



Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice

Master's Degree programme  
in Comparative International Relations

Final Thesis

Sino-European Relations from the Late Ming to the First Opium  
War  
From Chinese supremacy in Asia to its subordination to the Western world-  
order

**Supervisor**

Professor Giulia Delogu

**Graduand**

Alessandro Barlese

Matriculation Number 872203

**Academic Year**

2022 / 2023



## Riassunto

La tesi analizza il cambiamento dei rapporti tra Europa e Cina dai primi contatti durante il periodo tardo Ming fino alla prima guerra dell'oppio. In particolare, l'approccio e le politiche utilizzate dai vari attori sia da parte cinese che occidentale nei confronti gli uni degli altri saranno messi a confronto. Verranno sottolineati i punti di continuità e di differenza nell'approccio con l'Occidente delle dinastie cinesi che si sono susseguite, le dinastie Ming e Qing, confrontando le posizioni dei governi imperiali e quelle delle élite politiche e commerciali delle zone costiere regioni di contatto con gli europei.

A inizio Cinquecento, l'espansione nell'Oceano Indiano e nel sud-est asiatico del Portogallo lo portò in contatto con i mercanti cinesi che operavano nella regione malese. I mercanti portoghesi cercarono fin da subito di stabilire una linea commerciale diretta con la Cina, ma la loro presenza destabilizzatrice nella regione, unita al fatto che il Portogallo non faceva parte degli stati tradizionalmente tributari dei Ming, fecero sì che le iniziative diplomatiche portoghesi venissero respinte da parte delle autorità cinesi. La politica estera cinese si basava su un sistema tributario nel quale gli scambi commerciali erano strettamente legati allo status di un paese come tributario cinese. Nei decenni successivi, mercanti portoghesi riuscirono a infiltrarsi nel mercato cinese in modo semi-formale, in collaborazione con autorità locali e potenti famiglie delle zone costiere. La fondazione di Macao come insediamento portoghese nel 1557 seguì la stessa logica: avvenne senza la conoscenza o l'approvazione del governo centrale, ma fu frutto di un accordo tra i portoghesi e le autorità locali di Guangdong.

La fondazione di Macao, unitamente alla colonizzazione spagnola delle Filippine e alla legalizzazione del commercio privato cinese dal porto di Haicheng nel 1567, contribuì allo sviluppo del commercio internazionale incentrato sullo scambio dell'argento giapponese e americano per le sete cinesi. L'economia domestica cinese era passata infatti da un sistema incentrato sull'uso della carta-moneta, ora entrato in crisi, a uno basato sull'argento. La crescente domanda per questo metallo prezioso fece sì che il suo prezzo in Cina aumentasse rispetto al resto del mondo, e dunque che ne arrivasse dalle ricche miniere giapponesi e americane. Gli spagnoli a Manila e i portoghesi a Macao furono fondamentali intermediari in questo processo che connesse il mondo occidentale e orientale in un unico sistema di commercio globale che ebbe ripercussioni anche nei rapporti di forza tra le nazioni in Europa e in Asia Orientale. È da sottolineare come questi scambi avvennero per la maggior parte fuori dal sistema tributario che regolava i rapporti commerciali della Cina con gli altri paesi dell'Asia.

L'arrivo degli olandesi in Asia a partire dal Seicento ruppe il monopolio iberico nel commercio asiatico-europeo. L'esportazione della guerra contro la monarchia asburgica nei mari asiatici portò a una rinnovata violenza nella regione, in quanto la compagnia delle indie orientali olandese (la VOC) cercò di stabilire un monopolio commerciale nello scambio sino-giapponese. La politica aggressiva perseguita dalla VOC non portò ai risultati sperati, e i mercanti olandesi dovettero accontentarsi di avere un avamposto a Taiwan, ma fu proibito loro di andare direttamente in Cina. La classe mercantile cinese di Fujian, nel frattempo, iniziò un processo di organizzazione politico-militare che, sotto la guida del clan Zheng, diventò poi il punto di riferimento per il movimento di resistenza a stampo Ming contro la dinastia Qing, la quale nel 1644 conquistò Pechino e poi, nei successivi quaranta anni, consolidò il suo potere sulla Cina meridionale. Negli ultimi decenni della dinastia Ming, il governo centrale, fronteggiando l'espansione mancese da nord e ribellioni interne, delegò la gestione della sicurezza sulla costa sud-orientale, soggetta a disordini e pirateria, ai Zheng stessi. L'organizzazione Zheng e la VOC ebbero un rapporto complesso caratterizzato da periodi di collaborazione alternati a momenti di conflitto, anche armato; nella metà del Seicento, la compagnia olandese venne messa in secondo piano dal predominio sulla sfera economica marittima dell'Asia orientale dei Zheng e poi la sua influenza nella regione diminuì ulteriormente dopo la conquista Zheng di Taiwan nel 1662. Il clan dei Zheng completò il suo processo di organizzazione politica diventando definitivamente uno stato territoriale a stampo mercantile basato su Taiwan. Dalla caduta della dinastia Ming, i Zheng furono legati all'identità della casata han sconfitta, contrapposta alla dinastia Qing, mancese in ascesa. Fino al momento in cui fu sconfitto nel 1683, lo stato Zheng rappresentò il progetto di una Cina slegata dalla terraferma, dall'orientamento agrario delle dinastie continentali, e un paradigma alternativo basato sul commercio marittimo e il controllo dei mari. Ciononostante, facendosi portatori degli ideali di restaurazione della dinastia Ming, i Zheng furono anche spinti a una lotta costante contro la dinastia Qing per la realizzazione di questo progetto che eventualmente portò alla loro sconfitta.

I primi decenni di regno della dinastia Qing furono un periodo di consolidamento del potere sulla Cina, con la conquista delle province meridionali, la loro pacificazione e la presa di Taiwan che pose fine alla dinastia Zheng. Per sconfiggere la minaccia rappresentata dai Zheng, furono messe in atto politiche drastiche per tagliare i collegamenti commerciali tra la terraferma e i territori controllati dai Zheng. Fu imposta una proibizione marittima e una evacuazione delle aree costiere in modo tale da danneggiare la base economica dei mercanti Zheng sulla terraferma. Una volta conquistata Taiwan, però, la dinastia Qing fece propri certi

aspetti dell'orientamento commerciale-marittimo della defunta dinastia Zheng. Nel 1684, furono aperti quattro porti per il commercio con gli europei, e venne legalizzato il commercio cinese privato oltremare. Rispetto alla dinastia Ming, i Qing furono più flessibili e più aperti alle interazioni con l'Europa. Gli scambi vennero dunque inquadrati e formalizzati dal governo centrale, il quale prese il controllo di questi traffici e della loro tassazione, istituendo un sistema di supervisor nominati dalla corte imperiale che dovevano sorvegliare alle operazioni commerciali con l'estero e che rispondevano direttamente alle autorità di Pechino e che restavano in carica per un breve periodo prima di essere trasferiti altrove. Così facendo, si voleva evitare di creare situazioni in cui le élite costiere e le autorità provinciali venissero a monopolizzare il commercio e acquisire troppa influenza, come invece avveniva durante la dinastia Ming e l'inizio della dinastia Qing, quando la contrapposizione tra potere centrale e regionale portò alla “rivolta dei tre feudatari”, una guerra civile che finì il processo di consolidamento e accentramento del potere in mano alla corte imperiale mancata. Durante il regno dell'imperatore Kangxi (r. 1661-1722), oltre all'apertura agli scambi con l'Occidente, la fine della resistenza Ming e la conquista di Taiwan, la Cina venne a confrontarsi con un altro impero in espansione in Asia: la Russia. Le tensioni nelle zone di frontiera tra i due paesi, con intermittenti scontri armati, portarono a dei negoziati tra i rappresentanti dei due paesi che furono mediati da missionari gesuiti. Il risultante trattato di Nerchinsk (1689), definì chiaramente i confini nella zona contesa e legalizzò il commercio tra i due paesi. Di particolare rilevanza è il fatto che fu il primo trattato formale concluso dalla Cina con una potenza occidentale, e che i negoziati avvennero secondo il principio di uguaglianza tra le due parti, nonostante la Cina formalmente non riconoscesse suoi pari a livello di relazioni internazionali.

All'inizio del Settecento, Canton emerse come il porto preferito dagli europei e rapidamente divenne il più frequentato. Il porto presentava diverse caratteristiche che lo resero tale, innanzitutto la prossimità con Macao fece sì che ci fosse già una certa familiarità nel rapportarsi con gli europei da parte cinese, inoltre il porto presentava caratteristiche topologiche che rendevano più facile controllare le navi straniere, le quali richiedevano piloti locali per navigare le acque della foce del Fiume delle Perle, ma che allo stesso tempo fornivano più protezione dal maltempo rispetto a porti che davano direttamente sul mare aperto. A Canton, gli occidentali che venissero a commerciare dovevano “assicurare” le proprie navi a un mercante *hong* cinese, autorizzato dalle autorità a trattare con i commercianti stranieri; essi erano responsabili del pagamento delle imposte dovute sulle transazioni con gli occidentali, e solitamente veniva concessa loro una maggiore porzione dei contratti per il

carico della nave che “assicuravano”. Questi *hong* erano anche considerati responsabili della condotta degli equipaggi le cui navi assicuravano, e ci si aspettava da loro che intervenissero subito per sedare sul nascere qualsiasi tipo di disturbo all’armonia del porto che questi ultimi potessero causare. Quello dei hong non era un monopolio: le autorità del porto fecero in modo che ci fosse sempre una pluralità di mercanti in competizione tra loro con cui gli stranieri potessero contrattare, in modo tale che i prezzi non deviassero troppo da quelli di mercato. I sovrintendenti alla dogana marittima, gli *Hoppo*, nominati dalla corte imperiale, avevano infatti interesse che i mercanti occidentali tornassero gli anni successivi, e se questi avessero trovato condizioni sfavorevoli ai loro affari ci sarebbe stato il rischio che ciò non succedesse. La carriera degli *Hoppo* dipendeva anche dal mantenimento di un flusso in costante aumento di entrate dalla tassazione del commercio estero che andasse al governo di Pechino, e da ciò si evince la volontà di venire incontro, per quanto possibile, ai mercanti europei in modo tale che il volume di commercio crescesse nel tempo. Il sistema Canton crebbe anche con l’incremento di domanda in Europa del tè, che nel corso del Settecento divenne la principale merce attorno a cui girava tutto il commercio sino-europeo. Con la crescita di questo traffico, gli europei si trovavano però in difficoltà a reperire beni la cui domanda fosse alta nel mercato cinese, e furono costretti a pagare la maggior parte del tè che compravano in argento.

L’allargamento del volume degli scambi a Canton dipendeva dunque da una pronta disponibilità di argento nelle mani degli europei, in assenza di altre merci o manifatture che potessero sostituirlo. A metà Settecento, dopo la conquista del Bengala, zona produttrice di oppio, da parte della compagnia delle indie orientali britannica, mercanti privati cominciarono a contrabbandare la droga in Cina, in quanto essa garantiva un ritorno rapido in argento. Il traffico di oppio generava quindi i fondi necessari anche all’ampliamento del commercio legale, in quanto maggiori quantità di argento potevano essere ottenute e investite velocemente nell’aumento della produzione di tè. Con questa dinamica, il commercio legale e quello di contrabbando si complementavano e l’uno garantì la crescita dell’altro. Per questo motivo, per diversi decenni l’allargamento del consumo di oppio e il suo contrabbando vennero tacitamente tollerati dalle autorità locali, in quanto aiutava la crescita del commercio legale, e dunque anche le entrate che andavano al governo centrale. Nei primi decenni dell’Ottocento, però, il consumo di oppio fece sì che il movimento di argento si invertisse e che il metallo prezioso cominciasse a scarseggiare in Cina, con gravi ripercussioni economiche. La risposta del governo centrale fu molto dura, e venne avviata una campagna per fermare il contrabbando di oppio, la quale però antagonizzò la comunità straniera a

Canton, specie quella inglese che era la più coinvolta nel traffico della droga, aumentò le tensioni e portò al conflitto con la Gran Bretagna che sfociò nella prima guerra dell'oppio nel 1839.

La guerra, vinta dai britannici, portò a una serie di concessioni: più porti aperti al commercio britannico, la cessione di Hong Kong, l'extraterritorialità dei cittadini inglesi, e la fine del sistema dei commercianti *hong*. Al di là delle conseguenze immediate di questi negoziati, lo scontro fu il primo di una serie di conflitti che sancirono la fine del sistema tributario che aveva fino a quel momento regolato i rapporti tra paesi dell'Asia orientale, e che costrinsero la Cina a riconoscere l'uguaglianza formale tra essa e i suoi interlocutori occidentali. La Cina fu portata a forza entro un sistema di diplomazia basato sulla parità dei membri della comunità internazionale, in contrasto con la concezione dei rapporti basati su relazioni di tributo che era propria dell'ordine sino-centrico. Questa uguaglianza formale fu accompagnata da un aumento dell'influenza occidentale nel paese, la progressiva perdita di sovranità con i continui trattati ineguali a cui la Cina fu costretta ad aderire, fino a quando nel 1911 la Cina imperiale cessò di esistere sotto la spinta di interferenze estere e rivoluzioni interne.

## Table of Contents

Riassunto .....	i
Introduction .....	1
1. Ming China.....	7
1.1. The Portuguese.....	8
1.2. The establishment of Macao .....	12
1.3. The silk-silver trade.....	17
1.4. The Dutch .....	24
1.5. The VOC, Zheng and the Ming.....	28
2. The Ming-Qing Transition.....	35
2.1. The fall of the Ming.....	35
2.2. Zheng Taiwan: the vision of an alternative, maritime China.....	42
2.3. The VOC and the Qing .....	47
2.4. The Qing embassy to Batavia .....	56
3. Qing China.....	63
3.1. The Qing conquest of Taiwan and the opening of maritime trade.....	63
3.2. The emergence of the Canton System.....	74
3.3. The Russians and the treaty of Nerchinsk.....	81
3.4. Yongzheng and Qianlong.....	87
3.5. The Macartney Embassy and the revival of formal diplomacy.....	102
3.6. The Opium War .....	110
Conclusions.....	116
Bibliography .....	121
Primary Sources .....	121
Secondary Sources .....	121





## Introduction

On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping stated:

“With a history of more than 5,000 years, China has made indelible contributions to the progress of human civilization. After the Opium War of 1840, however, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society and suffered greater ravages than ever before. The country endured intense humiliation, the people were subjected to great pain, and the Chinese civilization was plunged into darkness.”<sup>1</sup>

The concept of a “century of humiliation” has a prominent space in the contemporary Chinese public discourse and is a core aspect of Chinese national identity (Kaufman, 2010). This period of Chinese history is taken to have started with the defeat to the British in the First Opium War (1839-1842) and to have ended with the victory of the Communists over the Nationalists in 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in the mainland. Within this period, the tributary-system that had governed Chinese foreign relations for centuries ended; China endured internal rebellions, civil wars and external aggressions; it lost effective control over a third of its territory; its government was forced to sign so-called “unequal treaties” with the Western powers and to agree to several commercial and territorial concessions.

In 1924, Sun Yat-Sen, the key figure behind the 1911 Revolution which brought down the Qing dynasty and established the Republic of China, said:

“During the days of her greatness, the influence of China was far reaching. She was the mistress of Asia and was the only nation powerful enough to gain imperial control in the continent. [...] At present the European Powers are using their imperialistic and economic weapons to weaken China, and so our territory is getting smaller and smaller.”<sup>2</sup>

For centuries, Chinese foreign relations were conducted in the framework of a tributary system. Foreign rulers had to submit formally to China, to accept its primacy and recognize the supremacy of the Emperor, the Son of Heaven with a divine mandate to rule all of

---

<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping, Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China, 2021, translated by the Government of People's Republic of China.

<sup>2</sup> Sun Yat-Sen, *The Three Principles of The People*, 1924, pp. 12-13.

mankind, in order to receive formal investiture and a place in the Chinese world-order (Fairbank and T'êng, 1941). This system ruled out the possibility of conducting international relations on the basis of equality. Nonetheless, the East Asian interstate system, despite being governed by the principle of hierarchy, was comprised of de-facto independent states, both in internal affairs and in foreign relations. The tributary system entailed the observance of rituals, ceremonies, the regular sending of tribute and the investiture of the foreign kings by the emperor of China, but the nominally vassal states were otherwise politically autonomous and independent.<sup>3</sup> There was no equivalent in the West to what China was in the Far East. The closest a political actor came to be the “master” of Europe was Great Britain in the nineteenth century, but its hegemony rested upon that same notion of formal equality of states, which was the principle behind the balance of power pursued by its government in European affairs and achieved through the political restructuring of the continent in the Congress of Vienna (1815). In nineteenth-century Europe, the international system became ideologically tied to the notions of sovereignty and formal equality of states.<sup>4</sup> The balance of power in Europe was paralleled by a surge of overseas expansion that brought most of the world under control of European states. The two different paradigms of international relations came into conflict with each other, as the Western powers’ commercial and military presence in East Asia increased on the surge of imperialist expansion. This study aims at reconstructing the dynamics of the relations between China and the Western world from the beginning of the sixteenth century up to the point of rupture that was the First Opium War. I was drawn to this subject because throughout my studies, the relationship between the West and China was mainly addressed from a contemporary point of view, from the post-Opium Wars onward, and I wanted to explore the earlier dynamics that brought to that state of affairs. As I started my research, I began to appreciate how in the modern era East Asia was a much more dynamic and vibrant region, both politically and economically, than I had once thought. I came to realize how despite their differences, the East and the West were both populated by actors with very similar goals, almost always a mixture of pursuit of power and profit, who traded, clashed and collaborated with each other in the East Asian maritime space. In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture, the analysis of the ample secondary

---

<sup>3</sup> Liu Kwang-Ching in the foreword of Kim Key Hyuk, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan and the Chinese Empire, 1860-1882*, 1980.

<sup>4</sup> This system is said to have begun in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). However, scholars such as Osiander (2001) argue that the conceptualization of a “Westphalian order” arising from the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 is a nineteenth-century phenomenon resulting from the era’s focus on concept of “nation” and “sovereignty”.

literature on the subject was complemented by the study of contemporary sources, both Chinese and European, in order to better understand the points of view of the main actors involved through the documents that they produced at the time.

The first chapter discusses the Ming dynasty approach to the arrival of the European traders on the Asian scene. The first contact between the Western and the Asian world-orders happened in the 1500s, when the Portuguese conquering drive brought them to interact with the Chinese overseas merchants in Southeast Asia. In Ming China foreign trade was restricted by the central government and linked with the tributary system, nonetheless maritime commerce was an important economic reality of the southern Chinese coastal communities. Indeed, an element that would be common throughout the whole period was the discrepancy between official government policy and the reality of the “coastal peripheries.” The enforcement of the imperial edicts was sporadic at best, the provincial elites and local officials themselves took part in these illegal, but profitable, commercial ventures. The Portuguese were officially rejected by the imperial government, which perceived them as foreign barbarians and troublemakers, but with the connivance of the provincial authorities of Guangdong they were able to settle and establish Macao in the 1550s. The Portuguese in Macao and the Spanish in Manila played a central role in the development of the transpacific silk-silver trade and the birth of the first globe-spanning commercial network, fuelled by the “silverization” of the domestic economy of China and the discovery of rich silver mines in Japan and Spanish America.<sup>5</sup> The international silk-silver trade, which had repercussions in the power relations of both Europe and Asia, was outside of the tribute-trade system; Sino-Japanese relations were strained in the sixteenth century, and the Portuguese in Macao and the Spanish in Manila were not Ming tributaries. Nonetheless, the Europeans were key intermediaries between Chinese silk production and Japanese and American silver exports. At the same time as these new global commercial developments were emerging, Ming China also relaxed its stance on foreign trade and legalized private maritime trade in Chinese shipping from Haicheng, Fujian, in 1567. In the 1600s, the Dutch expanded into Asian waters, and, unable to gain a foothold on the Chinese mainland, they had to retreat to Taiwan and founded a colony there. Again, the relationship between the Dutch and Ming China was informal, indirect and initially very conflictual. The Dutch, like the Portuguese and the Spanish before them, became key intermediaries in the Sino-Japanese silk-silver exchange. As the Ming dynasty entered its final crisis, the Chinese southeastern coast became the

---

<sup>5</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis, see “The silk-silver trade” chapter of this thesis.

domain of maritime clans, especially the Zheng, who had made a fortune in the East Asian seaborne trade, piracy and smuggling, and had become a state within a state.

The second chapter explores the subject of the Ming-Qing transition and its effects on the East Asian region, including the European actors who had significant commercial and colonial interests in the area. As the Ming dynasty collapsed and the Qing dynasty emerged to take its place, the maritime commercial sector of Fujian became a de-facto Zheng state, ideologically aligned with the movement of Ming resistance and restoration. The Zheng, after securing Taiwan from the Dutch, became a fully-fledged territorial state with a commercial-maritime focus, much more open to trade than any mainland-based Chinese dynasty had been. The Zheng Taiwanese state-making effort presented an alternative to the agricultural-bureaucratic society of the mainland, and was arguably the closest that a Chinese maritime-commercial state ever came to be. Nonetheless, the alignment of the Zheng with the cause of Ming restoration resulted in almost continuous war with the Qing, which diverted resources from the expansion on the seas and eventually resulted in their defeat. Still, the Zheng regime effectively expelled the Dutch from Taiwan, and for a time was the sole dominant naval power in the area, but with its defeat, the project of Chinese overseas expansion and the creation of a maritime empire was halted.

The final chapter addresses Qing China and its relationship with the Western world up until the First Opium War. When the Qing dynasty conquered Taiwan, it absorbed and adapted some of the elements that had been at the core of the Zheng state, namely the focus on international maritime commerce, and synthesized it with the agrarian-based society that the Qing inherited on the mainland from the Ming. The Qing dynasty was indeed much more open to foreign trade than the Ming had been. While the tributary system continued to function in the Sino-sphere, four designated Chinese ports were open to all other foreigners, without the need to bring tribute, or to become nominal vassals of China. This system flourished for a century and a half, from 1684 to 1841, and soon became known to Europeans as the Canton System, since it was the main port in which they traded. While occasionally Europeans went to other ports further north, it was not until the Flint Affair of 1757 aroused the suspicions of Beijing about foreign intrusion, spying and subversion that trade was formally restricted to Canton, the port furthest from the capital, but also the one that had already become the best suited for all parties involved. As Van Dyke (2007) points out, the structure for the management of foreign trade was not designed to obstruct it, but to encourage it, which is evidenced by the fact that trade grew throughout the existence of the Canton System. The imperial court reaped great benefits from the revenues collected in

Canton from the taxation of foreign trade, and the incentive system built in the institutional framework of the port ensured that all Qing bureaucrats involved were keen to keep the volume of trade growing as well. Each passing year Europeans came back to Canton to trade; evidently both the big companies like the British East India Company (EIC) and the private traders found it profitable enough. The trade was beneficial to all, Europeans and Chinese alike, until the opium crisis started to drain China of silver. While economic reasons were the primary cause of the conflict with Great Britain, the confrontation was also an ideological one, a clash of worldviews, a fundamental disagreement on the nature of international affairs that frustrated British traders and diplomats alike. The war was waged to create more favorable conditions for British commercial interests, but it also imposed the principle of formal equality between China and Great Britain and the western system of diplomatic exchanges.

The main secondary sources that I have drawn upon for the first chapter have been the research conducted by Ng (2017) on late Ming China's first contacts with the Portuguese, alongside Wills Jr.'s (2011) work on the Ming state relation with the various European actors in East Asia. I have drawn upon the findings by Flynn and Giráldez (1995-96) on the silk-silver trade for addressing the impact of the new global routes opened by the Europeans on the East Asian regional economy. For the section on the Ming-Qing transition, reference was made to the studies conducted by Cheng (2012) and Hang (2015) on the Zheng regime and seventeenth-century maritime Asia. For the third chapter, concerning Qing China, the analysis was based on the research conducted by Cranmer-Byng and Wills, Jr. (2011) and the monumental work done by Van Dyke (2007, 2011, 2016) on the Canton System. As for primary sources on the Ming, the main resource used has been the Veritable Records of the Ming, the *Ming Shi Lu*, an official day-by-day chronicle of each emperor's reign compiled by government historians. The Dutch daily registers of the colonial outposts in East Asia, which provide a valuable insight into the mid-1600s East Asian maritime environment, have been consulted. The English/British East India Company chronicles of the China trade compiled by Hosea Ballou Morse (1926-29) based on the company records of the London India Office were an invaluable source for understanding the perspective of the British in their commerce with Qing China from its inception up until the opium crisis. On the other hand, the compilation of Chinese primary sources on Sino-Western relations made by Fu Lo Shu (1966) has been most useful to understand the official Qing government perspective on the Western world; the main corpus of documents that he has gathered and translated come

from the Veritable Records of the Qing, the Qing Shi Lu, which presents the contemporary official governmental viewpoint on the relationship with the West.

## 1. Ming China

In Ming China, foreign trade was generally restricted to tributary missions from other countries, the average Chinese could not venture abroad on their own or interact with foreign private traders. Therefore, the only trade that could be legally carried out with foreigners was within the context of tribute embassies. These tributary relations must be understood in the context of the Sino-centric East Asian order that existed before the inclusion of the region within the Western international system after the Opium Wars. This order rested on the perceived cultural centrality and pre-eminence of China and was based on Confucian ideals of order, harmony and hierarchy. Within this framework, paying tribute was a symbolic ceremony that on the one hand recognized the hierarchical relationship between China and the tributary, and on the other hand gave legitimacy to the latter state and its ruling class in the eye of its subjects. These ceremonies consisted in the exchange of gifts between the two parties, but tributary missions also entailed private trading activities by members of the embassies who could bring with them limited amounts of silver and merchandise (Kim, 1980, pp. 1–8).

Since 1370, three ports had been designated for the reception of foreign embassies. Japanese envoys were assigned to Ningbo, embassies from Liuqiu to Quanzhou (later changed to Fuzhou), and all other missions from southern countries were directed to Canton. The frequency of these trips, the size of the embassies and of the cargo that could be carried was determined by the degree of intimacy that a particular country had with China, its size and status within the Sino-centric system (Ng, 2017, p. 267). This model of tributary trade, the *shibo*, was managed by the Supervisorates of the Maritime Trade and Shipping, the *shibo si*. In principle trading was thus restricted and limited to what could be exchanged on tributary missions, but private trade still flourished along the China coast. Indeed, for most of the Ming era, there was an official policy forbidding the Chinese to carry out sea-faring activities, known as *haijin*, the sea-faring prohibition, yet Chinese traders regularly went overseas with their junks to trade in Southeast Asia, going to places such as Pattani, Siam and Malacca. Furthermore, local Chinese officials often accepted private traders from abroad in their ports and levied taxes on their goods. This illegal trade was seemingly tolerated by local authorities, as it also provided revenue, benefited local elites and provided the “*xiaomin*”, a term meaning the “little people”, i.e. the non-wealthy majority of the population, with an opportunity to raise their standards of living, especially in those regions, like South Fujian, where population



growth and the low-productivity of land had resulted in economic hardship for many of them (ibid, pp. 134-135, 262).

The restrictive stance of the imperial court on foreign trade can be explained by the aim of the government to use trade as political leverage with foreign countries. It was an instrument to maintain good relations with other countries, while profitability was a secondary concern. This rationale applied both to China's land and sea frontiers. Indeed, trade was used as a way to secure the land border from the nomad populations beyond it, as these required agricultural and manufacturing products that they could not produce themselves, and in turn gave horses, skins and furs. In this exchange, China was at an advantage as the nomads were receiving essential goods, while on the other hand the Chinese did not depend on these exchanges to the same extent. Therefore, in case of disturbances on the frontier, the Chinese authorities would exploit this imbalance and revoke trading privileges until order was restored (Ng, pp. 271-2). The theme of Chinese self-sufficiency will be further reprised in the famous letter from the Qianlong Emperor of the Qing dynasty to the British King George III in which he wrote that "*our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and lacks no product within its own borders. There was therefore no need to import the manufactures of outside barbarians in exchange for our own produce.*"<sup>6</sup> It is argued, therefore, that the Chinese imperial authorities generally perceived their country as being in a position of strength vis-a-vis the rest of the world and that whatever commercial exchanges took place with foreigners were a concession on their part, rather than an economically mutually beneficial transaction. This official narrative was maintained by both the Ming and Qing dynasties when dealing with foreigners.

### 1.1. The Portuguese

The reality, however, was more complex and nuanced, as laws and regulations were not enforced uniformly along the coast, and local authorities were often flexible in managing private, formally illegal, trade, especially as they stood to gain from it in the form of tax revenues (Ng, p. 135). The imperial court itself seemed at times to have a more favourable attitude to foreign trade, while at other times more restrictive. When the Portuguese, after conquering Malacca, established contact with China through Chinese traders based there, they were successful in trading at Canton at a great profit in two voyages, in 1513 and 1515, from which they received a favourable impression of the Chinese and the trading

---

<sup>6</sup> Morse, *Chronicles*, II, Appendix J.

environment in the region (ibid, pp. 105-106). In 1517, an ambassador, Tomé Pires, was sent by the King of Portugal to Canton, along with another trading fleet, to seek an audience with the emperor and establish diplomatic relations. There were arguably promising signs for Sino-Portuguese relations at this point in time.

The Chinese government, on its part, had imposed a ban on all unscheduled trade in 1511, when the situation in Canton, where foreigners had little trouble in conducting business, caught its attention. The Ming Shi-Lu, the Veritable Records of Ming, records in 1514 that the open trade in Guangdong was source of worry for some local officials, as Chen Bo-xian, assistant administration commissioner in Guangdong, memorialized the Court stating that it resulted in “thousands of evil persons building huge ships, privately purchasing arms, engaging in evil activities upon the seas, illicitly linking up with the various *yí* [non-Chinese] and bringing great harm to the region.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, another issue was the fact that the Japanese tributaries were bringing more cargo and people than they were allowed. The restrictions, however, had little effect, also due to the reluctance on the part of the local officials in enforcing them. A memorial by the Ministry of Rites stated that “[...] those persons who were supposed to carry out the orders have let things continue as before and the activities have not been stopped. It is requested that the prohibitions again be publicized so as to prevent future calamity.”<sup>8</sup> In 1517 the court agreed to relax its stance, following the advice of Wu Ting-ju, an official who had served in various positions in Guangdong. His rationale held that trading would provide the spices in demand at Court and its revenues would help to pay for the local military expenses (Ng, pp. 135-137). It is recorded in the Ming Shi-Lu that: “Wu Ting-ju had plausibly argued about benefits to be gained and requested that all ships be received. The grand coordinator, regional inspector and the Ministry of Revenue were all deluded and this proposal was approved” and that afterwards, when the Portuguese started causing trouble, it had all been his fault.<sup>9</sup> When the Portuguese ambassador arrived in Canton, local authorities could therefore receive him due to the

---

<sup>7</sup> From the Ming Shi Lu, entry of June 27, 1514, in Geoff Wade, translator, *Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi Lu: an open access resource*, Singapore: Asia Research Institute and the Singapore E-Press, National University of Singapore, <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl>. Hereafter all references from the Ming Shi Lu are taken from the translations of Geoff Wade published by the National University of Singapore.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1515

<sup>9</sup> The Ming Shi Lu assigns blame to Wu Ting-Ju for the disturbances caused by the Portuguese along the coast, including the disruption of the tribute missions from other countries to China. “What was initially a source of benefits thus gave rise to unending troubles and all of this was Ting-ju's fault” ibid, June 15, 1517

reforms promoted by Wu Ting-ju. The embassy, however, ended in failure, and Sino-Portuguese relations as a whole would soon become troubled.

With these voyages from Malacca, the Portuguese became the first Europeans to go to China in the modern age, albeit not the first Europeans overall to reach the region. To the Chinese, however, they were no different than all the other populations of the Southeast Asian region. Their relations with them, at least initially, did not depart from what was customary with all the other foreigners of the area and the subsequent Portuguese misbehaviour, which arguably caused the rejection of the Pires embassy, resembled that of South China Sea pirates and smugglers (Fujitani, 2016). The imperial court dismissal of the embassy should therefore be understood within the wider context of the South China Sea trading environment. Particularly, the reasons for the rejection of the Portuguese envoys have been identified with a series of factors, diplomatic errors and misunderstandings, misbehaviour by their traders on the southern Chinese coast and the call for help to the emperor by the King of Malacca, Sultan Mahamet, a Chinese vassal driven away by the Portuguese. The Portuguese invasion of Malacca is recorded in the *Ming Shi*, the official history of the Ming dynasty, as follows:

“[...] the Franks [Portuguese] came with soldiers and conquered the country; the king Sultan Mamat ran away and sent envoys to inform the imperial government of this disaster. At that time the Emperor Shih tsung sat on the throne; he issued a decree upbraiding the Franks, told them to go back to their own country and ordered the kings of Siam and other countries to assist their neighbour in his need; none of these obeyed however and so the kingdom of Malacca was destroyed.”<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, even before the arrival of the Pires embassy the Portuguese were not seen favourably by the imperial court of China due to their actions in Malacca. The misbehaviour of Portuguese merchants referred to their inhabiting an island off Canton, Tunmen, building a fort there, and kidnapping Chinese locals. Fujitani (2016) analysed these accusations and found that, while the building of fortifications raised alarm among Chinese officials, from the point of view of the Portuguese it was a necessity arising out of the dangerous surrounding maritime environment. Furthermore, it was a customary practice in the region to assign foreign embassies an island each off the coast of Canton while waiting for the

---

<sup>10</sup> This excerpt is taken from the *Ming Shi* (明史), the official History of the Ming Dynasty, part of the Twenty-Four Histories. It was compiled during the Qing dynasty, as every dynastic history was compiled after its downfall by the succeeding one, but the source material comes from the government archives and literature contemporary to the matter at hand. The English translation for this passage is found in W. P. Groeneveldt, *Notes on the Malay Archipelago and Malacca. Compiled from Chinese Sources*, 1876, p. 133.

approval to enter the country, and Tunmen was the island assigned to the Portuguese. Other than by embassies, the islands offshore were also used by private traders, smugglers and pirates. What aroused the suspicion of the local authorities, however, was the fortification of Tunmen by the Portuguese and its transformation from a temporary trading post into a long-term settlement, evidenced by the building of houses. However, rather than a hostile act from a foreign power, Fujitani argues that the authorities saw it more as a potential criminal haven for maritime bandits. As for the accusation of kidnapping, the Portuguese indeed acquired slaves, but they did it within an already existing market, though the illegality of the act lay in the sale of Chinese slaves to non-Chinese, as slavery in itself was legal in China. Further, the scale of the phenomenon was an issue, as the Portuguese bought a large number of slaves as commodities to be resold for profit elsewhere, whereas other foreigners usually did it to replace lost crewmembers (Fujitani, p. 101).

Ng's (2017) account of the Sino-Portuguese rift surrounding the Pires embassy shares common elements with Fujitani's one. Ng, however, emphasises the role of Simão de Andrade, the brother of the captain of the Portuguese fleet that carried Pires to China, who was himself in charge of a small fleet. Ng assigns him responsibility for the troubles along the southern Chinese coast. Another element emphasized by Ng, which is absent in Fujitani's account, is the death of the Zhengde Emperor in 1521 and the succession to the throne by the Jiajing Emperor. Ng (2017, pp. 111-113) stresses the importance of the change in policy ushered in by the new emperor, who arguably wanted to strengthen his position against the eunuch officials in charge of receiving tributary embassies, which resulted in the detainment of the embassy and in open conflict with the Portuguese. The new emperor took a stronger stance on foreign trade. He ordered tighter controls on tributary embassies and the refusal of all unscheduled envoys. Following imperial instructions, the Guangdong authorities resorted to force in the expulsion of foreigners, which led to open battle with the Portuguese in 1521 and 1522 (Chang, 1934, pp. 55-58).<sup>11</sup> Ng's interpretation is supported by the official records of the *Ming Shi*, which state that the Portuguese sought audience with the emperor to "bring tribute and ask investiture", but since they were not "among the tributary

---

<sup>11</sup> The Ming Shi Lu records the violent clashes with the Portuguese in Guangdong in the entry of April 6, 1523.

kingdoms”, they were imprisoned by the local governor, and subsequently the emperor ordered their expulsion.<sup>12</sup>

The following decades saw the continuation of trade by the Portuguese in semi-legal and illegal ways. In 1529 the port of Canton was once again opened to foreign trade, but with the exclusion of the Portuguese. The move was aimed at providing revenue to sustain regional military and administrative expenses, and to increase the supply of foreign commodities in demand in China. Its proponent was Lin Fu, the Grand Coordinator of Liang-Guang (i.e. Guangdong and Guangxi), who argued that the closing of the port had only exacerbated the problem of smuggling elsewhere on the coast with the collusion of local officials. The Ming Shi Lu records Lin Fu’s proposal to the Ministry of War in which he stated that “Annam and Melaka have long been part of “the within”<sup>13</sup>, and regulations allowing them to trade are contained in the Ancestral Instructions and the Collected Statutes” appealing to the customary tributary relations that governed trade in the Sino-centric order, then he argued that the other foreigners should not be punished because of the actions of the Portuguese, and he requested that “Guang-dong be instructed to examine the fan [foreign] ships which arrive and not prohibit those which the regulations allow to trade.”<sup>14</sup> From 1533, however, the Portuguese were able to trade nonetheless by accompanying tributary missions from other countries. Ng further argues that between 1521 and 1549, the Portuguese often bribed local officials in order to trade, but that sections of the local population also were eager to do business with them. The local scholar-gentry elite, in particular, provided capital and labour for the smuggling operations (Ng, 2017, pp. 114-115).

## 1.2. The establishment of Macao

For the Chinese authorities, the situation along the coast deteriorated further due to the activity of pirates, known as the *wokou*, which were multinational crews that included Chinese, Portuguese and Japanese who raided and pillaged. The disturbances along the southeastern coast are recorded in the Ming Shi Lu as being caused by the people of those provinces who

---

<sup>12</sup> This is attested in the Ming Shi, as translated by W. P. Groeneveldt, *Notes on the Malay Archipelago and Malacca. Compiled from Chinese Sources*, 1876, p. 134. It should be noted that the Portuguese wanting to bring tribute and ask for investiture is the interpretation of the Chinese, according to their worldview and the Sino-centric order based on tributary relations. The Portuguese wanted to establish direct diplomatic relations not as vassals or tributaries of China but as equals, as explained by Ng (2017, p. 110). The same event is also recorded in the Ming Shi Lu, February 11, 1518.

<sup>13</sup> Here this expression is taken to indicate the countries within the Sino-centric order.

<sup>14</sup> From the Ming Shi Lu, November 7, 1529.

privately built large vessels and armed themselves to conduct trade in violation of the regulations. Indeed, the emperor himself is recorded as having stated the following:

“The pirate calamities are all resultant from residents violating the prohibitions and engaging in trade, the officials being lax in their duties and the Imperial commands being neglected and not heeded. Further, the military patrolling officials in the coastal regions do not remain in and defend their assigned areas. Thus pirates breed and harm is brought to the areas.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1547 the Imperial Court appointed Zhu Wan, former Provincial Administration Commissioner of Guangdong, as Governor of Zhejiang and as overseer of the military and coastal defense of Zhejiang and Fujian in order to solve the smuggling and piracy issues. Under Zhu Wan, the Chinese military won two major battles against the pirates in 1548-49.<sup>16</sup> However, his order of executing prisoners without Court approval led to an official investigation, to his removal from the post, and ultimately to his suicide in 1550. The investigation into him and his death are recorded in the *Ming Shi Lu*, in which it is noted that “Wan was honest and uncorrupted, and brave in his official duties”, but that his violations of the law had to be examined. It is noteworthy that it is also reported that after his death “the general feeling was one of sympathy for him.”<sup>17</sup> Despite his downfall, Zhu Wan had exposed members of the coastal scholar-gentry who had profited from the smuggling trade with foreigners; they were subsequently arrested and sentenced to death. Further, the prohibitions on private trade were made more stringent, with the death penalty for officials whose corruption resulted in deaths or disturbances, for those who built large vessels for foreigners, traded in prohibited items, or aided pirates (Ng, 2017, pp. 133, 144-45).

Nonetheless, with the removal of Zhu Wan, Ng argues that the Portuguese in the 1550s found once again a more favorable environment to trade. In 1554, with the agreement of a local official, the Coastal Surveillance Vice-Commissioner of Guangdong Wang Bo, they were once again admitted in Canton to trade “representing” Siam, a tributary of China. Three years later they also established a base in Macao with the approval of regional authorities, but without the knowledge of the central government (Ng, 2017, pp. 145-146). Wills Jr. (2011)

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, entry of September 29, 1533.

<sup>16</sup> Zhu Wan’s victories against the pirates are recorded in the *Ming Shi Lu*, entries of October 30, 1548, and July 28, 1549.

<sup>17</sup> From the *Ming Shi Lu*, entry of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1550.

provides a more in-depth look at the establishment of Macao as a permanent Portuguese settlement. Despite the removal of Zhu Wan, anti-piracy operations continued and illegal traders, Chinese and Japanese alike, found a progressively more hostile environment that threatened their livelihood. They turned to increasing violent attacks on Chinese coastal cities which destabilized some of the wealthiest regions of China for years. Wills Jr. argues that the turbulent situation in Fujian and Zhejiang drew most official attention there and let the relatively peaceful Guangdong develop its own modalities of trade without much disturbance. He presents the Portuguese in the 1550s as more inclined to peaceful trade, rather than resorting to violence, in contrast with their 1520s predecessors and argues that they were only marginal actors in the piracy conflicts of the time, more often caught in the middle of the violence and victims of it, rather than active participants (Wills Jr., 2011, pp. 34-35). The Portuguese merchant Leonel de Sousa, who arrived in Guangdong in 1552, was instrumental in finding an arrangement with the locals. Wills Jr. argues that de Sousa realized that profitable trade was possible only with the assent and collaboration of the Chinese authorities. On the Chinese part, Wills Jr. holds that equally important was the figure of Wang Bo, the Coastal Surveillance Vice-Commissioner, who allegedly accepted bribes to let the Portuguese trade in Canton. Sousa and Wang Bo worked out an arrangement by which the Portuguese were to pay the customary 20 percent duty, but only on half the cargo, and that 500 taels per year were to be given to the Coastal Surveillance Vice-Commissioner, arguably for the privilege of trading. Wang Bo even recommended that a formal embassy be sent to formalize the status of the Portuguese (*ibid*, p. 37). Indeed, an ambassador, Diogo Pereira, was sent by the viceroy of Goa, the Portuguese headquarters in Asia, in 1552, but was held up in Malacca and only reached China in 1563, where, however, Chinese authorities did not receive the embassy, probably due to the unresolved question of the Portuguese conquest of Malacca. The Portuguese established a permanent presence in Macao, built dwellings and churches, and were seemingly tolerated by the local Chinese authorities. Indeed, part of the reason is to be found in the help that the Portuguese gave to the Chinese in defeating rebels and pirates in the area in the late 1560s after a Ming military commander asked their assistance in putting down a mutiny near Canton. Therefore, Wills Jr. (*ibid*, p. 39) argues that the local Chinese authorities tacitly approved the status quo of Macao as they realized its usefulness and the drawbacks of trying to force out the Portuguese, and rather decided to keep them there under close watch. The central authorities must have known about it, however, as in the Ming Shi Lu there is a reference to foreigners and Chinese living together in the area of Macao in 1569 and to the emperor approving measures to limit the

contact between them and requiring traders to hand over goods at the “bays” and not go inland to the provincial capital. Although there is no direct mention of the Portuguese, the reference to the “*fan* [foreign] merchants of Melaka” strongly suggests that they are among the foreigners targeted by the measures. It is clearly discernible, therefore, the attempt by the central government to shore up foreign influence and limit the contact between Chinese and foreigners.<sup>18</sup> It is to be noted, however, that no forcible expulsion was carried out on the Portuguese, and that the Chinese officials themselves realized that they could not stop these interactions, so it was best to just limit them as much as possible and prohibit private dealings between the Chinese and the foreigners. Furthermore, in Macao, the Chinese had leverage on the Portuguese, as remarked by a high-ranking official: “All of the yi's [foreigners] daily food supplies are provided by us. If they ever harbour evil thoughts, we can block their throats. Without the need to shed blood, we will have control over their life or death.”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the prospect of expelling the Portuguese presented more issues, as their ships might go to different places every time, rendering their examination difficult, along with their punishment in case of troubles.<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that in an official document of the Ministry of War in 1617 it is advised to deal with the Portuguese in a flexible manner, so as to not create dangerous situations, specifically: “[t]he supreme commander and the regional inspector of the province should pay attention to issuing prohibitions or making arrests when anything may give rise to calamity.”<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, the Portuguese permanence in Macao depended on the goodwill of the Chinese, and though some within the Chinese circles argued for their expulsion, it was deemed safer to just let them stay there under close watch and limit as much as possible their proliferation, influence and private trade with the Chinese, without causing a violent reaction.

---

<sup>18</sup> From the *Ming Shi Lu*, entry of November 29, 1569: “...On Prohibiting Private Trading with the Fan [foreigners]. The fan merchants of Melaka and other countries have long been known for their coarseness and ferocity. In the past, induced by the lure of some small benefits, Hao-jing [the Macao area] and other bays were opened to the traders. People flocked there as to a market, and civilians and yi [foreigners] now reside there mixed together. The occurrence of calamity cannot be predicted. We cannot completely stop this, so it would be best to prohibit the civilians from having private dealings with them. Further, the bao-jia regulations should be firmly promulgated again so as to restrain the civilians. When proportional taxes (抽稅) are to be paid, the traders are to be instructed to hand them over at the bays. They must not be permitted to go to the provincial capital.”

<sup>19</sup> From the *Ming Shi Lu*, entry of January 16, 1615.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, entry of January 16, 1615: “If they [the Portuguese] are forcibly removed to Lang-bai, as the ocean is vast and boundless, the ships will not anchor at fixed places. Then, as the fan ships come and go, how will we be able to examine them? And how will we be able to stop evil persons from providing them with assistance? If they then link up with the Japanese and this gives rise to troubles, there will be no way to carry out punishment.”

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, entry of June 20, 1617.



In 1567 private maritime trade by the Chinese was legalized<sup>22</sup> in Haicheng after the Fujian governor successfully pleaded to the Imperial Court for the removal of the seafaring ban, but trading was again suspended in 1572 and 1592 (Ng, 2017, p. 282). Ng (p. 291) argues that 1567 was thus a watershed moment that “ushered in a golden age of Chinese overseas shipping trade that would last until the early decades of the nineteenth century”, despite later interruptions and the disruption caused by the Ming-Qing transition. Wills Jr. (2011, pp. 40-41) stresses instead that the 1567 policy change mainly allowed a “carefully limited and controlled maritime trade in Chinese ships” to be conducted from Haicheng, which had been already a hub of illegal trade. He stresses the importance of the explicit legalization and regularization of taxation of foreign trade in Chinese shipping that took place in 1578, nonetheless he argues that the 1567 Haicheng opening, despite being relatively small-scale and apparently tentative, was an important starting point for the further development of the management of foreign trade and its taxation, with practices that would also be found later in the Canton system, such as the measurement tax. It is relevant to note that the regional inspector of Fujian, Chen Zi-Zhen, memorialized the government in 1593 arguing for the opening of trade. In particular, he argued that:

“In the province of Fu-jian, land is scarce, people are many and the five grains do not grow abundantly. Thus, the coastal people use boats as houses, treat the sea as their fields, and trade with the fan [foreigners] for their livelihood. [...] Whenever there is prohibitions, the source of [these people's] wealth is obstructed, their livelihood is bleak, and they are in difficulty and distress. [...] If workers and merchants are not permitted to go abroad, they will go to sea as pirate gang members. [...] it would be appropriate to allow trade with the Eastern and Western Oceans, but that trade with Japan should continue to be prohibited. The trade should be strictly regulated by warrants and all goods should be examined. The [traders] provide fixed revenue of 20,000 [liang of silver?] and over the year there is a surplus. They also fund the needs of our armed forces. In these ways, they are beneficial, not only to the people but also to the government.”<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> “After 1567, the authorities finally worked out a modus operandi that was a compromise between strict prohibition and uncontrolled trade. It allowed the operation of private trade for the purpose of regularizing the movement, especially of the private junks sailing overseas, while benefiting from the handsome receipts of customs duties.” Ng, *Managing Maritime Affairs in Late-Ming Times, Boundaries and Beyond*, p. 291.

<sup>23</sup> From the Ming Shi Lu, August 19, 1593.

In this passage, Chen Zi-Zhen convincingly argued for the establishment of regulated private trade by referencing the particular environment of Fujian and the lifestyle of the Fujianese, the adverse effect of the trading restrictions, which pushed people to resort to piracy, and the benefits that would result to the government from allowing commerce, in the form of taxation and revenues to pay the military.

### 1.3. The silk-silver trade

The importance of the role played by Macao cannot be adequately understood without delving into the silver trade of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Considering China's domestic economy, Flynn and Giráldez<sup>24</sup> (1995 a) argue that the system based on paper money had already entered a crisis in the fourteenth century and had all but ceased to function in the mid-fifteenth century due to overissuing of currency. It is argued that silver thus began to be used as a means of exchange due to it being a more stable alternative to paper money, more practical to use than gold, which was "too valuable for most ordinary transactions" (Flynn and Giráldez, 1995 b, p. 207), and its value in a coin more easily estimated than with copper coins. The importance of this process cannot be overstated, as it dramatically changed the global trading flows and even "influenced the structure of power among nations throughout the world" (ibid, p. 208). In the 1570s the government enacted the "single-whip law", which simplified the tax system and made all taxes to be paid in silver. This policy change was foreshadowed by the practice of local coastal officials of requiring silver payments for taxes. Thus, the single-whip law could be interpreted as the Ming government finally recognizing the change at the societal level and giving in to practices already present on its territory.

The process of "silverization" of the country had global repercussions, as the value of silver in the country rose with respect to the rest of the world, thus attracting silver from abroad due to the price differences. The two main suppliers of silver were Japan and Spanish America, which were respectively linked to the Chinese market through Portuguese Macao and Spanish Manila, in the Philippines. Flynn and Giráldez stress how the narrative of silver flowing into China mainly as a passive balance to the outflow of Chinese products in demand in Europe as excessively Eurocentric, and instead present the silver trade as the result of

---

<sup>24</sup> For the references to Flynn and Giráldez, "1995 a" refers to "Arbitrage, China, and World Trade in the Early Modern Period" while "1995 b" refers to "Born with a "Silver Spoon": The Origin of World Trade in 1571".

changes in the internal economy of China, as explained above, and as a trade in which the European market and European traders played a secondary role.

Japanese silver flowed into China through Macao due to the restrictions on direct Japanese trade that were still in place. Indeed, as early as the fourteenth century, the relationship with Japan and especially with the maritime Japanese had been troublesome, due to disorders associated with tributary missions (such as the raids in the vicinity of Ningbo of 1523) and the persistent problem of the “wokou” pirates along the coast (although the latter were often Chinese themselves who had turned to piracy) (Ng, 2017, pp. 265, 270). Therefore, at the time of the establishment of Macao, for the Chinese trading with Japan was illegal (Wills Jr., 2011, p. 40). The Portuguese were well placed to fill the role of intermediaries between China and Japan due to their base in Macao, but also because they had established commercial relations with the Japanese since the 1540s (Flynn and Giráldez, 1996, p. 56). Indeed, Ng describes how the Portuguese had already, before their establishment at Macao, established a triangular trade network with Japan and China “exchanging Chinese silks, gold and porcelain for Japanese silver bullion and copper” (Ng, 2017, p. 145) and suggests that their settlement in Macao was directly related to this profitable trade, as the need for a permanent base was felt as their trade grew.

In exchange for silver, China’s main export was silk. Silk had a robust demand worldwide (Flynn and Giráldez, 1996, p. 55) and was a commodity whose production allowed the Chinese population to obtain silver from abroad with which to pay the taxes under the single-whip law. It is argued by Flynn and Giraldez that the Chinese government stimulated domestic silk production by requiring that taxes be paid in silver. Furthermore, the government incentivized silk production by easing its taxation, and also by keeping taxes high on other sectors, thus combining negative and positive incentives. Furthermore, Chinese silk was not a main item of export to Europe as the European market for silk was supplied by Persia, but was rather exported to Japan, through Portuguese Macao, and Spanish America, through the colony of Manila, in the Philippines (*ibid*, p. 54).

Manila was founded as a Spanish colony in 1571 (Flynn and Giráldez, 1995 b, p. 201) and from the start became the first continuous commercial link between America and Asia. After the discovery of very rich silver deposits in Potosí, in the Andes, in 1545, these remote mountain mines rapidly became the world’s major supply of silver, by some estimates accounting for around three-fifths of the global silver production in the latter half of the sixteenth century. This was made possible also by the changes in the domestic economy of

China in those decades which allowed a rise in the price of silver relative to the rest of the world, whereas the discoveries of deposits in America allowed for relatively cheap mining of the same precious metal (ibid, p. 209). By the phenomenon of arbitrage, then, silver would naturally flow from America to China, where it could be sold at higher prices until there was a price discrepancy. However, by the same nature of the phenomenon and according to the economic “laws” of supply and demand, the more silver flowed into China, the more abundant it became and the more its price there would lower until it reached a value that was in balance with the rest of the world and its trading would not be profitable anymore.

Despite the importance of the American silver, in the late 1500s and early 1600s, the main supplier of silver to China was actually Japan, providing at times 200 tons a year and around 10.000 tons in total over the whole period (Flynn and Giráldez, 1996, p. 56). According to Flynn and Giraldez, due to the strained relationship between China and Japan, Europeans worked as middlemen in this trade, with the Portuguese especially well positioned to fill this role due to their settlements at both Macao, since the 1550s, and Nagasaki, since the 1540s. They also emphasize, quoting Boxer (1963, p. 13), the role that Asians had in this inter-Asian silk-silver trade and argue that Europeans were often used as “fronts” by the locals: “powerful Indian and Chinese merchants frequently used Portuguese as 'fronts' in this trade; likewise, Jesuits and Macao factors were agents of Japanese merchant families, *daimyos*, and even of the military dictators Hideyoshi and Ieyasu” (Flynn and Giráldez, 1996, pp. 56-57).

The silk-silver trade cannot be framed as consisting of two separate and distinct legs, one connecting Macao with Japan and another connecting Manila with Spanish America, as they both influenced each other, and both revolved around China’s demand for silver and supply of silk. When the Spanish crown tried to enforce existing levies on the Pacific trade, where smuggling was rampant, or tried to restrict it to appease merchants from Seville and Cadiz suffering from the competition from the Pacific, the consequence was the defaulting of several Manila merchants and the subsequent bankruptcy of Chinese and Macao creditors in 1637-38, followed by a merchants strike until smuggling was tolerated again. It is important to note, however, that this disruption in trade created profitable opportunities for those involved in the trade with Japan. Flynn and Giraldez thus describe the trade as “a dual-engine craft capable of flying on a single engine” (ibid, p. 61).

Silver exports from Japan to China peaked in 1661 and then decreased as Japanese mines became exhausted. On the other hand, Spanish American silver continued to be shipped across the pacific, and Flynn and Giraldez argue that “there was no secular decline in the

Pacific leg of the silk-silver trade” (ibid, p. 58) as throughout the century at least P2 millions of silver were transported each year. They further argue that the profits made from the silver trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and thus the huge Chinese demand for this metal, were the main factor sustaining the consolidation of Japan, its exit from the Chinese tributary system, and its expansionist attempts (exemplified by Hideyoshi’s failed invasion of China through Korea in the 1590s), as well as allowing the Spanish monarchy to finance its numerous wars in Europe, Asia, and America (Flynn and Giráldez, 1995 b, pp. 211-213). Therefore, the high demand for silver in China greatly influenced the power relations of both Asia and Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which highlights the truly global repercussions of the Asian-American trade.

Cooper (1972, p. 424) emphasizes the significance of the Japanese silver for Macao by underlining how, when Japan formally prohibited the Portuguese from trading in 1639, in the aftermath of the Shimabara rebellion, the Macao senate sent an embassy to plead for the resumption of commerce, only for sixty of its members to be executed in Nagasaki. A further unsuccessful attempt was made in 1647, but this time, at least, no executions were carried out on the Portuguese. From the start, Portuguese relations with Japan had entailed commerce along with the spread of the Christian religion through missionary work. This kind of activity was seemingly tolerated by Japanese authorities as the demand for Chinese silk, obtained through Macao, was high, but the spread of foreign religions was seen with suspicion and as a possible threat to Japanese sovereignty, especially in a period in Japanese history in which the country was in the process of consolidating under a strong central authority. However, edicts prohibiting missionary activity, aimed particularly at the Jesuits, were not enforced with much strength in order not to hinder trade. Citing letters written by Jesuits in Japan in 1591 and 1607, Cooper argues that the authorities turned a blind eye toward missionary activity at that time (ibid, p. 423). However, by the 1630s the situation had changed, and heightened hostility towards Catholics resulted in their banning from the country in 1639 (Toby, 1977, p. 363) after the Christian-linked Shimabara rebellion, which, according to Laver (2011, p. 24), convinced the Japanese authorities of the impossibility to separate Portuguese trade and missionary activity. This prohibition deeply affected Macao’s trade as “the prosperity of Macao took an enormous plunge, never to recover” (ibid, p. 7).

As for the Japanese trade, among the Westerners only the Dutch were allowed to trade directly with Japan after 1639, and even they were confined to the small man-made island of Deshima, off the coast of Nagasaki. The following period in Japanese history has been defined as one of closure in the traditional historiography. However, more recent scholarship

has cast doubt upon the idea that Japan ever really closed itself off to the rest of the world. Indeed, Japan remained engaged with the rest of Asia, albeit with many restrictions on individual Japanese travelling and trading abroad. Laver (2011) describes the Shogunate foreign policy in the central decades of the 1600s as the result of internal dynamics aimed at placing foreign trade firmly under the control of the Bakufu (the Shogunate administration), and most importantly at consolidating the power of the Shogun at the expense of the local authorities of the Daimyos. Kazui & Videen (1982, p. 288) place more emphasis on the regional political environment as they hold that the Bakufu's main goal was to create a new order centered on Japan, rather than China, and that the restrictions placed on trade and travel were modelled on Ming China's own foreign policy, as evidenced also by the similarity of the names of these policies – *kaikin* in Japanese and *haijin* in Chinese – that also share the same characters: 海禁.

To add to the Portuguese issues in Asia, Malacca was lost to the Dutch in 1641, depriving them of an important colonial possession linking East Asia and India (Wills Jr., 2011, p. 50). The Dutch incursions in Southeast Asia had, since the beginning of the seventeenth century, threatened the Iberian privileged access to the Asian trade that they had so far enjoyed. In order to break the Portuguese monopoly on the Sino-Japanese trade as intermediaries, the Dutch had even attempted the direct conquest of Macao in 1622, albeit unsuccessfully (Cooper, 1972, p. 424-425). The Spanish had themselves tried to establish a direct foothold in the Canton area and were seemingly successful in obtaining at least tacit approval by the local authorities in doing so, but they were driven away forcefully by the Portuguese in 1599 (Boxer, 1946, p. 152). Nonetheless, Boxer argues that the Dutch represented a serious enough threat to both the Portuguese and the Spanish that the Iberian rivalry had at times given way to cooperation and collaboration between Macao and Manila in order to contain it. According to Boxer (*ibid*, p. 158), the Dutch attempted conquest of Macao in 1622 also alarmed the Spanish in Manila, who feared the consequences of the Dutch establishing themselves on the Chinese mainland, and thus sent men and munitions to the aid of their Portuguese rivals. It must also be borne in mind that at the time Portugal and Spain were ruled by the same monarch in personal union, but, as a condition for the recognition of the legality of the union, the Cortes of Thomar (an assembly of the estates of the Kingdom of Portugal) required that the colonial dominions of the two countries be managed separately and that trade and movement between them should be prohibited (*ibid*, pp. 150-151). Still, the reality was that trade between Macao and Manila continued to take place and even “flourished”, despite the numerous official bans. This situation was mirrored by the pacific

leg of the silk-for-silver trade, where official prohibitions were ineffective at stopping this lucrative business as both the Manila and the Acapulco authorities "cooperated in deceiving the home country" (Flynn and Giráldez, 1996, p. 59). Boxer argues that the main reason for the thriving of the unofficial Manila-Macao trade was the lack of a Spanish base in China (Boxer, 1946, pp. 151-52). Wills Jr. (2011, pp. 53-54) however also describes the close relationship between Manila and Fujian and the bustling trade that was carried out by the Chinese themselves with Manila. Through Manila, the Chinese manufacturing sector found a new market for its silk production, not so much in the Philippines themselves, but in Spanish America. Indeed, it will be recalled that Manila was located at the end of the Pacific leg of the silver trade, and that galleons bringing that bullion across the Ocean brought back silk to America. Flynn and Giráldez (1996, pp. 62-63) bring to attention the impact that imports of silk had on the local economies of America, in particular in Mexico and Peru. Indeed, the nascent industry of Mexican sericulture was virtually destroyed by the competition with Chinese silks, but the import of yarn actually benefitted the local silk guilds, as they could vary their product by using the imported raw material. A good portion of Mexican finished products was exported to Peru, despite multiple attempts by officials to suppress this trade. Ultimately, however, a ban in 1634 was somewhat successful, but by blocking the Mexican-Peruvian trade it stimulated the import into Peru of finished Chinese silks, and as a result, the Mexican silk-weaving industry was destroyed.

When the Spanish founded Manila in 1571, there was already a local population living under a Muslim king in the area alongside a Chinese community. Wills Jr. (2011, pp. 51-52) describes the start of the Sino-Spanish relationship in the area as somewhat friendly, positive, and mutually beneficial from a commercial point of view. The episode of the rescue by the conqueror of Manila, Miguel López de Legazpi, of the crew of a Chinese Junk disabled off the coast of one of the islands of the archipelago in 1571 could be considered as emblematic of the positive relationship that could be developed between the two communities. Indeed, some of the rescuees came back a year later with a large cargo to trade. The first transoceanic shipping of Chinese goods took place the year after that, and in 1574 and 1575 respectively six and more than twelve junks are recorded to have arrived. However, Wills Jr. argues that the number of Chinese who settled in Manila started to be an issue with the Spaniards, as already in 1586 there were around ten thousand, whereas the Spanish were less than two thousand. Wills reports that "At Manila the Chinese brought almost all the goods that would be shipped to the New World, and did almost all the mercantile and skilled craft work of the city" (ibid, p. 52). He also emphasized the centrality of the Chinese population in the local

economy as they were found in virtually any trade “from bread baking to bookbinding to tavern keeping to stone masonry” (ibid, p.55). Efforts were made to limit the number of Chinese and the kind of work they could do, but were not very effective. The selling of a limited number of residence permits resulted in corruption as the responsible officials profited from selling them above the quota and at higher prices. This practice continued and in the 1630s the revenue thus obtained surpassed the income made through the taxation of the trade of the Chinese (ibid, p. 59). The Chinese were themselves suffering from the misgovernance and extortions by the Spanish authorities and even petitioned the King of Spain to let them be governed by themselves, but to no avail.

The relationship between Spanish and Chinese in the Philippines was also tinged in blood in three major massacres committed against the Chinese community in 1603, 1639, and 1662 in which tens of thousands were killed (Wills, 2011, pp. 53, 58, 60). The 1603 massacre broke out as the result of mutual mistrust and fear that pervaded Manila between the Chinese on one part, and the Spanish, Japanese, and Filipinos on the other (Ng, 2017, p. 287). In particular, the catalyst for the event was a delegation sent by the Fujian provincial authorities to investigate a false claim that there was a mountain of gold in Luzon.<sup>25</sup> Despite the warm welcome by the Spanish, the local authorities were skeptical about the nature of the mission, believing it to be a spying operation in preparation for a major invasion of the island. After the delegation went away, tensions grew and preparations were made for potential hostilities on both sides, eventually violent clashes escalated into a massacre that resulted in an estimated fifteen to twenty-five thousand Chinese killed (Wills, 2011, pp. 57-58), out of a total estimated Chinese population of thirty thousand (Ng, 2017, p. 287).

The response of the Ming authorities to this event sheds light on their attitude towards their own sea-faring population and merchant class. Wills Jr. (2011, p. 58) argues that after the violence ended, the Spaniards realized their need for the Chinese, or rather, for their “trade and industry”, in order for Manila to keep functioning. Indeed, the Spanish feared that they had brought upon themselves an armed retaliation by the Chinese and that in any case no more junks would come to commerce with Manila. In Fujian, on the other hand, the episode enraged both the seafaring population, among which many had lost dear ones, and even some high-ranking officials, who requested retaliation from the court in Beijing, as the

---

<sup>25</sup> This is also attested by an entry in the Ming Shi Lu, which reads: “The Fu-jian mining taxation Eunuch Director Gao Cai had, on receipt of Imperial orders, sent officers across the sea and they had ascertained that Ji-yi did not produce gold and silver. Thus he submitted impeachments against the evil person Zhang Yi and the Company Commander Yan Ying-long for submitting a false memorial (...)” entry of December 14, 1603.



episode was seen as an insult to the prestige of the empire. Nonetheless, no such action took place. Wills argues rather straightforwardly that the Fujian authorities were inclined to blame Zhang Yi<sup>26</sup>, the man who made the claim about the mountain of gold, for the violent affair, and that they only reprimanded the Spanish for having killed Chinese on their own. Ng, on the other hand, explains the issue more in-depth and argues that despite the local officials' protests, the Court decided against military action because of the risk involved in such an operation and the possibility of failing a maritime expedition, and, perhaps more importantly, because of the low social standing of traders in the Confucian worldview. This is best exemplified by the words of Fujian Governor Xu Xueju in relation to the Manila massacre: “merchants were the least worthy of the four social strata. How could we make war for such insignificant people? They are scum, ungrateful to China, their land, their parents and ancestors, because they failed to return to China for the New Year” (Fujian Governor Xu Xueju quoted in Ng, 2017, p. 289). What emerges is the prejudicial attitude against overseas Chinese in the imperial Court. Tremml-Werner (2015, p. 309) states that, as far as the Court was concerned, these Chinese expatriate communities were no longer considered to be Ming subjects. In the traditional Confucian worldview, merchants were considered to be at the lowest place of the social occupational hierarchy, below respectively scholars, agriculturalists and artisans (Kuhn, 1984, pp. 20-21). However, besides the discrimination based on their occupation, the sea-faring community was considered akin to a “traitorous” group because of their alleged disregard for their homeland and the place of burial of their ancestors, thus going against one of the main principles of Confucianism, that of worshipping one’s ancestors (Tremml-Werner, 2015, p. 310). Further, Tremml-Werner argues that this episode foreshadows the stigmatization of Chinese migrants as “traitors to their motherland” in the following centuries as well.

#### 1.4. The Dutch

In the preceding pages, the role of the Dutch has been mentioned in relation to the Spanish and Portuguese interests in Asia. The Netherlands fought a long war of independence from the Spanish Crown throughout the sixteenth century and seventeenth centuries, in the

---

<sup>26</sup> The emperor himself is recorded to have said that "Zhang Yi and so on have deceived and lied to the Court. They have also initiated troubles abroad leading to the slaughter of 30,000 merchants. This has harmed majesty and bequeathed calamity. Death will not expiate their crimes. Have them immediately executed and their heads displayed throughout that province". From the Ming Shi Lu entry of January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1605. Whereas in the same entry it is recorded that the chieftain of Luzon (the authorities of the Philippines) had killed without authorization officials and civilians, but the emperor simply asked for advice on how to handle the matter.

conflict known as the Eighty Years War. Since the end of the fifteenth century, the main distribution center in Europe for Asian spices had been Lisbon, as most of the spice trade was controlled by the Portuguese thanks to the newly opened route around the Cape of Good Hope. Throughout the sixteenth century the main distribution hub shifted to Antwerp, until this was occupied by Spanish troops in 1585, and then finally settled in Amsterdam. As the Portuguese proved not able to maintain the import levels needed to satisfy the European demand for spices, prices in the continent soared and Dutch traders seized the opportunity to begin their own direct trade with Asia. Since this was an expensive and risky undertaking, the rise of the prices of spices in Europe was evidently a strong enough incentive to convince the Dutch to go ahead with the project. Parthesius (2010, p. 33) presents Amsterdam as particularly well suited to begin this operation due to the know-how, capital, and networks that the protestants fleeing from Spanish-occupied Antwerp brought with them to the city. Additionally, the shipbuilding and maritime sectors of the Netherlands were already well developed, and the best navigation experts and geographers were available there. All these factors were instrumental in paving the way for creating a direct trading link with Asia. After the first attempts to reach Asia through a north-eastern route were blocked by the polar ice, other routes were explored, specifically through the Strait of Magellan, which proved successful in reaching Japan and the Moluccas. However, in the end, the most feasible route proved to be the one around Africa, which was already used by the Portuguese, and so in 1595 it was used for the first time by the Dutch as well. In 1602 the VOC (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, the Dutch East India Company) was established. The political authorities of the Netherlands gave the Company the monopoly of trade East of the Cape of Good Hope and West of the Magellan Strait, the authority to sign treaties with Asian political entities, build fortifications, and use military force. Parthesius (2010, p. 35) argues that the goal of the Dutch in Asia was to control the supply of specific commodities in order to control prices in Europe. Another aim was to limit the outflow of money to Asia, and since most European commodities were not in sufficient demand in the Asian markets, the Dutch used local Asian products to acquire the commodities for the return voyage, thereby getting directly involved in the intra-Asian trading network. The pre-VOC Dutch companies had been in competition with the other European traders, but also with each other, and this drove prices up in Asia while depressing them in Europe, decreasing the profitability of the entire Asian trade. Therefore, the VOC was founded also with the purpose of limiting internal competition. The other main factor, however, was of a political nature. Indeed, the Dutch government wanted to use the Asian trade to “export” the war against the Spanish in

the Far East, but Spain and Portugal themselves aimed at limiting whatever competition may come from the Netherlands in Asia and exerted their political influence in the region to hinder any Dutch commercial inroads in the area. Both parties, therefore, were ready and willing to confront each other militarily in Asia.

Direct trade with China was one of the goals of the VOC, besides the control of the spice trade further south, but access to the Chinese market was heavily restricted by the Ming government, and additionally, the Portuguese obstructed such attempts, even going so far as having Dutch traders who were stranded on Macao in 1601 executed by framing them as pirates (Parthesius 2010, p. 42; Wills Jr., 2011, p. 67). Parthesius (pp. 42-43) makes the case that this would prove to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the Dutch realized that the only way to obtain Chinese merchandise was to raid the ships in the area that were carrying Chinese goods. In 1604 a fleet of VOC ships anchored in the Penghu Islands, also known as the Pescadores, off the coast of Taiwan, and in collusion with some Fujianese merchants bribed the eunuch in charge of the Maritime Supervisorate in Fujian, Gao Cai, to obtain the permission to trade.<sup>27</sup> However, a Chinese fleet was mobilized to “evict” the Dutch from what was considered Chinese territory, with the suggestion to anchor off Taiwan, which evidently was not considered Chinese territory, while trying to find an arrangement (Wills Jr., p. 68). Wills Jr. (pp. 67-68) argues that the first decades of Dutch interaction with the Chinese were often marked by episodes of violence that left them with a bad reputation in the eyes of the maritime Fujianese community. He argues that the “red hairs” (*hóngmáo*), as the Dutch were known among them, were seen as akin to the Portuguese, the “Folangji” that wreaked havoc along the Chinese coast during the preceding century, as far as violent behavior went. In Chinese contemporary sources we find mention of the Dutch violence, as in the words of Fujianese Grand Coordinator Xu Xue-ju from 1608 “the “red yi” [the Dutch] have come again, have slaughtered merchants and fisherman, and are looking to encroach upon the inner territory.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, an imperial order from 1623 states that the *red yi* (i.e. the Dutch) “seize our merchants and discretely they buy over our evil people. They intercept the rice ships and the trading ships in the various oceans and induce the Japanese

---

<sup>27</sup> This event is reported in the *Ming Shi Lu* within the context of a larger political struggle between Trade and Taxation Supervisor Gao Cai and Fujian Grand Coordinator Xu Xue-ju. The latter had accused Cai of embezzlement of tax revenues, violating the maritime prohibitions by conducting private trade with the Dutch and extorting money from them. It is recorded that Xue-ju was the official responsible for repelling the Dutch, probably in 1604/05, but that every year afterwards they were in the Peng-hu islands “spying” (perhaps trading illegally, smuggling or raiding). The entries referenced are those from January 7, 1608, and January 16, 1608.

<sup>28</sup> From the *Ming Shi Lu*, entry of January 16, 1608.

and the people of Patani to come to places nearby.”<sup>29</sup> Here the concern over the Dutch and Japanese collusion as a cause of possible troubles emerges as well, as it will be remembered that the Chinese had forbidden direct trade with Japan due to the disturbances created by their tributary missions and the *wokou* pirates.

The VOC policy of forcibly obtaining access to the Chinese market and goods was overall not very effective. Chinese junks trading with Manila were attacked by an Anglo-Dutch fleet in 1619-21, in a joint attempt by the English and the Dutch to diminish Iberian influence in the area and break open the Chinese market. However, besides the captured booty, this aggressive policy yielded little results and the Anglo-Dutch alliance quickly dissolved (Wills Jr., 2011, p. 68; Parthesius, 2010, p. 40). As mentioned earlier, in 1622 the Dutch also tried to fight their way into the Chinese market by attacking Macao, unsuccessfully, and again retreated to the Penghu islands. They built fortifications there and again started negotiating with the Chinese authorities. The Dutch demanded that Chinese traders be allowed to come to the Penghu islands, or to Taiwan, to trade with the Dutch, but they would not be allowed to trade with Manila, if they were caught doing so, they would be subject to capture and requisition. They further threatened that if the Chinese authorities did not accept these terms, they would attack and raid Chinese shipping and coastal settlements. The governor of Fujian, Shang Zhouzuo, was willing to find an agreement with the Dutch, but not with them occupying Ming territory, and so he demanded, again, that they leave the Penghu islands and settle in Taiwan, whence then an arrangement could be found. While negotiations stalled, the Dutch lost no time in plundering the Chinese coast, capturing locals, and using them as forced labor. In 1623 Shang Zhouzuo and the Dutch commander Reijersen met in person in Fuzhou, Fujian, and finally came to an agreement whereby the Dutch would demolish their fortifications in Penghu as a gesture of goodwill, and in return this would be reported to the imperial court in Beijing with the recommendation that Chinese traders be issued permits to travel to Taiwan to trade with the Dutch. This plan, however, was rejected by both the higher authorities of the VOC and the Ming, with the consequence that the rather conciliatory Shang lost his position as governor of Fujian (Wills Jr, pp. 68-70).

Wills Jr. argues that the Dutch officers in the Far East quickly realized that the Chinese could not be easily bullied to accept their terms, as had been the case when the Dutch dealt with small kingdoms throughout Southeast Asia, but that the VOC headquarters in the

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, entry of September 28, 1623.

Netherlands were slow to realize it and persisted with an aggressive policy. In the latter half of 1623, Reijersen tried again to commence negotiations with the Ming, but to no avail. The Chinese imprisoned the Dutch envoys and attacked their ships. Once again, violence escalated as the Dutch started to attack Chinese ports again in 1624. The Ming were able to assemble a fleet of war junks that gradually surrounded and blockaded the Penghu islands, and on July 30 occupied all the territory of the islands, except for the Dutch-held part. The VOC officials had to agree to the Chinese demands to retreat to Taiwan (Hang, 2015, p. 38), as they were now isolated from their drinking water supply.<sup>30</sup> As Wills Jr. remarks (2011, p. 70) the Dutch were forced to accept the solution that had been offered to them already in 1604. It is interesting to note that among the intermediaries between Dutch and Ming was Li Dan<sup>31</sup>, the leader of the Chinese community of Hirado and Nagasaki, Japan, and Zheng Zhilong (Wills Jr., 2011, p. 70), who was to become the head of the Zheng family, a clan that would have a significant impact in the maritime history of East Asia in the seventeenth century.

#### 1.5. The VOC, Zheng and the Ming

Zheng Zhilong's relationship with the Dutch was only at its start, however, and would grow in importance in the following years. Zheng Zhilong's origins are still subject to debate, as certain information and reputable sources on his youth are hard to come by and easily mix with myth and legend. He was probably the son of a low-level Ming official, and it is known that he fled home and settled in Macao while still young. He joined his maternal uncle, a merchant, and started his maritime career. While in Japan, he got married to a Japanese woman, who would give birth to his son Zheng Chenggong, also known as Koxinga. He became the apprentice of Li Dan, also known to Europeans as "Captain China", merchant and leader of the Chinese community of Hirado and Nagasaki, and entered the circles of the most powerful men of Japan, including the Shogun. Li Dan maintained close relations with both the Japanese elites and the Fujianese gentry and authorities. He also had an associate, Yan Siqi, who managed Li's business in Taiwan and who, through his connections in Zhangzhou, guaranteed his access to the port of Haicheng, the only port open for Chinese foreign trade after the 1567 opening outlined earlier. As Hang (2015, p. 35) remarks, in the early seventeenth century Li Dan "and his network of smugglers dominated the Taiwan Strait

---

<sup>30</sup> The campaign of liberation of the Penghu islands is described in detail in the Ming Shi Lu, entry of November 28, 1624.

<sup>31</sup> The Ming Shi Lu, entry of May 6, 1625, records that Li Dan actually collaborated with the Ming in driving away Japanese pirates and isolating the *ji*, i.e. the foreign pirates and smugglers.

area of the China-Japan route.” This was aided by the Ming distrust of the Japanese concerning Taiwan. Indeed, Japanese merchants had tried to settle on the island to pursue direct trade with China from there, with the backing of the Tokugawa government, but were unsuccessful and in one case brought about disorder and violence on the Chinese coastal mainland instead.<sup>32</sup> The Fujianese authorities created a permanent maritime mercenary force out of fishermen, former pirates, and traders to enforce the trading ban with Japan, but in reality, its commander, Chao Ping-chien, a member of the local gentry, used the flotilla to profit off the smuggling trade instead and to prey on other junks passing in the area. Cheng (2012, pp. 24-25) argues that his subsequent capture and execution by the Fujianese authorities in 1618 could be seen in light of their realization that there were no malicious designs on the part of the Japanese on Taiwan, and that the mercenary force had outlived its purpose. Indeed, after 1617 the Japanese government gradually lost interest in gaining formal recognition and direct relations with China and therefore its menace in the Taiwan strait ceased to exist.<sup>33</sup>

Cheng (2012, p. 25) argues that the Fujianese authorities “turned a blind eye” to the illegal trade between China and Japan that took place through Taiwan, once they realized that the Tokugawa Shogunate had no longer intention to occupy the island. He further argues that the Fujianese authorities used the maritime mercenaries as intermediaries in managing what he calls the “‘stateless’ space in between the existing Chinese and emerging Japanese world orders.” It must be borne in mind that since 1609 the Dutch preyed on Manila-bound shipping, and that in 1620-21 there was also a blockade enforced by a joint Anglo-Dutch fleet on the trade between China and Manila. This dangerous situation diverted a lot of commerce to Taiwan, deemed a safer transit for the Sino-Japanese trade by the Chinese merchants. Indeed, the Fujianese merchants who sold their products in Japan and Mexico through Manila, had had to find another way to trade, now that the Philippines were

---

<sup>32</sup> From the Ming Shi Lu, entry of July 29, 1616: “the Japanese bandits of the various islands have manufactured over 500 warships and intend to take Ji-long Shan [Taiwan] by force. We are concerned that they will then be able to make sudden attacks on and will bring harm to the Fu-jian seas”. The Grand Coordinator of Fujian Huang Cheng-xuan stated: “Ji-long [Taiwan] lies close to our Eastern border, and is only a few geng by sea from guarded areas (汛地). If the Japanese obtain it, they will then take the various islands of the Eastern fan in order to secure their lair. Subsequently, they will be able to make use of cracks, engage in spying and act as they wish”.

<sup>33</sup> Cheng (2012, pp. 25-26) argues that a diplomatic mission sent by the Korean king to congratulate the Shogun on his conquest of the Osaka castle and the consolidation of the unification of Japan gave the Shogun Hidetada all the formal recognition that he sought. However, Toby (1984, p. 66) makes the case that the Koreans were not in fact congratulating the Shogun, nor paying tribute (and this is also emphasized by Cheng), but were sent in response to what they interpreted as a suit for peace. Nonetheless, the Shogun was able to use the reception of the embassy to bolster his legitimacy in the eyes of his subjects.

blockaded, and settled for the smuggling haven and “stateless space” that Taiwan represented at the time (Cheng 2012, pp. 29-33).

Li Dan took advantage of the situation by organizing the Taiwan smuggling network from Japan. Through his Japanese protector, he managed to secure the trading authorization, the *goshuin*<sup>34</sup>, by the Bakufu in 1622 so that he could monopolize the Taiwanese trade (Cheng, p. 36). As mentioned before, Li Dan and his protégé-agent Zheng Zhilong acted as mediators in the dispute between the VOC and the Ming authorities that ended with the relocation of the Dutch activities to Taiwan. Afterwards, the VOC and Li Dan worked out a deal by which they would collaborate in the smuggling of goods from the mainland, and Li Dan would help intercept any vessel in the strait that was coming or going from Manila or Macao (Hang, 2015, p. 46). In this way, the two entities, Li Dan’s smuggling-trading enterprise and the VOC, could coexist in the Taiwanese space and advance their own respective interests.

Li Dan died shortly thereafter in 1625, followed three months later by his close associate Yan Siqu. The smuggling empire that he had built fragmented into different factions, as no one had enough influence to keep it together. The next years saw the Taiwan Strait become the setting once again for violence and piracy, which disrupted all normal maritime commercial activities in East Asia, given the strategic location of the strait. The VOC tried to take advantage of the situation by presenting itself to the Ming as the solution to the chaos and violence in the area due to its military strength, in exchange for direct access to the Chinese market. Zheng Zhilong was at first backed by the VOC, which supplied him with men, weapons and a base in Taiwan from where he could conduct raids (Hang, 2015, pp. 45-48). According to Hang, Zheng was able to consolidate the remnants of Li Dan’s organization and transform it into a protection racket, rather than just a plundering force. Furthermore, due to his connections in Japan, he was fortunate to have an old friend in Suetsugu Heizō Masanao, the now newly appointed Shogunal deputy at Nagasaki. Masanao held a very powerful position as he could control the commercial flow to and from Nagasaki, arguably the gateway to Japan’s market. Furthermore, Suetsugu Heizō Masanao obtained the necessary *goshuin* from the Shogunate to be able to trade in Taiwan, where Zheng supplied him with high-quality Chinese products from the Yangtze Delta region (Hang, 2015, p. 48).

---

<sup>34</sup> Only Japanese traders in possession of a license issued by the Shogun, called *goshuin*, were allowed to engage in commerce overseas and enjoyed the nominal protection of the Shogun. the Japanese government also asked the rulers of the countries engaging in trade with Japan to ban unauthorized, i.e. without the *goshuin*, Japanese traders from conducting business (Cheng, 2012, p. 17).

The subsequent years saw Zheng Zhilong transformed from just the leader of a smuggling operation in the Taiwan Strait, albeit a successful, cohesive and well-organized one, into a Ming official. In 1626-27, a devastating famine hit Southern Fujian, in particular the Tong'an District (T'ung-an), whose effects were exacerbated by the strict adherence to a ban on the sale of rice intended to hurt pirate activity. Despite the influence exerted by the Quanzhou local gentry on their connections at court to repeal the ban and allow rice to flow into the areas devastated by the famine, such efforts were rendered useless by regional commander Yü Tze-kao, who had sole authority to use junks to purchase rice, officially as provisions for his soldiers, and could therefore profit greatly from the situation. Cheng (2012, p. 61) argues that while Zheng Zhilong was in fact intercepting rice junks as per his contractual obligations with the VOC, the root cause of the situation in Tong'an was the rice ban. Further, he argues that Zheng made the decision to unilaterally force the repeal of the ban in July 1627 by attacking the Fujian war junks to deny the Fujianese authorities the means to enforce the policy. Cheng seems to argue that his decision stemmed from seeing the desperate situation that the people from his own home region had to endure which also prompted him to offer shelter to the refugees fleeing the region in Nan-ao Island, which he controlled. His raid destroyed around ninety war junks and purposely avoided civilian casualties. Zheng publicly declared that his only issue was with Yü Tze-kao, and the raids resulted in easier access to rice in his hometown, lending credibility to the hypothesis that his aim was truly that of achieving the lifting of the rice ban. It can be argued that from a public relations perspective, Zheng's actions were a resounding success, since a lot of people from his hometown decided to join him, allowing him to amass a fleet of 400 ships and tens of thousands of refugees (Cheng, pp. 62-65). In October Yü Tze-kao contacted the Dutch governor of Formosa (Taiwan) Gerrit Fredericksz de Wit strongly implying that should the VOC help in taking out Zheng, their chance to be granted the right to trade legally with China would be high. While Governor de Wit accepted the deal, Cheng makes the case that both de Wit and Zheng, who had been working together up until that point, were not "anxious to fight each other". Indeed, Zheng led his forces only against Commander Yü, whose popularity was tanking due to the rice ban and his dealings with pirates and the VOC which were unpopular. Zheng forced him to flee from Xiamen, and Cheng (2012, p. 65) argues that Zheng returned home as a protector of the people, one who had taken their side in the fight against the corrupt authorities.

The Xiamen area was now under the de-facto control of Zheng and his forces (Cheng, 2012, p. 70). The local Quanzhou gentry petitioned the Emperor for Zheng and his subordinates



to be pardoned while Zheng willingly submitted himself to the authority of the Coastal Defence Force. Under the terms of his “surrender”, Zheng was to fight piracy off the coast and pacify the region in the following three years and, if successful, he would be granted an official rank and status (ibid, p. 72). The emperor agreed to the deal and had Yü Tze-kao imprisoned and sentenced to death.

To better understand the emperor’s decision, it must be borne in mind that the Ming empire was facing multiple challenges: besides the rampant piracy and smuggling off its coasts, on the northern frontier it was facing the expansion of the Manchu and in the northwest, it was dealing with a peasant rebellion. Hang (2015, p. 50) argues that there was little the emperor could do to solve the chaotic situation off China’s southeastern coast, other than imposing yet another maritime ban, which he did in 1628 (Cheng, 2012 p. 77), and therefore the decision to employ the services of a sea lord like Zheng Zhilong to pacify the coast seems reasonable in this light. However, after a good part of his lieutenants left Zheng and returned to piracy, as they did not want to become subjects of the Ming and enlist in its armed forces as per the terms of his surrender, or simply because there was little money to pay them (ibid, pp. 74-75) Zheng had to rebuild its forces from a small core of 600 men. In this moment of vulnerability, the VOC attacked Xiamen and held Zheng hostage until he agreed to let the Dutch have unrestricted access to the Chinese market, something that he did not have the authority to do. The Dutch were pushed to action by a diplomatic crisis with Japan, as the Nagasaki Shogunal deputy Suetsugo Heizō Masanao had pushed the Shogunate to close down the Dutch factory in Hirado after the VOC had attempted to limit direct contact between Chinese and Japanese vessels off Taiwan, as its new Dutch governor Pieter Nuyts had grown weary of the collaboration between Zheng and Masanao. Therefore, in order not to be cut off from the lucrative Sino-Japanese trade, Governor Nuyts ordered the Xiamen operation in order to guarantee the VOC control of the supply of Chinese goods at least at one end of the Sino-Japanese route (Hang, 2015, pp. 49-52).

It is noteworthy to underline how personal connections and individual agency had tangible consequences on the political and commercial environment in maritime East Asia. In 1629 Zheng Zhilong had a friend in the newly appointed governor-general of Batavia, the headquarters of the VOC in Asia, Jacques Specx, whom he knew from his time in Japan, and who proved to be a timely ally in his campaign against other pirate bands, and who also benefited from Zheng’s friendship on his part as, given the difficult situation that the VOC faced in East Asia at the time (i.e. the crisis with Japan), Zhilong could guarantee a steady flow of Chinese goods. This collaboration allowed the region to be pacified and thereafter

the maritime ban was revoked. Zheng then organized a private trading fleet that engaged in a triangular commercial route with Japan, where Chinese goods were sold for silver, and Southeast Asia, where spices, aromatic woods and primary goods for Chinese medicine were purchased. Through this trade he became very rich once again, “that he is said to have outdone the Emperor in Wealth”<sup>35</sup> but his success caused the Ming authorities to be distrustful of him and he was removed to the interior, on the pretext of fighting mountain bandits (Hang, 2015, pp. 52-54). It is discernible, therefore, the uneasy alliance between Zheng and his private commercial-military force on the one hand, and the official, public authorities of the Ming on the other. Evidently both needed each other: Zheng needed the Ming for security, legitimation and a safe base to operate from, and the Ming needed Zheng to keep the coastal situation under control, especially at a time in which, as mentioned above, it faced dangers elsewhere, especially from the rise of the Manchus in the North, which would eventually overthrow the Ming.

The 1630s saw other disturbances in the Taiwan strait, both by pirates, this time rallying behind a new leader by the name of Liu Xiang, and by the VOC. Zheng was hastily recalled to duty on the coast by the new Grand Co-ordinator (i.e. governor) of Fujian Zou Weilian, who recognized the need for his maritime knowledge, skills and connections in order to repel Liu Xiang and pacify the coast once again (Hang, 2015, pp. 55-56). Furthermore, the emperor formally approved his rank within the Ming bureaucracy (Cheng, 2012, p. 125), thereby effectively completing the process of his pardon and giving more legitimacy to his enterprise and organization. In 1632 Governor Zou Weilian reimposed the maritime ban hoping to weaken Liu Xiang, and ordered Zheng to enforce it. Zheng had an evident conflict of interest in this situation due to his commercial relations with the Dutch and thus tried to have this trade legalized by pressuring the Fujian governor with the support of high-ranking acquaintances. It is interesting to note that one of these was Ts'êng Ying, the official in charge of the licenses for the fishing boats and rice junks in Quanzhou, who was connected with Zheng's Dutch trade and smuggling operations, but who also was a Catholic Christian just like Zheng Zhilong. Cheng (2012, p. 131) argues that therefore his support and collaboration surely had economic grounds, but that the religious affinity between the two should not be overlooked. Governor Zou, however, would not concede to handing out the passes needed for the Chinese merchants to go to Taiwan, given that it would also be in open defiance of

---

<sup>35</sup> Dominican friar Domingo Fernández Navarrete in *Tratados históricos, políticos, éticos y religiosos de la China* (1676), from its english edition of 1732, p. 339.

the emperor's orders that no trade with the Dutch be carried out. Zheng kept lobbying the court using an argument that aimed at rendering business with the Dutch politically acceptable: he argued that the Dutch in Taiwan were the rulers of Batavia, which was actually the kingdom of Kalapa, a tributary of the Ming, and that therefore trade under the framework of the tributary system should be allowed (*ibid*, p. 135).

Nonetheless, the new Dutch governor of Taiwan, Hans Putmans, had become weary of the restrictions and delays imposed by the Ming and by Zheng's perceived lack of help in the matter (Cheng, 2012, p. 137). Putmans therefore decided to recur to violence to settle the issue and obtain trade on the terms that best suited the VOC. On July 12, 1633, the VOC made a surprise attack on Xiamen harbor where it all but annihilated Zheng Zhilong's new fleet of war junks that he was in the process of building. Furthermore, Putman decided to form an alliance with Liu Xiang and his pirates to pillage the Chinese coast and intercept Chinese junks. This strategy was aimed at putting as much pressure as possible on the Ming authorities by emulating the methods of the pirates and thus transforming the VOC in East Asia into a pirate force that could dictate its own terms to the Ming (Andrade, 2004, pp. 435-438).

Nonetheless, two typhoons prevented the Dutch from enforcing their blockade of Xiamen and bought time for Zheng to rebuild his fleet. In October 1633, Zheng was able to trap the VOC fleet inside the bay of Xiamen and defeated it.<sup>36</sup> The VOC pirate allies deserted Putmans, who retreated to the Penghus and decided to end the hostilities with China. The hasty abandonment of this project could have been caused also by a change in the trading environment of Taiwan that took place at the same time. Indeed, the regent of Nagasaki had been reprimanded for allegedly issuing trading passes for Junks bound for Southeast Asia and Taiwan without Shogunal approval, and this caused a halt in the arrival of licensed Japanese junks in Taiwan (Cheng, 2012, p. 153). The Dutch had become worried that the competition from the Japanese merchants coming to Taiwan might become too strong, and that therefore, in order to remain key-players in the Sino-japanese trade, they would either have to exclude the Japanese from Taiwan, or be allowed to trade in the Jiulong River estuary directly with the Chinese vendors, rather than have them come to Taiwan, where they could have bypassed the Dutch and engaged directly with the Japanese (*ibid*, p. 147). Furthermore,

---

<sup>36</sup> The engagement, known in historiography as the Battle of Liaoluo Bay, was the largest naval encounter between China and the West until the Opium Wars (Andrade, *Lost Colony: the untold story of China's first great victory over the West*, 2011, p. 35), and it ended in a one-sided victory for China, or, more specifically, for Zheng Zhilong.

another reason lay in the fact that after their defeat the Dutch no longer had the necessary forces to implement any offensive strategy effectively (*ibid*, p. 167).

In any case, Putmans came to terms. The Dutch agreed not to come to Xiamen to trade, in line with the Ming rules after the 1567 Haicheng opening, by which licensed Chinese merchants could obtain authorizations to trade abroad (except in Japan), but foreign traders could not come to China except within the framework of tributary relations (Andrade, 2004, p. 419). Even before the Dutch attacks, the emperor had delegated decisions on the matter to the Minister of Rites, who was in charge of tributary missions, who for his part declared that the Grand Coordinator (i.e. the governor) of Fujian had the authority to issue trading passes for Taiwan or Batavia. The Regional Inspector in Zhangzhou Lu Chên-fei, who held a position higher in rank than the Grand Coordinator, supported Zheng Zhilong's effort to legalize the Dutch trade, arguing that piracy was not the result of foreign trade, and helped sway public opinion in favor of legalizing the trade. Governor Zu had therefore conceded to allow foreign trade, on condition that the Dutch never again came to Xiamen with their ships. Following the Dutch raids and criticism by Lu Chên-fei, Governor Zu was dismissed by the emperor, as he was blamed for having appointed military officers who were ineffective at protecting the Fujianese territory (Cheng, 2012, pp. 138-139, 151-152). As after 1634 no more Japanese junks came to Taiwan, the Dutch worries of Japanese competition vanished, and in July Putmans sent letters to the Fujian authorities stating that if the Chinese could provide enough cargo in Taiwan, the Dutch would not cause trouble, implying that they would not come to Xiamen. The newly appointed Grand Coordinator, Shên You-lung, issued four licences for trading Taiwan within the following months (*ibid*, pp. 167-168). Thus, by the end of 1634, the Sino-Dutch trade had been formally legalized, although not in the “free” form that the VOC would have wanted and had gone to war to achieve, and not on the Chinese coast, but far off it.

## 2. The Ming-Qing Transition

### 2.1. The fall of the Ming

Throughout the following decade, Zheng Zhilong's wealth and power grew. In 1640 he was appointed as Fujian military commander, which gave him control of its armed forces that he largely privatized and tied to his organization, whose commercial proceedings helped procure weapons and supplies. In 1641 he started to trade directly with Japan again, in open defiance of Ming laws and antagonizing the VOC. The Japanese authorities welcomed his trade as it avoided a potential Dutch monopsony after the restrictions on foreigners imposed in the

aftermath of the Shimabara rebellion in 1639 (Hang, 2015, pp. 59-61). At the same time, however, the crisis of Ming China finally brought about its fall in 1644 amid peasant rebellions and an invasion from the north by the Manchu, who had founded a centralized Qing state that would eventually expand to control the whole Chinese mainland. After the fall of Beijing and the suicide of the Ming Emperor Chongzhen, the Manchus advanced south and seized Nanjing in 1645, capturing Ming prince Zhu Yousong who had been acclaimed as the new Ming emperor. Another Ming prince, Zhu Yujian, fled to Fuzhou where he was granted protection by Zheng Zhilong and where, with the backing of a lot of Ming officials who had also come there, he became the Longwu Emperor of the Ming (ibid, p.65). Both he and Zheng shared a vision of Ming restoration over all of China, but the shortages of food brought about by crop failures and drought, along with the Manchu's advance, made increasingly difficult the situation in Fujian. In 1646 the Manchu conquered Fuzhou, captured and killed the Longwu emperor. As the situation worsened, Zheng Zhilong entered negotiations with the Manchus and, against the wishes of the majority of his followers, gave himself to the invaders, who had promised him full control of Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang. However, seeing as he did not bring with him most of his subordinates, the Qing commander who received him decided instead to capture him and take him to Beijing, where he would remain until his execution in 1661.

Thereafter, Zheng Zhilong's half-Japanese son Chenggong, known as Koxinga, succeeded his father as the head of the Zheng organization. Throughout his "reign", he would see the Zheng enterprise go from a coastal commercial-military organization to a territorial state based in Taiwan. "Koxinga" was the Minnanese pronunciation of "Guoxingye", or Lord of the Imperial Surname, which was the title bestowed on him by the Longwu Emperor, who also made him commander of the imperial bodyguard. His relationship with the emperor is seen by some scholars as even stronger than that with his father, and it effectively tied him to the emperor's cause of Ming restoration, although it would also create a conflict in him between filial piety to his father and loyalty to the Ming (Hang, 2015, pp. 75-77). Andrade (2004, p. 441) argues that his opposition to the Qing was ideological to the point of fanaticism. Thus, he proclaimed allegiance to a Ming pretender, Zhu Youlang, also known as the Yongli emperor, in Western Guangdong. The distance between them allowed Koxinga to keep the emperor from interfering with his activities while still aligning himself with a powerful symbol of authority in the cause for Ming restoration in China. Hang argues that Koxinga's plan in the event of a successful restoration of the Ming dynasty was to become a regional lord with supreme authority over the southeastern provinces. Although, on the other hand,

he also argues that Koxinga's adherence to the cause was not a simple political calculation but was probably also largely influenced by his idealism and loyalty to the Ming (Hang, 2015, pp. 78-80).

During the 1650s, however, Koxinga was in talks with the Qing, as the Shunzhi Emperor, who took full powers in 1651, tried to be conciliatory towards the Zheng to find a settlement. This climate resulted in a bilateral truce from 1653 while negotiations were ongoing. Still, the two positions were far apart, as the Qing requested Koxinga's surrender, but promised him control of four prefectures between Fujian and Guangdong with a small degree of autonomy, and would even allow him to keep his maritime commercial organization, provided that he sent the court custom duties. However, the submission to the Qing also required the shaving of the head, a symbol of Manchu allegiance, which even in the following decades would always be an unacceptable condition to the Zheng and their followers until the very end. Koxinga referred the Qing to the example of Joseon Korea, which had been a tributary state of the Ming and now of the Qing themselves, but that also was an autonomous kingdom and whose subjects were allowed to keep their cultural markers of long hair and clothing style (Hang, 2016, pp. 84-86).

In the meantime, Koxinga consolidated the Zheng control of coastal Fujian, centered on the island cities of Xiamen and Kinmen, and started to build its institutional structure on the model of the Ming bureaucracy. Despite the evident process of state-building undertaken, the line between public and private was not clearly defined, as public institutions, like the Warehouse for the Nourishing the Country (*Yuguo Ku*), acted as investment funds that financed the activities of Koxinga's private firm, the Celestial Pier (*Tianbuang*). Furthermore, other public officials, such as the head of the Revenue Office, had their own private trading activities on the side. Additionally, the figure of official merchants (*guanshang*) emerged. These were either adopted sons of the extended Zheng family, or more often private merchants who borrowed from the Zheng at a favorable rate to conduct business in a system based on long-term debt obligations. Private traders could also engage in commercial activities overseas by purchasing passes based on the size of the vessel and its destination, a practice that he carried over from his father's administration. Koxinga's administration of foreign trade also rested on the so-called Five Mountain Firms, which were covert operations inside Qing China that procured and smuggled goods to Xiamen (silk, porcelain and other high-end goods). Their scope of activity was the Yangzi River Delta and extended even to Beijing. Other than the commercial purpose, they also provided Koxinga with intelligence from inside the Qing. Along with the Five Mountain Firms were the Five Sea Firms, which

managed Zheng overseas trade and shipbuilding. Each firm operated twelve junks, which in turn could be assigned to the Eastern Ocean Fleet, shipping to Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines, or to the Western Ocean Fleet, which handled operations for maritime Southeast Asia, i.e. Siam, Cambodia, Batavia and others (Hang, 2015, pp. 91-95).

Hang argues that the Zheng organization “reigned supreme” in the East Asian maritime world in the 1650s and 1660s, in particular with reference to the other big regional maritime actor that were the Dutch. The Zheng had on average higher revenues, a larger volume of trade and higher income than the VOC. Hang calculates that nearly all of the fifty Chinese ships going to Nagasaki on average each year were part of Koxinga’s network, either directly or by trading under his protection by buying his permits, whereas the Dutch sent around ten ships each year, and their volume of trade was less than half that of the Chinese. The VOC lacked direct access to Chinese products in demand in Japan, especially silk, which it had to acquire from the Zheng at a higher price, and thus the Dutch reverted to use substitutes, like Tonkin silk, and later Bengal white silk, whose quality was good but its volume of trade in Japan was little compared to the Chinese one. The Zheng themselves also obtained in Vietnam, that is Tonkin and Quảng Nam, silk and gold that were marketable in Nagasaki to the lower echelons of Japanese high society, along with Southeast Asian animal skins. From Japan, the Zheng brought back silver, which accounted for around seventy percent of the return cargos, and weapons to be used against the Manchu. Hang also argues that intra-Asian trade still eclipsed the nascent global trade that took place through the international connections in Taiwan and Manila. Granted, the Zheng engaged in trade with both of them, but the importance of the new global routes in the East Asian economy was still limited compared with the internal maritime East Asian trade network in which Koxinga mainly operated (Hang, 2015, pp.96-98).

Furthermore, the Zheng could count on the cooperative relationship with the Chinese diasporas in Japan and Southeast Asia, whose members were mainly of Minnanese (i.e. from Southern Fujian) background and included merchants and Ming loyalists, among whom some of their wealthiest and most influential members acted as Koxinga’s agents in managing trade, purchasing of goods and dealing with the local rulers (ibid, p.95). In particular, the large Chinese presence in Siam resulted in a close collaboration with the Siamese kings (King Prasat Tong until 1655 and later King Narai) who employed the services of Chinese merchants and eventually promoted them to the role of court officials, all the while Siam was actually a Qing tributary and had been in a formally exclusive commercial relationship with the VOC. The Chinese community in Manila served as a connection between the Zheng and

the Spanish, but, as mentioned before, the relationship between the two communities was difficult and marked by episodes of extreme violence, and the 1650s dwindling supply of silver from America strained the relation with Koxinga as well (ibid, pp. 107-108). Another beneficial relationship was the one that Koxinga had with Japan and its government, it will be remembered that he was born to a Japanese mother and had lived there in his youth. His half-brother Shichizaemon acted as his agent in Nagasaki and, together with Zheng Tai, another long-time member of the Zheng clan close to Koxinga, they were the de-facto leaders of the Chinese community in Japan and at the same time maintained close relations with the Japanese officials. On the part of the Japanese government, close ties with the Zheng ensured a counterweight to the Dutch influence and ensured a stable, cordial, connection with the leader of the majority of the Chinese maritime traders (ibid, pp. 100-103).

Hang argues that Koxinga's relations with the VOC were marked by cooperative efforts in the early 1650s as both sides tried to cultivate cordial relations and minimize conflict. Wills Jr. (2011, pp. 73-75) on the other hand emphasizes the strained relationship that the Dutch and the Chinese immigrants from the mainland had in Taiwan. As the Chinese population in Taiwan grew to more than fourteen thousand, especially as refugees fled from the Manchu invasion of China, the Dutch employed policies similar to those of the Spanish in Manila, such as imposing a head tax on every Chinese. Furthermore, the Dutch established a system of competitive biddings for the exclusive right to trade with a given aboriginal village. Tension grew and resulted in a short-lived revolt in 1652-53 that was quelled in blood with the death of thousands of Chinese. The Dutch authorities were aware of the risk that the Chinese population posed to their rule in Taiwan, especially if they acted in concert with Koxinga. Regarding the revolt of 1652 the Batavia council stated this in a letter to Nicolaas Verburg, Governor of Taiwan:

“... it has fortunately been discovered, quelled, and suppressed — for which may the name of the Lord be blessed to all time! At the same time, we are somewhat suspicious that those wicked people have not undertaken this rebellion without support or instigation from more distinguished quarters (perhaps from the Mandarin Koxinga), although there is not yet any clear proof of this having been the case.”<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Letter from the Batavia Council to Governor Verburg, 26 May 1653. In Campbell (1903) *Formosa under the Dutch*, pp. 459-460.



In another letter from Governor Verburg to the Batavia council, he exposed his worries regarding the situation in Taiwan, with reference to the Chinese population.

“What is our power compared with their numbers? [...] the island is simply swarming with all kinds of Chinese, who are constantly spying out the country in every direction, and who could easily get up a conspiracy, this having been proved to us by the very sudden and dangerous rebellion of that people on 10 September 1652.”<sup>38</sup>

Due to the Zheng dominance of the Sino-Japanese trade, Hang (2015, p. 63) argues that Taiwan had gradually lost its role as a regional entrepot, and that its economy had come to resemble those of other Southeast Asian Dutch colonial domains. Indeed, already in the 1640s its economy had become one based on sugar monoculture and natural resource extraction, which attracted a lot of Chinese labor. Furthermore, according to Wills Jr. (2011, p.74), as Brazilian production of sugar grew, demand in Europe for Taiwanese sugar diminished, leading to issues of overproduction. He argues that the VOC started to question the viability of Taiwan as an asset and became less willing to defend it in case of invasion by Koxinga, a possibility that later materialized itself. In contrast with the crisis of profitability of the VOC in the China trade, Hang (2015, p. 115) points out that the Chinese community in Taiwan thrived in the business of natural resource exports, and the influx of Chinese migrants transformed the city of *Provintia* into a “bustling commercial quarter filled with shops and residences.”

The increasingly unsustainable economic situation in the territories held by Koxinga on the Chinese mainland eventually forced him to go on the offensive against the Qing. Indeed, Qing authorities had begun to crack down on Koxinga’s network of smuggling and arrest his agents of the Five Mountain Firms operating in Qing-held territory. Furthermore, in 1656 the Qing Shunzhi Emperor issued a ban on maritime travel and trade, all in the hope of cutting supplies to the Zheng (Schottenhammer, 2010, p. 107). Still, Schottenhammer points out that smuggling still continued between Qing and Ming territories, but Hang underlines the effectiveness of the new policies by observing that in any case they disrupted the flow of silver coming from abroad into Qing China through Fujian. It is for these reasons that Koxinga, at the head of a formidable force of around 180.000 men and 3000 war junks, decided to strike back and initiate an offensive to capture (or liberate) the richest regions of China, i.e. the Yangtze River Delta (Hang, 2015, pp. 112-115).

---

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Governor Verburg to the Batavia Council, 10 March 1654. Ibid, p.461

Koxinga's offensive, which took place from 1656 to 1659, was initially very successful and even threatened to capture Nanjing, but ultimately failed.<sup>39</sup> As in February 1659 the Qing armies also forced other remnants of Ming loyalist forces on the defensive in Yunnan and caused the Ming Yongli Emperor to flee into Myanmar, Koxinga faced the possibility that soon the Manchu could focus all their attention on clearing out the Zheng from the southeastern coast (Hang, 2015, p. 125). When the Shunzhi Emperor became ill in 1660, the Qing commanders who were preparing the attack on the Zheng stronghold of Xiamen were recalled to Beijing, giving respite to Koxinga and allowing him to prepare his own invasion of Taiwan. Hang argues that Koxinga had begun preparing for an invasion of Taiwan even before his attack on the Yangtze River Delta, as a possible place of refuge should the war on the mainland against the Manchu fail. His subordinates, however, were mostly against such a move as they felt that it would separate them from their lucrative trading connections on the mainland and as they perceived Taiwan to be a wild, remote territory ridden with illness (Wills Jr., 1979, p. 227). Furthermore, from an idealistic point of view, the move was seen as a renunciation of the Ming restoration project on the mainland (Hang, 2015, pp. 128-129). Yet, as argued by Wills Jr. (1979, p. 227), conquering Taiwan was a strategically sound move, as it would secure a base far from the reach of the mainly land-based Manchu armies, and it would provide the necessary food supply to feed Koxinga's military. Furthermore, another factor weighing in the decision to go ahead was the prospective support of the fifty thousand-strong Chinese community in Taiwan which was oppressed by the Dutch administration and its heavy taxation (Hang, 2015, p. 129), as attested also by the aforementioned contemporary letters of the Dutch authorities in Taiwan who feared such a possibility.

In 1661 the Zheng forces invaded Taiwan and quickly defeated the Dutch garrisons, achieving control of the main island in less than a week. Only the stronghold of Casteel Zelandia remained firmly under Dutch control, and it would take another nine months before it surrendered (Andrade, 2004, p. 442). It is telling that on May 29, Koxinga changed the name of *Provincia* to *Capital of the Eastern Ming* (*Dongdu Mingjin*, 東都明京), and, in talks with the Dutch to secure their surrender, spoke of Taiwan as a land that rightfully belonged to him, as, in his view, it had been simply leased by his father, Zheng Zhilong, to

---

<sup>39</sup> Navarrete described Koxinga's defeat as follows: "He gain'd great victories over the Tartars, had ever the better of them, except at the assault he made upon the Southern Court in the Year 1659. Almost 100000 of his Men were kill'd, for he had then a prodigious Army. He was routed and fled, which was no small misfortune. This was the reason that mov'd the Tartar to draw the People from the Coast" in *Tratados históricos, políticos, éticos y religiosos de la China*, p. 340. The last sentence refers to the coastal evacuation policy enacted by the Qing to deny the Zheng trade from the mainland.

the Dutch. Furthermore, Zheng Zhilong had done so as a Ming official, and therefore Koxinga could claim that Taiwan was his to govern, but also a Ming territory at the same time. He also referred to Taiwan as a fundamental and integral part of China and applied this view retroactively to argue that it had always been so (Hang, 2015, pp. 133-134). In his own words:

“[...] Taiwan is close to the Penghu Islands, which is why this land must also be under the same Chinese administration. It can be understood from this that the inhabitants of both these coastal regions are Chinese and have possessed and cultivated these lands from ancient times. Previously, when Dutch ships came for trade, they did not have the slightest piece of land in any of these parts. Out of friendship, my father Iquan [Zheng Zhilong] pointed out and lent this land to them. [...] Thus, I have now come here with my very great power to not only improve this region but also to build cities and a large population. You also are aware that it is inappropriate to continue possessing someone else's land (which belonged to our ancestors and therefore now belongs to me).”<sup>40</sup>

By taking this stance, it can be argued that Koxinga maintained the Zheng dynasty within the Ming world-system (although an increasingly disappearing and abstract one), reaffirming the allegiance to the Ming dynasty, from which his rule also gained a measure of formal legitimacy, and at the same time conceptualized Taiwan as part of China, therefore rendering his fleeing from the mainland not an exile to a foreign land.

## 2.2. Zheng Taiwan: the vision of an alternative, maritime China

Within a few months of each other in 1661-62, Zheng Zhilong was sentenced to the death penalty in Beijing as a result of the Zheng invasion of Taiwan, which diminished the possibility of their surrender, the Yongli emperor was captured and executed by the Qing forces, and Koxinga himself died of disease (Hang, 2015, pp. 140-143). Koxinga's successor, his son Zheng Jing, would rule for two decades and complete the transformation of the Zheng enterprise into a full-fledged territorial state, that however would ultimately fall to the Qing in 1683.

In 1664, Zheng Jing, under the pressure of attacks on land by the Qing and on the coast by the VOC, decided to retreat to Taiwan and definitely abandon the mainland. Many of his

---

<sup>40</sup> The letter translated from Chinese into Dutch is present in *De dagregisters van het kasteel Zeelandia, Taiwan 1629-1662*, the daily registers of Castle Zeelandia, part IV, p. 352.

followers, however, rather than go to what they perceived as a foreign, undesirable land, defected to the Qing. Nonetheless, these same former Zheng people would prove to be valuable connections later on as Taiwan developed economically, because they would help establish a smuggling network between Taiwan and Fujian, in part also due to the personal relationships they had with the people who followed Zheng Jing. “[...] almost all of them [...] had relatives, comrades, friends, and old associates in Taiwan” (Hang, 2015, p. 164). Thus they represented a valuable asset for Jing’s administration as they helped bypass the Qing restrictions on trade, aimed specifically at weakening the Zheng (Schottenhammer, 2010, p. 105).

With the Yongli Emperor gone, and no clear Ming pretender to rally the Ming loyalists to the cause of restoration, the Zheng regime's claims to legitimacy risked being undermined by the reality of the dissolution of an active Ming resistance to the Manchu invasion. Nonetheless, Zheng Jing reaffirmed the loyalty to the Ming by keeping all the symbols of the Ming imperial administration. The Zheng continued to use the Yongli-era calendar, despite the death of the emperor, and a palace was built for him, where officials would “pay homage before an empty throne” (Hang, 2015, p. 156). Furthermore, Zheng Jing followed his father’s footsteps in crafting his administration on the model of the Ming bureaucracy. He implemented a series of economic and institutional reforms that allowed Taiwan to become self-sufficient with regard to basic necessities and effectively transformed it into a new Chinese home for his followers (ibid, p. 162). In particular, he used the manpower provided by his soldiers to create military agrarian colonies and encouraged immigration from the mainland by not levying taxes for the first three years of permanence of the migrants. As a result, during Zheng Jing’s reign, the size of the island’s agricultural land almost quadrupled (ibid, pp. 160-161). Under Jing’s leadership the Zheng regime, as its state-building process transformed it into a fully-fledged territorial state, came to resemble a political entity built upon the agricultural and bureaucratic structure that characterized the society of the mainland, and represented a marked difference with regards to the Dutch administration focus on commercial profitability and monoculture (Shepherd, 1993, p. 101).

The name of the polity was also changed into Dongning, 東寧, “Eastern Pacification”. Naturally, such a name had a marked political significance. Hang (2015, p. 156) argues that it implies the definitive abandonment of the restoration cause in the mainland and a permanent settlement in Taiwan, also hinting at a possible peaceful coexistence between Qing and Zheng. Of course, all of the political legitimacy of the Zheng regime rested on the

identification with the Ming, and therefore, as mentioned before, all of the symbolism and rituals that signified it were kept, and even strengthened in some cases. What was seemingly given up, on the other hand, was the project of a continued armed struggle against the Qing to reinstate the Ming dynasty on the throne of mainland China. Hang (2015, p. 246) also argues that for the Zheng, by the time of Jing, the concept of China had become decoupled from the land and the dynastic developments, and had taken on more abstract attributes that emphasized the cultural legacy of China, rather than attachment to the land itself. Therefore, Taiwan could arguably be the new Chinese home for the Zheng and their followers, especially given that they retained cultural and symbolic markers of the Ming dynasty (such as the hair and the flowing robes) that were outlawed by the Qing. It is also interesting to note how, in stark contrast with his father, Jing referred to Taiwan as a land that had never been part of China. Granted, he used this language when arguing for the legitimacy of his reign in Taiwan while negotiating with the Qing for a peaceful settlement and the right to trade among them, so it would make sense to maintain that Taiwan was outside China and that therefore the Qing had no claim on it, but it is still a significant departure from Koxinga's stance (Cheng, 2012, p. 424).

The family trade-based regime had undergone major changes from the time of Zheng Zhilong when it was mainly an armed smuggling and trading organization and a protection racket. At the time of his grandson Zheng Jing, it can be argued that it had transformed into a fully-fledged territorial state. While consolidating its rule in Taiwan, the expansion of the cultivable land and the employment of its soldiers in the fields, along with the reformed governing structures and the use of Ming-related symbolism gave Taiwan a resemblance to the agricultural-based bureaucratic society that had also been the foundation of the mainland Chinese dynasties. Still, the Zheng regime retained its core maritime orientation, as evidenced by the proactive foreign policy pursued by Zheng Jing. Indeed, despite having retreated from the mainland to Taiwan, the Zheng still enjoyed access to Chinese products from the mainland thanks to the connivance of the local coastal military officials and Fujianese authorities, who turned a blind eye to, or in some cases actively participated in, illegal trade with Zheng agents who entered the "exclusion zone" of the coastal areas that had been evacuated by the Qing with the aim of severing the ties between the mainland and the Zheng. By infiltrating the Qing bureaucracy at the provincial level through bribery, Zheng Jing managed to control even important manufacturing areas in the Yangtze River delta and to establish there some of his own merchant-agents (Hang, pp. 164-165). Furthermore, the Zheng established closer trade and diplomatic relations with Spanish Manila by sending

Vittorio Riccio, a Florentine friar who had been a close collaborator of Koxinga, as an envoy in 1663.<sup>41</sup> In Southeast Asia, too, the Zheng competed with the Dutch for access to the goods, such as animal skins, that were much in demand in Japan. In Cambodia, for instance, the VOC was granted a twenty-year exclusive access for the export of the country's deerskins, but in reality this was little enforced, and Chinese Zheng-affiliated merchants were still able to export them to Japan (Cheng, pp. 402-406). The situation deteriorated and in July 1667 Zheng soldiers attacked and destroyed the Dutch trading lodge in Cambodia, killing the VOC chief merchant Pieter Ketting.<sup>42</sup> The VOC pressured the Cambodian king to detain and execute those responsible, but the Zheng competition and influence was so great that in 1670 the VOC shut down its factory in Cambodia due to its unprofitability (Hang, p. 174). Despite the expansion of the Zheng influence in Southeast Asia, the VOC remained master of the Indian Ocean, and even strengthened its grip there, thereby creating a sort of division of spheres of influence between the two great maritime powers of Asia, with the Zheng in control of the East and the Dutch in the West, each negotiating with the rulers of the various kingdoms of the area to obtain privileges and monopolies and to exclude the other. This is evidenced by the aforementioned case of Cambodia, but also in Siam a similar struggle for influence emerged, as the Dutch successfully pressured its king to sever diplomatic ties with the Zheng but could do little to stop trade between Siam and Taiwan, which still flourished (Hang, pp. 173-174).

The actions of the Zheng must be considered within the wider context of the East Asian maritime space, as the actions of the major actors in it, namely the Qing, the VOC and the Zheng, influenced one another and did not take place in a vacuum. Already in 1656, the Qing Shunzhi Emperor had promulgated the first maritime prohibition directed against Koxinga:

“[...] The pirate-traitor, Cheng Cheng-kung, and others escaped and hid themselves in a corner of the uttermost parts of the seas. Hitherto We have failed to annihilate them. Certainly this must be because treacherous people secretly communicate with them for profit. They provide them with food and commodities. If We do not promulgate new laws to prohibit this, how can We clear out the pirates? Hereafter: viceroys, governors, and provincial commanders-in-chief (...) are ordered to

---

<sup>41</sup> Vittorio Riccio was a Florentine dominican friar who worked as a missionary in the Philippines from 1648 to 1655, then in China, where he became close with Koxinga, who was a Christian sympathizer. In 1662 he was sent by Koxinga as an ambassador to Manila to request its submission to the Zheng, which prompted a massacre of the local Chinese population by the Spaniards. (Hang, p. 414; Davidson, p. 62)

<sup>42</sup> From the Daily Journal of Batavia 1666-1667, entry of November 28, 1667, p. 392.

supervise all their subordinates, both civil and military, and to prohibit the sailing of merchant ships on the seas. If anyone dares to trade food and goods with the treacherous bandits (...) he shall be reported to the throne and beheaded. [...]"<sup>43</sup>

The maritime prohibition was strengthened in 1661, as the Ministry of Revenue issued a decree ordering the removal of the coastal population of the regions closest to the Zheng areas of operation further inland, in order to sever the economic ties and collusion between the Zheng and the local population.<sup>44</sup> The maritime prohibition was reaffirmed again the following year by imperial decree, which also defined the area to be evacuated as that within 30 *li* (or about 15 km) from the coast (Cheng, p. 381). Despite these measures, as already mentioned before, the Zheng were able to infiltrate the coastal areas and conduct illicit trading with the collaboration of the local Qing military and civil officials. From the text of the edict the ineffectiveness of the previous measures can be deduced, as it is stated that:

"[...] The merchants have not considered the meaning of the Court's edict and have betrayed Our good will; they have communicated and traded with the bandits. The government soldiers also have failed to carry out their duty. Although they have been aware of treacherous intrigues, they have pretended not to be. [...] Many times in the past, We sent strict instructions to the local magistrates. However, because they sought their own comfort and thought only of their own convenience, they neglected their duty and failed to look into these matters. Violations have occurred."<sup>45</sup>

Thus, it can be inferred also from the Qing contemporary sources that the close collaboration between the Zheng and the local population, with the assent or collusion of sections of the Qing military and civil administration, had allowed for the circumvention of the previous bans. Referencing Dutch records from Deshima, Cheng (2012, pp. 381-382, 384) shows how from 1664, after the evacuation edicts, despite the order of the Kangxi emperor to proceed with the invasion of Taiwan against the Zheng, the Qing naval officials based in Fujian delayed the attack and instead took advantage of the situation to send junks of their own full

---

<sup>43</sup> Fu Lo-Shu (1966) *A documentary chronicle of Sino-Western relations, 1644-1820* pp. 20-21.

<sup>44</sup> The text of the decree states that the reason behind the evacuation was the safety of the local population, however scholars (Hang, 2015, p.130) believe that the policy had the objective of eliminating the collusion between the Zheng and the locals. The decree states that "due to the proximity of the coastal regions of Jiangnan, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong to the strongholds of the bandits, the rebellious forces often invade, causing disturbances among the people. Therefore, it is necessary to relocate them to inland areas to ensure their safety and livelihood." The decree is included in the *Selected Records of the Holy Emperor of the Qing Dynasty*, p. 4, available at <https://tcss.ith.sinica.edu.tw/browse-ebook.html?id=EB0000000165#>.

<sup>45</sup> Entry of February 6, 1662, of the Ming-Qing Shih Liao in Fu Lo-Shu, *Documentary Chronicle*, pp. 28-30.

of silk goods to trade with Japan, in open defiance of the Emperor's edicts and reaping very handsome profits in doing so, as the prices in China had diminished due to the sea prohibitions, but those in Japan had stayed on the same level as before.

### 2.3. The VOC and the Qing

The Dutch, on the other hand, were frustrated at the lack of initiative shown by the Qing in retaking Taiwan. Contemporary records show that the Dutch had already in 1653 sought direct relations with the Qing dynasty by sending an embassy. Qing maritime prefect Shen Shih recorded: "The people of Holland (Ho-lan), a country that has never embraced our culture and has never communicated with us, admire justice and have come to submit. They [the Dutch] wish to follow our calendar."<sup>46</sup> The Dutch presented themselves as tributaries, wishing to even follow the Qing calendar, a clear signal of submission to the Middle Kingdom. They followed all the Chinese rituals, language and symbolism as expected of a tributary country. The real aim was arguably just to obtain direct trade with China, and the VOC authorities were clearly ready to embrace the protocol and the ceremonies that a tributary had to follow in order to achieve that objective. The first embassy, however, was turned away by the "Two Princes"<sup>47</sup> in Guangdong, because Holland was not among the tributary countries listed in the relevant books, and most probably also because their reputation preceded them, as Shen Shih reported: "I inquired about this matter among the merchants who said that the people of Holland were the Red-Haired Barbarians."<sup>48</sup> Two Dutch ships came again in 1655, bringing a memorial to the emperor by the Governor-General of Batavia and "native products", as required of every tributary mission (they had been informed by the "Two Princes" previously when they explained to them the rules for receiving tributary missions). This time, the embassy was received in Beijing to bring tribute and present the memorial, in which Governor Joan Maetsuycker of Batavia congratulated the Qing on their victory and petitioned to be allowed to trade.<sup>49</sup> In the memorial to the emperor, Governor Maetsuycker used the following rhetorical arguments in pleading for the right to trade:

---

<sup>46</sup> Entry of March 29, 1653, of the Ming Qing Shih Liao in *ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> The Two Princes were two Qing military leaders who had a major role in the conquest of Southern China from the remnants of the Ming and were rewarded by the emperor with the title of prince and territory. One was Geng Jimao, who held the title of Prince of Jingnan, and the other was Shang Kexi, the prince of Pingnan. They ruled huge portions of Southern China in semi-autonomous fiefdoms (Kops, 2022, pp. 546-547).

<sup>48</sup> Fu Lo-Shu, *Documentary Chronicles*, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.



“The Lord Creator, who made this earth, divided it into ten thousand nations. Some nations only raise natural products; other nations produce manufactures. The former have something which the latter have not; the latter have something which the former have not. The Lord Creator wishes people to exchange what they have with each other so that they can respect and admire each other, and be in harmony. Therefore most of us (the Dutch) sail abroad and travel to the remotest regions. We go to many regions, and everywhere we have friendly relations with the native rulers. [...] We, therefore, seek to congratulate [Your Majesty] and to petition Your Majesty for permission to allow our people to trade at any of the ports where our ships may anchor, for mutual trade is the will of God as well as the custom of all nations. Moreover, it will also benefit the people of China.”<sup>50</sup>

The prince of Pingnan, who received the envoys in Guangdong, reported to the Board of Rites that:

“The language of their [Dutch] envoys is very appealing and this time they do bring a memorial and native products. It seems to me that their sincerity toward [our] civilization should not be met with strong opposition, otherwise we might discourage the remote barbarians from admiring the grandeur of this superior Empire.”<sup>51</sup>

The Board of Rites must have been favorably impressed by the Dutch embassy and recommended allowing them to bring tribute every five years, but the emperor raised the interval to every eight years.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, their request to trade freely was denied, only allowing them to trade at the “cosmopolitan house” (會同館, huì tóng guǎn), the guesthouse where the envoys had to reside.<sup>53</sup> Upon sending back the envoy, the emperor gifted various rich presents to take back to the Governor of Batavia (as was customary in Chinese tributary relations).

After having lost Taiwan to the Zheng forces, the Dutch sought a military alliance with the Qing, and it is recorded in the Qing Shi Lu that in 1663 a Dutch admiral came to Fujian with a fleet, along with other two Dutch officials (Constantyn Nobel and Balthasar Bort) to “pay homage and present tribute.”<sup>54</sup> From the Dutch records, it emerges that they were held in

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp. 16-17.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pp. 32-33.

Fuzhou, awaiting a response from the emperor regarding free trade, as the “viceroys” would not give permission to trade unless the authorization came from the imperial court in Beijing, especially given the standing policy of maritime prohibition and coastal evacuations aimed at weakening the Zheng. The emperor had indeed given a response on the matter that, however, was deemed not clear enough to the Dutch, as it seemed to imply that the Dutch were invited to present tribute every eight years, and could trade every five years, which was deemed unacceptable by the company. The Dutch envoys and their ships waited in Fuzhou for six months for a further response from the emperor, about both trade and the joint war effort against the Zheng. The Dutch became increasingly frustrated at the lack of progress and cooperation on the part of the Qing authorities. When the imperial communication finally came to Fuzhou, the Dutch fleet had already departed, leaving behind merchant Constantyn Nobel.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the emperor’s words in the response were not satisfactory to the Dutch, as he stated the following:

“The Dutch have come with their ships to serve my empire in order to destroy the pirate Coxin [Koxinga]. They are experienced and knowledgeable warriors, and it is necessary for us to join forces with them. We will attack and wage war against him together. (...) The merchandise they have brought may be sold in the presence of appointed mandarins.”<sup>56</sup>

While it confirmed the intention to unite the forces to defeat the Zheng, the letter said nothing of an arrangement for continuous trade, only that the goods that had been brought by the Dutch fleet could be sold at that time, most of which had been taken back when the fleet went away. Furthermore, when the sale of the goods was allowed to take place, the local authorities reserved the right to buy the goods for themselves and those authorized by them. Still, Nobel received news from two commissioners who had presented a Dutch written petition to the emperor that the emperor himself had given permission to trade every one or two years and to build a warehouse and lodgings for the Dutch traders. However, this was only relayed orally, there was no sealed written letter from the emperor regarding the matters of free trade, and this unsettled the Dutch. From the Daily Journal of the VOC in Batavia: “we are left with an ambiguous answer, as if they are giving us an apple to play with.”<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Daily Journal of Batavia, 1663, entry of March 29, 1663, pp. 94-96.

<sup>56</sup> Daily Journal of Batavia, 1663, entry of December 5, 1663, p. 604.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*, p. 609.

Admiral Bort of the VOC and the viceroy of Fujian<sup>58</sup> met in Fuzhou in late 1663 to discuss the matters of war. During the meeting, Bort again requested “that free trade be allowed throughout China and that we be permitted to sell the merchandise we have brought in Hocksiew [Fuzhou] as soon as possible.” The viceroy then explained that trade was permitted by the emperor, but the sale of the Dutch goods had to wait until the conquering of Xiamen and Kinmen. Furthermore, the viceroy agreed to help the Dutch reconquer Taiwan<sup>59</sup> and assured that free and unrestricted trade would be granted to them for eternity in the aftermath of the expulsion of the Zheng from the mainland. It is questionable whether the Dutch actually believed him, as they recorded the following: “experience has [...] taught us that they [the Qing] are generous in making promises and slow in fulfilling them.”<sup>60</sup>

In the following battles for the control of Xiamen and Kinmen, the Dutch complained that the Qing fleet remained inactive and distant while the Dutch bore the brunt of the fight: “our side did not receive any assistance from the Tartar [Qing] fleet in this final naval battle.”<sup>61</sup>

In the Daily Journals of Batavia, the following comment on this episode is given:

“What is more astonishing, the great power of the Tartars [Qing] and the multitude of their soldiers, or their lack of courage, cowardice, and extraordinary fear? Truly, if our fleet had not protected them and turned the enemy away, they would have been totally ruined and put to flight.”<sup>62</sup>

While the Dutch also lamented the lack of booty taken in the conquest of the islands, optimism seems to have been high at the end of 1663, as attested by the following excerpt from the Daily Journals of Batavia:

“[...] it is likely that they [the Zheng] will no longer be able to continue their trade with Japan, as they will now lack the opportunity to obtain goods from the mainland of China. [...] So it is expected that the Company will not only become master of that trade but also over the trade in China.”<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> In the Daily Journals of Batavia, the name of the viceroy is given as Singnamong, with small variations throughout. Arguably, he is to be identified with Geng Jimao, who held the title of prince of Jingnan, 靖南王 “Jingnan wang”.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pp. 620-622.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 620.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 716.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 717.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 718.

In the first months of 1664, it appeared as if the situation had improved for the Dutch in China. The Dutch were able to sell their goods in Fuzhou at a profit to all those who wished to buy. Still, the Fujian authorities made clear that a visit to greet the emperor, effectively paying tribute, was due within the year, and that without it, trade could not continue.<sup>64</sup> It seems that, therefore, the Qing imperial court valued highly the displays of tributary relations, just as much as the Ming before them, and seemingly, at least in the 1660s, aimed at including the Netherlands in the framework of its Sino-centric order. On the other hand, it could be argued that its dependence upon the Dutch naval power in eliminating the Zheng threat to its power pushed the Qing to maintain close and cordial relations with them, at least for the time being, using the promise of free trade as a bargaining tool to obtain cooperation from the VOC. On this last point, the Dutch seem to have been inclined to think that to be the case as in their own records it is stated that: “they [the Qing] still keep us close [...] to use us for their purposes as long as there are enemies to conquer.”<sup>65</sup>

In the latter half of 1664, when a fleet commanded by Admiral Bort arrived in Fuzhou, the Fujianese authorities once again obstructed its trade:

“They [the Fujianese authorities] tried to make us believe that our affairs with the Emperor were very favorable because he allowed us to engage in trade every two years. But when we gratefully accepted this favor and requested to begin trading this year, they shamelessly told us that our arrival and the goods we brought had to be reported to the Emperor first, and we had to wait for his instructions.”<sup>66</sup>

Once again, the same situation as the year before presented itself. However, the Dutch also recorded that those same authorities told them that they could begin trade immediately, without waiting for an answer from Beijing, on the condition that they went to war together in Taiwan. This condition was deemed acceptable to the Dutch as long as Taiwan would then be restored to their control. Thus, in this way the Dutch would be granted trade in Fuzhou and regain control of Taiwan, while the Qing would definitely eliminate the Zheng. However, the Dutch were skeptical about the Qing maintaining their promises, as they stated: “It will be a good thing if they fulfill their promises, but there is great doubt about it.”<sup>67</sup> The expedition to Taiwan, however, did not go ahead, as mentioned before, due to the delaying

---

<sup>64</sup> Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of March 28, 1664, pp. 87-89.

<sup>65</sup> Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of November 28, 1664, p. 518.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pp. 517-519.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

by the Qing naval officials in Fujian. When a fleet was finally sent in late April 1665, it encountered a severe storm and was forced back to China after suffering losses.<sup>68</sup> For the time being, the attack on Taiwan was put aside. Cheng (2012, p. 390) argues that since most of the ships in the fleet were owned by the Fujianese officials, who had them built for their private use (as evidenced by the lucrative trading with Japan that they had been doing on their own), the loss of many of their junks had prompted them to suggest to the court a more conciliatory approach towards the Zheng. Of course, it could also be argued that those same regional military elites would prefer using their fleets for trade, rather than war, and that as long as the Zheng were in Taiwan, the coastal evacuations put in place against the “rebels” gave them almost an absolute control over the economic life of the coastal areas, and a virtual monopoly over the China maritime trade, so they had all the incentive for keeping the status-quo in cross-strait relations and on the southern Chinese coast.

Following repeated requests by the Fujianese authorities, in 1666 the Dutch finally decided to send a formal embassy to Beijing. It seems as if the VOC officials in Batavia had tried to delay the embassy as a leverage to obtain more guarantees on trade, especially given that their military aid had not brought about the changes that they hoped for in the trading environment in China. In April 1665 they recorded that:

“it was unanimously agreed and decided to suspend the sending of any military force there, at least for this year, because the Tartars [the Qing] have disappointed us for three consecutive years and sufficiently demonstrated that their intentions are not focused on advancing our interests, but rather their own. [...] it was decided not to send an embassy to the Emperor on behalf of this state this year, but to excuse ourselves until we have obtained firm assurances and sealed letters from His Majesty concerning free trade.”<sup>69</sup>

Nonetheless, the Fujianese viceroy told Dutch merchant Willem Pedel in Fuzhou that an embassy to Beijing was a condition sine qua non for any trade to take place, basically threatening the Dutch, as attested in the VOC records:

“[Willem Pedel] was expressly told by the viceroy Singlamong<sup>70</sup> that in the future, none of our ships would be allowed to appear on the coast of China without bringing

---

<sup>68</sup> Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of December 3, 1665, p. 387.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, entry of April 28, 1665, p. 91.

<sup>70</sup> Possibly Geng Jimao, the Prince of Jingnan.

an ambassador to the Emperor along with them; and if this requirement is not followed, then severe punishment, even to the point of death, will be inflicted upon the crew.”<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, in 1666 an embassy headed by Pieter Van Hoorn and Constantyn Nobel arrived in Fuzhou. It had been decided to ask, once again, for free and unrestricted trade throughout all of China for the VOC traders.<sup>72</sup> The Van Hoorn embassy was not able to achieve much. The emperor received the Dutch ambassadors, who presented him with their gifts and were treated very well during their stay in Beijing.<sup>73</sup> In return, the emperor sent back rich presents to Governor-General Maetsuycker along with a letter of appreciation for having sent an embassy to him. Van Hoorn also brought back several letters from other Qing officials, in which the matters of trade were discussed, as the emperor himself had made no mention of it in his diplomatic correspondence. Cranmer-Byng & Wills Jr. (2011, p. 189) and Fu (p. 39) both report that the Dutch trading privileges were revoked, going from once every two years to trading just during the tributary visits (so every eight years). The letters of Qing officials transcribed in Dutch records state that the emperor had not allowed free trade, but had permitted that Dutch ships may come and buy provisions for their crew in Chinese ports, “wherever they go.”<sup>74</sup> In 1668 when two Dutch ships returned from Canton their merchants reported that at that time the chance of ever being allowed to trade in China was very small because the emperor had only allowed the Dutch to come every eight years. Those Dutch merchants in Canton were only able to conduct trade illegally, and very little of it too, resulting in losses for the company and a bleak outlook for the future. Afterwards, the VOC records report of other instances of illegal trading in the Pearl River Delta (in the area of Macao and Canton) by Dutch merchants.<sup>75</sup> In 1671 the Portuguese authorities of Macao even complained to Batavia about these activities, as Macao depended on the goodwill of the Chinese rulers for its survival, and they feared that the crimes of the illegal traders would be blamed on the inhabitants of Macao, with severe repercussions for the city.<sup>76</sup> In 1673 another letter of complaints was sent from the governor of Macao to the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia, in which he pleaded for the VOC to restrain the Dutch private merchants coming

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, entry of December 16, 1665, p. 411.

<sup>72</sup> Daily Journal of Batavia. Entry of June 11, 1666, p. 88.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, entry of December 11, 1667, p. 399.

<sup>74</sup> Daily Journal of Batavia. Entry of January 26, 1668, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, entry of November 18-22, 1669, p. 453.

<sup>76</sup> The transcripts of the letters sent to Batavia by the Macao authorities are recorded in the Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of March 20, 1671, pp. 280-281.

into the area, and reported that the Canton “ministers” were secretly trading with the Dutch, in open violation of the laws of the emperor, while publicly accusing the Portuguese of inviting them and providing them access to the islands in the area.<sup>77</sup> Other Dutch merchants later in the year reported that Cantonese mandarins would personally oversee trading operations in Macao by accompanying the Chinese merchants when they went to meet the Dutch ships on their barges and observed the loading and unloading of merchandise. From the Daily Journal of Batavia:

“This clearly showed that the citizens' trade was not unknown and seemed to be happening with the knowledge and consent of the Cantonese King [the prince of Pingnan]<sup>78</sup> and officials, and the Tartars [the Qing] seemed to be less opposed to the Dutch trade than some might have thought.”<sup>79</sup>

In December 1673 the situation in China radically changed as the Celestial Kingdom was engulfed by a civil war, in what became known as “The Revolt of The Three Feudatories”, that would also involve the Zheng in another mainland expedition. The revolt started with the rebellion of Wu Sangui, one of the three “feudatories”, who already controlled a vast territory in the southwest of China almost independently from the central government. Wu Sangui had been an instrumental figure in the Ming-Qing transition, as he had been one of the Ming generals who defected to the Qing and allowed their conquest of Beijing in 1644. Wu Sangui, Geng Zhongming and Shang Kexi were former Ming generals who were instrumental in the Qing conquest of the southern provinces of China, and were rewarded by the Manchu court with the control of the provinces of Yunnan, Fujian and Guangdong respectively, becoming the so-called “three feudatories” (sānfān, 三藩). Each also received the title of Prince: Wu Sangui received the title of Prince of Pingxi, or Prince who pacifies the West; Geng Zhongming the title of Prince of Jingnan; Shang Kexi the title of Prince of Pingnan, both of the latter titles meaning “prince who pacifies the South”.<sup>80</sup> While arguably fundamental in the expansion of the Qing in the South and for the consolidation of Manchu rule over China, the enormous power that the three feudatories held had made them “three states within the Manchu empire” as Tsao (1974, p. 110) put it. In 1673 the Kangxi emperor had tried to end these princedoms with the retirements of the current princes, but this led to open conflict with Wu Sangui, the most powerful of the three, then followed by Geng

---

<sup>77</sup> The transcript of this letter can be found in the Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of April 5, 1673, pp. 91-93.

<sup>78</sup> The “Cantonese King” is the Prince of Pingnan, namely Qing mandarin Shang Kexi.

<sup>79</sup> Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of November 19, 1673, p.319.

<sup>80</sup> Wakeman (1985), *The Great Enterprise*, pp. 1017, 1019, 1099.

Jingzhong, the grandson of Geng Zhongmin who had inherited from his father Geng Jimao the Fujian principality, and by Shang Zhixin, the son and successor of Shang Kexi, who controlled Guangdong. Both Wu and Geng framed the revolt as aimed at restoring the Ming dynasty by casting out the Manchu foreign rulers (Hang, p. 199). The ideological dimension of the struggle put pressure on Zheng Jing to join the war on the Qing from Taiwan to reconquer the homeland of the Ming, now that its success seemed within grasp, and to redirect his efforts to this endeavour rather than continue in his project building a maritime-oriented, Ming-inspired Chinese state detached from China proper. Thus, Zheng Jing allied with the three feudatories and in April 1674 he moved his base of operations to the Fujianese islands of Xiamen and Kinmen. Once under his control, Zheng Jing lost no time in reopening the Fujianese coast to foreigners for trade in 1675, and the subsequent arrival of English ships with their “native goods” in Xiamen is documented in Chinese sources (Fu, 1966, pp. 48-49).

The English had already tried to establish a direct link with China as early as 1635-36 with two voyages to Macao, which resulted in failure, due to the resistance of both the Portuguese and the Canton officials, the former fearing that the English might disrupt the delicate balance with the Chinese that allowed the survival of Macao, and the latter because of the aforementioned Ming policies restricting foreign trade. During the second voyage the English even resorted to armed violence to pressure the Chinese, obtaining to do some trading, but also having to concede to never return after leaving (Morse, 1926, Ch. 1-2). In 1670 the English East India Company (EIC) signed a treaty with Zheng Jing to open a factory in Taiwan. As part of the deal, the English had to provide certain quantities of goods with each ship coming there, which would be sold at fixed prices to the government, among which were gunpowder and weapons, understandably useful for the Zheng regime (Morse, p.35). The subsequent Revolt of the Three Feudatories enlarged the area under Zheng control to the Chinese southeastern coast, especially in Fujian, and with it a possible foothold in China for the English materialized. Indeed, the English received two trading passes from the Zheng for Xiamen in 1676, and thus sent there two junks in May with a rich cargo, which yielded a handsome return for the company (Bassett, 1960, pp. 154-155). The English were also allowed to open a second factory in Xiamen in 1676 in exchange for providing armaments to the Zheng army (Morse, p. 45). Therefore, the first direct trade link between China and England was formed not with the Ming or the Qing, but with the Zheng regime, amid the civil war that engulfed the Middle Kingdom in the 1670s.



During the same period, the VOC authorities were arguably wary of trying again to trade in Fujian after the fruitless attempts of the previous decade, and were content with whatever trade that they could get via Canton and Macao, albeit illegally. This is evidenced also by the fact that in 1675 the VOC issued trading passes to private citizens to conduct trade for Fuzhou. Indeed in their contemporary records it is stated that “the Company does not intend to undertake such a venture at this time.”<sup>81</sup> However, among the rebel feudatories, the Prince of Jingnan, Geng Jingzhong, reached out to the Dutch and offered to open his ports to them, namely in Fuzhou, promising unhindered trade, inviting the Dutch to come yearly and even establish a permanent trading post. The VOC authorities in Batavia were initially skeptical about the matter, as the news had been relayed to them by two Chinese merchants who lacked proper credentials, but who had been allegedly sent by Geng Jingzhong to contact the Dutch to establish commercial relations. The VOC issued trading passes to two merchants for Fuzhou in 1675,<sup>82</sup> thus it is clear that it was not an official VOC enterprise, but just the authorization for private merchants to go to Fuzhou. The Batavia journals record in the following year that the Dutch had been well received by the Chinese in Fuzhou, especially by the Prince of Jingnan (the de-facto ruler of the region); they had been allowed to sell their merchandise and to buy most goods there by order of the prince, who also gave them gifts and an official letter to be given to the Dutch governor-general. The letter received by the VOC in Bantam eagerly invited and welcomed the Dutch in Fuzhou, so it reflected the same amicable and cordial treatment that the private Dutch merchants had received there. Another letter, along with other gifts, was also sent by the Prince of Pingnan, the ruler of Guangdong, who had yet to join the fight against the Manchu, inviting the Dutch to come and promising to assist them in all matters.<sup>83</sup> In response to these promising signs, the VOC decided to reserve Fuzhou for the company’s own ships for 1676, and to direct private traders to go to Canton instead.<sup>84</sup>

#### 2.4. The Qing embassy to Batavia

The tide of the war quickly turned against the rebels and, as attested by the records of Batavia, the VOC voyage to Fuzhou got caught in the crossfire between Geng Jingzhong’s forces and the Qing, who in the following year were able to reconquer the capital of Fujian and secure the surrender of the Prince of Jingnan, trapping the Dutch traders and their ships in the port

---

<sup>81</sup> Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of April 5, 1675, p. 103.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, entry of June 1st, 1675, pp. 145-147.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, entry of February 11, 1676, pp. 30-35.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, entry of March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1676, p. 45.

of Fuzhou. It was reported that the Qing authorities then inquired to the Dutch merchants about a collaboration between the VOC and the Qing to fight the Zheng forces, who remained in control of Xiamen and Kinmen, promising that the help given would be beneficial for the company to obtain trade with the Qing.<sup>85</sup> This deal was virtually identical to the one that had been promised them in the previous decade, when Admiral Bort helped the Qing clear out those same islands that were now occupied again by the Zheng. As mentioned before, all the efforts of the company in that regard had brought very little results in obtaining direct trade with China.

The Qing released the Dutch ships that were in Xiamen harbor and allowed them to sail away, giving them also letters for the VOC authorities. The Dutch merchants reported that they were treated cordially and amicably by the “Tartars”, as they called the Qing. The letters to the Company, written by high-ranking Qing military officers in Fujian, asked for the Dutch collaboration and appealed also to their pride, claiming that the destruction of the Zheng forces would avenge the humiliation of the loss of Taiwan, and promising that the help provided would be acknowledged by the emperor and bring the Company profits and benefits. The Qing Shi Lu records that the Kangxi Emperor himself requested the help of the Dutch, since the previous time that the islands of Xiamen and Kinmen were liberated from the Zheng, it had been done so with their assistance. Clearly, the Qing recognized their limits in maritime warfare, being more accustomed to land warfare than sea operations. Thus, the emperor requested “twenty ships with strong soldiers” from the Dutch, to be added to the hundreds of war junks being assembled by the Qing from other provinces as well.<sup>86</sup>

The VOC authorities, however, decided against sending military aid to the Qing forces and to try to continue trading at Fuzhou like before. They opted to remain neutral in the conflict between the Manchu and the Zheng, and to send a commercial expedition to Fuzhou with trading goods, arguably to check the Qing’s attitudes towards them first-hand.<sup>87</sup> It turned out that the Qing allowed the Dutch to sell most of their merchandise by imperial order, except for prohibited items (like iron and copper).<sup>88</sup> However, despite the imperial decrees allowing the Dutch unrestricted trade, at least for the ships that had participated in that voyage, the sale of goods was mediated by the local rulers, such that the merchandise could only be sold

---

<sup>85</sup> The transcript of the letter sent by the Qing Fujianese authorities to the VOC is in the Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of May 6, 1677, pp. 123-125.

<sup>86</sup> Fu Lo-Shu, *Documentary Chronicle*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>87</sup> From the Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of June 25, 1677, p. 193.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, entry of December 12, 1677, pp. 448-451.

to them, or to people authorized by them, resulting in artificially low prices.<sup>89</sup> From the VOC Batavian registers it can be evinced that its administrators perceived an improvement in the behaviour of the Qing towards the Dutch merchants, and in the trading environment overall, but that the monopsonic market was depressing prices. In their own words:

“It seems that now the influential people there are showing us a bit more favor than before, both in pursuing trade and seeking assistance with our ships against their enemies [...] However, the prices of the merchandise were so modest that the Company does not seem to be able to sustain itself with them. Nonetheless, there is hope for improvement in the future.”<sup>90</sup>

Still, the trade authorizations issued by the imperial court on that voyage do not seem to have been perceived by the Qing as the foundation for a possible long-term, mutually beneficial commercial relationship between China and the VOC. In a letter to the Company, Qing officials spoke of the issuing of trading licenses as a favor that had been done through the facilitation of the local mandarins, who had acted as mediators between the Dutch and the imperial court. In particular, they wrote: “We have done this favor for the Company, with no doubt that the Company, thanks to its honesty, will be helpful and ready to serve if this kingdom should need anything in the future.”<sup>91</sup>

Nonetheless, the positive signs must have encouraged the Company to keep pursuing trade in Fuzhou again, as they sent a trading mission with four ships headed by the experienced Martinus Cesar, who had been also the head of the VOC in Japan.<sup>92</sup> Upon its return the following year the VOC authorities in Batavia understood better the situation of the China trade and the motives of the Qing, as they recorded the following:

“[The] state of the Company's trade and other matters in that region [...] are not as prosperous and favorable as previously hoped, largely due to the greed of the Hokchew [Fuzhou] rulers. They refuse to allow the common merchants to trade with our Company but instead run a disgraceful monopoly through their own agents, not paying more for the Company's goods than they saw fit. [...] Their principal goal seems to be to persuade the Company through deceitful promises of free trade

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, entry of January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1678, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, entry of April 5, p. 129.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, entry of April 14, 1678, p. 138.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, entry of May 24, 1678, p. 225

throughout the entire empire, hoping to receive support with some warships against the Coxinders [the Zheng], who are strong at sea.”<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, the Dutch merchants in Fuzhou reported to their superiors that it was commonly believed that the authorities there openly infringed upon the emperor's orders and engaged in trade with the Zheng, their official enemies, in order to enrich themselves.<sup>94</sup> In December 1679, one of the Dutch ships also brought back to Batavia two Qing envoys with a letter from the emperor requesting the military assistance of the Company. A VOC report on the situation in China written in Fuzhou stated that the Kangxi emperor had spent a considerable amount to recruit troops and build ships, but that he suspected that the funds were being embezzled by lower officials, and therefore was looking for another way to end the war. It was also suspected by the VOC merchants that the Fujianese authorities had indulged the emperor in this matter by asking him to send an envoy to Batavia to ask for Dutch help in order to prolong the war with the Zheng, by maintaining the status quo that they were profiting off.<sup>95</sup> This belief might have been prompted by the fact that Martinus Cesar had explained rather clearly to the Fujianese on his voyage the earlier year that the VOC would not provide military aid,<sup>96</sup> so they must have already known that the Qing embassy to Batavia would only be a waste of time.

The envoys arrived in Batavia on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1679, and were formally received on the 29<sup>th</sup> of the same month. The VOC chose to treat the Qing emissaries with all the pomp and circumstance, complete with gun salutes and honor guards. From the records, it seems clear that the Dutch were eager to make a good impression on the Chinese envoys as hosts, and accordingly they prepared for them comfortable lodgings, along with food and entertainment for their stay. The letter written by the emperor reiterated to the Dutch that all of their requests concerning Fuzhou had been granted them, namely the free and unhindered trade, except for prohibited goods, the freedom for their ships to depart without waiting for formal approval, and the permission to build a warehouse. Furthermore, he stated that the actions of the Zheng the Dutch had suffered in their trade and lost Taiwan, and so he appealed to their communality of interests in fighting the Zheng together, and again reformulated the request for twenty warships to attack Xiamen and Kinmen together. In return, the emperor wrote about the greater friendship that would arise between them as a result of this and that

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, entry of April 2nd, 1679, pp. 125-126.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, entry of December 17, 1679, p. 575.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, entry of January 20, 1680, pp. 36-37.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, entry of April 2nd, 1679, pp. 125-126.

if the enemy was defeated he would be inspired to repay the Dutch and to show them more favor. From the letter it is clear that the Kangxi emperor did not depart from the traditional Chinese custom and language used when dealing with foreigners. Indeed, he used a paternalistic tone that reflected the Sinocentric worldview of the Chinese government, as he wrote that he welcomed and loved all foreigners who came in peace like his own subjects,<sup>97</sup> an expression that is consistent with the conception that the Chinese emperor is the inheritor of the “Mandate of Heaven” to rule all mankind, which is the foundation of the system that governed Chinese foreign relations in the previous dynasties as well (Fairbank & Teng, pp. 137-139).

This diplomatic mission ultimately would not bring the hoped-for results for the Qing side, as the VOC refused to provide the military aid that was requested from them. It would not be until May 1680, almost five months after the arrival of the Chinese envoys in Batavia, that serious talks about the matter were held between them and the heads of the VOC.<sup>98</sup> Whether the long wait was a deliberate tactic employed by the Company or not is not clear, however, it is evident that the Dutch were not in a hurry to act, as perhaps their whole outlook on the China trade seemed rather negative after years of fruitless trading missions and embassies had not yielded acceptable results. The VOC authorities explained to the envoys that it was not feasible for them to send a war fleet to China at the moment, as they simply did not have the necessary ships to do so, as a lot of them were employed in trading missions all over Asia, and that to assemble such a force, they would have to request for the vessels to be sent from Holland, which would take more than a year to arrange. They also argued that the trade that they had been conducting at Fuzhou had resulted in more losses than gains, due to the restrictions imposed on them. They maintained that they had not experienced free trade, as the Fujianese authorities would only let them deal with their appointed agents, which seems to be the major complaint among the VOC officials and a recurring theme of the trade in Fuzhou, as similar grievances were recorded already in 1663, as mentioned before. The VOC officials further stated that they had kept trading in Fuzhou to “cultivate the friendship” of the Emperor, hoping that once he learned of their good intentions, he would ensure that they were treated fairly, but that nothing had come of it as of yet.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> The transcript of the letter translated into Dutch is in the Daily Journal of Batavia, entry of December 29, 1679, pp. 623-625.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, entry of May 8, 1680, p. 217.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, entry of May 22, 1680, pp. 275-276

The VOC sent back the Chinese ambassadors in July together with an envoy of their own, with a letter for the Kangxi Emperor that addressed all the aforementioned issues, wishing that he would launch an investigation to look into the conduct of the Fuzhou “regents” who were not following the imperial decrees allowing the free trade of the Dutch. Furthermore, they stated that it was their wish to help the emperor, but that the fleet requested could not be assembled before twenty months, due to the distance between the Netherlands and Batavia. Moreover, the letter also touched upon the issue of Taiwan, and it was stated that the VOC would gladly join forces with the Qing to destroy the Zheng as it would in Xiamen and Kinmen, but that it would not retain the island for itself, as the *raison d’être* of the VOC in Taiwan was for the trade with China, which its traders could more conveniently carry out in China itself, as permitted by the emperor himself (though obstructed by the Fujianese authorities). Thus, it was argued that the possession of Taiwan would only be a burden to the company.<sup>100</sup>

The letter was to be delivered by the Dutch envoy, Hendrik Van Den Eeden, personally in Beijing to the Kangxi Emperor, but he reported that once in Fuzhou he was not allowed to go to the capital by the “combon”,<sup>101</sup> a high-ranking military official. Following a procedure already seen in other embassies, the combon argued that the emperor should be informed first about it, and that permission to go to Beijing would have to be granted by the emperor before proceeding. The VOC party seems to have been very skeptical about the whole process and very distrustful of the Fujianese officials.

The VOC officials arguably believed that direct communication with the emperor was necessary for the advancement of their interests, as they could not trust the Fujianese authorities to relay their messages to the imperial court, since their conduct was the object of the Company’s complaints. Furthermore, the worries of the Dutch seem to have been founded, as there does not appear to be any mention of a Dutch embassy in 1680 or 1681 in the *Qing Shi Lu*, or any word regarding Dutch trading in Fuzhou in that same period, so it might be inferred that the Fujianese authorities obstructed the communication between the VOC embassy and the imperial court.

---

<sup>100</sup> The full transcript of the letter is in *ibid*, entry of July 25, 1680, pp. 489-496.

<sup>101</sup> *Combon* is a title that is frequently appearing in Dutch records. It is most probably the Dutch transcription of the Hokkien (or Southern Min) word “kun-bûn”, which in Mandarin Chinese is “jūnmén”, and it is written with the characters 軍門. The term kun-bûn or jūnmén translates literally to “military gate”, but it also means “admiral” or “commander”.

This was arguably the final straw for the VOC. The company had already started to dismantle its factory in Fuzhou when Van Eeden was there, and when another trading voyage to China was arranged, the instructions for its crew were not to go ashore but to trade what they could from the ships; if that was not satisfactory they were to sail to Xiamen and Kinmen and try to conduct trade with smugglers (whether Qing or Zheng), and finally if that was not successful they then had to proceed to Canton and try there.<sup>102</sup> In the Pearl River Delta, the Dutch ships were able to trade covertly with the Chinese there, as they found an already existing smuggling market in which the English also participated. Still, Guangdong was not yet fully stabilized amidst the civil war that had engulfed China, and Qing officials were reportedly very strict and hindered trade in Canton, so the Company's ships were not able to sell their whole cargo.<sup>103</sup>

Another embassy was sent by the VOC in 1686, headed by merchant Vincent Paets, and was received and given audience by the Kangxi Emperor. The Qing Shi Lu recorded the arrival of the emissaries, who brought a memorial and native products to present to the court, as customary for every tributary mission. The emperor agreed to let the Dutch present tribute every five years (compared to the eight-year interval established earlier) and to let them come through Fujian instead of Guangdong. Furthermore, the Emperor bestowed precious silks and silver as gifts for the "King of Holland", though actually meaning the governor-general of Batavia, and even sent him an edict praising him for his loyalty and comparing him to a "vassal prince" who dutifully presented tribute.<sup>104</sup>

After yet another embassy had yielded little results, in 1689 the VOC headquarters in Batavia and back home decided to stop all further trading missions to China and use all of the company's ships in the Indian Ocean instead (Blussé, 1996, p.74). However, this move should be considered against the backdrop of the changing environment of maritime East Asia in order to comprehend the rationale behind it. Indeed, the second half of the seventeenth century had been a period of consolidation of the two major political actors of the area, namely Qing China and Tokugawa Japan. The VOC had succeeded in establishing trade with China in the late Ming era through its collaboration with the seafarer Zheng Zhilong, who provided Chinese goods to the Dutch in Taiwan, and were thus able to create a profitable triangular trade with Japan (hinging on Taiwan as a regional entrepot), also due

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, entry of July 23, 1681, pp. 441-442.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, entry of December 13 and 27, 1681, pp. 746-748, 781.

<sup>104</sup> The Qing Shi Lu relevant entries are translated in Fu Lo Shu (1966), pp. 85-86.

to the exclusion by the Bakufu of all other westerners after 1639. Leonard Blussé (1996, pp. 63-66) argues that the VOC trade with Japan helped the Shogunate while it was trying to establish an autarkic economic system after the *kaikin* edict of 1636 prohibited Japanese from going abroad, as it effectively substituted the Japanese junk traders in providing imports to Japan. The Dutch in Taiwan played a role very similar to the one that the Spanish and Portuguese from Manila and Macao had in the Silk-Silver trade. However, already in the 1640s the Zheng competition undermined the Dutch position in the intra-Asian market, and in Japan the Shogunate imposed further restrictions also on the Dutch, by fixing prices on silk imports and limiting copper exports, followed in 1668 by a ban of silver exports from Nagasaki, in response to decreasing domestic supply (Kazui, 1982, p. 295). In 1685 a further restriction was imposed by the Bakufu which limited the amount of export (in taels or guilders) for the Dutch and the Chinese, though it was double for the latter (Blussé, p. 73).

As Blussé (pp. 74-76) has shown, the declining trade volume from Japan, coupled with the relatively fruitless trade with China, contributed to the shift in priorities for the VOC that resulted in the refocusing of the resources in the expansion of the Indian Ocean trade. Another important factor lies in the conquest of Taiwan by the Qing in 1683, which ended the Zheng regime and allowed for the easing of restrictions on maritime trade by the imperial court. Batavia became one of the destinations where the Chinese traders themselves brought their products, therefore the VOC officials deemed it better to let the Chinese come to them, rather than keep on trying to open the China market for themselves as they had tried so far, with all the limitations and restrictions imposed on the one hand by imperial court, and on the other hand, whenever the central government made concessions, by the local authorities who sought to enrich themselves. All of these factors can be seen as contributing to the decision, in 1689, to stop sending company ships to China.

### 3. Qing China

#### 3.1. The Qing conquest of Taiwan and the opening of maritime trade

As already mentioned, Zheng Jing joined the Revolt of the Three Feudatories in 1674, refocusing the resources of his state on the mission of reconquering China from the Manchu invaders and reestablishing the Ming dynasty, and temporarily shelving the plan of creating a maritime Chinese state based on Taiwan. For the two major Western actors operating in the area, the VOC and the EIC (English East India Company), this opened up new opportunities in mainland China. Indeed, the VOC was offered a freer access to Fuzhou by the Prince of Jingnan, one of the rebelling feudatories now at war with the central



government, and the EIC, which had already established trading and diplomatic ties with the Zheng regime and opened a factory in Taiwan. Both the VOC and the EIC merchants found themselves in an awkward situation once the tide of the war turned against the rebel faction. The English would lose their factory in Xiamen in the midst of the fighting, the factors barely escaping to Taiwan (Massarella, p. 410), and the VOC ships sent to Fuzhou were effectively trapped by the Qing inside the city's harbor, but, as explained before, the Manchu authorities let them go and tried to obtain their assistance in fighting the rebellion. It can be argued that the Qing, always more accustomed to land warfare, recognized the need for a strong naval force that could fight the Zheng, who had retreated to the islands of Xiamen and Kinmen. Indeed, after negotiations with the Dutch in Batavia to secure their help went nowhere, as described in the preceding chapter, the Qing, who in the meantime had managed to build an impressive fleet of around 240 junks, resorted to using defectors from the Zheng to man the ships, since they had the knowledge and expertise required to effectively fight on the same level the experienced Zheng crews (Hang, p. 221). In 1680 the Qing secured Xiamen and Zheng Jing was forced to flee back to Taiwan once again, where he would die the following year. In 1683 the Qing attacked the Zheng fleet in the waters near the Penghu islands and won a decisive victory, securing the surrender of Taiwan shortly thereafter without the need for an invasion. The Qing implemented a proven strategy of embracing those who surrendered, as they proclaimed a general amnesty and bestowed honors and titles upon the high-ranking members of the Zheng organization (Hang, pp. 231-234). The Qing policy of actively integrating the defectors and surrendering foes had worked extremely well during the Manchu conquest of China, as arguably they realized that a foreign dynasty needed the support of the Han Chinese in order to rule a continent-sized state and thus kept many of the Ming officials in their service when it came to administering the country. This policy backfired when the three major Ming defectors, who had been given semi-autonomous control over a huge territory in Southern China, rebelled against the central government under the banner of Ming restoration in the Revolt of the Three Feudatories, but once the rebellion had been quelled, the Qing did not depart from their old ways and showed mercy and liberality upon the Zheng and the Taiwan population in exchange for their submission, externally displayed by the shaving of their heads in Manchu fashion.

The English were still operating a factory in Taiwan at the time of the Qing takeover. Its employees had wanted to leave due to the deteriorating situation, but the Zheng did not let them, so they were still there once the Qing arrived. The commander of the Qing forces, Admiral Shi Lang, who had been a Zheng official who defected to the Qing in 1651 (Hang,

p. 81), took the English under his protection, who for their part gave the Qing officials presents to ensure their safety. However, the English were accused of having had close relations with the Zheng regime and of having supplied the rebels with weapons and ammunition, which they did, so the condition of the company men left in Taiwan was precarious and Shi Lang took advantage of the situation extorting from them around 3000 silver taels worth of “gifts” (Massarella, p. 415). Despite his outward hostility and extortionary practices, Shi Lang actually wanted to the English and the Dutch to trade with China, or rather with him, as he envisioned a commercial network under his control on the model of that of Zheng Jilong, with Xiamen or Taiwan functioning as entrepôts for the Sino-Japanese trade, with the Europeans supplying goods from Southeast Asia, with him in control of the export trade from China and in which all merchants passing through his area of control would have to buy his passes (Hang, pp. 236-237). To that end he allowed the English to go from Taiwan with the news that they would be allowed to trade in Xiamen (Massarella, p. 416). He further memorialized the imperial court for the annexation of Taiwan to the empire, arguing that if it was not incorporated into the Qing territory, the Dutch, who had been in its control, might come back and use it to create trouble. To persuade the court, he stated the following regarding the Dutch:

“[...] Their [the Dutch] character is very sly and everywhere they go they know how to win over the hearts of the people. And their warships are strong, huge, and invincible in the sea. As long as they do not regain a foothold, we shall be undisturbed, but if they take this territory of several thousand square li of fertile farms, we must expect disaster in the future.”<sup>105</sup>

Despite a big debate in Beijing as to whether or not to annex Taiwan, in the end the emperor chose to follow Shi Lang’s proposal and to go ahead with the annexation. Fortunately for Shi Lang, Taiwan became a prefecture of Fujian with an assigned garrison of eleven thousand soldiers under Shi’s control, therefore extending his direct control across the strait and formalizing his command of the area (Hang, p. 237).

In the meantime, an English EIC ship, the *Carolina*, had arrived in Guangdong with orders to attempt to establish a factory in Canton, as the factory in Xiamen had been deserted with the arrival of the Qing. It arrived near Macao in June 1683 and encountered the opposition

---

<sup>105</sup> The memorial by Shi Lang is found in various Chinese primary sources, including the *Taiwan Waichi* (臺灣外記, the Taiwan Foreign Records) and is found translated in Fu, *Documentary Chronicles*, pp. 60-61.

the Portuguese, like in the previous EIC voyages of 1635-36. The city of Macao was in a very precarious situation as its trade had diminished a lot due to the civil war and the coastal evacuations. Furthermore, the situation was exacerbated by the strict controls imposed by the Manchu authorities; the high taxes levied on the transactions with the Portuguese were so heavy that food was reportedly scarce in the city; the English commented that Macao was at the mercy of the Qing officials (Massarella, p. 412). The Portuguese apparently convinced the Manchu officials to forcibly remove the English, arguing that they were Dutch instead, but in any case, the Manchu were reportedly hostile to both English and Dutch, because of their alleged assistance to the Zheng, and so the *Carolina* was forced to leave. Still, on its way out of the delta, it was able to conduct some illegal trade with Chinese merchants bound for Japan in Lantao Island (today part of Hong Kong). Another EIC ship, the *Delight*, arrived in Xiamen in May 1684 after trying unsuccessfully to trade in Macao. Its supercargoes were received by the local authorities and were told that the mandarins were “expecting presents”, which were duly given. The Qing also requested that the weapons and ammunition brought by the ship be given as gifts, to which the English protested and offered to give them for sale instead. The Chinese officials brought up again the issue of the EIC relationship with the Zheng, arguing that the weapons were actually intended for them, but in the end a compromise was reached between the two parts and the English were allowed to keep at least some of their weaponry for their own protection on the return voyage. It was not until October, five months after the *Delight* had arrived in Xiamen, that the English were told that the emperor had granted them free trade with no customs to be paid on account of their earlier “gift” of their weapons (Morse, pp. 50-56). There does not seem to be a record of the emperor issuing such an order directed to the English per se and there is no mention in the veritable records (*qing shi lu*) of the English arriving in Xiamen in 1684. The absence of an ad-hoc decree for the English in Xiamen, however, is consistent with the change in policy regarding maritime trade that took place in that same year.

In 1684, after the Zheng had finally been defeated and Taiwan incorporated into the empire, there was a significant shift in Qing foreign policy as the Kangxi emperor formally authorized the opening of the country to maritime trade and established four customs offices in Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, and Jiangnan (Fu, p. 61). Cranmer-Byng & Wills Jr. (2011, p. 193) argue that this radical change was the result of the end of the war with the Zheng, which had lasted since the Qing takeover of China, that rendered unnecessary the wartime measures of the coastal evacuations and trade restrictions. Furthermore, the legalization and regularization of foreign trade would also undercut the illicit commerce from which the high-

ranking coastal officials had profited previously. In order to take control of this source of revenue away from the coastal officials, maritime customs superintendents were to be nominated by the central government to supervise the taxation of foreign trade. It is arguably evident that the Kangxi Emperor, having overcome all challenges to his power and hold of the Chinese empire, was confident enough to directly go against the interests of the southern coastal elites without fearing that such a political move would backfire, as it did when the Revolt of the Three Feudatories broke out. Bringing maritime trade under the central government's direct supervision with the customs superintendents (the "hupu", or "hoppo", of the later Canton System) was seemingly a measure aimed at preventing exactly the occurrence of a situation like that of the rebellion of the 1670s, by ensuring that should powerful regional lords or princes arise, they would not be able to accumulate wealth and resources from maritime trade in a way that could threaten the authority of the imperial court. The "three feudatories" had been instrumental in the consolidation of the Qing hold on China and their power and command over troops and resources, in the early days of the dynasty, was such that the imperial government had no choice but to grant them their fiefdoms and autonomy in order to appease them, and it can be argued that this strategy worked in the early decades of Qing rule. It can also be argued that Shi Lang, the admiral who defeated the Zheng, could have become a "maritime feudatory", meaning a high-ranking Qing official with control of the military in Fujian and Taiwan who could enrich himself by taking advantage of the centrality of the Taiwan Strait in the East Asian trade. However, despite being given control over the regional military forces, the Kangxi Emperor undermined such designs by legalizing and bringing maritime trade under the close watch of Beijing officials, which also resulted in more competition by traders from regions outside the influence of Shi, especially from Guangdong, such that Shi could not hope to exercise a monopolistic control through the ports directly under his command in Fujian and Taiwan. Hang (2015, pp. 237-238) makes the case that Shi Lang pursued "an outdated dream of monopoly and territorial autonomy" that was unfeasible at a time when the Qing dynasty had fully consolidated its grip on China and was reaching the pinnacle of its political power under the Kangxi Emperor.

As a result of the changes in the political climate and the new regulations, when the EIC ship *Delight* left Xiamen in late 1684, its supercargoes were told that they would be welcome to come again the next year also to establish a factory. The voyage could therefore be considered a success, or at least a promising beginning for the future of English trade in China, but the *Delight's* merchants lamented that the Chinese buyers had "designed a monopoly" as they all

offered the same prices initially, and one big buyer was the “chief civil magistrate” who forced the English into accepting his offers, as he threatened them with stopping trade and sending them away. Thus, it can be inferred that despite the policies devised by the central government, the situation in the port cities still retained some of the earlier problems encountered by European traders, specifically the abuse of power by the local elites in dealing with them, as exemplified by the threats of the chief civil magistrate, but also the endless “gift-giving” to all the relevant officials that was demanded in order to be able to trade.

Another EIC ship, the *China Merchant* arrived in Xiamen at the end of July 1685 with the purpose of also establishing a factory, taking up the offer by the Qing authorities the earlier year, and found that the building that had been used by the English factors previously had been converted into a customs house, thus already seeing first-hand the effects of the change in legislation regarding maritime trade. Another example of the abuse of power took place when the English, looking for a new place where to settle, rented a building from a local mandarin, being forced to accept his price under the threat that he would have the ship’s sails and rudder removed if they did not comply. The local officials also informed the English that the customs had to be paid on all goods brought in, even if they were not sold, and on all goods bought there for export. The *China Merchant* would ultimately leave Xiamen with a “good investment” of local Chinese goods, but also with a lot of its original cargo that was not sold. Another EIC ship, the *Loyal Adventurer*, which was supposed to go to Nanjing but had to stop in Xiamen for repairs, could only dispose of little of its cargo (just the lead) but was forced to pay the duties on all of it anyway. The supercargoes of the *Loyal Adventurer* had actually decided to anchor off Kinmen, therefore outside Xiamen, arguably to avoid such a situation, but the Chinese authorities forced them to come into the port of the city and pay customs on their cargo by threatening to extract them from the *China Merchant* instead, which was still in the port (Morse, pp. 56-59). Despite all of these issues, the Company continued to send ships to Xiamen, and in 1687 there was the first instance of the “measuring” of a ship in its port to calculate the taxes to be levied on it. This was a method that was already in use in Canton, but that was first encountered by the EIC in Xiamen at this time. Morse (1920, p. 61) argues that the extortions and abuses suffered by the English traders in Fujian were the result of the strict control of the local institutions by the Manchu, rather than the Han Chinese, as at that time the region had just been reconquered by the Qing after the civil war, and it was still being administered by military-oriented Manchu officials, rather than by the class of Han scholar elite that would be more predominant afterwards, and thus he also argues that this is also the reason behind the lateness in adopting the practice of measuring

ships to calculate duties in contrast with Guangdong. In 1689 the EIC ship *Princess* traded in Xiamen, but it was reported that the authorities were even more obstructive than usual, and that duties were also higher. Its supercargoes suggested that the Company might direct its efforts towards Ningbo or Canton in the hope of better conditions (Morse, p. 64).

Indeed, the Company had sent in 1689 a ship, the *Defence*, for the purpose of establishing trade in Canton. The company records attest that this voyage ended in disaster, and arguably threatened to nip in the bud whatever trade prospects the English might have had in Canton. The captain of the ship reportedly got into trouble with the Chinese authorities whereupon a fight ensued in which a Chinese man died and some company men were taken prisoners. The *Defence* left, or rather fled, in March 1691 without securing the release of its imprisoned crewmembers (Morse, pp. 78-84). Throughout the rest of the decade, the company only engaged in small-scale trade with China, mainly in Xiamen. In 1699 the EIC again tried to trade in Canton by sending there the galley *Macclesfield* in a voyage that was somewhat successful, but that most importantly inaugurated the “China trade” in Canton that would develop into the Canton System in the following years. The ship anchored off Macao and did not immediately proceed to Canton. There, the ship’s supercargoes met with both Portuguese and Chinese officials, including the Canton Hoppo, the Court-appointed official in charge of customs. The Hoppo was apparently very accommodating to the English, as after measuring their ship to determine the measurement tax, instead of the 1200 taels that had to be paid, he charged only 480 taels. The supercargoes then went to Canton to arrange the transactions, and managed to sell their whole cargo to one merchant, Hunshunquin, who had already dealt with the English and the Dutch in the past and who could speak Portuguese, which greatly eased communications due to the lack of need of an interpreter. A contract was stipulated with him for the purchase of Chinese goods for the return cargo. Thus, once the negotiations for both selling and buying had been done, and all the necessary permits had been obtained by the Hoppo, the *Macclesfield* was brought to Whampoa, about 20 kilometers downriver from the city of Canton.<sup>106</sup> The supercargoes, however, had to fight for another nine months in order to conclude the dealings. Firstly, the merchant Hunshunquin was imprisoned, probably because he refused to share the trade with the English with other “Mandarines Merchants”, most probably merchants entrusted by

---

<sup>106</sup> Throughout the existence of the “Canton System” no foreign ships were allowed into the city of Canton itself but had to stop along the river to anchor off Whampoa, which was a location that provided shelter from bad weather and the open seas but that was still far enough from the city so that foreigners could not easily cause trouble (Van Dyke, 2007, p. 17).

powerful mandarins to trade in their name. Then, once freed, the same merchant refused to buy the English woollen at the agreed price because he found all sorts of issues in them upon inspection. Further, the Hoppo started to demand advances on the duties to be paid, of increasing amounts. Hunshunquin could not easily resell the English cloths he had bought and, nearing bankruptcy, had to allow other merchants to make contracts for the *Macclesfield* trade. The issues continued with the other traders as well, mainly due to the English woollen cloths being almost unmarketable. In the end, the Hoppo himself agreed to buy the English products, at a great discount, but still the chief supercargo, Mr Douglas, retained a portion of it. The *Macclesfield* left in July 1700, with still a quarter of its original cargo, it stopped in Chusan (Zhoushan), Zhejiang, where further silk goods were bought, and returned to England in July 1702 (Morse, pp. 85-98).

After the *Macclesfield*, and despite the issues it had encountered, every year afterwards the EIC dispatched at least one ship to Canton. Morse (1920) argues that 1700 marks the beginning of a new era in the “China trade”, as in Canton a more developed system was in place for the management of trade in contrast with other port cities such as Xiamen and Zhoushan. The Chinese officials in Canton, especially the Hoppo, had better business acumen than their colleagues in other port cities and knew to attract the foreign traders by explicitly lowering the fees to be paid, making exceptions for them and treating them amicably. One issue that emerges clearly in the account of the *Macclesfield* in Canton is the lack of demand for English woollen cloths. Indeed, the humid and hot climate of Southern China, compared to Northwestern Europe, has to be considered as the major factor in this, but it can be argued that as early as 1700 the structural issue that would persist for the following century is discernible, namely the lack of an English, or European, good or product in high demand in China that could be used instead of relying on silver. This issue would later become one of, if not the only, major cause behind the growth of the opium trade, which would have a dramatic impact on Chinese society and on Sino-Western relations.

In the years following the *Macclesfield* voyage to Canton, the EIC directed its supercargoes to try to trade in more northern ports, such as Ningbo, which were closer to the manufacturing area of Nanjing. The Nanjing products, especially silk, were obviously a major factor in this decision, but the directors of the company were also looking for a more favorable market for English woollens goods. In Chusan (Zhoushan), however, the English encountered a lot of issues: one of their officials was detained by the “Mandarin of Justice”, who pressured the English to trade with him on his terms, and when they refused, having already made their contracts with the “chumpein” (the brigadier-general, reported to be the “dominant authority

over Chusan”), he ordered them to leave at once, which they did, leaving behind unsold goods and unliquidated advances for more than 50,000 taels.<sup>107</sup> The President of the EIC council for China reported to the directors of the company that:

“The Monopoly and Tyranny of the Mandarins of this place is so great that we cannot believe it Your Honours' Interest to continue at it; nor do we intend the next Shipping shall have product here, unless Your Honours have made provisions by an Ambassador or otherwise for better Terms, or that the Mandarins unexpectedly alter their Tempers.”<sup>108</sup>

In August 1702 the President of the Council for China again remarked to the EIC directors that all company ships should stop by Pulo Condore, a company outpost off the coast of Vietnam, to exchange intelligence so that China-bound vessels could be directed to the port that had been deemed most favorable according to the experience of the ships returning from China. In his opinion, Canton was preferable to Xiamen, and both were better than Chusan (Zhoushan) (Morse, p. 118). Therefore, in the early years of the eighteenth century, Canton was already becoming the port that was considered the best for trading in China.

Van Dyke (2007, pp. 6-8) argues that Canton was the port city that was most flexible in dealing with foreigners, and that the terms that foreign merchants could negotiate there were more beneficial than in other ports. He maintains that Canton was the most convenient place for all the parties involved, both Western and Chinese, for a series of reasons. First of all, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Canton had already for more than a century managed trade with Macao, and its authorities had learned how to strike a balance between economic interests and security concerns by monitoring and restricting the movement of foreigners to designated areas, which in Macao's case was the city of Macao itself, and which in Canton would be seen also in the famous “Thirteen Factories” where Europeans would be confined later on when the Canton System fully developed. Chinese authorities had learned that they could exert pressure on the foreigners by cutting off their food supply, or even just threatening to do so, in case of disputes, and it was easy to do if the foreigners were confined to a single location. This form of control, combined with the change of the monsoon patterns that threatened their return voyage, ensured that the foreigners would

---

<sup>107</sup> The EIC supercargoes were pressured to advance money to the Chinese merchants when contracting for goods before their delivery, despite their superiors in London advising against it, as otherwise they had difficulties in purchasing a return cargo (Morse, p. 114).

<sup>108</sup> This report is quoted in Morse (1926), *The chronicles of the East India company, trading to China 1635-1834*. Vol. I, p. 116.



quickly come to terms in case of disagreements. The peculiarities of the geography of the Pearl River Delta also meant that foreign ships who went up to Whampoa to trade in Canton had to rely on local pilots to navigate the shallow and difficult waters of the river and the delta, and by controlling the pilots the Chinese authorities could effectively stop the foreign ships from leaving if there was the need, which in other ports might not be the case. Indeed, one of the factors that prevented Macao from becoming the centre of foreign trade was the fact that for the Chinese it would be more difficult to control foreigners there, as their ships could easily leave due to the proximity to the open sea, whereas Canton was situated more inland, on the shores of the Pearl River, and also offered more shelter from storms compared to the more exposed Macao.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, the geographical features of the Delta made Canton a good location for controlling trade on the part of the Qing government. For the foreign traders, Canton was also a convenient place for business because it was very easy for both the Chinese and the foreigners to communicate with each other than in other ports. The authorities could easily find Chinese people who could speak Portuguese in the Chinese community of Macao and the foreign ships only had to make sure to have a crewmember who could also speak that language, whereas in other ports there was no guarantee that there would be an easy medium of communication readily available.<sup>110</sup>

English records indicate that from 1704 onward, the vast majority of the EIC ships dispatched to China were directed to Canton.<sup>111</sup> Together with the English company ships, other western traders were also recorded in Canton, and already in 1716 the volume of this trade was clearly on the rise, as evidenced by the fact that twenty foreign ships came to its port, including six of them French and three English (Morse, p. 157). There are reports of the French already operating in the area as early as 1699, and the French East India Company sent one or two ships to Canton yearly, like the English EIC, until 1714 (Van Dyke, 2007, p. 10). From 1720 onwards another chartered company, the Ostend General India Company, started to dispatch ships to Canton. Operating from the Austrian Netherlands with a charter issued by the Viennese imperial court, its ships, crews and merchants were reportedly mostly

---

<sup>109</sup> As previously explained, the Portuguese in Macao were also not very eager to let other foreigners in on their trade with China, especially if those foreigners were protestant English or Dutch.

<sup>110</sup> Van Dyke makes the case that in Xiamen and Quanzhou, for instance, there were also local merchants who could speak foreign languages due to their trade overseas, but it was not a given that a person who could speak the same languages spoken by the crew of a European ship could be easily found.

<sup>111</sup> According to the EIC Table of Shipping, 1635-1753, in Morse (1920) *The chronicles of the East India company, trading to China 1635-1834*. Vol. I, p. 307.

Englishmen trying to work around the English company's monopoly and prohibition of private trade (Morse, p. 161).

An important factor behind the growth of the Sino-European trade in the early decades of the 1700s can be found in the rising demand for a specific Chinese good among the European population: tea. Tea had been brought into Europe in the early seventeenth century; the VOC imported it into Holland in 1610 (Mathee, 1995, p. 28), and in 1664 the English EIC bought a little over 2 pounds of it, probably from the Dutch. In 1669 the English bought 143 pounds of tea from Bantam, and in 1687 they bought "150 peculs" of tea, corresponding to roughly ten tons, for the first time directly from China, in Xiamen, (Morse, pp. 9, 62) destined for England. The *Macclesfield*, mentioned before, brought back to England "160 piculs" of tea from Canton (Morse, p. 97). In 1704 the Court of Directors of the EIC ordered the supercargoes of the ship *Kent* to buy 117 tons of tea in Canton (Morse, p. 136), an unprecedented amount, clearly indicating the rise in popularity of tea in England. Already in 1717, the orders to the supercargoes indicate that tea was becoming more important than silk as a commodity to be purchased for the return cargoes of the English ships, which, however, lacking a product in high demand in China, had to carry as much silver as was legally allowed, specifically nine-tenths of the outward cargo, as by law at least a tenth of the cargo had to be made up of English products (Morse, pp. 67, 158). The purchase orders for all four English company ships sent to Canton in 1721 made no mention of silk, but rather the indication to buy as much tea as possible, chinaware (210 thousand pieces per ship), and as much sago<sup>112</sup> as could be packed inside the chinaware (Morse, p. 166). In seventeenth-century Europe, tea was considered more a medical remedy than a beverage per se, its purported medical properties were advertised in English coffeehouses and by prominent Dutch physicians alike. In the eighteenth century, the increased availability of tea in Europe decreased its price and widened its consumer base. Tea also enjoyed a good reputation in protestant societies as it was perceived as a drink that was healthier than coffee and alcoholic beverages, and therefore was seen as a more moral drink, especially in contrast with intoxicating alcoholic drinks (Mathee, 1995, pp. 30, 35). Therefore, the increased supply of tea helped spread its popularity beyond the European elites, and in turn increased its demand, which fuelled the growth of the Sino-European trade.

---

<sup>112</sup> Sago was an important item of commerce of the time as it was used to safely pack porcelain for the return voyage and the lack of it could hold up trading operations (Van Dyke, 2007, p. 149).

### 3.2. The emergence of the Canton System

In Canton, European traders also started to cultivate business relationships with specific Chinese merchants. In the early 1700s, the English primarily dealt with two Fujianese merchants, known as Linqua and Anqua, who were partners who also reportedly had their own agents working for them in Macao and as far as Batavia. Their trade was so successful that in 1717 the EIC directors instructed their supercargoes to try to buy from others as well, so that the two partners would not grow so powerful as to be able to drive others from the market and dictate their own prices. Still, the presence of reliable contacts with whom they could trade undoubtedly elevated Canton above other ports. By 1716, the relationship between the EIC and Linqua and Anqua had resulted in a working cooperation the modalities of which foreshadow the emergence of the security merchants, the *Hongs*, as a central figure in the Canton System. Specifically, in 1716 the officials of the EIC ship *Susanna* had contracted the purchase of most of its cargo with the two aforementioned merchants, but, most importantly, they also agreed that the merchants themselves would take care of all of the duties, fees, presents etc. that previously had been exacted by the mandarins directly from the English. The two merchants also agreed to assist the English in their dealings with the Hoppo and to guarantee the smooth sailing out of the ship when business was done (Morse, p. 156). This arrangement arguably worked best for the parties involved, as the English only had to deal mainly with the Chinese merchants rather than the mandarins or the Hoppo, and the merchants' knowledge of the inner workings of the system arguably made them better suited to deal with, and perhaps even negotiate the reduction of, the exactions and imposition by the civil officials. Already in 1704 in Xiamen the local authorities and the merchants had organized themselves into a guild that restricted trade with the Europeans to a selected few (around eight to ten merchants) each with their own allotted share of the contracts (Morse, p. 132). In 1720, in Canton a similar system was put in place; the Chinese merchants, the *hongs*, created an association to set prices (mainly on high-volume goods like tea, as the sale of small manufacturing products was left mainly unrestricted and open to all) and agreed to split the share of the contracts with the Europeans so that no one of them would be able to obtain a contract for the whole cargo, but at most half of it, the rest to be divided among the others. The EIC supercargoes lamented the restriction to a selected pool of *Hongs*, and asked the Hoppo to release a chop, a stamped official document, that would allow everyone to freely engage in trade with them (Morse, pp. 164-165). Furthermore, two merchants privately approached the Company and offered them a reduction on the price of tea should they complain to the "viceroys", the Governor-General of Guangdong and Guanxi, about the

merchant guild. The prospect of losing the English trade in Canton to some other port was enough to make the Governor-General pressure the merchants to dissolve their association (Morse, pp. 166-167). Therefore, the experiment of forming a sort-of merchants' cartel very quickly came to an end. However, certain elements of the arrangement would be adopted and integrated into the workings of the Canton System, for instance the division of shares of each ship's cargo among various merchants.

In this "crisis" a rather newer aspect of the relationship between Europeans and Chinese authorities can be found. As the Hoppo, the customs superintendent, was an itinerant official appointed directly by the imperial court, the revenues resulting from the taxation of foreign trade were forwarded to Beijing annually. Hoppo's, who were nominally in charge for terms of three years, had a very strong incentive to match, or surpass, the revenues of the previous years, because if there was a decrease in revenues sent to Beijing their reputation and career would be undermined. This aspect was largely absent for most of the previous century when foreign trade was mainly under the control of local powerful lords. For this reason, despite the security concerns and the need for control by the imperial court and the Chinese political officials in dealing with foreigners, it was also in the Hoppo's interest to foster trade in order to increase the flow of money going to the central government. The Canton authorities arguably realized that if there was not enough competition among merchants that could guarantee reasonable prices for foreigners, and if the exactions, fees, taxes and so on were too high, it would discourage foreign traders from coming back again, which of course would lower the amount of revenues sent to Beijing (Van Dyke, 2011, p. 85; 2007, p. 20). The main concern of the Canton authorities, particularly the Hoppo's, was to keep a steady and rising flow of money going to the central government, and to that end, it was necessary to be accommodating towards foreigners, as shown by the issue of the 1720 short-lived merchant guild. It can be argued that already in the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Qing central government was aware of the importance of foreign trade as a valuable source of tax money for the government budget, and its significance grew as the volume of trade grew throughout the rest of the century and beyond.

The imperial court arguably protected the trade with the Europeans while instead perceived more as a security concern the trade of its own population to Southeast Asia, known as the Nanyang trade. The Qing Shi Lu records that in 1716 the Kangxi Emperor spoke to his ministers of the dangers arising from the dealings of the Chinese merchants going abroad:

“We learned that every year seafarers, possibly over a thousand, built ships to go abroad. Only five or six out of ten returned their ships to China; the rest just sold their ships abroad. [...] Beyond the ocean lie Luzon, Batavia, and other places which serve as asylum for the Chinese outlaws. From the time of the Ming dynasty, these places have been the headquarters of the Chinese pirates. [...] The people of Taiwan and the Chinese in Luzon often exchange visits; We must prevent this. [...] After hundreds of years, We are afraid that the Middle Kingdom will suffer injury from the overseas countries, for example, from the European countries. This is only a prediction.”<sup>113</sup>

It can be argued that the Kangxi Emperor thought of the Europeans as potential security concerns for China far in the future, but he was seemingly more alarmed by the Chinese traders going abroad and interacting with “Chinese outlaws”, perhaps fearing a repetition of the struggle that had taken place early in his reign against another kind of overseas Chinese, the Zheng regime, which had challenged the Qing claim of being the legitimate ruler of China. A Qing official, Chen Mao, brigadier-general of Jianshe, Guangdong, was one of those who instead were more wary of the Westerners. Perhaps being a military man rather than a civil official who stood to gain from increased trade, made him see things differently than the Hoppo or the Viceroy. In 1717 he addressed the Board of War requesting the banning of Catholicism by stating the following:

“Catholicism originated in Europe; now the Westerners have set up churches in various provinces which attract bandits and rascals. The hearts of these Westerners are inconceivable. At present they have established many churches both within and without the city of Canton. Moreover, their foreign ships also throng in the harbor of Canton. How can we guarantee that the missionaries and Western merchants do not communicate with each other and cause trouble?”<sup>114</sup>

Clearly his concern was that the spread of Catholicism, a “Western” religion, could undermine the foundations and integrity of Chinese society, especially in connection with the growth of trade, and therefore the increasing presence of Westerners in Canton. However, the court was arguably not too concerned by Christianity at the time, as it took no extraordinary measures against its proliferation. Instead, in 1717 the emperor issued a ban

---

<sup>113</sup> From the Qing Shi Lu entry of December 9, 1716, in Fu, *Documentary Chronicle*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, entry of May 24, 1717, pp. 123-124.

on Chinese trade to the *Nanyang*, the Southern Ocean, in particular targeting the Philippines and Batavia (Ng, pp. 420-421).

The presence of Christianity in China predated the establishment of the Qing dynasty. With the establishment of Macao, the Portuguese brought with them their customs and religion, but Christianity remained mostly confined to the Portuguese enclave. In the late sixteenth century the Jesuits Matteo Ricci and Michele Ruggeri made significant inroads in Chinese society. Matteo Ricci, in particular, presented himself as a literate and even dressed himself like a Confucian scholar. His willingness to assimilate Chinese customs, culture and language was certainly very useful in befriending Chinese scholar-officials, as was his knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, philosophy and natural sciences. In order to carry out his mission of spreading the faith, he deliberately chose a strategy of accommodation with Confucianism; he tried to explain Christianity by appropriating and reinterpreting Confucian classics, borrowing their concepts, trying to diminish the “foreignness” of his religion and to make it more familiar to the Chinese (Y. Liu, 2008). He was even invited by the Wanli Emperor to court as a scientific and technical adviser, and he was asked to stay for the maintenance of the clocks and mechanical devices that he had brought. After Matteo Ricci, other Jesuits took his place in the Imperial Palace and took the role of astronomers and scientists for the emperor. The Jesuit presence was tolerated by the highest levels of Ming society due to the Jesuits’ proficiency and usefulness in the technical fields. Indeed, a few years after Ricci’s death in 1610 two other Jesuits, Adam Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest, were appointed as official court astronomers, and in the meantime the Christian population of the Empire had reportedly risen into the tens of thousands (Sebes, 1978). The Qing Shi Lu records how already in 1644, after the Manchu had entered into Beijing, Schall presented the prince-regent Dorgon with his Western methods for astronomical calculations and correctly predicted an eclipse. The Qing court was favorably impressed with Schall and appointed him as Director of the Imperial Board of Astronomy; he was also tasked with designing a new, correct calendar for the Qing, which after completion resulted in the conferment of the title of sub-director of the Court of Sacrificial Worship.<sup>115</sup> In 1653 the Shunzhi Emperor, when personally bestowing on him another honorific title, stated that:

“We determined when Our country laid the foundation of a great Empire, that to set up a correct calendar and distribute it to the people was an urgent affair. [...] You,

---

<sup>115</sup> The Qing Shi Lu relevant entries are translated in *ibid*, pp. 3-5.

Tāng Ruò Wàng [Schall], in the late Ming Dynasty, came from Europe by sailing the sea over one hundred thousand li, and you lived in the Imperial capital. You mastered the theory of the sun, the moon, and the five planets and are an expert who knows how to calculate the calendar. [...] Then you were ordered to compose the calendar of the Great Qing Dynasty for Us, and to complete it. O! you are indeed industrious! [...] you are indeed faithful to Us!”<sup>116</sup>

Clearly, Schall, and by extension the Jesuits, enjoyed a good reputation at court in the early years of the Qing dynasty. This would change during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor. In 1665 Schall was accused by another astronomer, Yang Guangxian, of various crimes, connected both to his work in astronomy and calendar-making, and to the Christian religion. Yang stated that:

“[Schall] posed as a calendar-maker in order to carry on the propagation of heresy. [...] [Schall] under the guise of calendar-making, reaches beyond the gate of the Golden Palaces and engages in spying out the secrets of our Court. If they (Westerners) do not have intrigues within and without China, why do they establish Catholic churches both in the capital and in strategic places in the provinces? [...] During the last twenty years they [the Jesuits] have won over one million disciples who have spread throughout the Empire. What is their purpose? Evidently, they have long prepared for rebellion. If we do not eradicate them soon, then we ourselves rear a tiger that will lead us to future disaster.”<sup>117</sup>

Schall, along with other Jesuits and Chinese converts, was sentenced to death. He was pardoned, but five of his Chinese colleagues were executed. All other Christian missionaries were sent away to Canton and all churches in China were closed down. Eventually, the Western methods for astronomical calculations proved more accurate than the ones endorsed by Yang, and after the Kangxi Emperor gained more direct control of the government in 1667 from the regents<sup>118</sup> he gave official approval to the use of the Western methods for calendar-making and restored the titles and ranks of Schall, who had passed away in the meantime (Witek, p. 141-142). Therefore, the young Kangxi Emperor arguably

---

<sup>116</sup> From the Qing Shi Lu entry of March 30, 1653, translated in Fu Lo Shu (1966), pp. 12-13.

<sup>117</sup> The full translation of Yang Guangxian’s memorial to the court is in *ibid* pp. 35-36.

<sup>118</sup> The Kangxi Emperor had acceded to the throne aged seven in 1661 and the actual political power was in the hands of a group of four Manchu officials: the regents. Starting from 1667 the emperor started to gain more power and contained the influence of the regent. In 1669 he was able to assume full control of the government (Oxnam, 1973).

realized the usefulness of keeping the Jesuits at court as astronomers and technical advisors, as when in 1674, during the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories, he asked Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest, who had taken the post of director of the Imperial Board of Astronomy, to cast cannons for the army.<sup>119</sup> He allowed the Jesuits in Beijing to continue practicing Catholicism, but he also tried to contain its spreading among the Chinese population. A 1669 imperial edict reads:

“Concerning their [the Westerners’] worship of the Lord of Heaven, they only follow the old custom of their own country. So far they have demonstrated no trace of evil-doing. Therefore, their old sentences must be removed. [...] Only Nan Huai-jen [Ferdinand Verbiest] and the others (Europeans in the capital) may practice Catholicism as before. However, We fear that in the provinces they (Europeans) may again set up churches and convert our people to their religion; therefore, We order that this practice be strictly prohibited.”<sup>120</sup>

A further episode showing the attitude of the court towards Christian missionaries took place in 1687, when five French Jesuits entered Zhejiang asking to visit the Christians and the churches of the interior, and if possible, to reside there. The Board of Rites initially denied this request, arguing that foreigners were not allowed to live in the interior, although it must be borne in mind that there were Jesuits in Beijing working for the emperor. This decision was later overturned when it came to the court’s attention that “It is not improbable that among the foreigners [...] are those who may know the method of calendar-making.” Therefore the decision was reversed as the relevant imperial edict reads: “We order them to repair to Peking and wait for Our employment. As for the others who cannot be employed, We also allow them to reside freely in the Interior.” So not only was the court permissive towards those missionaries who could serve its interests by working for the government, but also allowed those among them who were not “employable”, i.e. well-versed in the technical and scientific fields, to reside in the interior.<sup>121</sup> It can be argued that the government was willing to be somewhat accommodating to the Jesuits, perhaps realizing that only allowing those with technical expertise to reside in China at the service of the Emperor while turning away their fellow missionaries could strain the relationship with those employed at court in the long term. In 1692, Prospero Intorcetta, an Italian Catholic residing in Zhejiang, reported

---

<sup>119</sup> From the Qing Shi Lu entry of September 10, 1674, translated in Fu Lo-Shu (1966), p. 48.

<sup>120</sup> From the Qing Shi Lu entry of September 9, 1669, translated in Fu Lo-Shu (1966), pp. 45-46.

<sup>121</sup> These events are recorded in the Xi Chao Ding An, which is a Chinese contemporary source written by Catholic priests working in Beijing. These excerpts are translated in Fu Lo-Shu (1966), p. 93.



that the provincial governor had ordered the destruction of the churches, of the printing blocks for their books, and had denounced Catholicism as a heresy calling for its eradication from China. Two Jesuits in Beijing, Tomàs Pereira and Antoine Thomas, who worked for the government in the Imperial Bureau of Astronomy, sent a petition to the emperor asking for his intervention in the matter. Interestingly, they also appealed to the case of the accusations that had been levied against Schall and the reversal of these decisions by the young Kangxi emperor himself and maintained their selflessness and loyalty to the emperor. Their arguments were convincing because indeed the Jesuits in Beijing had been working for decades for the Chinese Emperors with various tasks that went beyond calendar-making, including important mediations with the Russians over the northern border issue which will be analyzed more in detail later. They stated:

“We have translated and compiled a number of books on Western astronomy and calendar, mathematics, music, natural science and so on for more than twenty years in the Imperial Palace. [...] from the early years of the Late Emperor Shunzhi’s reign up to now, the late Westerners were ordered to make weaponry. [...] We only hope that the Emperor shall take into consideration our unselfishness and pitiableness. Also we humbly request the Emperor to construct a farsighted resolution and to bring it into force.”<sup>122</sup>

In response, the Kangxi Emperor issued what became known as the “Edict of Toleration”. He stated that:

“Westerners are revising and formulating the calendar. They constructed weaponry at the time of the military operations. They are diligent in their work. Besides, Catholicism involves no wicked or unprincipled activities. People should be permitted to go and present joss sticks [i.e. practice their religion]. [...] Their religion, which a few people regard as an evil heresy and want to forbid, is truly innocent.”<sup>123</sup>

It was further decided that the spread of Catholicism should be permitted. Therefore, after diligently serving the Qing emperors for more than forty years, the Jesuits finally obtained the imperial endorsement for practicing Catholicism and proselytizing. Considering the relationship between the Jesuits and the Kangxi Emperor, it is easy to understand why, in

---

<sup>122</sup> Wang Bing (2009) “The Inscription on Tomás Pereira’s Tombstone and the Edict of Toleration from the Emperor Kangxi” pp. 76-77.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

1717, he did not give much weight to Chen Mao's fears regarding the spread of Christianity, and was rather more troubled by the possible connections between the Chinese maritime traders and the overseas outlaws which could undermine the unity of the empire and possibly become the seeds for a new rebellion.

### 3.3. The Russians and the treaty of Nerchinsk

Beside the relations between China and the West that developed within the framework of maritime trade, the Qing dynasty also had to confront another foreign political entity that had not been part of the traditional Sino-centric order, but that came to represent a threat to its security on its northern land border: Russia.

Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Russia had expanded beyond the Urals, reaching the Pacific Ocean in 1639. Early reports by Russian explorers on China indicated that it was a country wealthier and larger than it had originally been thought. After a 1608 Cossack expedition to establish direct relations with China, the governor of Tomsk, in Siberia, reported to Moscow that:

“[...] he [the Chinese Emperor] has firearms. And from many lands people come to trade with him. And the robes they wear are all of golden brocade, and various precious things and fabrics are brought to him from many lands.”<sup>124</sup>

An embassy was sent to Beijing in 1618, but it was not received by the emperor, as it had come without gifts to offer to him. This is again in line with the framework of tributary relations through which the Chinese court related to foreign states, as would be required of the Dutch in 1655 and in 1686. Russia then actively restrained its subject from engaging with the Chinese for more than thirty years afterwards. Kiriloff (1969) argues that this measure was a reaction to the perceived disparity in power and wealth between the two countries. In the early seventeenth century, Russia completed a troublesome dynastical transition after a period of deep crisis, internal unrest, civil war and rebellion known as the “Time of Troubles”, which “nearly destroyed the country” (Dunning, 1995). Furthermore, on its western border, it was almost constantly at war with Sweden, Poland and the Crimean Khanate, and on its eastern frontier its power was not yet fully consolidated, as the newly acquired Siberian possessions were threatened by attacks by the Mongols and other nomad populations. Therefore, the decision to avoid direct contact with China has to be seen as an

---

<sup>124</sup> Kiriloff, C. “The Early Relations Between Russia and China.” *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, no. 4, 1969, p. 6.

attempt by the Russian government to not get drawn into troubles so far away from its centers of power with a country that was reported to be much powerful and wealthy (Kirilloff, p. 8).

Still, Russians explorers, pioneers, and even outlaws, extended the boundaries of the Russian state into the Northern Far East by establishing control over large swaths of land with little organized resistance to counter them. However, in these remote, cold areas food was scarce and not easily obtainable through cultivation or commerce due to the remoteness of the territory, and so to the early settlers of these regions food acquisition was arguably the highest priority. To their south the Amur River valley was reported to be a fertile land inhabited by sedentary farmers. In 1651 an expedition to the Amur, backed by Russian local officials, reportedly encountered for the first time Manchu military resistance. For the Chinese part, the Qing Shi Lu also records border skirmishes with Russians, which the Chinese called *Luochoas*, at around the same time, in the vicinity of Ninguta (now Ning'an) in Northeast China, and reports the sentencing to death of the Chinese commander for losing the battle.<sup>125</sup> Kirilloff (p. 11) argues that after the reports of the situation reached the Russian government, it was decided to reverse the previous no-contact policy and to try to establish trade relations with China, as it represented a potential market for Russian furs, at a time in which the demand for them in Europe had decreased. To that end, an official envoy was sent to Beijing in 1656, but the Russian ambassador refused to kowtow and therefore was sent away. The Qing Shi Lu reports the following: "Since the ambassador is ignorant of our ceremonies, it is improper to give him audience. Their tribute is refused and he is ordered to return to his own country."<sup>126</sup> In 1658, the Qing requested Korean assistance for a punitive expedition against the Russians and later the combined Qing-Korean army won a victory on the Amur frontier.<sup>127</sup> It must be pointed out that the Amur valley was not just a remote frontier land for the Manchu, indeed it had much symbolic significance due to it being an area very close to the Manchu original homeland, and its populations were ethnically related to them, all being Tungusic peoples, therefore Russian encroachment could not be tolerated (Kirilloff, p. 27).

The Qing Shi Lu records that the *Feyaka*, i.e. the Giliaks, also known as the Nivkh, willingly submitted to the Qing after their victory over the Russians, and sent a tribute to Beijing. The

---

<sup>125</sup> Qing Shi Lu entries of August 21 and October 19, 1652, translated in Fu Lo Shu (1966), p. 9.

<sup>126</sup> The relevant Qing Shi Lu report is translated in Fu Lo-Shu (1966) p. 20.

<sup>127</sup> The relevant entries of both Chinese and Korean primary sources are translated in *ibid*, pp. 22-23.

fact that the peoples inhabiting these areas sent a tribute indicates that they were not considered, and did not consider themselves, as Chinese, or as direct subjects of the Qing, but more as an indigenous population that lived in a contested area, and that were now being included within the sphere of influence of the Qing, as vassals rather than Chinese.<sup>128</sup>

In 1675, an embassy was sent to Beijing, but again it was dismissed due to issues of ceremonial etiquette, specifically the refusal to kowtow by the Russian ambassador Nikolai Spathari. As he was being dismissed, the ambassador received the following communication from the Li Fan Yuan, a Qing governmental body in charge of relations with Central Asian polities and vassal-states:

“If your Lord really intends friendship with us, he should send back Ken-fe-mu-er, (Gentimour) the fugitive, and other fugitives from our Empire. Also, he should select another ambassador who will conform to the Chinese ceremonial etiquette. Then we will consider granting your request for trade.”<sup>129</sup>

This communication, recorded in the Qing Shi Lu, sheds light on the motivations of both parties. On the one hand, the Russians clearly requested that a trade relation be established. On the other hand, the Chinese court first of all required the adherence to protocol, and Qing officials were clearly irritated at the refusal to kowtow by Spathari, but also required the extradition of fugitives from China that were being harbored by the Russians. The specific mention of Gentimour is telling. He was a Tungus chieftain who had defected to the Russians and was at the center of negotiations because if the Qing could obtain its extradition, their power and influence over the other tribes of the region would certainly grow, and for that same reason the Russians did not want to give him, and the other fugitives, up to the Chinese, as by not doing so the local populations might be more inclined to side with them (Kirilloff, p. 13). Therefore, it can be argued that China and Russia were trying to win the allegiance of the populations that were residing in the contested areas.

The Russian raids on the frontiers continued in the following years at the expense of the local populations. After the end of the Revolt of the Three Feudatories, the Kangxi Emperor could direct the freed-up military resources of the empire to deal with the Russian incursions. Russian raiders had settled on the shores of the river Amur in the fortress of Albazin and had made it their base for their activities in the surrounding areas. In 1685 a Qing army laid

---

<sup>128</sup> From the Qing Shi Lu entry of April, 1<sup>st</sup>, 1659, translated in *ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>129</sup> From the Qing Shi Lu entry of August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1676, translated in *ibid*, pp. 49-50.

siege to Albazin, and after a bombardment the outnumbered Russian garrison surrendered. The instructions that the emperor gave to his officials are also telling of the ideological framework that the Qing imperial court applied to matters of war and relations with other countries. In particular, he wrote:

“War is a terrible thing and fighting dangerous. Our ancestors waged war only when they were compelled to do so. We rule the Empire by the principle of benevolence and never by the principle of force. [...] They must restore to us our territory and our city. Do not kill one single man but let all return to their native land. In this way We show them Our sublime idea of kindness toward strangers.”<sup>130</sup>

Indeed, after the battle of Albazin, the Russian prisoners were set free and allowed to go with their weapons. The following year, however, they came back and reoccupied Albazin, which prompted a second military campaign by the Qing in response. In the meantime, the Chinese imperial court also tried to reach the Russian government using the Dutch as intermediaries, since a Dutch embassy headed by Paets, as mentioned earlier, was received in Beijing at around the same time as the second Albazin campaign was ongoing. From the Qing Shi Lu:

“Our Court has several times sent decrees to Russia, but has never received an answer. [...] We have asked the assistance of the tributary ambassador of Holland, who reports Holland's boundary is closely connected with that of Russia and that officials of each country can understand each other's language. He has been informed of our problem several times and understands all the details thoroughly. Now we have written a letter, using the seal of the Board of War, and given it to the Dutch ambassador to forward to the Ch'a-han Khan [the Czar] to ask him to withdraw the Lo-ch'as [the Russians] at Ya-k'o-sa [Albazin] and Ni-pu-ch'ao [Nerchinsk], suggesting that we define the boundaries so that both sides will refrain from crossing.”<sup>131</sup>

In November 1686 Russian envoys reached China to try to ease the tensions between the two countries. They stated that:

“Recently the frontier subjects of our humble nation did cause trouble and disturbance, so Your Majesty sent an army to the frontier. Now we respectfully request Your permission to investigate the persons who are responsible for stirring

---

<sup>130</sup> From the Qing Shi Lu entry of July 5, 1685, in *ibid* p. 82.

<sup>131</sup> Qing Shi Lu entry of September 14, 1686, in *ibid* p. 88.

up trouble and to send them where they shall be punished most severely. In addition, we are sending an ambassador to negotiate on the problems of the limits of the frontiers.”<sup>132</sup>

Therefore, the Russian government was distancing itself from the actions of its people in the Amur valley and was willing to find a compromise with the Chinese regarding the border between the two nations. In response the Kangxi Emperor agreed to lift the siege of Albazin while waiting for the full-fledged Russian embassy to initiate negotiations. The tsarist regime sent a plenipotentiary, Fedor Alekseevich Golovin, to discuss terms. He was also given the authority to make territorial concessions in exchange for a defined border and, most importantly, a trade agreement. The Chinese also sent a delegation of their own to meet them. It was agreed to hold the talks in Nerchinsk, a Russian-built fortress in a portion of the contested territory. The Qing envoys were accompanied by two Jesuits, Gerbillon and Pereira, who were to play a key role during the negotiations. When the two delegations came together in the location in which the tents had been erected for conducting the discussions, as per previous arrangements, the members of both parties simultaneously descended from their horses and entered the tents (Kiriloff, pp. 17-18). This clearly shows that no one was willing to be seen as being received as a guest by the other, which could be interpreted as a symbol of disparity of power, and so such a compromise had to be reached already before the talks could actually begin. The first two days of talks went nowhere, each side unwilling to concede anything. The Qing party even began packing up in preparation for leaving, because, as Perdue (2010, p. 348) put it “[the Qing] resolved to conduct no more conversations with people whom they could not trust.” The order was sent to the Chinese soldiers near Albazin to attack it. As negotiations were breaking down, the Jesuits assumed a more active role and convinced both parties to resume talks and stall the start of hostilities. In the end, the Russian envoys agreed to recognize as Qing territory the Amur valley, and to raze Albazin to the ground, but they retained the possession of Nerchinsk. The treaty was finally signed on September 6, 1689, its text written in Manchu, Chinese, Mongolian, Latin and Russian.

Kiriloff (1969) argues that the treaty therefore settled a border dispute over a relatively small portion of the Sino-Russian frontier, leaving the rest of it undefined, but that it settled its most vital segment. Furthermore, the importance of the treaty of Nerchinsk lies also in the

---

<sup>132</sup> Qing Shi Lu entry of November 14, 1686, in *ibid* p. 89.

fact that it was the first formal treaty signed between China and a Western country on the basis of equality between the two parties. As Perdue (p. 352) points out “even though both the Qing and Russian empires embraced rigid notions of hierarchy, their representatives at the border conducted negotiations on a basis of equality and mutual, if grudging, respect”. Indeed, Perdue argues that the negotiators were able to overcome the cultural differences that separated the two governments and their respective worldviews, in order to work out a deal, also amid the lack of trust between the delegations themselves. According to Perdue (p. 341) the treaty represents a “remarkable victory for diplomatic cross-cultural interchange” that avoided a war between the two empires, which were able to recognize instead the benefits of peace. In the historiographical discussions regarding who gained the most from the Nerchinsk treaty, Kirilloff (pp. 23-24) argues that it actually benefited both sides, as the alternative, war, would have required a huge commitment of resources, and for the Russians, the territory eventually gained would have required a “large-scale colonization programme” in order to be able to be firmly held. The peace with China also enabled Russia to concentrate its efforts against Poland and the Crimean Khanate. On the economic side, the Russian trade with China, now based on a legal footing, grew significantly afterwards. For the Chinese government, the treaty allowed the emperor to focus the efforts of the military on extending Qing rule over Xinjiang and Mongolia, tightening its grip on inner Asia.

Overall, the Kangxi era (1661-1722) saw the ultimate consolidation of Qing power over China. It was during the reign of Kangxi that the Ming loyalist cause was finally defeated, but the maritime-commercial orientation of the Zheng regime did not die with it after the conquest of Taiwan. The Qing government was able to synthesize the maritime-commercial paradigm of the Zheng, the Fujianese, the Guangdong coastal merchant classes and the overseas Chinese, with the agrarian-bureaucratic structure of continental China. By rescinding the maritime prohibitions and the coastal evacuations in the 1680s, the junk trade of the Chinese was legalized and subsequently flourished until the 1717 ban. After a rocky start, the Europeans, especially the English, found an environment favorable for trading in the port of Canton, more so than in the other ports further north like Xiamen and Zhoushan-Ningbo. The Kangxi reign also saw the definitive separation of tributary missions and foreign trade that had been the custom up until then. As Cranmer-Byng & Wills Jr. (2011, pp. 194-195) remarked, the Dutch embassy of 1685, discussed earlier, would be the last “maritime European embassy for commercial purposes for a century”, as the English and other Europeans started trading in China without sending an embassy to Beijing, as instead had been the case for the Dutch in the early Qing. The tributary framework remained central for

the relations between China and other Asian states that had been a part of the Sino-centric order before, but from the 1680s onward, it can be argued that the Qing government applied a different set of rules for Asian countries that traditionally had a place in this framework, and Western countries, which were allowed to have a commercial relationship with China outside of it. The Kangxi emperor also concluded the first formal treaty with a Western power with the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689), which was also a first for imperial China since it was negotiated and written based on the principle of equality of the parties, marking a departure from the previous interactions in which the Chinese emperors had always related to other countries' rulers from a position of formal superiority, as the emperor was supposed to be the "Son of Heaven", with a mandate to rule over all mankind, which had been the conceptual framework that had dictated Chinese diplomacy and foreign policy up until that time (Fairbank & Têng, p. 138).

### 3.4. Yongzheng and Qianlong

Following the Kangxi reign, the successive emperors, Yongzheng and Qianlong, largely continued the Kangxi Emperor's policies concerning foreign trade, but regarding Western influence they were less accommodating. In 1727 the Yongzheng emperor reversed the maritime ban of 1717 towards the *Nanyang*, thereby allowing Chinese merchants to travel abroad in Southeast Asia to trade. While he did not restrict the European trade that had been growing yearly in Canton, he was more opposed to Christianity than his father, the Kangxi Emperor. In January 1724, very soon after the Yongzheng Emperor had acceded to the throne, the imperial government issued a decree ordering all missionaries to go to Macao, except for the scientists, who were to be employed by the court. In the end, the missionaries were allowed to stay in Canton and practice Christianity in the city's churches. On the matter, the Board of Rites memorialized the following:

“They [the missionaries] [...] are not allowed to go to other places nor to spread their religion nor preach the gospel. All the Catholic churches in other cities should be converted into public buildings. The converts who, prior to this edict, were misled into accepting the Catholic religion are all ordered to renounce it.”<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Qing Shi Lu entry of February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1725, in *ibid* p. 140.



In 1725, a papal embassy was sent by Pope Benedict XIII to formally congratulate the ascension of Yongzheng to the throne. The envoys had brought with them a memorial and native products, as it was required of tributary missions. It was received by the emperor in Beijing and was sent back with presents. It does not seem that there was any policy discussion then or afterwards regarding Catholicism in China. The only mention of anything possibly concerning the status of Christians in China is found in the reply that the emperor sent to the Pope with the envoys, in which he stated the following:

“As for Westerners who reside in China, We shall apply to them the principle that the Emperor should love ten thousand human beings as one. In other words, We shall always direct them to be prudent and quiet. If they really can carefully observe Our laws and maintain order and behave well without transgression, We shall extend to them Our love and clemency.”<sup>134</sup>

This can be interpreted as implicitly indicating that Westerners, especially Christians, residing in China had to keep their religion to themselves and not in any way try to convert others to it. Another embassy was sent by Portugal and received in Beijing in 1727. Its purpose was to try to convince the emperor to reverse the policies that targeted Christians. The issue, however, was not discussed as the missionaries present in Beijing advised the envoys not to bring it up with the emperor. From the perspective of the Chinese, therefore, these two embassies must have been perceived as foreign nations paying tribute to the emperor and did not depart from the traditional tributary framework. Moreover, they achieved nothing in the way of persuading the emperor to revise the anti-Christian policies. Indeed, throughout the course of the eighteenth century, European embassies were never able to discuss policy or to meaningfully interact with the imperial court in a way that could politically influence the relationship between their countries and China (Cranmer-Byng & Wills Jr., pp. 206-207, 226).

The Qianlong emperor's reign (1735-1796) arguably represented the pinnacle of Qing China's imperial power. Under Qianlong, Qing China reached its maximum territorial extension through wars of conquest, the Ten Great Campaigns, which asserted Chinese dominance in Central Asia. By the 1750s, Qing control extended also to Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang (Waley-Cohen, 1998). For what concerns the relationship with the West, the Qianlong era showed continuity with the preceding reigns. The imperial court tried to foster

---

<sup>134</sup> Qing Shi Lu entry of November 13, 1725, in *ibid*, p. 145.

trade, as its taxation brought increasing revenues to Beijing and in turn to the government budget, but at the same time the state exerted strict control over the Westerners in China, whether traders or missionaries. This attitude is exemplified by an edict of 1736 which abolished a 10 percent tax that had been levied on silver imports in Canton, which the Europeans brought to buy Chinese goods, but at the same time reaffirmed the regulation of removing the cannons from their ships for the duration of their stay. The imperial decree reads:

“We think that we should continue the precedent of removing the cannon from the foreign ships arriving at Canton. Moreover, the additional tax of ten percent absolutely is in conflict with the idea that we wish to benefit the foreigners. We order the viceroy of the province to consult the regulations, reduce the tax proportionally and to proclaim Our edict to the barbarians so they may know about it.”<sup>135</sup>

It is interesting to note that the official decree of the emperor explicitly mentions the “wish to benefit the foreigners”, clearly indicating an accommodating stance towards the Europeans, but that however was not to be above the security concerns related to their presence in Chinese ports. Qing suspicions regarding Christianity grew as a result of the discovery of missionaries and Chinese converts in Fujian in 1746. Already in 1733 two Dominican friars had been caught in Fujian and expelled from China due to their “introducing the foreign heresy to seduce the native people,”<sup>136</sup> but apparently the evangelizing mission did not stop as a result. In 1746 the governor of Fujian reported that in the county of Fu’an alone there were 2000 converts, among which there were also “official clerks and servants.”<sup>137</sup> Again, the emperor ordered the banishment to Macao of the foreigners involved, and called for “special punishment” for those Chinese converts who could not be reeducated, but just to “reproach” the “ignorant people who are misled and then set them free.” Particularly alarming for the Chinese authorities was the allegations that the churches in Macao received money from abroad and distributed it to all the provinces of China, probably to finance the missionaries’ work, and that the missionaries would draw up lists with the converts’ names and send them back to their king to receive money in proportion to the number of converts. These lists and the circulation of money from abroad must have raised the suspicions of many officials, who probably feared the creation of

---

<sup>135</sup> Qing Shi Lu entry of November 6, 1736, in *ibid*, p. 169.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, p. 166.

<sup>137</sup> Entry of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1746, in *ibid*, pp. 179-180.

potentially subversive secret societies devoted to a foreign religion that could destabilize societal order. The anti-Christianity policies stayed in place throughout the Qianlong era, but investigations and strict enforcement of the rules only happened occasionally, when the presence of westerners in the interior was brought to the attention of the provincial officials and the central government, as in a crackdown in 1785-86 following the discovery of four Franciscan friars in the Hubei province (Witeck S.J., 2011, p. 173).

Cranmer-Byng and Wills, Jr. (p. 206) noticed how in the first half of the eighteenth century the development of the European trade in Canton proceeded without much policy discussion in the central government that was recorded in the Qing Shi Lu or other formal records, and without diplomatic encounters. Indeed, the structures and rules underlying the management of trade in Canton developed almost naturally in loco, and later on some became official policy. One of the most important examples of this is the emergence of the figure of the *Hong* merchant. These merchants were the ones who were officially authorized to deal with foreigners. As previously mentioned, in 1716 two of these merchants, Linqua and Anqua, had agreed to pay the duties and fees for an EIC ship in exchange for a large share of its trade. This practice became common in the following years and in the 1730s it was officially required for every foreign ship to have a *Hong* merchant who would “secure” it. This meant that the merchant who stood security for a ship was responsible for the payment of its port fees and import and export duties. Furthermore, he was considered responsible for the behavior of the crew of the ship, and if members of the foreign crew caused any trouble, he was expected to step in and bring the situation under control, being also liable for any damage caused by the foreigners. Common practice was of course to give the security merchant the largest share of the trade of the ship that was secured. It must be underlined how trade with foreigners was not simply restricted to a small number of authorized merchants, as had been the case for the Dutch in Fujian in the 1670s. In fact, outside merchants, such as Canton artisans, shopkeepers, retailers and so on, could sell their products to foreigners, but generally they had to conduct the transaction through a *Hong* merchant (Van Dyke, 2011, p. 9-11).

As for the taxation of trade, the rates for calculating the duties on each type of good and the structure of the measuring fees were established by the imperial court in the early years of trade and stayed largely the same until the Opium War. The duties on goods were a fixed sum per unit of good, so they did not rise and fall with the prices, and the measurement fees were standardized by the 1720s and did not change until the 1830s. The Canton authorities, however, had leeway to negotiate with foreigners, especially when it came to the freedoms that they would grant them, but always within the confines of the law as set by the central

government. When European ships started coming to Canton, the negotiations between their officers and the Canton authorities could take weeks, and the terms that were agreed on had to be renegotiated every year. With each passing season, however, both sides became more acquainted with each other and precedents became established practices. For instance, the foreigners had insisted on having the freedom to choose their own merchants, but also all the other figures that were necessary such as the pilots to navigate the waters of the delta, the linguists who acted as intermediaries with Chinese officials, and the compradors from whom they bought the food and other provisions necessary for the stay in port. The Hoppo did not grant these freedoms to the fullest, but still there was always a plurality of officially licensed traders (the *Hongs*), linguists, pilots and compradors, among whom the foreigners could choose, which guaranteed competition and prevented the creation of powerful monopolies. At all levels of the customs authority every official, down to the lowest ones, received a percentage of the duties and revenues collected through trading, so everybody within the customs office had the incentive to keep the trade growing and not to hinder it (Van Dyke, 2007, pp. 8, 11, 15-16). As already mentioned, besides maintaining order and harmony in the port, the collecting of revenue was the highest priority for the Hoppo, as his career depended upon keeping a steady, increasing, flow of money going to Beijing. Therefore, he had an incentive to be accommodating to foreigners, otherwise if they found the conditions too strict, they might not come back in the following years, and trade would suffer as a result. Providing a pool of licensed intermediaries and merchants that competed among themselves guaranteed that prices would not be fixed but allowed to float according to market forces. Another freedom that was requested and granted was for the foreign officers to use ship's boats flying their flag to move unmolested from Canton to the ships in Whampoa without stopping for inspections at the tollhouses along the way. This was required in order for officers to frequently be able to go between Whampoa and Canton to oversee the loading operations while taking care of business in the factories in the city (Ibid, p. 23). This privilege would however be abused by using these "flag boats" to smuggle goods and silver in and out of the city without paying taxes on them.

The imperial government got directly involved in the management of trade in 1759 when it restricted Europeans to trade only in Canton. This move did not signal the beginning of the "Canton System" as the system was already in place beforehand. As already explained, since the beginning of the eighteenth century Canton was the port that was preferred by foreigners, due to its environment particularly suitable for trade and because the terms that foreign traders could obtain there were better than in other ports. In the 1750s, the EIC tried to

obtain changes to the management of trade in Canton; in particular, it requested the abolishment of the security-merchant system. In 1753 the English supercargoes wrote a petition to the Hoppo with the help of interpreter James Flint in which they asked “not to be troubled with securities for our ships.” The issue that they faced was specifically that the payment of all taxes by a single merchant, even on those transactions of which he was not a part, was a financial burden to the designated security merchant, as seeking reimbursement for it from the other traders involved was not easy. According to the EIC officers:

“[...] unless he [the security merchant] transacts every Article of our business, he advances considerable Sums of Money for all those who have any dealing with us, and 'tis often with great difficulty that he is reimbursed.”<sup>138</sup>

Another issue was the dynamics of the *singsong* trade, that is the trade in rarities, mechanical gadgets and luxury goods brought by the English crewmembers as part of their allotted private cargo space for their own trade. The imperial court allotted 30.000 taels per year for the purchase of these rarities for the emperor, and therefore, whenever there were such goods aboard a ship, the Hoppo would order the security merchant of that vessel to purchase them. Knowing this, the sellers intentionally inflated the prices of these goods, and when the Hoppo then bought the goods from the hong merchant who purchased them, he would often pay less than the full price. This dynamic created financial strain for the hong merchants, especially with those who secured EIC ships, since the English were reportedly the only ones bringing *singsongs*, with the result that it became harder and harder for the EIC to find merchants who would stand security for its ships (Cranmer-Byng and Wills Jr., pp. 227-228). Besides the security-merchant issue, the English complained about being the subject of accusations that resulted in tensions in Canton:

“We complain of very unhandsome Chops, which have lately been affixed in public parts of the City and Suburbs, accusing us of Crimes, the mention even of which, is horrible to us: to them we attribute the frequent Insults we meet in the Streets, and therefore desire they may be removed, and that the Government would not only protect us, but likewise our Merchants, Linguists, Compradores and Servants.”<sup>139</sup>

A further source of complaints was the difficulty in getting hold of officials when they required it. They stated: “We find it so difficult to get access to the Mandarines, that we take

---

<sup>138</sup> Morse, *Chronicles*, V, p. 10.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

this opportunity of addressing you whose Protection we particularly desire.”<sup>140</sup> Summing up the issues, it was stated that: “Under such Circumstances it is no wonder that the Merchants are unwilling to engage themselves for our Ship.”<sup>141</sup>

Not receiving satisfactory answers from the Canton authorities, in order to remedy the aforementioned issues, in 1755 the EIC resolved to send Flint, the company’s interpreter, to scout other ports along the coast to see if he could find better conditions elsewhere. From 1755 to 1757 there were three attempts at trading in Ningbo under the supervision of Flint. There the English found the duties more advantageous than at Canton, but they encountered a hostile attitude from the Governor-General there, who was connected with the Governor-General in Canton, who for his part did not want foreigners going to another port, as it diverted revenues away from Guangdong. The records of the EIC shed light upon the political dynamics between the two Governor-Generals. From the account of the second voyage to Ningbo in 1757:

“As we were Coming away we Receiv'd an Edict from the 'Tsongtoc's [Governor-General's] Office that tho' the duties have for these two last Year been easier than at Canton, yet if we were resolv'd to come to this Port, we must Expect to have them rais'd: and in the same Edict, he advises us, rather to Trade to Canton than here: but as the whole is wrote in a Vague manner, we imagine is done with no other intent than to let the Tsontoc [Governor-General] of Canton See, he has done every thing in his Power to discourage Us.”<sup>142</sup>

Therefore, it is clear that despite all, the Qing authorities at Ningbo were arguably not that opposed to Europeans trading there, but that outside political pressures influenced them to discourage it. After duties were raised in Zhejiang to discourage Europeans to trade there, two customs secretaries informed the English at Ningbo that the Canton interests were behind such a change in policy. From the EIC records:

“We then desired to know the reason of the great alteration in the Customs, and if the Emperor had ordered them to be doubled of his own accord. They said it was owing to the Mandarines and Merchants of Canton, that the latter had spent above 20,000 Taels in getting things represented at Court, to their own advantage, and to

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, pp. 52-53.

our prejudice, and to the joint requests of the two Tsongtocs [Governor-Generals], of Canton and this province, to get us forbid the port, or to raise the duties to force us from it.”<sup>143</sup>

What emerges from Chinese official records is that the imperial court also viewed with suspicion the attempt to trade at ports other than Canton. When the imperial court received word of these Westerners coming to Ningbo for trade, it caused some concern with regards to security. It was official policy that foreigners were welcome to trade at any port where a customs office was established, but for some decades now Europeans had mostly gone to Canton, with the occasional ship drifting northwards and calling at other ports for repairs. The presence of the English at Ningbo aroused some suspicion among Qing officials. Following a report to the court by the provincial commander of Zhejiang, the Emperor stated:

“[...] if foreigners are hereafter allowed to have another market, we fear that in the course of time, those who remain in our Interior will increase in number. The coastal region is important to our national strategy. To allow them at Ning-po [Ningbo] is not a good policy for there is no way to prevent their gradual penetration of the Interior.”<sup>144</sup>

And further:

“[...] at Ning-po [Ningbo], the amount of tariff is comparatively lower [than in Canton]. Since our inspection and patrol cannot be tightened, we fear that in the future the number of foreign ships going to Ning-po [Ningbo] will increase daily. Then Ning-po [Ningbo] will also become an international market, where foreigners assemble. We fear that this may cause other disadvantages.”<sup>145</sup>

Therefore, as briefly mentioned before, it was decided to raise the tariffs in Zhejiang, the province with the ports of both Ningbo and Chusan (Zhoushan), in order to remove the economic incentive to trade there short of prohibiting it altogether. From its own edicts, it is clear that the court was concerned with the possibility of Ningbo becoming another port with a high traffic of Westerners and that they would gradually infiltrate the interior of China, undermining Qing authority and the social order. It can be argued that the interests of the

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>144</sup> Qing Shi Lu entry of August 4, 1756, in Fu, *Documentary Chronicle*, p. 200.

<sup>145</sup> Qing Shi Lu entry of November 2, 1756. Ibid, p. 201.

Canton high officials influenced the decision to favor the port city of the Pearl River Delta, but from the prompt response of the central government, and its rationale as explained in the edicts, it can be inferred that there were also genuine security concerns represented by the foreseen increased presence of Europeans in Ningbo that moved the court to act swiftly to contain the perceived threat.

The higher duties in Zhejiang, however, were not enough to discourage the English, as also in 1757 an EIC ship went there to trade. Despite the heavier taxes, the supercargoes reportedly were able to buy silk, tea and chinaware and also to sell their stock of silver, cloths, lead and long ells (serge) and pay the duties themselves, without a merchant who stood security for their ship. However, despite the good disposition shown by the officials in Ningbo, the Viceroy (Governor-General) was opposed to the English presence there, and although he let them finish their trade, he warned them that they would not be welcome the next year. From the EIC records:

“All the Mandarines from Chusan [Zhoushan] [...] informed us that we must not attempt to come here next Year, and said if we did come, The Tsongtoc [Governor-General] had given them possitive (sic) orders not to receive us”<sup>146</sup>

The governor-general of Canton issued an edict informing the whole foreign community that “in future all Ships must come to the Port of Canton” and that if they tried to go to Zhejiang “they will expose themselves to the necessity of being Obliged to leave the said Port, which will be Attended with a considerable loss of their Time, their Capitall with many other Embarrassments, and running Risques of which they will have reason to repent.”<sup>147</sup>

Despite these rather clear admonitions, the EIC sent Flint again northwards. Flint arrived again in the Zhoushan-Ningbo area, but then proceeded to Tientsin (Tianjin) to deliver a petition to the emperor detailing the grievances of the EIC. The petition prompted the imperial government to launch an investigation into the situation in Canton, which resulted in the dismissal from office of the Hoppo, found guilty of not stopping the corrupt conduct of his subordinates, but Flint was also accused of violating the laws of the empire by trying to open another port in violation of the prohibition. Another issue was the drafting by Flint of the petition in Chinese with the help of his Chinese teacher, Cranmer-Byng and Wills Jr. (2011, p. 230) argue that this, paired with the arrival of Flint, a foreigner who could speak

---

<sup>146</sup> Morse, *Chronicles*, V, p. 62.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.



Chinese, near the capital, reinforced the security concerns of the Qing bureaucracy regarding spies and foreign encroachment. Flint was subsequently imprisoned in Macao for three years, at the end of which he was to return home, and his teacher was beheaded, for “plotting on behalf of foreign merchants.” In an audience with all foreign merchants in Canton, the imperial commissioners told them:

“You must know that you are absolutely not allowed to go into the region of Ningpo [Ningbo]. If you go there again, you must be expelled. [...] You ought to be satisfied to trade quietly in Kwangtung [Guangdong].”<sup>148</sup>

An imperial edict was read in Canton to the foreign community regarding the recent issues:

“Because the said merchant [Flint] had accused the superintendent of maritime customs of many charges, we investigated and found out that the accused superintendent had indeed mismanaged his administration. Thereupon we impartially removed him from his office. We sympathized with your people. You foreigners are ignorant. Although you spread these accusations everywhere, if there were no other fault, we could spare you punishment and graciously forgive you. Now through your testimony We discover that Hung Jen-hui [Flint] persuaded the treacherous people of our Interior to draft the charges in the petition because he wanted to violate our regulations and open another seaport. [...] It is well known that the products of the Interior are rich and plentiful. We do not need to import trifling and non-essential goods from beyond the seas. We specially granted you the privilege of trading simply because you people wished to come here. [...] Our Gracious principle of hospitality towards strangers does not forbid foreigners to trade with us.”<sup>149</sup>

The reasoning used by the Qing authorities implies that China lacked nothing and required nothing from abroad, and that foreigners were welcomed to trade because of the principle of hospitality, not for the mutual benefit that might come from international commerce. Again the implication is that trade was therefore a concession by the benevolent emperor to the outside “barbarians”, which underlines the perceived superiority and centrality of the Chinese empire vis-à-vis the rest of the world. In reality, as already mentioned before, throughout the eighteenth century the Qing government gained an increasing amount of tax

---

<sup>148</sup> Fu Lo-Shu, *Documentary Chronicle*, p. 222.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 223-4.

revenue through the taxation of foreign trade in Canton which, with each passing year, was becoming more and more important to the government budget. Furthermore, as argued by Cranmer-Byng and Wills Jr (2011, p. 183) the growing export trade had the effect of developing several sectors of the economy of southern China, especially the production of tea and its transportation to Canton. The inflow of silver from abroad was also a key factor in the monetization of the country's economy.

The Flint affair, as it became known, brought about repercussions for foreign trade and a reorganization of its management. First of all, foreigners were now officially confined to Canton. Although it was already the preferred port, European traders had not been formally barred from entering other ports since the reopening of 1684 until then. Secondly, foreigners were required to leave Canton when their ships left, so in the offseason they were not allowed to stay there. Furthermore, foreigners were to be confined to the area of their factories, which were buildings located along the river that were rented from the hong, and the hong merchants were made responsible for the behavior of those to whom they provided housing and storage spaces. This was aimed at tightening the control over the foreign population in Canton and always keeping it under control in an area separated from the rest of the city. Unauthorized communication with the interior was forbidden, as the Qing authorities wanted to prevent the passing of information between the foreign merchants and the "treacherous people of the interior." Finally, more soldiers were to be dispatched to Whampoa to maintain order among the sailors, due to the frequent episodes of violence among them.<sup>150</sup>

It can be argued that the "Flint affair" also came about due to the lack of proper diplomatic channels between foreign authorities and the imperial court. All the grievances of the foreign companies and traders could not be presented directly to the government in Beijing, but had to go through the provincial authorities of Canton. There was no regular diplomatic exchange between European countries and China until the Macartney embassy of 1793, and the previous European diplomatic missions were perceived by the Qing as tributary in nature, not as meetings where to confront each other's positions and form a dialogue that could change policies. Flint had to go sail up to Tianjin in order to present the EIC petition to the imperial government, and even that was seen as a grave violation of protocol that brought about severe repercussions. The Cantonese authorities were indeed accommodating to the

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, pp. 225-6.

European merchants, as the smooth conduct of trade and the tax revenues that came from it were important for their careers and personal wealth, but were not interested in making fundamental changes to the system that could potentially disrupt trade in the short-term, even if the long-term benefits might compensate for it. Van Dyke (2007) underlined how it was important for the Hoppo to keep the “machine” of the Canton system running and to leave at the end of their three-year term having maintained revenues going to Beijing and the harmony of the port, without disruptions or fundamental restructurings.

One of the underlying problems of the Canton system was the rise of the contraband trade in the latter half of the eighteenth century which eventually brought about the opium crisis and the war between Britain and China in 1839, but that also complemented the legal trade and allowed it to grow with the silver capital that it generated. Opium had been illegal in China since an edict of the Yongzheng Emperor in 1729 had banned its sale and consumption.<sup>151</sup> Nonetheless, over the years an illegal opium market developed in Canton. Since it was prohibited, the big companies like the EIC did not get involved in its trade due to fears of repercussions on their legal trade if the authorities caught them. A 1750 EIC directive reports the warnings that the Hong merchants themselves made to the English officers regarding the drug trade:

“The Merchants have also informed us that an Officer belonging to one of the English Ships has offered some opium to Sale; as this is a Commodity most strictly prohibited at this Port, we desire that you will make enquires whether any Officer or other person belonging to your Ship is possessed of any, and in case they should, that you will use the most effectually means to prevent its being landed here, which might occasion very great Embarrassment to our Honorable Masters affairs”<sup>152</sup>

Thus, the EIC officers were expected to make sure that no opium was transported to Canton aboard the company ships by any member of the crew as part of their allotted cargo space. The opium trade, however, was actually beneficial to the growth of the legal trade in Canton. The drug could be sold quickly in a matter of days for silver, which could be used to pay for the advances on the tea contracts, which instead took months to be repaid. The opium and tea trade were jointly connected as the former was a means to procure the silver needed for the expansion of the latter. The growth of inland production, mainly of tea, but also of silk

---

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, pp. 162-164.

<sup>152</sup> Morse, *Chronicles*, I, pp. 288-289.

and other Chinese export products, required large advances of silver, as the producers were reluctant to produce more than what they could reasonably expect to sell. Furthermore, despite not selling it directly in Canton, the EIC sold opium at auctions in Bengal, an opium-producing area under its control from 1757, to private traders, who in turn brought it to Canton to be sold illegally (Van Dyke, 2007, pp. 122, 125, 131). As already mentioned, Europeans did not possess commodities that were highly in demand in China; the EIC ships were required by law to have English woollens as a portion of their outward cargo, but demand for this kind of cloth was low, especially in southern China. Therefore, most of the purchases in China were financed by silver. The Seven Years War (1756-63) drained much of the English silver reserves, but also brought Bengal under Company control, giving the EIC tighter control over opium production in the area, and stimulated the development of its trade, since opium was a commodity whose demand in China was on the rise and which could be quickly sold for silver (Van Dyke, 2007, pp. 125, 158). As the contraband trade complemented the growth of the legal trade, the Canton authorities largely tolerated it. Van Dyke (2007, p. 132) argues that without the contraband trade, the legal trade could not have grown so much and as consistently as it did throughout the 140 years<sup>153</sup> of existence of the Canton system and that therefore it was in the Hoppo's interest to tolerate the illegality of these dealings as they indirectly ensured that legal tax revenues would be sent to Beijing. On the other hand, however, in the long term, the opium trade generated an increasing silver outflow from China itself, in a reversal of the trade deficit that had characterized Sino-Western trade up until that point, which raised the price of silver and brought the issue to the attention of the public and the court.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, the growth of private trade, and consequently of contraband, undermined the control exercised by the Hoppo through the Canton institutions and also the effective authority of the big companies like the EIC, which for their part could not control private traders like they could their own employees. However, Cranmer-Byng and Wills, Jr. (p. 237) argue that while trade was increasingly being conducted outside of the established legal channels the Qing institutions were tightening and increasing the strict enforcement of the traditional legal rules and institutions. The occasional discoveries of Catholic converts and clandestine churches in the interior fuelled Qing fears and suspicions of foreign conspiracies, contributed to a negative view of Western influences and prompted

---

<sup>153</sup> Van Dyke considers the Canton System to have effectively begun around 1700 and to have ended with the Opium War.

repressive campaigns against Christianity. Another factor contributing to this negative perception of the Western “barbarians” was the incidents of fights erupting in Whampoa among the crews of different nationalities, which occasionally resulted in deaths and involved the trial of Westerners in the Qing legal system even in cases where no Chinese had been injured.

One such case happened in 1780 when a French sailor of a country ship<sup>154</sup> killed a Portuguese sailor of an EIC company ship. The culprit was apprehended by the Chinese authorities and then executed. This was recorded as “the first instance of a European being executed for the murder of another in China, and was considered to form a dangerous precedent.”<sup>155</sup> Before that, disputes arising from cases of homicide, even by Europeans against Chinese, had been settled without imposing the death sentence. In one case, in 1721, an officer of the Hoppo was accidentally killed and six English sailors were detained in relation to the fact, but then, after protests by the EIC supercargoes, they were released. In 1722, when a Chinese boy was accidentally killed by an English gunner, 2000 taels were paid to as compensation the family and the Cantonese authorities (the family only receiving 350 taels) and the case was thus settled.<sup>156</sup> Already by 1773, however, the Qing officials had become less willing to compromise with the foreign merchants in cases of violence concerning their crews. When before monetary settlement had been generally accepted, in 1773 a death sentence was carried out on an Englishman for the homicide of a Chinese in Macao. The case also brought about an issue of conflict of jurisdiction between the Portuguese and the Qing, as the fact had happened in Macao and had been tried by a Portuguese court, which had cleared the accused of the charges, but then the Qing demanded and obtained the “extradition” of the Englishman who had been accused in order to conduct their own proceedings, which found him guilty and sentenced him to death.<sup>157</sup> A further high-profile case happened in 1784, when a gun salute from an English country ship, the *Lady Hughes*, killed two Chinese and injured two others. In place of the actual culprit, which had “absconded”, the supercargo of the *Lady Hughes* George Smith was taken by the Chinese authorities into Canton. This diplomatic crisis stopped trade in Canton for all other nations as well and communications were cut from Whampoa to the city by order of the Hoppo. From the company account of the incident:

---

<sup>154</sup> Country ships were private English ships trading between India and China, not under company orders but trading with EIC license.

<sup>155</sup> Morse, *The International Relations of The Chinese Empire*, p. 102.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p.101; Morse, *Chronicles*, I, pp. 174-175.

<sup>157</sup> Morse, *International Relations*, pp. 101-102.

“The circumstances moreover which followed the seizure of Mr. Smith were such as plainly indicated that our personal safety was not altogether free from danger, the Avenues leading to the Quay were barricaded & filled with Soldiers [...] no one [among the foreigners] could pretend to say he was safe accustomed as they [the Chinese] are to exact Responsibility from whatever person they think proper to charge with it [...]”<sup>158</sup>

The crisis created a European united front against the Cantonese authorities which had detained Smith. A joint protest was drafted and sent by the officials of all the nationalities<sup>159</sup> in the port while concerted action was taken by them to protect the foreign factories with armed boats. The Governor-General was reportedly surprised at such a united group reaction to a matter that, as far as he was concerned, involved only the English, but the officers from the other nations replied to the Governor-General that “they had joined with us [the English] because they conceived the situation of all Europeans here to be precisely the same, that what happened to one Nation might happen to all [...]”<sup>160</sup> The age-old threat of withholding provisions in case of non-compliance was used once again by the Chinese towards the foreigners if the gunner was not given up. In the end, the gunner was given to the Chinese authorities and then executed by strangulation.

The Lady Hughes affair was a catalyst for all the grievances that the Europeans had gradually accumulated with regards to their treatment within the Chinese legal system. The English officers were undoubtedly shaken by the episode and even talks of demanding extraterritoriality for English subjects started to emerge. Most of all, however, the frustrations arose from the differences between the legal customs of Europe and China. The English lamented how a case of manslaughter was punished by death, but overall the issue was the different perspective on legal responsibility. Collective responsibility as a guiding principle applied to most dealings in Canton, from the security-merchant being responsible for the conduct of the crew of the ship that they secured, to the foreign supercargoes and captains being considered responsible for their subordinates. However, what troubled Europeans was that collective responsibility could apply to criminal proceedings too, as when

---

<sup>158</sup> Morse, *Chronicles*, II, p. 101.

<sup>159</sup> Reportedly there were English, French, Dutch, Danish, and even Americans involved. Morse, *International Relations*, p. 102.

<sup>160</sup> Morse, *Chronicles*, II, p. 103.

the culprit could not be found, then a substitute could be tried in his place. On the matter, the EIC supercargoes wrote:

“We [...] consider these facts as proofs that the Government exercise over us the same absolute and Tyrannical power as towards its own subjects—that in the case of death a man must be given up to them—that it does not admit of a culprit's having escaped, for in that case a substitute must suffer ; or if he be refused the Supra Cargo of the Ship or Chief of the Nation must answer for his crime ; & to complete the rigor of this Law, it does not allow of Manslaughter and Life only can atone, for what in Europe is thought rather a Man's misfortune, than his crime.”<sup>161</sup>

### 3.5. The Macartney Embassy and the revival of formal diplomacy

In 1787, a formal embassy was sent by the British government to Beijing in order to work out a solution to the perceived difficulties related to British trade in China. The ambassador appointed was Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Cathcart, a British officer and member of parliament, whose premature death en route to China, however, put an end to the whole endeavor. His instructions for the negotiations shed light on the purpose of his mission and on the interests of the British government in China, rather than just those of the EIC. Specifically, he was instructed to seek an agreement with the Chinese government for the cession to the British crown of a depot where British merchants may store their goods and, most importantly, where the British would be subject to British law, and the Chinese to Chinese law. The preferred location for such a territorial concession were either in Macao, to be ceded by Portugal with Chinese assent, or a place near Xiamen, which was closer to the silk and tea producing areas.<sup>162</sup>

Interestingly, Lt-Col Cathcart himself showed awareness of the perception on the part of the Chinese of the Europeans, and especially the British, as trouble-makers, and how that could undermine the success of his mission:

“It is evident we can not expect an Establishment, unless the Assurance of better Control over our own People is promised on this occasion [...]. How can so regular a Government as that of China, confide in Us at present, when they annually see,

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, pp. 154-156.

fifty or sixty Sail of our Ships in their Ports, whose Sailors are subject to no Law or authorized Coercion and Subordination?”<sup>163</sup>

On the other hand, the instructions he received underlined the grievances of the British traders in Canton regarding its environment there and the administration of justice. One passage reads:

“Great Britain [...] has long been obliged to pursue this Trade under Circumstances the most discouraging, hazardous to it's (sic) Agents employed in conducting it, and precarious to the various Interests involved in it. At Canton [...] the fair competition of the Market is destroyed by associations of the Chinese, Our Supracargoes are denied open access to the Tribunals of the Country and the fair Execution of it's (sic) Laws, and are kept altogether in a most arbitrary and cruel State of depression incompatible with the very important concerns which are intrusted to them, and such as one hardly supposes could be exercised in any country that pretends to Civilization.”<sup>164</sup>

The same letter of instruction, nonetheless, assigns responsibility for all of these issues not to the Chinese government itself, nor to the emperor, but to the authorities in Canton, a place far away from the center of the political power of China, and warns that the general character of the Chinese nation and its high government should not be deduced from the practices of Canton. It is stated that:

“[...] the relations of various Travellers afford the strongest reason to believe, that The Emperor himself is accessible, that the reception of Foreigners at Peking is courteous, and that the Policy of encouraging foreign Trade is not ill understood there [...] a National character is not to be formed, nor the dispositions of the superior Government estimated from the Practices of a Sea Port, situated at the most distant extremity from the Metropolis and a Province formerly the seat of Pirates and Robbers.”<sup>165</sup>

The key objective for the British was therefore to sidestep the so-called “Canton interest”, that is the authority of the provincial elites, the Hoppos’ and the Governor-Generals’, and to reach directly the government in Beijing, which was thought to be more receptive on

---

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, pp. 158-159.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p. 161.



issues of trade and overall more hospitable towards Europeans than the Cantonese administrators were.

The following attempt at a direct diplomatic envoy to China was made in 1793 with the Macartney embassy. Lord Macartney was already an established politician and diplomat who had served as an envoy to the court of Saint Petersburg and as an official in India. Macartney was received and welcomed by all officials he encountered with the utmost respect, cordiality and honors that a foreign ambassador in China could aspire to get. He personally met with the emperor, and while he had insisted that he would not perform the kowtow, the two parties had reached a compromise in allowing Macartney to kneel on one knee in the same manner as he would before his King. Behind the insistence not to perform the “prostrations” was the symbolic meaning attached to it, given that the gesture could be interpreted as a sign of vassalage or inferiority of Britain vis-à-vis China (Morse, 1910, pp. 54-55). In any case, the issue of the kowtow did not seem to have compromised the embassy, as the ambassador was granted audience three times with the emperor and, as already mentioned, was treated with all honors before and after them. In particular, Macartney had lengthy conversations with “the viceroy”<sup>166</sup>, the newly appointed governor-general of Guangdong and Guanxi (the Liangguang), on his way back from Beijing to Canton, also discussing together the grievances of the British and the proposals put forth by the embassy to address them. Nonetheless, despite the success of the mission from a formal and ceremonial point of view, the Qianlong Emperor did not accept any of the requests made by Macartney. The emperor sent back to the British king a letter in which he answered the requests one by one and presented the reasons for the refusal of each point. Overall, the Emperor stated that whatever privilege would be granted to the British, it would be unfair to all other nations trading at Canton, and that they would all request the same privileges and concessions given to the British.

“[...] O King, your Ambassador has requested my minister, to lay before me some Proposals relating to the Trade of your Subjects: but these Proposals, having a Tendency to alter that whole system of European Commerce, so long established

---

<sup>166</sup> According to Morse, *Chronicles*, II, p. 227, the Viceroy to which Macartney refers to in his writing is the newly appointed Governor-General of the Liangguang, former Governor of Zhejiang, but western sources differ when identifying him by name. This person is most likely Ch'ang Lin, mentioned also in Fu, *Documentary Chronicles*, p. 327, who also refers to him as the newly appointed viceroy of Liangguang. Therefore, he is to be identified with Jue Luo Changlin (1749-1811), 覺羅長麟, whose biography is included in the Draft History of the Qing, the Qing Shih Gao, 清史稿, vol. 343.

here, I cannot therefore assent to them. [...] your Ambassador's Proposals aim at once at the overthrow of this long settled mode of Trade, for the Substitution of another in its Room, but this new Method would be very inconsistent with the good will which we profess for all foreign Nations. It being our constant Maxim to treat them all equally well, without any Partiality. The English are not the only People who trade at Canton; Now, if they were all, after your Example to make the same Requests, could I give satisfactory answers to each of these? [...]"<sup>167</sup>

To the request of opening the ports of Ningbo, Zhoushan and Tianjin, the Emperor replied that “it has been the Rule from remote Periods, that all the Merchants of the European Kingdoms, without exception, should carry on, their Business at Canton” and that the other ports were not equipped to handle trade with the Europeans: “There are no Warehouses prepared for this Trade [in the other ports]. Were your Shipping to go thither, What would they purchase? Besides, There being no Interpreters in these Places, nobody would understand your Language, and no Benefit could thence be derived.” Macartney had also requested a place for trading within Beijing itself, following the precedent of the Russians being allowed to do so. The Emperor replied:

“If Pekin were the Place appointed for your Trade, the Voyage to and from it, would be attended with much more Difficulty. I acknowledge that the Russians had a Place assigned them for their Trade at Pekin; but this was only for a Time,—until a Place had been appointed for them at Keach-tou [Kiakhta]. As soon as this was done, they were all sent thither, and none permitted to remain at Pekin. This Transaction took Place many years ago, and the Russians have ever since traded at Keach-tou, as your People do now at Canton.”

To the proposal that the small island of Zhoushan, off Ningbo, could be settled by British merchants for ease of trade, the Emperor argued again that there were no warehouses nor interpreters, and that no ship could remain there long, probably referring to the unsheltered environment, and that, in any case, “such Concessions are unknown in our Empire, and this Permission is peculiarly inadmissible.” To the petition to be granted a small place near Canton or Macao for the residency of British traders, the Emperor again referred to the long-

---

<sup>167</sup> All of the citations henceforth from the Qianlong Emperor’s reply to King George III are taken from Morse, *Chronicles*, II, Appendix J.

established customs of Canton and argued that the separation of Europeans and Chinese was required in order to prevent disturbances between them:

“As to those Merchants who repair to Canton for the Purpose of Trading the Place of their Habitation is fixed, and confined to certain Boundaries, beyond which they must not go; nor are they permitted to enter the City. Such hitherto has been the Rule, founded on the Precautions necessary to be taken in order to prevent Disputes between our People and your own. [...] the European Merchants are under Mandareens appointed to preside over the Place of their Habitation at Canton, and carefully to protect them from ill usage. Were it not for these Regulations, continual Broils would arise between the Chinese and the Europeans; in which case what must become of my Affection and good Will to these latter? It is proper therefore that all the Merchants should remain in the same Place, and on the same Footing as heretofore.”

The request that British traders be exempt from taxation on their merchandise when moving from Canton to Macao, as many of the permanent residents had to do during the offseason, was also not granted, on the grounds that whatever taxes were imposed on foreigners, they were fair and applied equally to all: “When Taxes are imposed on the Subjects of other Nations, the Rate is always ascertained, and the same Rule is observed for all the European Traders indiscriminately Whatever Kingdom they come from. No more will be required from your People than What is due, nor will less be taken.” Overall, the Emperor concluded by stating: “[...] as the Requests made by your Ambassador militate against the Laws and Usages of this Our Empire, and are at the same Time wholly useless to the End proposed, I cannot acquiesce in them.” Furthermore, he also warned against trying to trade at other ports in the future, as “[...] our Laws are exceedingly severe in such Cases, I shall be under the Necessity of directing my Mandareens to force your Ships to quit these Ports.”

The British Macartney embassy was followed by a Dutch embassy in 1795. Following the defeat to the British in the fourth Anglo-Dutch war in the 1780s and the defeat to the French revolutionary armies in the 1790s, the Netherlands were going through a period of severe crisis. In that context, the VOC operations in China were a mere shadow of what they once were, and in a few years the company itself would cease to exist, therefore the Dutch embassy to Beijing in 1795 did not arise from the need to discuss foreign trade or any such policy issues, but mainly from private interests and ambitions on the part of the Canton authorities. Cranmer-Byng and Wills, Jr. (2011, pp. 249-250) argue that the Canton officials were worried

after the Macartney embassy about the complaints that could have been raised by the British to the imperial court regarding the situation in Canton, and that therefore they solicited an embassy from another European nation that would instead put them in a more favorable light in the eyes of the Emperor. To that end, they let the Dutch chief in Canton, Andreas van Braam Houckgeest, know that the British and the Portuguese were planning to send embassies on the occasion of the Qianlong Emperor's sixtieth year of reign, which was not true, and this prompted the Batavian authorities to send an embassy of their own. The embassy, led by Isaac Titsingh, was made to promise in Canton not to raise any complaints or make any requests to the emperor but simply to give him congratulations. As expected, the embassy was well received by the imperial court, and the Qing Shi Lu records how their envoys were "feasted" alongside other tributaries, with no mention of any substantive diplomatic talks beyond the ceremonies.<sup>168</sup> Thus, this embassy had served the interests of the Canton officials by elevating their reputations in the eyes of their superiors but achieved nothing for the Dutch themselves. As for the foreign relations of Qing China as a whole, Cranmer-Byng and Wills Jr. state that the Dutch embassy had strengthened the impression in the government cliques that the tributary framework could successfully apply to relations with European countries as well. Despite the refusal of all the proposals advanced by Macartney, from the point of view of the Qing government, the British embassy of 1793 had been a success, especially because all the formalities and ceremonies that pertained to a tributary mission had been observed, even despite the compromise on the kowtow, and such was the case also for the subsequent Dutch embassy of 1795, which did not even present any requests, unlike the British. It can be argued, therefore, that the two European embassies of 1793 and 1795 had the effect of stiffening Qing attitudes towards the West, by giving the impression that all foreign relations could be managed within the framework of tributary relations, and thereby creating an even greater divide between the Western customs of conducting international relations and the Chinese one.

The following British embassy to Beijing was the Amherst one of 1816, which was even less successful than the ones preceding it. Since the last envoy of 1793, the Qianlong Emperor had died and the Jiaqing Emperor had acceded to the throne. The Chinese domestic situation had started to deteriorate in the last years of Qianlong, and in the first decades of the new century it had only worsened. The Jiaqing Emperor had inherited an empire whose population was almost double what it was at the beginning of the Qianlong reign, resulting

---

<sup>168</sup> Fu, *Documentary Chronicle*, pp. 333-334.

in shortages of food. The hardships endured by the general population were accentuated by the corruption of the government officials, and rebellions occurred as a consequence; there were at least three provinces affected by rebellion when Jiaqing took charge. Furthermore, the treasury was being drained by the wars, the floods that affected the Yellow River, and the expenses of the Imperial Household.<sup>169</sup> The fiscal rigidity of the Qing state made it hard for the government to muster the resources necessary for its expenditures, leading to the neglect of important public works like the water-conservancy projects fundamental to functioning of the agrarian sector. The salaries of Qing officials did not keep up with rising prices, and corruption followed as bureaucrats sought ways to preserve their standards of living (Hung, 2001, pp. 503-504). According to the EIC committee in Canton, the “causes” that prompted another embassy were:

“[...] the insolent, capricious, vexatious proceedings which the local Government of Canton has for some time past held towards the Company's Representatives there, by which they have obstructed, and embarrassed the conduct of the Company's Commerce, have shewn it to be exposed to arbitrary interruption,—to uncertainty and insecurity.”<sup>170</sup>

For the EIC, the issues were clearly of the same nature as those that prompted the 1793 embassy. This time, however, the instructions for Lord Amherst, the head of the current embassy, were somewhat more limited in scope. In relaying the British prince regent's instruction to Lord Amherst, Lord Castlereagh maintained, arguably somewhat hyperbolically, that without changes in the management of foreign trade in Canton, the whole trade was in peril: “[...] repeated representations have been made by the Supra Cargoes of the East India Company of the difficulties to which their trade has for some time been exposed, by the vexatious proceedings of the local Authorities at Canton; and that unless steps be taken without delay, there is reason to apprehend the failure of the Commerce altogether.”<sup>171</sup> It was particularly emphasized to Amherst to seek a direct line of communication between the EIC merchants in Canton and the government institutions in Beijing, bypassing the Cantonese authorities. Furthermore, while the opening of other ports

---

<sup>169</sup> Fang Chao-Ying, “Yung-yen” in *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912)* edited by Arthur W. Hummel (1943).

<sup>170</sup> Morse, *Chronicles*, III, pp. 284-285

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, p.279.

for trade would have been welcome, the priority was obtaining a formal, continuous, diplomatic residence in Beijing. To that end, the following was stated:

“If your Lordship should be able to obtain permission for the Company's Ships, in addition to the Port of Canton, to resort to some other Port to the Northward, it would be considered an acquisition of real importance to the Commerce with China; but there is nothing which would contribute more to the promotion of the objects of your Lordship's Mission, than the establishment of a Resident Minister as Agent at Peking, through whom the concerns of the Subjects of the British Empire might be treated.”<sup>172</sup>

Lord Amherst was also to assure the emperor that a Chinese official sent as an envoy to Britain would have been welcomed and received with all proper honors by the prince regent. Therefore, besides the aim of obtaining redress for the British merchants' affairs in Canton, there was arguably an interest on the part of the British government to formalize a relationship of equality between the two empires by the exchanging of embassies in each other's countries, which would also put the Chinese empire on the same formal level as all the other European powers in an international system whose members, intended as the European powers and the United States, were all formal equals. Naturally, the imperial government of China had no such views of equality with the other countries of the world, given that the emperor was perceived as the “Son of Heaven” with a mandate to rule all mankind.

Nonetheless, the embassy stalled early on the issue of the kowtow, Lord Amherst was advised to refuse to do it, just as Macartney did. In this case, however, no compromise was reached on the issue, and the embassy was dismissed and ordered to go back to their country. Apparently, the breaking point was reached when an audience had been arranged with the emperor himself, and Amherst, and the vice-ambassador, refused to attend it citing ill health and exhaustion from the voyage. In a letter from the Jiaqing Emperor to the Prince Regent, he stated that:

“The Ambassador suddenly affirmed that he was exceedingly ill and could not move a step. I thought it a possible case, that the Ambassador was taken suddenly ill, and therefore ordered the assistant Ambassador to enter and see me; but both the assistant Ambassadors also affirmed, that they were ill. This was rudeness, which was

---

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p. 283.

never exceeded. I did not inflict severe chastisement, but sent them away the same day with an order to return to their own Country.”<sup>173</sup>

Nonetheless, the Emperor decided to cast aside the misbehavior of the envoys and blame it on the ambassador himself, rather than on the character of the British government in general, and sent a reply to the prince regent, since in any case the memorial and the presents had been duly sent by the British sovereign as was customary of the tributary embassies.

“It is considered, that You O King from the distance of several times ten thousand Le respectfully presented a written representation and duly offered up Presents—that Your Ambassador's inability to communicate in your behalf with profound veneration and sincere devotedness is his fault; the disposition of profound respect and obedience felt by you O King I indeed really perceive.”<sup>174</sup>

Further, he concludes by stating that a regular embassy need not be sent to Beijing:

“Hereafter there is no occasion for you to send an Ambassador so far, to be at the trouble, passing over mountains and crossing seas. If you can but pour out the heart in dutiful obedience it is not necessary at stated times to come to Court, ere it be pronounced that you turn towards the transforming influences (which emanate from this Land). This Imperial Mandate is now given that you may for ever obey it.”<sup>175</sup>

The language used by the emperor is particularly interesting as it clearly displays the complete adherence to the Sinocentric worldview and an attitude of formal superiority of China towards Britain. Indeed, he explicitly calls the King of England to the obedience of the imperial mandate of China. The Amherst embassy was the last attempt by the British government to initiate high-level diplomatic talks with the Chinese empire before the Opium Wars.

### 3.6. The Opium War

In 1820 the Jiaqing Emperor died, and his son acceded to the throne becoming the Daoguang Emperor. Despite inheriting a government whose treasury was in a state of depletion, in the first years of his reign, the Daoguang Emperor pursued an aggressive foreign policy on the western frontier, conducting a successful military campaign against a rebellion in Xinjiang in

---

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p.301

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p. 302.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

1826-28.<sup>176</sup> Most importantly, the reign of Daoguang was marked by the defeat at the hands of the British in the First Opium War (1839-1842). The immediate causes of the war were tensions with Britain resulting from the opium trade in Canton. In 1835, it was reported that the population of China had increased to four hundred million people.<sup>177</sup> This demographic growth was not followed by an increase in national income, which caused prices to rise. In the meantime, the opium trade had grown so much that silver had started flowing out of the country, causing a shortage in the domestic economy. Besides the moral argument for prohibition, in the 1830s the economic reason for stopping the import of opium also played a role in the renewal of efforts by the central government to enforce the ban on the drug. The governor-general of Huguang, the provinces of Hubei and Hunan, Lin Zexu was a hard opponent of the opium trade and had taken steps to eliminate it in the provinces under his authority by arresting dealers and suppliers, confiscating the drug, but also by having “prescriptions made out for the gradual curing of the addicts.”<sup>178</sup> In late 1838, Lin was appointed by the Emperor as “Imperial Commissioner with plenipotentiary powers to examine the opium situation at Canton and put an end to the evil.”<sup>179</sup>

Lin had very extensive powers conferred on him by the Emperor to bring an end to the opium trade, even overriding the authority of provincial officials like the Hoppo and the Governor-General. Lin conducted a strong campaign to eliminate the opium trade from Canton. He issued orders for the requisition of all the opium in the foreigners’ possession, and to that end he resorted to stopping trade altogether and “imprisoned” all the foreigners within their factories, with no possibility of exiting. This state of confinement lasted for more than a month with the factories being put under armed guard, until more than 20.000 chests of opium were delivered to the Chinese officials, which amounted to about half of the total import of the drug to China for the previous season of 1838-39.<sup>180</sup> The British trade supervisor for China, Captain Elliot, was Lin’s main interlocutor on the Western side during this affair and negotiated under duress, as the foreign community was locked down in the factories, the surrender of the British-owned opium. The confiscated drug was destroyed, and the legal trade was allowed to restart. The strict enforcement of the prohibition in Canton, however, had the consequence of moving the smuggling operations elsewhere along the Chinese coast and of raising the price of opium, from 500 to 3000 Spanish dollars for a

---

<sup>176</sup> Fang, “Ch’ang-ling” in *Eminent Chinese*, ed. Hummel.

<sup>177</sup> Fang, “Min-ning” in *ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Tu Lien-chê, “Lin Tsê-hsü” in *ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Morse, *International Relations*, p. 210; *ibid.*, Ch. IX.



chest in the city of Canton.<sup>181</sup> Following the end of the lockdown, moreover, Elliot ordered that every British subject was to leave Canton and no British ship was to enter the port, also due to the requirement for the captains of each ship to sign a bond in which they declared, under penalty of death for the transgressors and the requisition of the ship and its cargo, that no opium was carried in it. He publicly stated that:

“[...] there is no safety for a handful of defenceless men in the grasp of the government at Canton; because it would be derogatory from the dignity of their sovereign and nation to forget all the insults and wrongs which have been perpetrated, till full justice be done, and till the whole trade and intercourse be placed upon a footing honourable and secure to this empire, and to England.”<sup>182</sup>

With the British trade officially at a standstill, merchants of other nationalities started to work as intermediaries between Chinese and British. The island of Hong Kong was then used as a depot for the British, where other traders, mainly Americans, would take the cargo of English products and Indian cotton, bring it up to Whampoa and acquire tea that would be transhipped to British vessels and brought to England. It was in Hong Kong that an incident occurred which later brought to the firing of the first shots of the war between China and Britain. On July 7th, 1839, a Chinese man was killed during a brawl that implicated British sailors.<sup>183</sup> Captain Elliot decided to conduct a trial under British law aboard a British vessel regarding the violent affair, but the killer could not be identified. Lin and the other Chinese officials did not recognize the jurisdiction of the British over this case, as the established precedent was for acts of murder committed by foreigners in China to be judged by a Chinese court. The issue over jurisdiction was the catalyst for yet another diplomatic crisis between the British and the Chinese. Lin ordered food supplies to be cut off from Hong Kong, where the British ships were anchored. Elliot's had ordered British ships not to enter the port of Canton, but one ship actually ignored the order and went to Whampoa anyway, its captain signed the controversial bond and began trading operations. This event showed to the Chinese that the embargo by Elliot could not be rigidly enforced, and that trade might soon normally resume with the British without the need to compromise with Elliot on the issue of the Hong Kong homicide case or the matter of the opium-bond. As Elliot did not give up the culprit or one in his stead as required by the Chinese, the situation escalated, with the

---

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p. 232.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 235.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p. 237.

Chinese threatening to surround the British ship with war junks and seize all the people they deemed involved in the homicide affair and/or connected with opium. The war started on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1839, when twenty-nine war junks were sent to Hong Kong to pressure Elliot to give up the murderer and two British warships present in the area opened fire to get the Chinese fleet to withdraw.<sup>184</sup>

The war was eventually won by the British in 1842. The peace treaty of Nanking stipulated the following provisions: the island of Hong Kong was ceded to Great Britain in perpetuity; four more ports beside Canton were opened to British trade: Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai; the hong-merchant system was abolished; compensation was to be paid for the opium confiscated and for the expenses of the war expedition. A supplementary treaty, known as the Treaty of the Bogue, was negotiated in 1843. It stipulated the most favored nation status for Great Britain and the extraterritoriality of its subjects in China.

An important factor, perhaps the most important one, in the victory of the British was the technological superiority of their armed forces compared to the Qing defenders (Headrick, 1979, pp. 240-243). The British effectively employed steam-powered ships and modern cannons against the Chinese war junks and older artillery pieces. During the course of the war, the British never ventured far inland but instead attacked cities, ports and fortifications along the coast and rivers where their navy could adequately support the land troops, but it was enough to bring the Imperial government to the negotiating table. The tipping point was the conquest of Zhenjiang, situated at the junction of the Yangtze River with the Grand Canal, from which the British could compromise the supply of rice to Beijing itself.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that the unpreparedness that Qing China exhibited in the open conflict with Britain was the result of the lack of information-gathering at the places of interaction between China and the West, such as Canton. Van Dyke (2007, pp. 162-163) summarizes the issue by pointing to the focus by the Cantonese authorities on keeping the “bureaucratic machine well-oiled and running smoothly” that allowed for some important changes in the outside world to go unnoticed by the central government, and that the eventual downfall of China is to be attributed also to the lack of an “administrative structure that could collect information about foreigners and international markets, analyse those data to determine their significance and then respond appropriately.” For instance, customs authorities only recorded the number of cannons and amount of ammunition aboard each

---

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, pp. 246-247.

ship, but did not document the evolution in the design of the weapons that the Western vessels had and this allowed for the coastal defences, and the military technology as a whole, not to be upgraded accordingly (Van Dyke, p. 110). Another major advantage that the British had was the steamship, which allowed them to navigate shallow waters and narrow rivers in ways that sailing ships could not. Already in 1835 a steamship was present in Canton, its engine was inspected by the Chinese, and then, when it tried to force its way upriver, it was stopped by the river fortifications after hours of bombardment; the inadequateness of the traditional defences was already evident four years before the start of the Opium War, but no concrete steps were taken to address these shortcomings. It was not until the war had already begun that the Qing military started to seek information about the foreign technologies employed by the British and tried to build vessels that could match the enemy ones. In aspects besides military and naval technology, like the overall changes in the international environment and trade patterns, information-gathering and analysis were lacking, and this hampered any effort at reform that the government might have initiated to counter the widening technological gap with the Western powers and the corruption and smuggling that had become endemic to the Southern coast of China. Finally, once the opium trade had started to drain the country of silver the imperial government set out to investigate the matter, but the heavy-handed approach in Canton only heightened the tensions with the foreign community and eventually resulted in open war with Great Britain, at the end of which China was forced to accept the terms imposed by a victorious foreign power that demanded freer trade, extraterritoriality of its subjects but most importantly that put China on the same level as a “barbarian” country such as Great Britain. It was the first step towards the gradual erosion of Chinese sovereignty, the first of what came to be known as the “unequal treaties” forced upon China by the Western powers, and later also by Japan, which dismantled the sino-centric world order that had existed in East Asia up until then, and ushered in a new era in which the Asian countries were compelled to conclude the unequal treaties forced by the West through the use of military force. As Kim (1980, pp. 3-4) remarks, the Western forceful intrusion in East Asia resulted in the dismantling of the traditional regional order centered upon tributary relations and Chinese centrality, but at the same time it imposed a system of international relations based on the equal sovereignty of all nations. The formal equality of China with the Western countries represented a step down from the claim of Chinese supremacy over the world and the Chinese emperor as the Son of Heaven, but the provision of the treaties that China was forced to sign over the last decades of the

nineteenth century arguably show that the “formal equality” of China was in contradiction with the multiple concessions that were made under duress to the Western powers.

## Conclusions

The Ming and the Qing dynasties had elements of commonality in their handling of relations with European powers. Both were distrustful of foreign encroachment and influence. Throughout the Ming dynasty, Europeans were kept at a safe distance by the central government. They were not part of the traditional Chinese tributary system, through which Ming rulers framed their foreign policy, and so they were excluded from the official diplomatic channels that other tributaries exploited to conduct trade. It was through backchannels, dealing semi-formally with provincial authorities or private merchants, that the Portuguese, the Spanish and later the Dutch gained access to the huge market of the Middle Kingdom. The Portuguese were successful when they were allowed by the Guangdong officials to reside in Macao, a territorial concession the likes of which would not be replicated until the cession of Hong Kong to Great Britain after the First Opium War, but Macao was very different from Hong Kong. The latter was obtained through force, and the British had full jurisdiction and sovereignty over it, while the former was granted through negotiations with the local authorities that resulted in a mutually beneficial deal for both parties, but the Chinese retained nominal sovereignty over the colony and could intrude in its affairs whenever there was the need to do so. Macao, as would be Manila and Dutch Taiwan, was outside of the tributary system, but in the latter half of the sixteenth century the prohibitory rules on foreign trade were relaxed as the Ming court realized that illegal trade and smuggling were rampant on the southern Chinese coast, and that the maritime bans were not effective in curbing it. The silk-silver trade flourished through Manila and Macao, and the Europeans and the maritime Chinese were its key players. In essence, no high-level diplomatic exchange shaped the relationship of the Ming Dynasty with European countries, the interactions were instead mainly initiated at the lower echelons of both parties, between Chinese provincial authorities and coastal merchants on one side, and maritime explorers, merchants and commercial company officials on the European side. The arrangements that were made were a compromise of the official government stance and the local practical economic and security interests, like in the establishment of Macao, or the negotiations with the Dutch in the 1620s. The most important decision taken in Beijing that had an impact on foreign trade was the Haicheng opening of 1567, but that concerned mainly the Ming subjects' activities overseas and legalized a trade that was taking place regardless of the government regulations anyway.

The Fujianese maritime-commercial private sector became incorporated in a state in its own right amid the dynastic transition between Ming and Qing and gave rise to the Ming loyalist

Zheng state. The Zheng regime in many ways resembled a European chartered company like the VOC in the war and state-making activities in maritime East Asia. The attachment of its rulers and elites to the Ming legacy, identity and culture eventually undermined the project of realizing a true Chinese maritime state; The Zheng were almost continually engaged in conflict against the rising Qing dynasty for control of the mainland. The desire for the restoration of the Ming dynasty on mainland China and the drive to expand in maritime East Asia at the same time worked to undermine the overall Zheng strategic position and eventually brought about its defeat by the Qing dynasty.

The Qing dynasty incorporated to a certain degree the commercial orientation of the Zheng in its foreign policy and was overall more flexible and open to Western commercial interactions. While the coastal evacuations and sea bans of the early decades of Qing rule were highly detrimental to the Chinese southern coastal merchant classes, as soon as the Zheng threat to its rule was overcome these restrictive policies were repealed in favor of a more open stance towards foreign trade. The early Kangxi era also saw a general relaxation of all the Ming-era limitations on commerce. Private Chinese overseas trade was permitted, and four ports were open to all Europeans in 1684. The institution of Beijing-appointed customs superintendents brought the taxation of foreign trade under the control of the central government at the expense of the provincial elites and, together with an incentive system that involved all customs officials, fostered the growth of trade. The relative importance of silk diminished while the European increasing demand for tea fuelled the expansion of the trade in Canton, which quickly became the preferred port for conducting business. While in the Ming dynasty there was no official framework for the handling of trade with the Europeans, but rather a series of ad-hoc arrangements mostly arising from compromises with local authorities and not a direct involvement of the Imperial Court, in the Kangxi reign the European trade was officially permitted in the designated ports by imperial decree. The tributary system still applied to the countries that had been originally bound to it, but the Western countries that sought commerce with the Middle Kingdom were considered outside of it, and were not required to send tribute, nor embassies to formalize their status vis-à-vis China.

The negotiations with the Russians that led to the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk show the flexibility of the early Qing in dealing with a foreign power. In this case, both parties negotiated on the basis of equality and worked out an arrangement that probably avoided an armed conflict. Qing China and Tsarist Russia did not embrace the principles of equality among nations and mutual distrust following the repeated skirmishes along the frontier lands

had only heightened tensions, nonetheless, through the mediation of the Jesuits, a compromise was reached for settling the border dispute that guaranteed peace and also stimulated trade, again outside of the tributary system.

In the 1700s, Qing power reached its zenith. The wars of expansion in Central Asia extended Chinese control westwards and cemented the status of the Middle Kingdom as the unquestioned hegemon of Asia. Despite the internal economic issues and social unrest that emerged in the early 1800s, the revival of formal diplomatic missions by European powers, namely the Dutch and British embassies, and the successes and heights of the Qianlong era arguably lured the Qing imperial government into a false sense of security at least relative to foreign threats. In addition, the lack of a reliable system of information gathering about the Western world that could adequately inform the central government of all the changes that were already visible in places like Canton led to the underestimation of the Western rapidly advancing technologies in both military and naval fields. Furthermore, as the illegal trade in opium provided quick capital for the expansion of the legal trade, its proliferation was tolerated by the local Cantonese authorities, and only when silver became scarce as a result did the central government fully grasp the extent of the problem and tried to root it out, but it was already late.

The heavy-handed response to the opium crisis antagonized the foreign community of Canton. Renewed emphasis was given to the goal of securing better conditions for the trade and the treatment of foreigners. Grievances over the treatment of foreign subjects within the Chinese judicial system resurfaced and would later lead to the granting, after the First Opium War, of extraterritorial privileges for British, and then other Western, subjects in China. The principle of collective responsibility, embraced by the Chinese and applied to foreigners in Canton, was at odds with the legal tradition of individual responsibility common to the Western legal systems, and was one of the main points of contention between the Western and the Chinese in the lead-up to the conflict. On a diplomatic level, the tributary system and the Qing hierarchical conception of international relations ran counter to the Western international order based on a community of formally equal sovereign states, even though a hierarchical order, albeit an informal one with Great Britain at its center, also existed in the Western world in the nineteenth century.

Ultimately, the First Opium War broke out as a result of the repressive campaign against the opium trade, which had a moral rationale, but also a very tangible economic aspect to it. Nonetheless, deeper underlying factors had set up a “collision course” between the West and

China in the nineteenth century in the preceding decades, if not centuries. In the Ming and early Qing era, Europeans had to be content with what arrangements could be found for trading with China, despite the globe spanning Iberian and Dutch colonial empires, against the powerful Chinese state they could not impose their will as they did in America or in weaker Southeast Asian countries. When armed confrontations took place, such as in the Battle of Tunmen in 1521 against the Portuguese or the Battle of Liaoluo Bay in 1633 against the Dutch, the Chinese had the upper hand on the European forces. By the nineteenth century, however, Great Britain, propelled by its industry, technological advancements and imperial expansion, was no match for the weakened Qing state that was now suffering from internal social and economic unrest. Furthermore, the imperial court itself underestimated the threats from the West, and only grasped the extent of the inadequateness of its defences during the war. A “century of humiliation” followed, China was forced to accept the terms imposed by the Western powers in the “unequal treaties”, to open its ports to them, to guarantee the extraterritorial privileges of the foreign subject and to cede parts of its territory. From the heights of the Qianlong-era, in a little over a century the Qing dynasty ceased to exist amid encroachment from outside, defeats in the two Opium Wars, the Sino-French war of 1884-85, the Sino-Japanese war of 1895, and the Eight-Nation Alliance intervention of 1900, and internal strife and rebellions, most notably the Taiping rebellion (1850-1864), the Boxer uprising (1899-1901), and finally the Xinhai revolution of 1911. From the Treaty of Nanking (1842) onward, the traditional East Asian Sino-centric order gradually disappeared, as did the tributary system that had governed regional relations up until then.

Overall, Qing China was initially flexible and accommodating when it came to the commercial intercourse with Europe; the structure for the management of foreign trade put in place during the Kangxi reign, fostered the growth of commerce, that brought a large influx of silver, while also ensuring that the security concerns of the central government were addressed by restricting the movement of Europeans to specific areas within designated ports and their interactions with authorized merchants, pilots, compradors and government officials. Compared with the ad-hoc arrangements of the Ming-era, the Qing dynasty established a system of foreign commercial relations that existed parallel to the tributary order, open to all foreigners who wished to trade on the same terms, whether private traders or large companies, and that also guaranteed a level of internal competition that ensured that prices did not deviate from the market rates. This system successfully functioned for more than a century, but in the long term, its weaknesses were not addressed, and in the nineteenth



century, as the world was rapidly changing, imperial China was not quick enough to adapt, and as a result was made to endure a “century of humiliation”.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Blussé, J.L., N.C. Everts, W.E. Milde, and Yung-ho Ts'ao, (ed.). 2000. *De Dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, Taiwan: 1629–1662, IV, 1655-1662*. The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis.

1891-1909. *Dagh-Registers van 't Casteel Batavia*. (vols. 1663-1679). Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen.

Fu, Lo-Shu. 1966. *A documentary chronicle of Sino-Western relations, 1644-1820*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.

Groeneveldt, W. P. 1876. *Notes on the Malay Archipelago and Malacca. Compiled from Chinese Sources*.

Morse, Hosea Ballou. 1926-1929. *The chronicles of the East India company trading to China, 1635-1834*. Vol. I-V. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Navarrete, Domingo Fernández. 1676. *Tratados históricos, políticos, éticos y religiosos de la China*.

1963. *Selected Compilation of the Veritable Records of the Holy Ancestor of the Qing Dynasty (清聖祖實錄選輯)*. Taipei City: Bank of Taiwan Economic Research Office.

*Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi-lu: an open access resource*, translated by Geoff Wade. Singapore: Asia Research Institute and the Singapore E-Press, National University of Singapore.

Sun, Yat-Sen. 1924. *The Three Principles of The People*. Translated by Frank W. Price.

Xi, Jinping. 2021. “Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China.”

### Secondary Sources

Andrade, Tonio. 2011. *Lost Colony: the untold story of China's first great victory over the West*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Andrade, Tonio. 2004. “The Company's Chinese Pirates: How the Dutch East India Company Tried to Lead a Coalition of Pirates to War against China, 1621-1662.” *Journal of World History* (University of Hawai'i Press) 15 (4): 415-444.

- Bassett, D.K. 1960. "The Trade of the English East India Company in the Far East 1623-1684." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge University Press).
- Blussé, Leonard. 1996. "No Boats to China. The Dutch East India Company and the Changing Pattern of the China Sea Trade, 1635-1690." *Modern Asian Studies* (Cambridge University Press) 30 (1): 51-76.
- Boxer, Charles R., 1963. *The Great Ship from Amacon: Annals of Macao and the Old Japan Trade, 1555-1640*. Lisbon: Centro De Estudos Historicos Ultra-Marinos.
- Boxer, Charles R. 1946. "Portuguese and Spanish Rivalry in the Far East during the 17th Century." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (2): 150-164.
- Campbell, William. 1903. *Formosa under the Dutch*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.
- Chang, T'ien-Tsê. 1934. *Sino Portuguese Trade from 1514 to 1644: A Synthesis of Portuguese and Chinese Sources*. Leyden.
- Cheng, Weichung. 2012. *War, trade and piracy in the China Seas (1622-1683)*. University of Leiden.
- Cooper, Michael. 1972. "The Mechanics of the Macao-Nagasaki Silk Trade." *Monumenta Nipponica* (Sophia University) 27 (4): 423-433.
- Cranmer-Byng, John L., and Jr., John E. Wills. 2011. "Trade and Diplomacy with Maritime Europe, 1644-c. 1800." In *China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions*, by Jr et al. John E. Wills, 183-254. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davidson, James Wheeler. 1903. *The Island of Formosa, Past and Present*. London and New York: Macmillan & Co.
- Dunning, Chester. 1995. "Crisis, Conjuncture, and the Causes of the Time of Troubles." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 19: 97-119.
- Fairbank, J. K., and S. Y. Têng. 1941. "On The Ch'ing Tributary System." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 6 (2): 135-246.

- Flynn, Dennis O., and Arturo Giráldez. 1995. "Arbitrage, China, and World Trade in the Early Modern Period." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (Brill) 38 (4): 429-448.
- Flynn, Dennis O., and Arturo Giráldez. 1995. "Born with a "Silver Spoon": The Origin of World Trade in 1571." *Journal of World History* (University of Hawai'i Press) 6 (2): 201-221.
- Flynn, Dennis O., and Arturo Giráldez. 1996. "Silk for Silver: Manila-Macao Trade in the 17th Century." *Philippine Studies* (Ateneo de Manila University) 44 (1): 52-68.
- Fujitani, James. 2016. "The Ming Rejection of the Portuguese Embassy of 1517: A Reassessment." *Journal of World History* (University of Hawai'i Press) 27 (1): 87-102.
- Morse, Hosea Ballou. 1910. *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, The Period of Conflict, 1834-1860*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- Hang, Xing. 2015. *Conflict and commerce in maritime East Asia : the Zheng family and the shaping of the modern world, c. 1620-1720*. Cambridge University Press.
- Headrick, Daniel R. 1979. "The Tools of Imperialism: Technology and the Expansion of European Colonial Empires in the Nineteenth Century." *The Journal of Modern History* 51 (2): 231-263.
- Hummel, Arthur W., ed. 1943. *Eminent Chinese Of The Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)*. Washington: United States Government Printing Office.
- Hung, Ho-fung. 2001. "Imperial China and Capitalist Europe in the Eighteenth-Century Global Economy." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 24 (4): 473-513.
- Kaufman, Alison Adcock. 2010. "The "Century of Humiliation," Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order." *Pacific Focus* 25 (1): 1-33.
- Kazui, Tashiro, and Susan Downing Videen. 1982. "Foreign Relations during the Edo Period: Sakoku Reexamined." *The Journal of Japanese Studies* (The Society for Japanese Studies) 8 (2): 283-306.
- Kim, Key-Hiuk. 1980. *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order. Korea, Japan, and the Chinese Empire, 1860-1882*. University of California Press.
- Kiriloff, Constantine. 1969. "The Early Relations Between Russia and China." *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 1-32.

- Kops, Henriette Rahusen-de Bruyn. 2022. "Not Such an 'Unpromising Beginning': The First Dutch Trade Embassy to China, 1655-1657." *Modern Asian Studies* (Cambridge University Press) 36 (3): 535-578. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3876647>.
- Kuhn, Philip A. 1984. "Chinese views of social classification." In *Class and Social Stratification in Post-Revolution China*, by James Watson, 16-29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Laver, Michael S. 2011. *The Sakoku Edicts and the Politics of Tokugawa Hegemony*. Cambria Press.
- Liu, Kwang-ching. 1980. "Foreword." In *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan, and the Chinese Empire, 1860-1882*, by Key-Hiuk Kim. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Liu, Yu. 2008. "The Intricacies of Accommodation: The Proselytizing Strategy of Matteo Ricci." *Journal of World History* 19 (4): 465–487.
- Massarella, Derek. 1993. "Chinese, Tartars and "Thea" or a Tale of Two Companies: The English East India Company and Taiwan in the Late Seventeenth Century." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Cambridge University Press) 3 (3): 393-426.
- Mathee, Rudi. 1995. "Exotic substances: the introduction and global spread of tobacco, coffee, cocoa, tea, and distilled liquor, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries." In *Drugs and Narcotics in History*, by Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, 24–51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ng, Chin-Keong. 2017. *Boundaries and Beyond: China's Maritime Southeast in Late Imperial Times*. NUS Press.
- Osiander, Andreas. 2001. "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth." *International Organization* (The MIT Press) 55 (2): 251-287.
- Oxnam, Robert B. 1973. "Policies and Institutions of the Oboi Regency 1661-1669." *The Journal of Asian Studies* (Association for Asian Studies) 32 (2): 265-286.
- Parthesius, Robert. 2010. *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters. The Development of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Shipping Network in Asia 1595-1660*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Perdue, Peter C. 2010. "Boundaries and Trade in the Early Modern World: Negotiations at Nerchinsk and Beijing." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43 (3): 341–56.

- Schottenhammer, Angela. 2010. "Characteristics of Qing China's Maritime Trade Politics, Shunzhi Through Qianlong Reigns." In *Trading Networks in Early Modern East Asia*, edited by Angela Schottenhammer, 101-154. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Sebes, Joseph S. 1978. "China's Jesuit Century." *The Wilson Quarterly* 2 (1): 170-183.
- Shepherd, John Robert. 1993. *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600-1800*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Toby, Ronald P. 1977. "Reopening the Question of Sakoku: Diplomacy in the Legitimation of the Tokugawa Bakufu." *The Journal of Japanese Studies* (The Society for Japanese Studies) 3 (2): 323-363.
- Toby, Ronald P. 1984. *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu*. Princeton University Press.
- Tremml-Werner, Birgit. 2015. *Spain, China, and Japan in Manila, 1571-1644. Local Comparisons and Global Connections*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Tsao, Kai-fu. 1974. "K'ANG-HSI AND THE SAN-FAN 三藩 WAR." *Monumenta Serica* 31: 108-130.
- Van Dyke, Paul A. 2007. *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Wakeman, Frederic E. 1985. *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China*. Vol. II. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Waley-Cohen, Joanna. 1998. "Religion, War, and Empire-Building in Eighteenth-Century China." *International History Review* 20: 336-352.
- Wang, Bing. 2009. "The Inscription on Tomás Pereira's Tombstone and the Edict of Toleration From the Emperor Kangxi." *Revista de Cultura de Macau* 32: 73-86.
- Wills Jr., John E. 1979. "Maritime China from Wang Chih to Shih Lang: Themes in Periferal History." In *From Ming to Ch'ing. Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth Century China*, edited by John E Wills and Jonathan D. Spence, 201-238. Yale University Press.
- Wills Jr., John E. 2011. "Maritime Europe and the Ming." In *China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions*, by Jr et al. John E. Wills, edited by John E Wills, 24-77. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Witek, S.J., John W. 2011. "Catholic Missions and the Expansion of Christianity, 1644–1800. by John E. Wills, Jr et al., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 135–182." In *China and Maritime Europe, 1500–1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions*, by Jr. John E. Wills, 135–182. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.