

Paul Arthur VAN DYKE

Whampoa and the Canton Trade. Life and Death in a Chinese Port, 1700–1842

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Paul Arthur Van Dyke, American, the retired professor from the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China, the man who devoted most of his life to research into the trade in Southern-Chinese Canton, which is highly likely to be the largest trade emporium in the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, wrote another book on this topic. The Van Dyke's (and his excellent team) work outcome was the series of essential works on this theme, from which at least *The Canton Trade* (2005) and *Merchants of Canton and Macao* (Vol. 2, 2011 and 2015) are worth mentioning. Van Dyke turned back to the anchorage in Whampoa in his last study. This place lies approximately at a distance of 18 kilometres down the river from Canton. It was the foreign ships terminal since no foreigner was allowed to enter the city. Therefore, the Van Dyke's book looks on trade more from the perspective of Whampoa than from Canton's. The author mainly focused on social, political and trade activities, and structures operating on that scene. What he offers is

that what he calls himself the common seamen's perspective.

However, the Van Dyke's book is not aimed at the general reader. It is more directed at experts on the given issues. It is due to both concept and selected methodology. Undoubtedly, it is an extraordinary work as to its scope, which is based on intensive study in archives in China, Australia and the United States of America as well as in Denmark, the Netherlands, England, Belgium and Sweden.

The book layout has twelve chapters and appendices to six of them, thirty-two in total, which are designed as a form of electronic links. Each appendix contains details of the research discussed in a relevant chapter. The chapters deal with diverse aspects of trade, such as manipulation of the data on trade, navigation on river, the used signalling and care for crew, bankshalls (bamboo shelters used for serving anchored ships), health-care, injuries, death and alcoholism, diseases and demises among officers and men (the guesses about a number of

deaths and the analysis of death protocols), crimes committed by crews and their punishment, thefts of goods committed by Chinese sailors, maritime insurance, floating brothels, large ships repairs, the local labour market, desertion, the hierarchy within single western companies' fleet officers, and the like. So the structure of the work resembles rather a collection of single studies.

In the Introduction, the author pleads for more accurate study of ships arrivals, and compares his findings with earlier studies by Liang and Dermigny. Van Dyke collected these data for thirteen years. He had managed to amass data on 3,371 ships arriving on the Pearl River between 1720 and 1816, which issued in a large table showing the origin of a ship, a captain, a Chinese security merchant, arrivals in and departures from single places, and the sources of these data.

The analysis revealed that the data on the number of ships given to Beijing had reflected more increase and decrease in collected fees whatever their reasons. The government devoted no attention to ships but to fees it did. Hoppo, the key imperial fiscal clerk, was under a constant pressure as he was supposed to collect the same amount at least or even higher every year. These clerks reported on nearly all ships from 1750 to 1775, however it did not mean that the correct data were provided every year. Hoppo manipulated the data, often transmitted

them from one year to another. Therefore, the information gained from the Yuehaiguan Zhi register is not reliable. The manipulation of figures on ships was used even by the imperial court. Moreover, flags, especially of private ships, only give evidence about a captain's nationality. Nevertheless, the data analysis indicates that the trade from 1784 was undoubtedly dominated by the British. This process closely related to the establishment of British India and the decline of other East India Companies. The author shows the Chinese government's effort to restore competition among Europeans and how the government was more and more getting under the British pressure.

The Chinese authorities developed the perfect ships and crews control system. A ship sailed to the anchorage in Whampoa under the control of maritime pilots, who used nautical flags to communicate. Each vessel was in charge of a Chinese security merchant, who cared for everything a crew needed. Some crews spent their three-to-five-month stay in a bankshall, where alcohol was consumed, ship repair was provided, the ill were treated, domestic animals butchered, etc.

The stay would be something boring and frequently even dangerous for sailors. Up to 1,200 sailors spent part of a year in Whampoa in the 1830s. It was generally assumed that only two out of three sailors who had left Europe to sail to Canton came back.

Deaths partly resulted from local heavy drinking (samshu), and from fall from rigging, getting drowned, diseases and sequels of skirmishes. Therefore, some cemeteries for officers and sailors who died during the stay had been established there.

Chinese clerks, mainly hoppers, supervised the collection of export and import duties. Van Dyke arrives at conclusion that the imperial tax collection was the primary aim of harbour clerks, which can give reasons for great tolerance of the Chinese administration towards foreign traders. The author states in Chapter One: *"When I began writing this book, I had no idea that I was putting together a story of Chinese tolerance."* As he is coming to Chapter Eleven, he returns back to the given theme and refers to *"incredible patience and tolerance,"* which was the key thing for how officials would govern the trade in. Van Dyke concludes in the last paragraph of the book: *"Thus,*

instead of Chinese officials being too harsh, as they were often accused, evidence presented here reaffirms what other studies have found that Qing administration was often too lenient to the point that foreigners intruded upon the locals." These findings are in a sharp contrast to most of existing interpretations and numerous complaints lodged by English traders in the 19th century, who perceived their position in Canton as a position of barbarians, and complained of being a subject of degrading restrictions and bullying. Without direct comments on these complaints, Van Dyke casts new light on this context. In this sense, the book by Van Dyke is the beginning of another considerable discussion.

The reviewed work is broad as to the scope and significant as to the findings, which are opening door to another research.

Michal Wanner

