

Whatever way one may resolve such questions and issues, there can be no doubt that the partnership between Qiancheng Li and Robert Hegel has given rise to a valuable new version of *Xiyou bu* for English readers. Its thoroughness and care are such that it leaves room for alternative interpretations, even when it makes its strong case for authorship by Dong Sizhang. And its emphasis on dreams, desires, and feelings links it inextricably to late Ming currents, whether or not formal or thematic influences from after the death of Dong Sizhang might have played a role.

ELLEN WIDMER  
*Wellesley College*

***Whampoa and the Canton Trade: Life and Death in a Chinese Port, 1700–1842.*** By Paul A. Van Dyke. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020. Pp. xxi + 304. \$67.00.

For almost a century, from 1757 to 1842, Chinese maritime trade was confined to a single port, Canton. Although the modalities of these exchanges had been extensively researched, Whampoa, an outer harbour located some twenty kilometres from Canton, downstream from the Pearl River, had not been the subject of a systematic study. Yet, this vast area included anchorages that could accommodate hundreds of foreign ships (more than 100 docked every year from the mid-1820s). Whampoa also comprised wharves and basins for careening and repairing ships, as well as barracks to house and care for the crews (more than 10,000 men from the 1830s onwards), away from the Chinese population. Whampoa was also a burial place for foreign sailors who died in China. Overshadowed by studies on Canton, this area has been little investigated. Paul Van Dyke, Professor of History at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, has come to fill this gap.

*Whampoa and the Canton Trade* also completes and renews the vision of trade in the Pearl River Delta in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that

we had already obtained thanks to the works of Louis Dermigny,<sup>1</sup> Cheong Weng Eang,<sup>2</sup> and Ch'en Kuo-tung.<sup>3</sup> Van Dyke's volume finalizes the voluminous work he has been doing for several years on the merchants of Canton.<sup>4</sup> Using an impressive quantity of sources held in the collections of American university libraries, archives in Beijing, as well as those in Denmark, Indonesia, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, Van Dyke delivers a meticulous analysis of the economic and social activities in Whampoa.

The book, divided into eleven chapters, brings in several innovative contributions.

First, the meticulous reconstruction of the list of ships arriving at and departing from Whampoa in 1700–1842. Chinese foreign trade during this period was governed by the arrangements made at the time of the establishment of the Canton customs (1685), which were to continue until 1842, when they were superseded by the forced opening of the treaty ports. The first problem Van Dyke addresses is that of the list of ships arriving at Whampoa. He compares the list provided by Liang Tingnan 梁廷柟 (*Yue haiguan zhi* 粵海關志) and that by Dermigny (*La Chine et l'Occident*) and tries to identify the inconsistencies caused by the different periods used by these two authors. The lunar calendar (355 days per year) is used by Liang, while Dermigny uses the solar calendar (365 days per year). By eliminating the discrepancies caused by the different calendars, Van Dyke reconstructs a list of ships (British, French, Swedish, Dutch, Danish, and American) that arrived at Whampoa from 1720 to 1816, a period for which the author has reliable statistical data. In this respect, Appendices 1.2.a

---

<sup>1</sup> Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident: le commerce à Canton au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1719–1833*, École Pratique des Hautes Études, VI<sup>e</sup> section, Centre de recherches historiques, ports, routes, trafics, XVIII (Paris: Sevpen, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> Weng Eang Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton: Chinese Merchants in Sino-Western Trade, 1684–1798* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Kuo-Tung Anthony Ch'en, *The Insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants, 1760–1843* (Taipei: The Institute of Economics, Academia Sinica, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005); *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011); *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Success and Failure in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016).

and 1.2.b (lists of ships at Whampoa from 1720 to January 1816, arranged by year, and by nationality) will be of interest because of its comprehensiveness. The problem of identifying ships and their cargoes was further complicated by the large number of private, i.e., non-chartered, ships that entered South China from the 1790s onwards, and by French and Dutch traders regularly shipping cargoes to and from China on American vessels.

This exhaustive reconstruction of the number of ships and the volume of their cargoes leads the author to a second discovery: for the imperial court, the fundamental issue was that tax revenues linked to foreign trade did not decrease from one year to the next. On the other hand, the calculations that could be made by crossing the number of ships and tonnages (and thus the details of the amount of duties paid) did not interest it. In this way, the court was deprived of the opportunity of detecting the manipulations carried out by the *hoppo*s, the Canton customs officials in charge of supervising the movement of foreign ships, collecting customs duties, and, more generally, maintaining order within the large foreign community living in the delta region.

This lack of rigour made accounting manipulations possible. By intentionally under-reporting the number of ships and, therefore, the income to be declared, the *hoppo*s could engage in significant misappropriation of funds. Other factors were of course at play here, such as the limitations of the Chinese accounting system, and the changing composition of foreign trade, which has an impact on the value of cargoes.

The third strong conclusion is that, in terms of foreign trade, the East India Company (EIC) largely dominated over other foreign companies. And the “Honourable Company” did not suffer interferences in its affairs: piracy, endemic in the Pearl River delta, prompted the East India Company’s subcargoes to consider building a warship in Macao to fight against the pirates, if necessary. The EIC even landed troops in Macao in 1808, triggering vehement protests from the Chinese imperial authorities and from Portugal.

The overwhelming dominance of the East India Company over China’s other trading partners from 1784 onwards, and the threat it posed to the *hoppo*s, is a point well made by Van Dyke. Despite this imbalance, the Chinese administration had to maintain the level of tax revenues from foreign trade. This leads the author to significantly reassess the level of Western-Chinese confrontation, which had been the dominant paradigm, to show that the *hoppo*s

were seeking to attract foreign operators to counterbalance the dominance of the EIC.

The EIC also succeeded in imposing itself because of the power of its economic institutions, and its commercial organization. Another factor was the foreigners who were used by the British in their relations with the *hong* 行 (for example, the Parsi merchants, who proved to be formidable money-handlers, threatening to ruin the *hong* merchants).

What were the reasons for the weak competitiveness of Chinese merchants? Why were they so helpless in the face of competition from their foreign rivals, the British in particular? This would merit an investigation into the ways in which business was conducted. If, as the author notes, the *cohong* 公行, contrary to popular belief, did not eliminate competition, it was, as Ch'en Kuo-tung has shown, caught between the commercial aggressiveness of foreign companies and the pressures of the imperial administration.

Another thread in the book is the moderation of the Chinese administration, in its interactions with foreigners. The administration, with its three components, the provincial governor, the *hoppo*, and the local administration, has long been presented as despotic, corrupt, and inefficient. Van Dyke shows instead how its concern for harmony helped to maintain the cohesion of this hybrid system, in which efforts were made to keep foreigners at the margins while extracting tax revenues from foreign trade. However, the flexibility and tolerance of the Chinese administration paradoxically opened up new room for corruption and ultimately led to the collapse of the Canton system. The obsession with maintaining tax revenues from foreign trade also led the Chinese administration, according to Van Dyke, to place trade above all else, without regard to the negative effects that it might have on the Chinese population.

Beneath the surface of these tensions between the Chinese administration and foreign traders, another conflict was emerging, between trading methods used not only by European companies, but also by Armenian, and Parsi traders, among others, which undermined the *hong* system, and an administration whose trade management methods ultimately prove to be less than rigorous. Van Dyke rightly questions overly Manichaeic oppositions: he depicts some *hoppo*s as men of integrity and competence who enjoyed the esteem of both Chinese and foreign merchants, but also points to unscrupulous administrators, since the system could not prevent corruption and its disastrous drifts for

the Chinese merchants, the central administration, and relations with foreign merchants.

Beyond these economic analyses, the book offers the reader a detailed picture of life in an area on the margins of Chinese society. Van Dyke's volume does justice to the crowd of sailors, handlers, deserters, and downgraded characters who were the day-to-day operators of trade with China and brings in a valuable contribution to the economic and social history of a Chinese port.

The delicate task of piloting foreign ships up the estuary, as well as the careening and repair of rigging were complex and dangerous operations which involved close cooperation with the local administration (Chapter 2). The construction of sites to house the crews and also a place to treat the sick is examined in Chapter 3. The influx of private operators affected the management of the factories in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although officially prohibited, the administration did not object to their construction and management being subcontracted to foreigners who provided the required services (crew accommodation, goods storage, etc.).

Work-related accidents, which were common in the maritime professions, are dealt with in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 is concerned with funeral ceremonies and other celebrations. Chapter 6 is devoted to crimes and their punishment and presents several concrete cases of the treatment of offences. In this community of foreigners, sometimes confined for long months in an unattractive environment, brawls, alcoholism, and the use of prostitutes were both tolerated and a source of conflict.

The recurring issue of thefts from chop-boats, the small transport vessels that carried goods for export from Guangzhou to Whampoa, is discussed in Chapter 7. Chop-boats were subject to repeated pilfering by Chinese stevedores or seafarers, sometimes even with the complicity of the ship's captain on which the theft occurred. These malpractices gave rise to numerous conflicts between the foreign companies and the *hong* merchants. The latter usually reimbursed the stolen goods. When thefts occurred on foreign ships, the culprits had to be handed over to the Chinese authorities.

Chapter 8 examines the labour market issue and the problem of desertions and dismissals. Desertions were a recurring problem among crews averaging 100 to 150 men per ship. Due to illnesses, deaths, and desertions, maintaining a sufficient number of seafarers to serve on board the vessels on their return

voyages to Europe was a constant concern for the captains. And it was not uncommon for them to poach members from other crews for their return trips to Europe or the United States.

Revolts and mutinies are reviewed in Chapter 9. Revolts broke out on board the ships of the Ostend East India Company (GIC) or the Dutch East India Company (VOC) because of the reduction of privileges granted to seamen in matters of private trade, for example, which were the responsibility of the subcargo. The tensions resulting from the living conditions at Whampoa were such that a mutiny even took place on board the EIC ship *Belvedere* in December 1787. The prostitution and the flower boats (the floating brothels), tolerated by the Chinese administration to maintain social harmony, are the subject of Chapter 10, while the last chapter deals with disasters affecting foreign trade (fire aboard the ships or at the bankshalls, collisions, etc.) and the question of maritime insurance, in particular its low diffusion among foreign trade operators.

Two regrets: the statistical appendix on which the very innovative conclusions of Chapter 1 are based is not included in the book, and is only available online. This makes it sometimes difficult to go back and forth between the demonstration and the quantitative data that Van Dyke has painstakingly compiled from a large number of sources scattered in numerous libraries in Asia, Europe, and the United States. Although the book is abundantly illustrated, with views of Whampoa, the map of the Pearl River Delta (p. 40) which gives the geographical location of Canton, Whampoa, and numerous islands and sand bars is difficult to read. The digital version is fortunately more legible, but a clearer map would certainly help the reader orientate himself in Van Dyke's extensive descriptions of the various anchorages, warehouses, and dangers in this part of the estuary and up to Canton.

These few remarks do not alter the very high quality of this book, which provides a richly documented picture of life in the outer harbour of Canton and offers new insights into trade with China before the opening of the treaty ports.

FRANÇOIS GIPOULOUX

*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris*