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The History of Early Relations between The United States and China 1784—1844

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FOREWORD

The author wishes to make grateful acknowledgment of the courtesy of the many individuals and institutions whose helpfulness and courtesy have made this study possible. Especially is he under obligations to Professor Clive Day of Yale University, the Connecticut Academy, the Yale Library, the John Carter Brown Library, the Essex Institute, the Salem and New York Customs Houses, the Lenox Library and the great collection of which it now forms a part, the New York Public Library, the New Haven Colony Historical Society, the Rhode Island Historical Society, the New York Historical Society, the Boston Athenaeum and the Boston Public Library, the Harvard Library, the Library of Congress and the State Department, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the American Baptist Missionary Union, now the Baptist Missionary Society. Above all the author wishes to record his indebtedness to Professor Frederick Wells Williams of Yale University, under whose direction the study was originally made, in whose ample library much of the work was done, and to whose constant interest and kindly criticism are due much of whatever value these pages may have.

INTRODUCTION

The intercourse of western nations with China falls into two periods, the dividing line between which is the discovery of the sea route to India in the fifteenth century. In the first period come the vaguely known trade with the Roman Empire, the burst of commerce and papal missions made possible by the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the slight revival of indirect communication under Tamerlane and his successors.[1] The second period begins with the coming of the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century.[2] In the first period intercourse was largely by the overland route across the high table land of Central Asia. In the second, except in the case of Russia, it has been almost entirely by sea.

The second period is in turn separated into two natural divisions by the first British-Chinese war and the treaties of 1842-4. Before these years all Westerners were regarded by the Chinese as troublesome barbarians. They were looked upon as tributary peoples, uncivilized, not to be considered as equals. They were confined to limited quarters in the suburbs of one port, Canton, and to Macao, which Portugal had leased from the Empire. They were ruled by the most stringent of regulations, but were viewed with such contempt that officials would deal with them only through a non-official commercial monopoly, the co-hong.

In spite of handicaps, however, the commerce and missions of two countries, the United States and England, steadily grew, and when Chinese isolation and self-satisfaction finally became unbearable, the first British-Chinese war broke out and resulted in treaties which granted revolutionary concessions. With these treaties, China entered the family of nations, and theoretically at least, recognized western countries as her equals. Foreigners were allowed residence in five ports, were released from the old

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[1] Henry Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither,* being a collection of Medieval notices of China translated and edited by Colonel Henry Yule, with a preliminary essay on the intercourse between China and the Western Nations previous to the discovery of the Cape Route. London, 1866. This is the best single work on the period.

[2] S. Wells Williams, *A History of China.* New York, 1901. pp. 75-110.

cumbersome regulations, and were placed under their own laws and a more equitable system of port rules and duties. China still had a long road to travel before reaching a full appreciation of other powers and entering fully into modern life. Wars, rebellions, and outbreaks were to mark the mile posts. But in 1842-1844 she put her feet in the way, and the years since that date are rightly thought of as being spent in advancing toward the goal then first dimly seen.

It is the purpose of the following chapters to trace the part of the United States in the first division of the second period, i. e., the years before 1844. This will lead us to show how trade with China began, to trace its expansion, its changes, and its influence, to find the beginnings of American missionary effort for the Chinese and to see its early growth, and finally to consider the immediate effects of the first British-Chinese war and the British treaty on both commerce and missions, and to give the story of the first American treaty with the empire. As we proceed we shall find that there are well marked chronological divisions in our subject. The first includes the opening of the trade and its first few years. The second begins with the sudden expansion of commerce caused by the European wars and the discovery of new sources of furs, sandal wood, and *beche de mer,* and closes with the commercial stagnation of the Second War with Great Britain. The third begins with the conclusion of peace in 1814, and ends with the beginning of the opium troubles. The fourth and last begins with the opium troubles of 1839, includes the first British-Chinese war, and ends with the treaty of Whanghia, in 1844.

Practically all the known available material on the subject has been examined. Manuscript correspondence of persons intimately connected with the events narrated, especially that of the consuls at Canton, preserved in the State Department in Washington, and that of the missionaries of the American Board and the Baptist Board, preserved in the archives of these two societies, forms a considerable and important source of information. Manuscript logs, largely those preserved in the Essex Institute and belonging to Salem ships, and those of the firm of Brown and Ives of Providence, deposited in the John Carter Brown Library of American History, are also important. Published journals, correspondence, and especially narratives of voyages are also

indispensable. A surprising number of these, most of them long out of print, are to be found in nearly all of our large libraries. A few periodicals are very useful. One especially, the Chinese Repository, is an invaluable source. There are numerous biographies and memoirs, largely of missionaries, which cover this period, and a number of secondary authorities can be found which add useful information. Congressional documents and other government papers are of use, especially in tracing the negotiations which resulted in the Treaty of Whanghia.

CHAPTER I.

The Period of Beginnings, 1784-1790.

American commerce with China was the result of influences reaching back over an extensive period. At the very discovery of the New World a connection had existed with the Celestial Empire, for it was to find Cathay and the Indies that Columbus sailed westward, and it was partly the belief in a Northwest Passage through the continent to the same countries which led the European explorers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to nose their way along the eastern coast of North America. Still later the English colonists became acquainted with China through the East India Company. Their tea came in the Company's ships from Canton by way of Great Britain. Since 1718, ginseng, the drug which formed a large part of the cargoes of the first China ships, had been known to be native to North America,[1] and it is probable that the East India Company had shipped some of it to Canton.[2] The Company may, too, have had some of its Indiamen built in the colonies.[3]

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[1] A Jesuit, Joseph Francis Lafitare, in 1718 published his "Mémoire présenté à S. A. R. Mgr. le duc d'Orléans, régent du royaume de France, concernant la précieuse plante du ginseng, decóuverte en Canada." Paris, 1718. Reuben G. Thwaites, "Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents," Cleveland, c. 1900, 66:333 (Notes); 71:347. See also Justin Winsor, "Narrative and Critical History of America." Boston and New York. c. 1886. 4:289, 298.

[2] William Speer, The Oldest and the Newest Empire, China and the United States, Hartford, 1870, p. 410, says that the East India Company used it as a return cargo to save exports of specie, and speaks of "Agents sent to New England, who induced Indians to search for this medicinal root by rewards of money, whiskey, trinkets, and tobacco." Hamilton, in his Itinerarium of 1744 (Hamilton's Itinerarium, Albert Bushnell Hart ed., St. Louis, 1907, p. 4), speaks of having a "curiosity to see a thing [ginseng] which had been so famous." David MacPherson, Annals of Commerce, London, 1805, 3:572 gives among the articles exported in 1770 from the American colonies—which he regards as including Newfoundland, Bahama, and Bermuda—74,604 lbs. of ginseng valued at £1243.8s.

[3] One was built in Danvers, Mass., in 1755, but was never used. J. W. Hanson, History of the Town of Danvers, from its early settlement to the year 1848. Danvers, 1848. George Henry Preble, Notes on Early Ship-building in Massachusetts, communicated to the New England Historical and Genealogical Register, 1871, p. 17.

Another influence leading to American commerce with China was the development of shipping in the colonies. The West Indian trade, the fisheries, and a commerce with Portugal and the Mediterranean,[4] had been important means of support to the Northern Colonies, and had raised up a hardy race of sailors and small merchant firms.[5] The spirit of adventure needed in the initiation of long voyages to China had received cultivation from piracy. For instance, in the last years of the seventeenth century the waters north of Madagascar were infested with a band of marauders who fitted out their ships, obtained their supplies, and often spent their ill-gotten gains in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, and the Carolinas.[6] A letter of 1696[7] said of them, "All the ships that are now out are from New England, except Tew from New York, and Want from Carolina."[8] The privateering of the Revolution had an even greater influence. Craft bearing letters of marque from the colonies swarmed the seas. Large fortunes were accumulated, a surplus shipping, too large for the coasting trade, was built, a knowledge of distant seas was acquired, and an adventurous spirit was

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[4] Charles E. Trow, Old Shipmasters of Salem, New York and London, 1905. p. 48.

[5] Log books in the Essex Institute, Salem, for this period, show something of the extent of the trade. See also G. F. Chever, Some Remarks on the Commerce of Salem, from 1626 to 1740, with a sketch of Philip English, a merchant in Salem from about 1670 to about 1733-1734. Hist. Cols. of Essex Instit. 1 : 67.

[6] Gertrude Selwyn Kimball, The East India Trade of Providence, Providence, 1896, p. 3, quotes the Governor of New York from the N. Y. Col. Docs. Vol. 4, p. 306, to the effect, that "I find that those Pirates that have given the greatest disturbance in the East Indies and the Red Sea, have either been fitted from New York or Rhode Island, and manned from New York." See also Paullin, Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers. Baltimore, 1912, pp. 154-156.

[7] T. South to the Lord Justices of Ireland, from Dublin, Aug. 15, 1696. Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies. May 15, 1696—Oct. 31, 1697. J. W. Fortescue, ed., London, 1904.

[8] A letter to the East India Company from Bombay, Ibid. 1697-8, p. 363, says of the same band, "There is a nest of rogues in the Isle of St. Mary's [near Madagascar] . . . . where they are frequently supplied . . . . by ships from New York, New England, and the West Indies."

stimulated in sailors and merchants.[9] With the end of the war these were forced to seek other outlets.

Still another influence was the loss of the trade with the British West Indies. Before the Revolution the colonies had, of course, been included in the British colonial system. They had sent their provisions and lumber to the West Indies, had received in payment credit on England, and with this credit had secured the necessary old-world manufactures and supplies. Independence, by placing them outside the colonial system, made it necessary for them to look elsewhere for the investment of their commercial capital, and for the means of paying the bills owed by them to British merchants and manufacturers. As Phineas Bond wrote at the time[10]: "In the restricted state of American trade it is natural for men of enterprise to engage in such speculations as are open to them, and which afford a prospect of profit."

But independence and withdrawal from the colonial system, while shutting the door of the West Indies, had opened that to Asia and the East Indies. For nearly a century the East India Company had held a monopoly on the British trade in the entire hemisphere from the Cape of Good Hope eastward to the Straits of Magellan.[11] After the treaty of peace, this, of course, ceased to be binding on the new nation, and it would have been strange

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[9] Trow, Old Shipmasters of Salem, pp. xx-xxiv. Charles S. Osgood and H. M. Batchelder, Historical Sketch of Salem, 1626-1879, Salem, 1879, p. 137. H. W. S. Cleveland, Voyages of a Merchant Navigator of the Days that are past. Compiled from the Journals and Letters of the Late Richard J. Cleveland, New York, 1886, p. 6. Horace S. Lyman. History of Oregon: The Growth of an American State, 4v, New York, 1903, 2:87, says that Captain John Kendrick of the "Columbia" had commanded a privateer. The log books of some of the privateers exist in the Essex Institute in Salem.

[10] Letter to Lord Carmarthen, July 2, 1787. Letters of Phineas Bond, British Consul at Philadelphia, to the Foreign Office of Great Britain, 1787, 1788, 1789. Edited by the Historical Manuscripts Committee of the American Historical Association. In Annual Rep. of Am. Hist. Ass'n. for 1896. Vol. I, pp. 513-659. p. 540.

[11] Great Britain, The Statutes at Large, London, 1763 et seq. 3:738; 9 and 10 Wil. III (1698) c. 44, sec. 81, give this grant, and place as a penalty, forfeiture of ship and cargo.

indeed if advantage had not been taken of the opportunity thus given.[12]

In the light of these causes we are not surprised to find in the United States widespread movements in 1783 and the years immediately following to take advantage of the China trade. In 1783 Salem and Boston began to agitate the matter,[13] and Boston merchants had already planned a voyage. In 1784 such a venture seems to have been planned in Connecticut, and was defeated only because the amount of state aid asked was larger than the sturdy yeomen would grant.[14] In 1784 a Boston vessel got as far as the Cape of Good Hope, and returned with a cargo of fresh teas purchased there from the British.[15]

It was in this same year, 1784, that an American ship first reached China. In the latter part of November, 1783, Robert Morris wrote to Jay, "I am sending some ships to China in order to encourage others in the adventurous pursuits of commerce."[16] This probably referred to the "Empress of China," John Green, Master.[17] Robert Morris and Daniel Parker and Company of New York joined in fitting her out,[18] and engaged as supercargo

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[12] Fitzsimmons, in a speech on the tariff, Apr. 16, 1789, describes the situation quite exactly. Thomas Hart Benton, Abridgment of the Debates of Congress from 1769 to 1856, 1857-1861. New York. 1842.

[13] Joseph B. Felt, Annals of Salem. 2 v. Salem. 1845-9. 2:285, 291.

[14] William B. Weeden, Economic and Social History of New England, 1620-1789. 2 v. Boston and New York. 1890. 2:821. He quotes from the Connecticut Archives, a manuscript collection at Hartford.

[15] This was advertised for sale in July, 1784. Hamilton Andrews Hill, The Trade and Commerce of Boston, 1630 to 1890, in Justin Winsor, Memorial History of Boston, Boston. 1881. 4:203.

[16] Nov. 27, 1783. The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay, edited by Henry P. Johnston. New York and London. 1891. 3:97. See also Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, Robert Morris, Patriot and Financier, 1903, p. 222, and William Graham Sumner, The Financier and Finances of the American Revolution. 2 v. New York. 1892. 2:162.

[17] This seems to have been universally believed at the time, and no one has ever questioned it. There seems to be no evidence which would lead one to doubt it.

[18] The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the first American Consul at Canton, edited, with a life of the author, by Josiah Quincy, Boston, 1847, give a full account of this voyage, and are reliable, since the author was the supercargo of the ship and wrote from his journals kept on the trip. The account of the voyage, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from him.

Samuel Shaw, a man of some education, who had seen honorable service as an officer in the Continental army.[19] The main part of the cargo was ginseng. The ship sailed February 22, 1784, protected by a sea letter granted by Congress.[20] She stopped at the Cape Verde Islands for water and repairs, rounded the Cape of Good Hope, and then steered a straight course for the Straits of Sunda.[21] Here she met a French ship and in company with her proceeded to China, anchoring at Whampoa, the harbor of Canton, August 28th. The Chinese after a little trouble learned to distinguish the Americans from the English, calling them "the New People."[22] The representatives of the various European nations welcomed them, and even the English were friendly and seemed anxious to forget the recent war. With the assistance of more experienced traders, specially the French, the Americans threaded their way safely through the unaccustomed maze of the Canton trade regulations, disposed of their ginseng and merchandise to advantage, and purchased a cargo of teas and China goods of various kinds. Returning, "The

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[19] He was successively adjutant, captain, brigade major of artillery, and, finally, aide de camp to General Knox. Quincy's life of Shaw is good. Delano says of Shaw, "He was a man of fine talents and considerable cultivation." Amasa Delano, Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Boston, 1818. p. 21.

[20] The Journals of the United States in Congress assembled [Confederation], Philadelphia, . . . 10:47. Similar letters were frequently granted later. For instance, to the "Canton," March 22, 1785 (10:97) and Jan. 2, 1786 (11:14); to the "Hope," Jan. 26, 1786 (11:17); to the "Columbia" and "Lady Washington," Sept. 24, 1787 (12:144, 145); and to the "General Washington," Oct. 25, 1787 (12:217).

[21] Most accounts of the voyage are taken from Shaw's Journal, but garbled ones are given in Robert Waln, Jr., Life of Robert Morris, in John Sanderson, Biography of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence, Philadelphia, 1823, p. 368, which is quoted by Sumner, Financier and Finances of the American Revolution, 2:162. It calls the ship "The Empress" and says that it was the first attempt to make an out of season passage to China by going around the south cape of New Holland. A cursory examination of Shaw's Journals will show that Waln was correct only in the year of the voyage, both the name of the ship and the course being wrong. He may have confused it with the voyage of the "Alliance."

[22] For the first year, to avoid extra presents demanded of nations opening trade, the Americans were reported to the Hoppo, or customs collector, as English.

Empress of China" sailed in company with some Dutch ships for a distance, touched at the Cape of Good Hope, and arrived safely in New York May 10th, 1785. The final profit of the voyage was estimated at $30,727, or about twenty-five per cent. on the capital invested.[23]

The news of this successful voyage created much interest and added incentive to the plans which were already projected. Shaw reported the result of the voyage to Jay, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and received soon afterward by order of Congress a reply telling of that body's "peculiar satisfaction in the successful issue of this first effort of the citizens of America to establish a direct trade with China."[24] Long accounts of the voyage were published in the New York papers and copied in the different commercial cities.[25] In Boston, plans were soon under way for building and fitting out a ship for the East India trade[26] in which "any citizen who wished to become interested" might purchase a share for $300. Robert Morris, satisfied with the result of his first venture, continued his investments.[27] He bought from Shaw and Randall a cargo of teas which they had shipped home in the "Pallas," and talked of engaging the two for another voyage.[28]

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[23] Another brief summary of the voyage is in John Austin Stevens, Progress of New York in a Century, 1776-1876. New York, 1876. p. 45.

[24] Shaw's Journals, Appendix, p. 337, gives Shaw's letter (May 19, 1785) and Jay's reply (June 23, 1785). The report of the committee is in the Continental Congress Reports of Committees (Ms. in Library of Congress). It was read June 9, 1785. It is also mentioned in the Journal labeled Reports of Coms. (Ms. in Library of Congress).

[25] A column and a quarter was given to it in the Providence Gazette, May 28, 1785.

[26] Hill, Trade and Commerce of Boston, p. 81, quotes from the Independent Chronicle for June 23, 1785, to that effect.

[27] Robert Morris to Jay, May 19, 1785. Jay's Corres. and Public Papers, 3: 143.

[28] Shaw's Journals, p. 218. Morris may have sent the "Empress" a second time. A letter to which there is no author nor name of person addressed, but with the date New York, Nov. 3, 1786, in Letters Written to the British Government by agents from America, labeled America and England, 1783-1791, Ms. transcripts in Lenox Library, mentions the "Empress of China" as having arrived June 6, 1786, from Canton after a voyage of thirteen months. This leaves such a short time for her to unload, load, and clear from New York after her first voyage that it seems more likely that the date is wrong. It should probably be 1785.

In 1787 he helped to send out the "Alliance," Thomas Reid, master, on a voyage which attracted much attention at the time, both because of the size of the ship and because of the course followed.[29] An old frigate, she was much larger than the ordinary American Indiaman. She left Philadelphia June, 1787, and returned September 19, 1788, with a cargo said to have been worth half a million dollars. She has been popularly reported to have sailed with no chart but a map of the world, without letting go her anchor ropes from the time she left Philadelphia until she reached Canton, and to have been the first American ship to go to China by way of the south cape of Australia![30] Her return temporarily saved Robert Morris from bankruptcy.[31]

Still other voyages were undertaken. Stewart Deane, an old privateersman, after consulting with Captain Green of the "Empress of China," sailed for Canton in the latter part of December, 1785, in a sloop of eighty-four tons. So small was the vessel that when it reached China it was mistaken for a tender to a larger ship.[32] Shaw went out again from New York in February, 1786, as supercargo of the ship "Hope," James Magee, master, and carried with him a commission from Congress as Consul at Canton. This office was rather an empty honor; the occupant was not "entitled to receive any salary, fees, or emoluments," but merely hoisted a flag, did a little routine business, and was looked upon by the Chinese as a head

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[29] For accounts and mention of this voyage see Letters of Phineas Bond, Oct. 2, 1788, p. 578. Waln, Life of Robert Morris in Sanderson, Biography of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence, Philadelphia, 1823, 5:368. (He was copied with slight changes by Oberholtzer, Robert Morris, p. 224.) Parliamentary Papers, 1821, 7:122; C. Dixon, Voyage Round the World. More particularly to the Northwest Coast of America. London, 1789. p. 298; Freeman Hunt, The Library of Commerce, Practical, Historical, and Theoretical. New York, 1845. 1:118; Abraham Ritter, Philadelphia and her Merchants as constituted Fifty to Seventy years ago. Philadelphia, 1860.

[30] Her course is certain.

[31] Sumner, Financier and Finances of the Am. Rev., 2:227. He quotes for his authority a letter of one of the English agents in the United States to Lord Dorchester, 1788, given in Canadian Archives, 1890. 104.

[32] Timothy Pitkin, A Statistical View of the Commerce of the United States of America. New Haven, 1835. p. 245.