivée, j’ai été extrêmement occupé, et chaque jour les affaires se multiplient et se succèdent si rapidement qu’il me reste peu de temps à donner à mes affaires particulières et point à mes plaisirs.” He was writing in a year when the Compagnie sent just one ship, but he was also doing nearly all the work by himself, with the aid of one inexperienced assistant (Havet). The head of the *comptoir* (Desmoulin’s) bouts of insanity rendered him of little help, while at the same time creating numerous problems.
3. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 273: Letter from Charles de Constant to Samuel de Constant, dated Canton in China, October 6, 1789. “Nos affaires sont composées des achats, de la vente et du choix des marchandises, et enfin de rendre compte à la compagnie de toutes nos opérations; la tenue des livres, la correspondance, la caisse, le magasin, les livraisons et les recettes, les négociations, les contrats, voilà ce qui compose la majeure partie de nos occupations.”

Osmond Tiffany, an American who visited Canton in the 1840s, described a clerk's life during the busy period:

The clerk's life is very different from that of the visitor; he has no time to run about the shops and stare at curiosities, but he betakes himself to the counting rooms, and diminishes pens all day long. The immense amount of work performed in one of the large Canton houses is indescribable, and the clerks are occupied on average of from twelve to fifteen hours a day. They seldom quit the desks before midnight, being all the time occupied in the various processes of receiving and dispatching cargoes, of making out sales and interest calculations, copying letters, filing away papers, and the perpetual round of business employments.

This of course is during the most busy season when ships are pouring in.⁴

On New Year's Day 1775, barely two weeks before the first four of the six French ships then at Whampoa departed China to head back to France, trader François Terrien found a few moments to write a letter to his cousin. Terrien had arrived in Canton the previous year and relied on reading to distract himself from the pressures of life in the hong. He asked his cousin to send him books; among the ones he requested that New Year's Day were the complete works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his letter he explained that they would help him pass the time after the ships departed, because while the ships were at Whampoa, "we can only read ledgers, invoice books, receipt books, etc. etc."⁵

In describing a visit to the home of a hong merchant in 1789, Charles de Constant noted that the invitation was extended at a time in the trading season when the Europeans were the least busy. Their import cargoes—the goods that their ships had brought to China—had been dispatched; the major purchase contracts for their export cargo—the goods to be bought in China—had been drawn up; and now they were waiting for those goods to arrive from the interior of the country.⁶

A journal kept by Constant between September and December 1789 provides a glimpse into his work life during the busy season, beginning with his arrival aboard *Dauphin*.

Wednesday [*sic*], 29 [September 1789]

On the 22nd of this month I went ashore in the ship's boat. . . . When I set foot in Macau, I paid a visit to the Portuguese governor, who speaks good French, and I was very well received. I was too eager to greet my friends to linger. I'd already rehired my former Chinese servant, whom I have raised, so to speak, and who came to meet me. Soon afterward I had the pleasure of greeting my old friend Bourgoigne, and this pleasure was well reciprocated. Others came [to welcome me], and there was much embracing, and then I had to go to the Compagnie's house. I was the bearer of bad news for M. de Montigny; the Compagnie is very dissatisfied with him and is recalling him in a rather harsh way; I had to spare him the bitterness of the news . . .

Then I went to M. Desmoulins's. We opened the packets from the Compagnie that were jointly addressed to us. . . . I stayed in Macau for two days. I'd hardly boarded the ship when we set sail in company with fifteen other ships, which had arrived the day before. We passed the Bocca Tigris, a narrow passage that marks the mouth of the Canton River; two forts defend it, with soldiers who are rather scammers and who accompany the ships going to Whampoa. We anchored at Whampoa the next day, and I immediately disembarked and went to Canton.

4. Osmond Tiffany, *The Canton Chinese*, 223.

5. AD Loire-Atlantique: E 1245, letter from Terrien to his cousin A. Dubrézeul (or Dubréseul), dated Canton in China, January 1, 1775. "Nous ne pouvons guères [*sic*] faire de lectures que dans le journal, le grand livre, le livre de factures, de réceptions, &c. &c."

6. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 364, dated November 20, 1789.

Four hours after I arrived, I found our house, the French factory, in a state of disrepair, so dilapidated that it makes one tremble.⁷ I hastily arranged a room, and according to custom, the Chinese merchants and all the Europeans came to call on me. While awaiting our messieurs, I take down information on business and on the soundness of the merchants, and get updated on the changes that have taken place during my absence.

Friday, 2 October. . . . Today the hoppo measured the *Dauphin*, which, however, still has neither a comprador nor a fiador. . . . Yesterday M. de Grammont, an ex-Jesuit . . . , paid me a visit. . . . Once *Dauphin* departs, my activities will change. In Macau we are superbly and comfortably housed; my apartment has several rooms and is out-of-the-way, which greatly suits me. The two English supercargoes are very pleasant.

Saturday, 3 October. Today I dined at the English company. Its agents engage in a level of spending that is hard to imagine, and we are very small, very poor in comparison Yesterday fire broke out on a boat that the hoppo, the official who collects the fees and taxes for the Emperor, was on, but the fire was soon extinguished. . . .

Today is a great festival among the Chinese, as it's the fifteenth day of the eighth moon [the Mid-Autumn Festival, 中秋節] The Chinese say they celebrate [this moon] more than others because it's more round; they honor it more. Everywhere firecrackers are set off, paper is burned, incense sticks are lit in front of the *poutsats* of the houses, which are their household deities; their altars are laden with meat and fruits that the Chinese [would normally] feast on.

. . . . *Dauphin* still hasn't got a comprador, who supplies our food. Our people, after nine months at sea, find it very hard to eat salt meat in port, while the others eat good beef and fresh bread. I'm not able to choose a comprador; they must be given a sum of money to compensate for what the mandarins take, and I have to agree on that with M. des Moulins [the head of the French *comptoir*]

Sunday, 4 October. Our messieurs won't arrive until the day after tomorrow

Wednesday, 7 October. Our messieurs arrived yesterday evening from Macau. M. des Moulins and I ran around all day seeing the hong merchants, the merchants who are privileged to trade with the Europeans. It's from among them that we must choose a fiador, or security merchant, for *Dauphin*.

Thursday, 8 October. Trade is suspended, the offices are closed

Sunday, 11 October. Time is passing and we're making little progress, but we're working a great deal nevertheless; with the Chinese there have to be endless trips, questions, and discussions. Our silver arrived from the ship; it's the only thing we're allowed to disembark at the moment.

Today I was in a pagoda or temple to see some Japanese who escaped a shipwreck. The Chinese, who always show hospitality on such occasions, took them in, fed them, clothed them, and will send them back home to their country.

14 October: The work to be done multiplies with every passing moment, though the mandarins aren't yet allowing us to offload

16 October: We can't unload anything yet; we don't know exactly when the mandarins will allow it. The heat is exhausting.

17 October: Red tape and business matters take up all my time.

18 October: As often happens, I was interrupted yesterday just as I was beginning to write to you. We almost lost the *Dauphin* this morning; some Chinese rascals cut one of her cables to steal her we don't yet know how much damage she suffered, but at the moment she's not taking on any water.

7. Charles de Constant generally referred to the French hong as a factory (*factorerie*) rather than as a hong (*hang*), though he usually spelled it *factorie*, a French spelling of the English "factory;" as already noted, this may reflect his familiarity with the English language, as he had spent time in England in his early teens and had close friends among the English traders at Canton.

20 October: We're still not unloading. . .

22 October: Tomorrow, if it pleases the mandarins, we'll offload a little; then there'll be some time during which we'll do nothing . . .

25 October: By the sweat of our brow we finally have a fiador, and he's the one we wanted, the most honest. . . . The work is going to multiply and I'll have little time to write, but I'll always be thinking of you.

28 October: We're still offloading. The weather's beginning to get chilly, and already there are ships that are ready to set off for India. Here is the list of all the ships here this year, and they've nearly all arrived: 21 ships from the English company and other private English vessels in the country trade; 5 ships from the Dutch company; 17 Americans; 1 Danish; 3 Portuguese; and *Dauphin*. In February, there won't be ships any left—they'll all be en route to you, bringing tea, silks, nankeens, porcelain, and my letters, too. Today, I was led by chance to a house where I prevented a fire from starting . . . When fire starts in a house, it burns 200 of them rather than just one.

30 October: . . . Trade is suspended . . .

3 November: After our ship departs, I'm going to apply myself to learning Chinese with the help of a very smart, well-educated Chinese with whom I get along very well; I'll try some translations of their good books.

5 November: Business has resumed and we're starting to offload . . .

7 November: I've arrived [back in Canton] from Whampoa. The roadstead offers a lovely view; imagine 79 large ships, all handsome, on a pretty river whose banks are very pleasant and full of life. We dined on board *Dauphin*—it's all our captain knows how to do.

17 November: There was a total solar eclipse [today] and for five minutes, it was night at noon . . . M. de Guignes, the son, has translated a book on Chinese astronomy into French; I haven't read it yet.⁸ . . .

18 November: Trade is still suspended for a reason that's easier not to believe than to admit: Whampoa Customs ran out of paper for its account books. They have to ask the mandarins, and for that, it takes two days.

23 November: I often go to bed very late, I'm on my feet early in the morning, and have to run around all day, going back to the same man ten times. . . .

26 November: I had one of the most beautiful of this country's products, Nanking raw silk, put into a chest. It is superb. . . .

1 December: The *Dauphin* is finally offloaded to our great satisfaction; her cargo has been sold and delivered, and the return cargo is nearly ready; once it begins loading, it will go very quickly. I am quite happy with the business we've done; it is a satisfaction to see that our efforts aren't all wasted.

10 December: It is with pleasure that I see things moving forward; every day we're loading and receiving goods for *Dauphin*, but it's with sadness that I see those who arrived here with me go away.⁹

While the heavy workload during the busy season was a given, life at the hong was subject to additional stresses. Problems surfaced particularly with regard to the individual's satisfaction with his post; to interpersonal rivalry, especially in the 1770s and 1780s; and to the ongoing challenge of adapting, or not, to a culture that was significantly different from that of the individual's homeland.

In 1777, for example, the consul Vauquelin received instructions from Antoine de Sartine, the secretary of state of the navy, to select *un bon et fidèle interprète* (a good and faithful

8. Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes was the French agent at Canton and the son of sinologist Joseph de Guignes.

9. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 247–266. The passages reproduced above are a small selection from Vienne's lengthier reproduction of Constant's 1789 journal.

interpreter).¹⁰ The young (Pierre) Thimotée, son of a former head of the Compagnie's archives, Guillaume Pierre Thimotée, was a possible candidate. Young Thimotée had come to Canton at the age of ten as an *enfant de langue* to learn Chinese.¹¹ He was not yet quite capable of assuming the position of interpreter, and Vauquelin also wanted to determine whether he would indeed be a good fit for the post. The consul felt it prudent to wait until November 1778 to make the decision, thinking that by assiduous study, the young man would then be able to assume the position. He proposed to young Thimotée that he assist the consulate's chancellor, Philippe Vieillard, with some of the consular bookkeeping.¹²

The benefits would be multiple. The arrangement would lighten the chancellor's burdensome workload while providing the younger man with on-the-job training that would groom him for a possible future at the consulate as chancellor. And finally, thought Vauquelin, it would rescue him from the inaction in which he would surely find himself, given his "natural inclination to the most shameful laziness."¹³

But young Thimotée promptly rejected the offer. He flatly refused to have anything to do with the chancellor's office or the consulate's accounting. Any possibility of his eventually becoming the interpreter immediately evaporated. Instead Vauquelin appointed Jean-Charles-François Galbert, the son of a former Compagnie supercargo, to the post. In his letter to Sartine, Vauquelin noted that Galbert had consistently merited the esteem and the friendship of his superiors during the eight years that he had lived in China.¹⁴ Young Thimotée, in contrast, was sent back to France.¹⁵

A few years later, young Thimotée's uncle, a supercargo, experienced the opposite problem: wanting a post but not being appointed to it. In 1783, supercargo Thimotée applied for the position of consul. He had been offered the post when the consulate was created in 1776, but had turned it down because he was unhappy with the salary.¹⁶ This perhaps doomed his later prospects, for despite his several decades of experience in the service of the Compagnie, his application was unsuccessful.¹⁷

Dissatisfaction with salaries was another issue. The trader Dangirard, who arrived in Canton in 1767 on the Compagnie ship *Penthièvre*, soon decided that life in Canton was too expensive for him to afford. He departed later that year for Isle de France on another French ship.¹⁸ In 1771, all but one of the members of the Canton Conseil resigned because of their dissatisfaction with the significant drop in the salaries. Still, the salaries of members of the Conseil, even after the reduction in 1771, were greatly superior to the wages of day laborers in China and France. A first-rank carpenter at Canton earned a daily wage of 0.20 taels in 1770; a first-rank bricklayer earned the same in 1772.¹⁹ In Rouen, a laborer's daily wage in 1771 was 15 sols (approximately 0.11 taels); in 1780, a mason and his assistant received 50 sols (approximately 0.35 taels).²⁰

10. FR MAE: 8MD Asie 16, f° 286r–v. Letter from Vauquelin to Antoine de Sartine, dated January 26, 1778. Also reproduced in Cordier, *La France en Chine*, 89–90.

11. *Enfant de langue*: literally, "language child." A son or a nephew of a French Canton trader might accompany his father or uncle to Canton to learn Chinese, and later be appointed interpreter at the French *comptoir*. As the examples of Galbert Jr. and Guignes show, in this position they might also translate documents for other companies in addition to the French.

12. FR MAE: 8MD Asie 16, f° 286r–286v. Also reproduced in Cordier, *La France en Chine*, 90.

13. FR MAE: 8MD Asie 16, f° 286r–286v. Also reproduced in Cordier, *La France en Chine*, 90.

14. FR MAE: 8MD Asie 16, f° 286v–287r. Also reproduced in Cordier, *La France en Chine*, 91.

15. ANOM: COL C.1.11, f° 143r.

16. 8MD Asie 16, f° 163v, 220r. Also reproduced in Cordier, "Le consulat," 50, 55.

17. Cordier, "Le consulat," 59.

18. SHDL: 2P 42-7; ANOM: COL C.1.11, f° 54v bis; SHDL: 2P 42–9.

19. Paul A. Van Dyke. "Prices and wages in Canton and Macao, 1704–1833" (March 4, 2008), 2014, <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/data.php>.

20. A. Lefort, *Salaires et revenus dans la Généralité de Rouen au XVIIIe siècle comparées avec les dépenses d'alimentation, du*

Biographical Sketches

Traders

BOURGOGNE, Julien¹ (1759–c. 1810). Julien Bourgogne arrived in China in the 1770s and remained active into the 1790s.² A native of Lorient and a cousin of François-René de Montigny du Timeur,³ he entered the Canton Trade through his cousin, who had founded a trading company in Canton with Charles-Henri de Vigny in 1773; the two men served as agents for individuals in France. Among those who entrusted Bourgogne with large sums of money for the purchase of trade goods were François Rothe and Foucaud, two major fitters-out of ships in Sino-French trade. Both men had been clients of Montigny du Timeur, who when he returned to France in 1777, left his share of the management of the trading company to Bourgogne.

When the Imperial ship *Prince de Kaunitz* arrived at Canton in 1779 with a handful of inexperienced traders, including the teenaged Charles de Constant, it was to Bourgogne whom they turned for assistance.⁴ The following year (1780), Bourgogne joined forces with John Reid to form a private trading business in Canton.⁵ He also maintained close relations with the Imperial Company and played a key role in the deceitful transfer of the French hong to that company after the death of French consul Vauquelin in 1782 (see Chapter 5). Bourgogne was also among those who lent money to hong merchants in Canton; his name appears on the list of creditors drawn up in 1785 by Philippe Vieillard, then the French vice-consul at Canton.⁶

1. Not to be confused with François Bourgogne.
2. Constant and Dermigny, *Les mémoires de Charles de Constant*, 48n55. Both Dermigny and Vienne believe Bourgogne to have arrived around 1772, while Paul A. Van Dyke has stated that the earliest references he found in the British and Dutch records to Bourgogne's presence in China and/or Macau were for early 1777 (email to author, January 26, 2017). 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 international traders in China prior to 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.
3. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 873; Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 48–49, 48n55.
4. Constant and Dermigny, *Les Mémoires de Charles de Constant*, 342. The *Prince de Kaunitz* was the former French *Superbe*, which had sailed to Canton in 1774 for her French owners, who included François Rothe. The *Superbe* was subsequently sold to Charles de Proli (the son of a founder of the Imperial Company) and renamed *Prince de Kaunitz*. She set sail from Lorient for China in 1779, flying the imperial Austrian flag. Officially, her captain was Angelus Leeps from Ostend, but her actual captain was the French-born François Maugendre, who was supplied with papers showing him to be from Vienna. She is not to be confused with a smaller vessel of the same name that was either English or Parsi-built in India, and which also belonged to the Imperial Company, for whom she made several voyages to China. See Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 959, 965–968.
5. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 968. Reid was the younger brother of Scottish Imperial trader Andrew Reid, who had served as supercargo on a previous voyage of the *Prince de Kaunitz*.
6. ANOM: COL C.1.15, ff° 69r–70r. Also cited in Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 899.

CLOUËT is the name of three persons who participated in the French trade at Canton: (1) Clouët the elder (Clouët l'aîné); (2) his nephew, Isaac-Pierre; and his brother, Clouët de Champillon, who is sometimes also referred to as simply Clouët.

The elder Clouët first went to China in the early 1730s, and by 1740 was serving the Compagnie as a supercargo.⁷ In 1748, after a trip back to France, he returned to China on the *Duc de Béthune* and brought his nephew with him.⁸ The nephew, generally referred to in the French records as simply “Clouët nephew” (neveu Clouët), was going to China at his family’s expense to study Chinese.⁹

In 1751 his uncle incurred the displeasure of the Compagnie’s directors when, against their earlier orders, he did not immediately send his nephew back to France. “The Compagnie is still surprised,” wrote the directors in Paris to the *conseil* in Canton, “that Sr. Clouët disobeyed its orders in letting his nephew remain in China. The Compagnie expressly orders you, if he is still there, to have him embark for France.”¹⁰

The nephew returned to France in 1752, traveling with Mr. Boessière.¹¹ That same year, the members of the Canton Conseil had recorded that the boy, “who was quite young, was beginning to recognize Chinese characters, which could be of great usefulness.”¹² He had just returned to France when he was sent back to China to continue his language studies at the expense of the Compagnie.¹³ A letter from the Canton Conseil in 1757 reported on the progress that he and another *enfant de langue*, Charles-Henri de Vigny, were making in the language.¹⁴

He made another trip to France in 1762 and subsequently returned to China. As a clerk at the Canton *comptoir* when the second Compagnie lost its trade monopoly in 1769, he was part of the transition to the era of private trade, and was elevated, along with the other clerk, Paul-François Costar, to the new *conseil*.¹⁵

Altogether, Isaac-Pierre Clouët’s career in China spanned a period of close to thirty years. He remained in China until 1774, and was a member of the *conseil* that was badly disrupted by Robien. In 1774 he requested to leave Canton, citing his health as the reason, and providing medical certificates to support his request.¹⁶

A third Clouët, Clouët de Champillon, was the elder Clouët’s younger brother. In the 1743–1744 season, he served together with his brother on the Canton Conseil, along with Duvelaër de la Barre, Jean-Baptiste Dangla, and Meignan.¹⁷ He was still in the Compagnie’s employ in the 1750s, and was a second supercargo on the 1752 voyage of *Duc de Chartres* to China.¹⁸

CONSTANT, Charles de (1762–1835). Charles de Constant was born in Geneva into a Protestant family that had departed France for Switzerland in the sixteenth century.¹⁹ He early on became multilingual; he spoke Italian and German as well as his native French, and was

7. SHDL 2P 26-I.12, 2P 29-I.8.

8. SHDL 2P 33-II.7.

9. ANOM: COL E 85, ff^o 149–150, “Clouët [*sic*] (Isaac Pierre), ‘Chef de la Nation française en Chine.’ Letter from Clouët to the minister of the navy, dated January 20, 1778.

10. ANOM: COL C.1.10, f^o 72r.

11. ANOM: COL C.1.10, ff^o 80v–81r.

12. ANOM: COL C.1.10, f^o 81r: “ce dernier, qui est fort jeune, commençoit à connaître les caractères chinois, ce qui pourroit être d’une grande utilité.”

13. ANOM: COL E 85, ff^o 149–150.

14. ANOM: COL C.1.10, f^o 126r.

15. ANOM: COL C.1.11, f^o 89r.

16. ANOM: COL E 85, f^o 149.

17. ANOM: COL C.1.10, f^o 28r. July 30, 1743. The season ran from July 30, 1743, to January 18, 1744.

18. SHDL: 2P 36-16.

19. Constant and Dermigny, *Les mémoires de Charles de Constant*, 25.

sent to school in England for two years in his early teens. He later added Portuguese and some Chinese while in Macau.

In 1778, when he was sixteen, an uncle working for the Imperial Company procured him a position with that company as an apprentice.²⁰ At the end of February 1779, he sailed for China on the Imperial Company's *Prince de Kaunitz* and spent most of the next fourteen years there. In his first two periods of residence (1779–1782 and 1783–1786), he worked for the Imperial Company; in the third (1789–1793), he worked for the last French Compagnie.

Of his early time in China, Constant wrote, “I was barely seventeen and a half . . . , and I looked young for my age. I was lively, I knew the ways of the world, . . . I was open-minded, I understood quickly and easily, I knew four languages more or less well, and I learned Portuguese in no time at all, plus a little Chinese. . . . I had little pocket money, as I had only one hundred piasters a month, but I didn't need much, either. I had no horse, no palanquin, no black [servant] to cover my head with a parasol in the daytime, or to carry a lantern for me at night . . . my sole expenses were the wages of my servant Akao and my laundry . . . and I had a dog I cherished.”²¹

He became aware during his first period of residence in China of the gaps in his knowledge, both professional and cultural. Prior to departing Europe for his second stay, he purchased books on mathematics and accounting, and during the voyage, which set out for China in 1783, he was happy to be tutored by Gilles Sebire, a private trader and native of Saint-Malo, who was on the same ship.²²

During his first stay at Canton, he made few friends, except for Julien Bourgogne and Le Déan.²³ Like François Terrien, who arrived in China in 1774, he was often homesick during his first years in China; the thought of being so far from his family and country and not knowing when he would see them again was painful.²⁴ Unlike Terrien, however, he would later remark, when he arrived at Canton for his third stay, at the pleasure he felt at being back again in China, despite the frustrations he also encountered.

After the French company lost its monopoly in 1790 and the employees were allowed to engage in trade on their own account, Constant partnered with French private trader Jean-Baptiste Piron to create a trading house in Canton.²⁵ In 1793, however, he went back to Switzerland because of health issues.²⁶ The move turned out to be definitive.²⁷ For although he entertained thoughts of returning to China, as well as of publishing a long-envisioned guide to the trade—a work that he had begun while living in Canton, and which he continued to revise—by 1822 he realized that the Canton trade as he knew it no longer existed; too much had changed for the guide to be relevant or for him to return.²⁸

20. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 44.

21. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 49–50. At the time of his departure from France, however, on February 20, 1779, Constant, who was born October 3, 1762, was still 16.

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

23. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 127.

24. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 171–172.

25. Constant and Dermigny, *Les mémoires de Charles de Constant*, 82; Constant and Vargas, *Récit de trois voyages*, 37.

26. Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 78.

27. The move also turned out to be costly. He sent the cargo in which he had invested his capital on a single vessel, the ship on which he himself was traveling from Canton to Ostend: *Etrusco*, which was flying the Tuscan flag, carried a captain of convenience, and boasted a multinational crew. The *Etrusco* was subsequently seized by an English vessel at Ostend as a prize of war, and Constant lost his investment. See Great Britain, *Papers, presented to the House of Commons, respecting the ship L'Etrusco, and the Walsingham packet*, Vol. 10. ([London], 1808), 10–12, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpcp&rft_dat=xri:hcpcp:rec:1808-001771.

28. See Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 85–86.

COSTAR was the surname of a father and son who were members of a family of merchants and notaries from Saint-Malo.²⁹ The father, Louis Costar, served in the administrative offices of the Compagnie in Paris from 1743 to 1764, and then as secretary-general of the Compagnie until 1784.³⁰

His son, Paul-François Costar, went to China as a clerk on the 1764 *Penthièvre*. As his voyages show, he moved frequently between Canton and Isle de France. In 1765 he embarked at Isle de France on the 1765 *Villevault*.³¹ He embarked again at Isle de France as a supercargo the following year, when he traveled on the 1766 *Duc de Duras*.³² Already on board the *Duras* was Pierre-Louis-Achille de Robien (see later in this chapter), who was traveling to China for the first time. Costar made another voyage to China on the 1770 *Pondichéry*, again as a supercargo.³³

In December 1782, at the age of 37, he became the chancellor of the French consulate at Canton when Jean-Charles-François Galbert, who had been made chancellor ad interim several months earlier, resigned the post in favor of the more experienced Costar.³⁴

DUVELAËR may refer to either of two brothers: Pierre Duvelaër and Julien-Joseph Duvelaër. The latter is also sometimes referred to as Duvelaër de La Barre, or de La Barre, or du Lude.³⁵ Pierre Duvelaër (1699–1755), the elder brother, married Marie-Elisabeth Duval d'Eprémesnil, the daughter of Compagnie director Jacques Duval d'Eprémesnil.³⁶ Following her death in 1738, he remarried in 1740; his second wife, Marie-Elisabeth Marcadé, was related to Philibert Orry, who served as France's comptroller-general of finances from 1730 to 1745.³⁷ Pierre was one of the first employees at the Canton *comptoir* under the second Compagnie; together with Renault de Saint-Germain, he served under the *comptoir's* first director, La Bretesche, and the deputy director, Tribert de Tréville.³⁸ In 1724, the Conseil Supérieur of Pondicherry sent the *Saint-Joseph* to Canton, with Joseph Dupleix, later the governor of Pondicherry, as supercargo.³⁹ Duvelaër sailed back to Pondicherry on the *Saint-Joseph* in March 1725.⁴⁰ He spent twelve years in India and China in the Compagnie's service, and for the last four of those, was head of the Canton *comptoir*.⁴¹ In 1739 he became the Compagnie's shipping director at Lorient.

Pierre's younger brother, Julien-Joseph Duvelaër (1709–1785), was active in France's trade with Manila as well as with China. During his time in Canton, he returned to France at least three times. He was a supercargo on the 1740 *Jason*, which pioneered an itinerary to China via the west coast of the Philippines.⁴² His knowledge of this alternative route was attributed to

29. The surname "Costar" sometimes appears as "Costor" or "Costard."

30. Haudrière, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 158, 160.

31. SHDL: 2P 40-II.10

32. SHDL: 2P 41-I.6.

33. SHDL: 2P 44-I.10.

34. Cordier, "Le consulat," 56.

35. The reference to "Lude" derives from his purchase of the chateau Le Lude in France in 1751. The Duvelaërs were of Dutch heritage; their grandfather, Joseph Duvelaër, arrived in France in 1656 and was subsequently naturalized.

36. Du Halgouët, "Pages coloniales: Relations maritimes," 367; Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 360n2; "Françoise Du Velaër," Geneanet, <http://gw.geneanet.org/garric?lang=en;p=m+francoise;n=du+velaer>. During his life, Jacques Duval d'Eprémesnil served the Compagnie in several functions, including that of shipping director at Lorient.

37. "Duvelaër, Pierre," Geneanet, https://en.geneanet.org/archives/registres/view/40021/192?idcollecti...1&legacy_script=%2Farchives%2Fregistres%2Fview%2Findex.php&page=192.

38. CCSP 1:22 (Introduction). *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des Missions Etrangères. Mémoires de la Chine* (Lyon : J. Vernarel, 1819), 12:38; Martineau, "Quatre ans," 29.

39. CCSP 1:23; Martineau, "Quatre ans," 29.

40. Martineau, "Quatre ans," 32.

41. "Testimony of M. du Velaër, head and director of trade of the Compagnie des Indes at Canton," dated Lorient, March 20, 1736. *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, 12:38–39.

42. For the route, see d'Après de Manneville, *Instructions sur la navigation*, 518–527.

his previous voyages from India to Manila.⁴³ He also had interests in Cochinchina.⁴⁴ In 1736, he spent several days in jail after a Chinese was accidentally killed by several members of the French community who were engaging in shooting practice.⁴⁵ In 1743, the Compagnie sent him on what proved to be a disappointing mission to Spain to obtain piasters directly from Peru or Mexico.⁴⁶

While in Asia, he married a Chinese woman, who may have been from Batavia or Manila. Although the exact date of the marriage is not known, they were married by 1742, and possibly much earlier.⁴⁷ His wife accompanied him back to France when he returned there permanently to live in 1751; they departed Canton on an English vessel.⁴⁸

Duvelaër had several other relatives in the Canton trade, including M. de La Borderie, who is sometimes referred to as “nephew Duvelaër” (Duvelaër neveu) and to whom Duvelaër advanced funds to engage in private trade. Also related to Duvelaër is Charles-Henri de Vigny. Like La Borderie, Vigny, too, may have been a nephew.⁴⁹

GALBERT, father and son (Jean-Charles-François). The senior Galbert sailed to China on the 1752 *Duc de Chartres* as a clerk.⁵⁰ At some point he returned to France and may have made additional voyages to China before embarking at Lorient for Canton on February 1, 1765, as a supercargo on the 1765 *Villevault*. On this voyage he brought his eight-year-old son, Jean-Charles-François, with him as an *enfant de langue* to learn Chinese; they disembarked at Canton on September 30, 1765.⁵¹ In 1774, the son, now seventeen years old, took on the duties of interpreter and registry clerk.

On September 26, 1782, Vieillard, formerly the chancellor of the Canton consulate but now its head following the death of Vauquelin several days earlier, appointed Galbert as chancellor. Not quite two-and-a-half months later, however, Galbert resigned in favor of Paul-François Costar, who was twelve years his senior and who had the experience that Galbert felt he lacked. Not only had he come to China when he was so young, Galbert explained, but he felt that he was better informed in commercial matters than in judicial ones, which were part of the chancellor’s duties.⁵²

Around 1783, Charles de Constant described Galbert as having the character and manners, as well as the language ability, of a Chinese man of letters.⁵³ The two men both left China at the end of 1785 on the 764-ton English East India Company ship *Atlas*.⁵⁴ For Constant, it was the termination of his second period of residence in Canton; for Galbert, it was the end of

43. d’Après de Manneville, *Instructions sur la navigation*, 524n–525n; BL IOR G/12/48, “China Supra Cargoes (ship) Diary,” entry dated October 2 [1740]; Dermigny, *La Chine et l’Occident*, 259–260.

44. ANOM: COL C.1.1, ff° 131r–147v, “Quelques reflexions sur le mémoire qui traite [sic] du commerce de Cochinchine,” for example, gives Duvelaër’s comments in 1748 on the voyage of Pierre Poivre. As a member of the Canton Conseil, Duvelaër also had a part in the instructions given to Poivre on his voyage, which sought to open trade with Cochinchina; see ANOM COL C.1.2, ff° 3r.

45. Dermigny, *La Chine et l’Occident*, 513–514.

46. Dermigny, *La Chine et l’Occident*, 743; Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*. 275.

47. A.L.: Mss 656, letter dated Lorient, December 4, 1742.

48. A.L.: Mss 638, January 15, 1752. In 1751 he purchased the Château du Lude at the northern end of the Loire valley. He and his wife had no children, and he left his estate to his niece, the Marchioness de La Vieuville (Françoise Joséphine Butler, 1741–1798). She was the daughter of his sister (Françoise Duvelaër) and her husband, Irish-born ship captain Richard Butler (1696–1749). Butler became a French national in 1740, the same year as François Rothe.

49. Du Halgouët, “Pages coloniales: Relations maritimes,” 366.

50. SHDL: 2P 36–16 [sic].

51. SHDL: 2P 40-II.10. Dermigny notes the name of the scholar who initially tutored the 8-year-old Galbert as Hio Igonies Yvene, but observes that the name has been distorted. Dermigny, *La Chine et l’Occident*, 1107, n6.

52. FR MAE: 8MD Asie 17, ff° 121r–v. Also reproduced in Cordier, “Le consulat,” 56–57; Cordier, *La France en Chine*, 158–159.

53. Constant and Dermigny, *Les mémoires de Charles de Constant*, 49. See also Vienne, *La Chine au déclin des Lumières*, 133n22.

54. FR MAE: 8MD Asie 17, ff° 121r. Also reproduced in Cordier, “Le consulat,” 56.

Conclusion

In the global expansion of trade that occurred during the eighteenth century, China played a vital role as the source of commodities that were avidly sought after by merchants and consumers alike. France, which was then one of the two most important western powers, was a key participant in this trade, and was home to one of the three major East India companies. Although the French company (*la Compagnie française des Indes orientales*) may have been founded more than half a century after those of the English and the Dutch, France was early in entering the Canton Trade, sending her first merchantman to Canton in 1698.

In the structure and governance of the Compagnie, as well as in the role of the private sector, the French were sufficiently distinctive to constitute a separate model of Sino-European trade. While the Compagnie had certain features in common with other European East India companies, its most distinctive feature—the extensive government involvement in, and control over, the Compagnie's organization and administration—was an element that is perhaps not surprising in a nation ruled by an absolute monarch, giving rise to what has memorably been called “a Versailles of trade.” The major involvement of the state was evident at the very start in the nature of the Compagnie's creation; in its initial broad geographical scope; and in its equally broad mission, which included proselytization and colonization as well as trade. Even after the Compagnie was streamlined in 1730, the state's involvement was evident in the role of the French monarch and government ministers, and in the correspondingly subordinate role of the traders.

At the same time, and this is one of the paradoxes of the French example, private trade nevertheless played an impactful role in a nation where the state wielded such power. Private traders conducted the first two decades of French merchant voyages to Canton, having been granted limited leases of the Compagnie's China-trade monopoly, and France became the first of the three nations with a major East India company to suspend its company's monopoly and open the East India and China trade to the private sector (1769). It also became the first of the three to put a definitive end to the company model and to open its East India and China trade, this time for good, to all its nationals. For although a third company was created in 1785, it was of short duration; after being stripped of its monopoly in 1790, it was permanently abolished in 1793.

The French experience is also of interest for its role in redefining the terms “private” and “company.” The traditional interpretation often approached trade in terms of one or the other, but as the “country-cum-company” policy of the voyages from Pondicherry to Canton in the mid-1720s, for example, shows, the distinction between the two is far more nuanced, requiring

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