

HIGHLIGHTS IN THE HISTORY OF EXPLORATION AND TRADE IN CHINA

Foster Stockwell

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING

Highlights in the History of Exploration and Trade in China

Written by Foster Stockwell

Foreign Languages Press Beijing

First Edition 2002

Home Page:

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

E-mail Addresses:

info@flp.com.cn

sales@flp.com.cn

ISBN 7-119-03119-1

©Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, China, 2002

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

Table of Contents

<i>Chapter 1</i>	Some Basic Facts About China	1
<i>Chapter 2</i>	Those Who Came by Three Silk Roads	13
<i>Chapter 3</i>	China's First Contacts with the West	24
<i>Chapter 4</i>	The Legacy of Marco Polo	36
<i>Chapter 5</i>	Jesuits in China	48
<i>Chapter 6</i>	Prized Goods from China	60
<i>Chapter 7</i>	Early Western Exploration in Tibet and Yunnan	72
<i>Chapter 8</i>	Aftermath of the Opium War	85
<i>Chapter 9</i>	Americans and the China Trade	99
<i>Chapter 10</i>	Role of Missionaries in Exploration, Trade, and Culture in China	111
<i>Chapter 11</i>	Przhevalsky: The Man and the Horse	123
<i>Chapter 12</i>	Distaff Explorers	135
<i>Chapter 13</i>	The Last Imperialist	146
<i>Chapter 14</i>	Cities Buried in Sand	158
<i>Chapter 15</i>	Rocks and Culture	169
<i>Chapter 17</i>	An American Dinosaur Hunter	181
<i>Chapter 17</i>	The Giant Panda Argument	193
<i>Chapter 18</i>	The Communist Revolution	205
<i>Chapter 19</i>	The New Zealander Who Won the Hearts of the Chinese	218
<i>Chapter 20</i>	Rapid Growth of China's Economy	231
<i>Chapter 21</i>	Illusion and Reality	245

Chronology of Chinese History	258
Pronunciation Guide to Chinese	259
Other China Explorers of Note	260
Bibliography	263
Index	267

Chapter 1

Some Basic Facts About China

The gates of China are now opening to foreign investment and international trade as never before, and many in the West are coming to view that country, with its huge population, as a vast new area for the development and growth of trade. China and the West, of course, did have a history of trade and exchange of products in the past. But, based partly on China's attempts to preserve its society unchanged, and even more on the efforts of various western powers to establish colonies there, as they did in other parts of the world, much hostility and suspicion developed. In the light of China's present policy of welcoming foreign investments and promoting free trade throughout the world, it is important for those seeking a better understanding of that vast country to learn about its long history of Western contacts.

In total land area, China is comparable in size to the United States or Canada. But unlike these two, three-quarters of the Chinese terrain is filled with high mountain ranges and huge deserts that stretch in an immense bow from North to South across the western section of the country. That is a region not easily visited because communications and roads in much of the area are still a problem. Besides the long chains of mountain ranges, there are massive plateaus and basins crisscrossed by many rivers, some of which never reach the sea, as well as immense grasslands, steppes, salt lakes, oases, and jungles. In the desert regions there are troughs that lie lower than the Dead Sea that borders Israel and Jordan, and some of China's mountains, such as the one called Everest by Western climbers and Qomolangma by the Chinese, are the highest

peaks in the world.

The present boundaries of China (including Tibet, Turkestan [Turkstan], and Inner Mongolia) were established many centuries ago as the borders of the "world's oldest continuous civilization." It is a nation that has a recorded history stretching back thousands of years. In earlier times the Chinese empire was, in fact, somewhat larger than it is today.

The part of the country familiar to Western tourists and business persons actually comprises only some 25 percent of the land area. Yet this is where the richest and most advanced among China's cities are located — Beijing, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Nanjing, Shanghai, and Tianjin, to name a few — and this is where one finds its fertile alluvial lowlands on which the nation feeds its almost one quarter of the world's population. This part of China, reaching from Manchuria to Hong Kong, is also an area with easy access to the ocean, and it is where prosperity is most evident. It is the part of China in which one will find the special economic zones and most of the new industrial plants. And it is where the largest portion of foreign investments are concentrated.

Eighty percent of China's 1.266 billion people reside in this fertile region, which is roughly half as large as the inhabited areas of the United States. From the rice, wheat, and vegetable fields located there (on only about 7 percent of the world's arable land) China must feed its 23 percent of the world's population. Compared to the U.S., which has some 570,000 square miles under cultivation and could greatly increase that amount, China has perhaps 450,000 square miles of cultivated land (less than one third acre of food-producing soil per person), and the nature of China's soil gives little prospect for increasing the cultivated area by more than a small fraction.

Until the middle of the 19th century China's mountains and deserts in the West both sheltered and isolated the country from its surrounding neighbors, such as India and Russia, as well as from the nations of Europe. And the Pacific Ocean to the East shut China off from much of the rest of the outside world. Despite these

barriers, China was regularly visited over the centuries by some of the most hardy travelers, both traders and explorers.

Center of the Universe

The term *Zhongguo*, by which the Chinese refer to their country, means the Central Realm. For some five thousand years the Chinese viewed themselves as indeed being at the center of the universe. They conceived of the rest of the world as composed of barbarians, and they treated their immediate neighbors — people in the surrounding countries of East Asia — as vassals. In time, Chinese culture profoundly influenced the development of Korea, Japan, and several other countries that bordered China to the south.

Nearly everyone in China (93.3%) belongs to the Han nationality named for the Han Dynasty that was established in 206 B.C. Most of the other 55 national minorities within the borders of the country make their homes in the mountainous and desert regions to the west. China, in other words, has the most homogeneous body of mankind on the entire planet. Their language, *putonghua* (Mandarin), is based on the northern Chinese dialect. However, the differences in pronunciation can be stupendous. If someone from Canton (Guangzhou) and someone from Shanghai meet and neither can speak the standard dialect, their only recourse is to use the written language as a means of communication.

That written language has a history that stretches back more than 6,000 years, with the earliest Chinese writing being pictographic representations of various objects and animals that were incised on the backs of tortoise shells. Eventually these pictographs evolved into thousands of different characters, each one designating a specific word. Because the Chinese have no alphabet, the written language is not easily learned. Just to read a newspaper requires one to be able to recognize at least 2,000 different characters, and scholars must memorize more than 10,000 of them in order to read classical Chinese literature. Fortunately for the west-

erner, the Chinese developed a phonetic form of Chinese (*pinyin*) in late 1950s that, along with some accent marks, transcribes the speech sounds into the Roman alphabet.

During the 19th century and before, the Chinese empire was the largest realm under one government outside of Christendom. None of the well-known European dynasties, such as the Capetian kings of France (987-1328), the Norman and Plantagenet kings of England (1066-1485), the Hapsburgs (1273-1919), or the Romanovs (1613-1917), ruled as large a state or maintained such a monopoly of central power as did the emperors of China. Nor did the rulers of India, Japan, or Persia.

Despite the fact that the various Chinese dynasties rose and fell over a period of 2,000 years and China experienced as many ups and downs in its history as elsewhere in the world, the economic system in China remained relatively unchanged until the 1911 Revolution led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925). All of the emperors came from great dynastic families, such as the Liu clan that produced 27 emperors during the Han Dynasty, the Li clan that produced 23 emperors during the Tang Dynasty, and the Zhu clan that produced 17 emperors during the Ming Dynasty. Beneath these emperors were various provincial, county, and district officials (the intellectual class) who were recruited through an educational system that indoctrinated them in the principles of Confucian philosophy and culminated in civil service examinations that determined each man's ability to assume the political post to which he was assigned. Confucianism actually provided China with a most stable system of bureaucratic power. Social advancement under this system was determined by one's scholarship and one's family connections.

The function of the family, as outlined in the writings of Confucius and various commentaries on those, was to raise filial sons who would become loyal subjects of the emperor. The father was the supreme autocrat, with complete control over the use of all family property and income. He had the decisive voice in arranging for the marriages of his children and, according to law, could sell his children into slavery or even execute them for improper con-

duct.

The highly ordered Confucian system of family kinship extended from the grandparents through both the fraternal and maternal uncles and aunts and their families, and every relationship was clearly named and the rights and duties of each individual were dependent on the status of that individual within the family. And, of course, all the family members expected to be called by the correct term indicating their relationship to the person addressing them.

The Confucian code of ethics prescribed a manner of behavior in which the women obeyed the men, younger brothers obeyed the older brothers, sons obeyed their fathers, and the fathers obeyed men of superior rank. And everyone rendered homage to the emperor, who was regarded as an embodiment of Confucian virtue and innate wisdom, indeed the head of the Great Family or Nation.

A similar order extended throughout all aspects of society, leaving little room for social mobility. The people were divided into four distinct social classes: intellectuals, peasants, craftsmen, and merchants. It was a social system that lasted more than twice as long as the feudal system did in Europe, and it did so because the system worked so well and because the Chinese rulers were seldom threatened by outside powers.

Some Western historians have argued that the Chinese are mistaken in calling this system "feudalism." These historians point out that the essential characteristic of European feudalism was the inalienability of the land. The medieval serf was bound to the land he lived on and to the lord who controlled that land. A European serf could neither leave the land he tilled nor dispose of it.

The Chinese peasant, on the other hand, by law and in fact, had the right to purchase land of his own, if he had the means to do so. And, of course, therein lies the problem. It took many generations of abundant crops and much luck for any Chinese peasant to acquire enough money to actually purchase even a tiny bit of land. Most of the peasants under China's "feudal system" remained indebted to a landlord throughout their entire lives, often paying

interest on debts that were initially acquired by their grandfathers or great-grandfathers. Thus the life of the Chinese peasant was no less miserable than that of the European serf.

Under China's social system, it was also the case that any person (regardless of class background) who was able to pass the government's arduous civil service examinations might become a government official. The system allowed persons to rise from the lowest ranks to positions of power on the basis of intellectual prowess alone. It made brains predominant over class background. And there were a few peasants — only a very few — who actually rose to become county and provincial governors. In reality, those who were educated enough to take the civil service exams were almost invariably the sons of landlords, i.e., boys whose fathers could afford to hire tutors for their sons and who didn't need those sons to work in the fields.

The huge rents collected from the peasants by the landlords went mainly to satisfy the appetites of their own landlord families and the needs of those who ruled politically. Money for the latter went to the upkeep of the court, salaries for a swarm of officials, and payment for occasional frontier wars as well as wars to suppress periodic revolts initiated by the people at home.

Creative Talent

During their long history, the Chinese produced many distinguished natural scientists, inventors, engineers, philosophers, poets, and military strategists. China was one of the first nations to advance material culture to a quite high level and to develop skillful methods of farming.

Immediately before and after the beginning of the Christian era China rivaled the Roman Empire in its wealth, geographic extent, and civilization. In the seventh and eighth centuries, only the Arabs approached the Chinese in terms of their brilliance of culture. And by the eleventh century no other empire was as fertile in creative

art and thought, or as wealthy.

The best-known industrial and scientific inventions of the Chinese included paper, silk, porcelain, printing, gunpowder, and the mariner's compass. The Chinese also anticipated Europe in the first use of coal for fuel, deep drilling for salt and natural gas, the bellows in metal smelting, suspension bridges and canal locks, the seismoscope to detect earthquakes, the differential gear and clockworks in mechanics, the stern-post rudder, the paddlewheel for ships, and the crossbow, cannons, and gunpowder rockets for warfare. Although the Chinese began to work iron later than some of the Europeans, their early use of coal gave them advantages in the quality of the iron that they produced. The first century Roman historian Pliny said that "the iron that came from China was considered the best."

Chinese alchemists contributed much to the technology for producing porcelains, dyes, and alloys, and in their physiological and chemical experiments, they built up a huge pharmacopoeia of medicinal herbs and concocted elixirs. Their discovery of acupuncture as a method for relieving pain and treating disease by inserting needles into various parts of the body is only now being recognized in the West as a valid alternative medical procedure.

Books printed in China gave a great impetus to education there, much of which was conducted in ancient times by tutors in the homes of most wealthy families. At first the government had tried to control all printing, which was widespread throughout the country. However, by the 1020s the government had given up this attempt and had begun to encourage the construction of schools by providing them with both land and books. The aim was to establish a government school in every prefecture. These schools offered lectures, conducted Confucian rituals, and enrolled candidates for the national civil service examinations. It is estimated that by the early 1100s this state school system had 1.5 million acres of land that provided both a living and an education for some 200,000 students.

The fact that China was no longer a sea going nation when the

first Dutch, English and French ships arrived at the port of Guangzhou led to the widespread European belief that this was a nation of landlocked people. But nothing could be further from the truth. The Chinese, in fact, had been skilled and adventurous boatmen since the dawn of history. As early as the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279) they had established a regular navy, and by the early 1400s they were constructing the largest oceangoing ships in the world, some of which carried 500 to 600 people on a single voyage. It was not until the mid-1400s that the emperor suddenly decided to disband the navy and forbid any more commerce by Chinese traders on the high seas.

At a much earlier time there were books written about the Chinese knowledge of winds and currents in the Pacific Ocean, some of these dating to the first century A.D. There is even an account recorded in the *Liang Shu (History of the Liang Dynasty)* that describes the voyage of Hui Shen and five other Buddhist monks who sailed to a strange place called Fusang Guo (the Country to the Extreme East) that seems to bear a strong resemblance to Mayan Mexico. The monks found that the people of Fusang Guo could make cloth and paper from bark and that they wrote with strange characters. The monks also reported that, like the emperor of China, the king of this place was preceded and followed by drummers and heralds wherever he went, and that, again like in China, Fusang Guo had a severe judicial system in which not only a criminal but also his children and grandchildren might be punished.

At that time the Chinese believed that the waters of the four oceans around them emptied into a great whirlwind or abyss from which no traveler could return, much as the Europeans at the same time believed that the world was flat and anyone sailing to its edge would fall forever into an abyss. However, the Chinese astronomer Zhang Heng (c. 78 - c. 139), a contemporary of Ptolemy, taught that the earth was round and floated in space like yolk in the albumen of an egg.

At the beginning of the 19th century the Chinese were endeavoring to keep aloof from the rest of the world. They refused to

negotiate diplomatic relations on any type of equal terms, and they permitted foreign trade through only one port, Guangzhou. Thus, throughout the first half of the century, they were able to resist the growing pressures for open trade on the part of the Western mercantile nations. But they were handicapped by the growing decay of the ruling Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), which was composed of the descendants of the Manchus who had overthrown the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) in the 17th century and had thus established their own rule over China.

The early Qing rulers were quite enlightened and tended to give the Chinese people relatively good government. However they were hampered in this by the traditional Confucian bureaucratic methods of management. When, for example, Emperor Kangxi initiated an open-door policy by permitting foreign trade at all Chinese ports, in 1685, so many rules and regulations were soon put in force that the movements of visitors became rapidly restricted. Also the demands for presents on the part of the officials at that time became so exorbitant that commerce was quickly stifled.

By the end of the 18th century the quality of the Manchu rule had greatly deteriorated and the emperors were unable to provide the kind of leadership that might enable the Chinese to adjust to the revolutionary currents then impinging upon their country from the now much more industrially developed West.

It was not until some time after the Chinese ports were forced open by the military might of Western nations that the Chinese first began to develop a system of industrialization of their own that was comparable to the early European industrialization. Yet the disparity that the European and American traders noted in terms of China's technological and material backwardness in comparison with their own industrial development in no way lessens the importance of the vast size and maturity of China's domestic trade and the growing power of its merchant class during the Ming and early Qing dynasties. This was recognized by the economist Adam Smith, who said in 1776, in his book *The Wealth of Nations*, that China's home market was as big as that of all the countries of

Europe put together.

The inter-provincial trade in China was highly commercialized and enabled the country to be quite self-sufficient. Cotton cloth produced in the mechanized Lancashire mills of England were of little interest to the Chinese because their own hand-woven nan-keen cotton cloth was somewhat superior for local purposes and certainly less costly for the Chinese to purchase. And up until the 1930s this Chinese-produced cloth continued to supply most of the needs of the local people. China's chief imports for mass consumption turned out to be the drug opium and the fuel kerosene, a product from the West that was due mostly to unique geological conditions rather than to Western industrial development. When China's modern economy did finally develop, much of it remained in Chinese hands.

Cultural Characteristics

A characteristic of most Chinese people, shaped by five thousand years of civilization, holds to the philosophic objective of preserving dignity and restraint in social relations, especially with foreigners. This is the basis for the well-known propensity of all Asians to "save face," or, in other words, to save one's honor and that of the person with whom one may be dealing. It is also the reason why the Chinese are usually reluctant to say "no" in response to requests from others. The hope is that positive relationships may be maintained.

Throughout history the Chinese have thrived in times of stability and have suffered during periods of great turmoil. They are thus much more cautious about new ideas and revolutionary inventions than we tend to be in the West, and stability has a place of high-priority among their values. It is, in fact, an ancient curse to say that one hopes an opponent "will live in interesting times."

The Chinese have a reverence for their history and a knowledge of it that few Americans can appreciate. After all, we recount

our history as going back only a few hundred years, while China's record stretches back for thousands of years. And the Chinese tend to describe that history in terms of dynastic periods rather than in particular years. Thus a porcelain vase will be described as being produced during the Ming Dynasty rather than in 1400, 1530, or 1620. The same can be said of any one of a series of events that might have occurred within a single dynasty. Thus a happening will be described as taking place during the reign of Emperor Kangxi rather than in a specific year of that reign, such as 1675, or, in modern times, during the "Cultural Revolution" rather than in a specific year, such as 1966, of that ten-year long period. And whenever the phrase "a thousand years" is used by a Chinese it probably means a very long time rather than the exact number.

In business dealings the insistence by Westerners on getting specific facts, drawing absolute conclusions, and making precise definitions can be somewhat frustrating to the Chinese. A specific number when referring to a large group often becomes fuzzy when it is more than ninety-nine, and the term "a great many" usually proves much more useful. Thus the Westerner who insists on demanding an exact figure larger than a hundred can be perceived as a bore, or even perhaps rude. Contracts, sworn statements, and the like are features of Western business practice that can never be more than 95 percent respected in China because, to the Chinese mind, the absolute is somewhat absurd and does not really exist.

This is not a matter of being mathematically challenged. Instead, it is the way the Chinese tend to deal with superlatives. After all, some of the finest mathematicians in the world are Chinese, and their ancestors invented the abacus that can usually do calculations as rapidly and accurately as any electronically-operated machine.

Contrary to American society, which tends to put its greatest attention on youth, the Chinese give their greatest respect to those who are elderly. And in times past many Chinese glorified their ancestors by honoring their memories on tablets and scrolls that hung from the walls of their homes and even maintained small

shrines where they could light incense as a means of respect for such ancestors. One may no longer see much ancestor worship in today's China, but reverence for the aged is given special attention by the Chinese government through programs that guarantee health and financial benefits to those who have retired.

It is, of course, only natural that education would be highly regarded in a society where for centuries intellectuals ranked as members of the most important social class. Thus today most Chinese families encourage their children to do well in school and make every effort to assure that these children receive high marks in their class work. Even Chinese living overseas carry on this tradition, and in many American colleges students of Chinese ancestry are among those in the top percentage of scholars.

The Chinese also have a traditional sense of direction and space that is embraced in their system of geomancy known as *fengshui*. Homes are often built with great attention being placed on the direction in which they face and family members are often assigned bedrooms in accordance with geographic locations. In the past all the streets in the city of Beijing were laid out so that they crossed each other at right angles. As for space, the Chinese are not as concerned with personal space as most Westerners are, and they more readily endure the crowded conditions in which they work and live.

For persons from the West who might wish to develop trade or other commercial relations with counterparts in China, it is just as important to understand some of the historical and cultural characteristics of the Chinese people as it is to gain technical information about their products, prices, and methods of production.