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Introduction

The New York of the 1820s and 1830s was a city opening itself to the world. The ships of John Jacob Astor, the merchant prince, with such captains as Samuel Hill at the helm, had opened the way to the south seas and the ports of East Asia in the years from 1780 to 1820. By 1826, the year that pious and practical business man, D. W. C. Olyphant was making his way to China to set up a trading firm and to help in the task of evangelizing the people of the Celestial Kingdom, his home city was challenging the supremacy of the New England China trade ports of Salem and Boston.

Manhattan, captured so well in the opening chapter of Melville's epic, Moby Dick, is the subject of this essay. Just where on this island borough will one find collections of archival materials that bring to life the intertwined worlds of Canton and New York as they existed in the final years of the Old China Trade? Two such set of collections are found on Manhattan's west side at the New-York Historical Society and the Burke Library of the Union Theological Seminary. Another group of collections are found within the various subdivisions of the Research Division of the New York Public Library. This paper examines these collections. It suggests those problems in China Trade history that each collection can help illuminate and surveys the holdings that make up each of these collections.

Prelude: China Mission History and China Trade History

I am not a China Trade historian; rather, I am a student of the American Protestant missionary enterprise in China. Over the past twenty years I have explored the origins, the evolution, and the present-day state of the ongoing effort to create a Christian China. However, as historians such as Valentin H. Rabe, James A. Field, and Stuart Creighton Miller have demonstrated, there has existed, over the course of the past two hundred years, a close relationship between the American trader and the American missionary. The merchants who pioneered the China Trade in New England and in New York were the same men who helped to found, and then support, the American Protestant missionary enterprise. The interdenominational American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the first of the American foreign mission boards, was one of a number of such mission agencies supported by the merchants' funds. The discovery of this strong link between missionary and merchant has forced me, and others in the field of mission history, to become familiar with the
archival collections on the China Trade as well as primary published sources on that trade that are found in the larger library collections. Because I teach in Manhattan, I have come to know the relevant collections on this island that was home to both Olyphant, the evangelist merchant, and Melville, the merchant seaman, customs house official, and astute recorder of New York and New England's maritime enterprise.

The New-York Historical Society (NYHS) 170 Central Park West, New York, NY 10024; Phone: (212) 873-3400; Director: James B. Bell.

How was the China trade carried out? What were the procedures and patterns followed when those American merchants and supercargos carried on this trade with the Celestial Empire? What was life like for the China trader and his family, for the China-bound ship's captain, and for the ordinary seaman journeying to and living in the South China cities of Macao, Wambua, and Guangzhou? These are some of the questions that must be addressed if we are to understand the trade in its various dimensions and if we are to obtain a Dilthystic—i.e., a participant's-perspective of the Old China trade. The manuscripts and the published materials that make up part of the collection of the New-York Historical Society helps us answer such questions and allows us to develop such a close-to-the-events perspective.

First, one must examine those published works within the NYHS collection that allow us to address these questions. Among these published works are books by China traders and their relatives. There are also biographies and journals of American missionaries to China. Finally, there are books on the various expositions of Chinese art and curios that Professor Goldstein has written about.

These published materials provide a starting point but the student of trade will undoubtedly feel that the documents collection is of even greater value as he pursues his research. The collection contains different types of material on the Old China Trade. Each type will illuminate a specific aspect of this transoceanic mercantile enterprise.

Ship's logs give us the gestalt of the China captain's world and take us down to a level of intimate detail. We see life on a ship from day to day as experienced by the participants and thus capture the tension and the boredom of life at sea during these decades. There are a number of ships' logs which give insight into this important dimension of life in the China trade. One such document is the log of the Eliza Gracie. This ship's log contains a detailed account of a voyage from Canton to New York from December 1809 to April 1810. It was written by the ship's master, James Waller. A second log contains data about three voyages of the ship Helena. This merchant vessel sailed from New York to Macao and was captained by D. P. Benjamin.

Some of these materials also contain details on procedures for engaging in trade in China. A most valuable document of this sort is a logbook/journal written by Captain James W. Goodrich of the Galaxy. Available in a typescript copy, this logbook provides information on how a ship's captain and his vessel's supercargo dealt with the Qing maritime officials, how they worked their way through the mass of regulations all Westerners encountered when taking a ship up river to the Wambua anchorage, and how they dealt with the hong merchants and ships' compradors who provisioned a vessel during the months it remained at the Wambua anchorage.
But just how did the business work? Information on this pragmatic aspect of the trade can be found in account books and letters of agreement. One such set of account books, written by Oliver Wolcott of New York, contains lists of the goods brought to the United States by a number of vessels including the *Triton*, the *Trident*, and the *Frances Henretta*. There are also letters of agreement between a trader, Henry Marier, and Isaac Classon, owner of the ship *Frances Henretta*. These documents were signed in 1809. Finally, there is a pass (or chop, as such documents were called) that an American, or European, vessel needed to legally enter the inland waterways of the Canton Delta leading to the Wambua anchorage. Such documents represented the framework of formality and ritual that held the Canton system together and we can see these materials and touch them, thereby adding a tactile dimension to our intellectual knowledge of the past. And, if this author may interject a personal observation, it was on this basic emotional level and through the perusal of archival material in my college library that I first gained the sense of immediate and direct contact with the past. Such an experience may well have forced me to recognize that, whatever else I was, I was, even then, an historian; it is just plain fun to immerse oneself in the past in this physical way.

There is one final category of documents that cast light on the Sino-American relationship and which provides word pictures of Canton at this period. These are diaries and journals written by men and women who traveled to South China. One such document is the diary of Catherine Hyde Butler. Miss Butler traveled to Canton and then back to New York on the *Roman*, a ship owned by D. W. C. Olyphant. This diary contains very useful descriptions of Macao and of the summer home of the Western merchants as it existed in 1836 and 1837.

Working with the New-York Historical Society collection can be expensive. There is an admission fee of $2.00 that one pays upon entering the NYHS and there is an additional charge of $1.00 for use of the library and its collections. One can escape the entry fee by becoming a member of the Society, but such a fee is costly unless one intends to work in the collections for many days.

Once the two admissions fees have been paid, the researcher begins his search for data. He will, most probably, first use the published materials in the large reading room on the second floor. He will have the documentary materials made available to him in the smaller reading room at the right rear of the main reading room that houses the reference guides to the Society's collection.

The various published sources held in the NYHS collection can be found by using the main catalog placed at the left rear of the main reading room. There is also a catalog, located to the right of the rear hall doorway, which contains listings of the newspapers that are part of the NYHS collection. The newspapers are listed alphabetically by state, by town within the state, and then by title.

Two separate finding aids are used for the documents collection. One is the documents collection card catalog which is organized alphabetically by subject. The second consists of two volumes; in the first is a listing of subjects, arranged alphabetically. Next to each subject is a series of numbers which refer to specific documents described in paragraphs in the second volume, organized in numerical order. There is some overlap between the documents collection card catalog and the two finder volumes, but there are also a number of items found exclusively in only one or the other of the research aids.
The New York Times recently reported on the sorry state of the NYHS collections of painting, sculpture, and artifacts; nothing, however, was said about the documents collection. I found little difficulty in obtaining what I needed there because the document materials are housed in the NYHS Central Park West facility and are thus readily at hand.

Monographs and articles written by such scholars as Frederic Delano Grant, Jonathan Goldstein, Robert Gardella, and Peter Ward Fay have deepened our understanding of this period in all its dimensions but more remains to be done. What these materials in the NYHS collection allow us to do is deepen, even further, our understanding of the period. They allow us to see these years as the participants saw them and help us create Diltheyist portraits of this era. Thus a deep reading and analysis of these published and unpublished materials make us more aware of the period's significance in the larger history of the Sino-American relationship.

The Burke Library of the Union Theological Seminary 3041 Broadway at Reinhold Niebuhr Place, New York, NY 10027; Phone: (212) 662-7100.

Merchant accounts, logbooks, and journals provide us with one set of perspectives on the Old China Trade. An examination of missionary materials will provide another and will suggest different sets of problems of the Sino-American relationship that may be addressed. For example, it is a truism that missionaries, with their own brand of benevolent imperialism, served as a vanguard in the Western takeover of the third world. They often worked with merchants to reconnoiter an area. Furthermore, they and their merchant allies often espoused imperialistic adventures in their reports, books, and magazines. Does this generalization hold in the period of the Old China Trade or did the missionary-merchant relationship serve to hinder the process of imperialism? Another important question is this: just how did the missionaries see the merchants with whom they often traveled to China and for whom they served as pastors and spiritual counselors? The answers to such questions may be found by making use of the materials in the Burke Library.

The Union Theological Seminary's Burke Library is the home of what had been, until a decade ago, a separate library within the seminary complex, the famous Missionary Research Library (MRL). When Union began to refurbish its facility and modernize its library, it absorbed the MRL collection. The works that had been housed separately are now housed with the general collection in a building that extends along Broadway between 120th and 122nd Streets, a twenty-minute uptown bus ride from the New-York Historical Society. Though some of us mourn the removal of the old Missionary Research Library from its garret home, we admit that the new facility is far more efficient and easier to work in than the old one had been.

There are two separate catalogs of the Burke Library. One is the microfiche catalog which lists the recent holdings, i.e., those books obtained after 1976. Periodicals are also found in the fiche catalog. These holdings are organized into the catalog according to the Library of Congress classification system. The very latest holdings can be found in the "in-process" file.

While this modern collection is valuable for the student of theology and contemporary religion, it is of less value for the student of China Mission history or China trade
The Burke/MRL collection contains important published and unpublished materials, as can be seen in the guide to the MRL collection, prepared at Harvard in 1960. For example, the collection includes all the major mission memoirs and the biographies of nineteenth-century China missionaries such as Samuel Wells Williams and Elijah Coleman Bridgman. There are also a number of mission histories and collective biographies.

The library collection also contains first-hand descriptions of China written by missionaries before and during the treaty port era. Joseph Edkins' *The Religious Conditions of the Chinese* is one example of such a work. Another is the classical early book on the subject, Walter Henry Medhurst's *China: Its State and Prospects*.

Another category of book, valuable to the newly-arrived merchant and missionary, was the language text. Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society pioneered the effort to create these texts and Samuel Wells Williams, the American missionary scholar who worked with Bridgman and Morrison, prepared books and magazines on the Chinese language in the waning years of the Old China Trade. One of Morrison's major books was *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language*. Another major publication is Williams and Bridgman's *A Chinese Chrestomathy*.

Guidebooks were also of value to the new arrival, as they still are today. Such guidebooks were written and published by the missionaries at Canton or Macao, and later, in Hong Kong. One such work was a brief book on Canton based on a series of articles first published in the *The Chinese Repository*. A second, and much larger, book was *The Chinese Commercial Guide*. This detailed guidebook—one that merchants soon found essential—was first published in the 1840s and was updated in each of the two following decades. It was the work of Samuel Wells Williams, a man recognized in his own times as the first great American sinologist.

The final category of works available at the Burke/MRL collection are periodicals from the nineteenth century. The most famous of these is *The Chinese Repository*, published in South China from 1832 to 1852. Its editors were Bridgman and Williams and its contributors included missionaries, merchants, and diplomats. It remains an indispensable English-language source for the final years of the Old China Trade and for the first decade of the Treaty Port era. The MRL contains a complete bound set. The collection also has a number of individual monthly issues of the magazine. While the information contained in the bound volumes and in the individual issues is much the same, the individual issues contain front and back pieces which have advertisements and announcements not found in the bound set; scholars can use these additional materials to gain a different perspective on the Western trading community.

The individual and collective biographies, the memoirs, and the eye-witness accounts, as well as the dictionaries, guidebooks, and magazines, contain portraits of the mission community and information on the complex relationship between the missionary and the merchant. Such books also permit us to see the American and European merchants in Canton and in the other treaty ports through different eyes. One becomes aware that the missionaries often had a love-hate relationship with the merchants. One also becomes aware that each group played their roles in opening the way for the imperialistic diplomats and military officials who followed them to China's gates.
Clearly the study of the China Trade is a complex undertaking. One often finds one has to examine sections of such vast documentary collections as the Parliamentary Papers, the Congressional Records, or diverse sets of State Department materials as well as the material in more narrowly-focussed collections of the types we have already examined. Often the researcher also needs to make use of a library which houses the sometimes obscure, but valuable, journals and newspapers of the period. New Yorkers are fortunate for they have at hand one of the most renowned of such research libraries, the Research Division of the New York Public Library. Each of the different centers within the NYPL and the materials these centers house will now be examined.

The Documents Division is found on the third floor of NYPL's 42nd Street facility. This is the room most of those interested in the China Trade will make their home. It is the division within the NYPL/RD that contains the library's collection of documents and primary sources. The major collection of interest to the China Trade historian is the Pierpont-Constable Papers. The Pierponts and the Constables were merchants from Brooklyn and Manhattan. Pierpont Street in downtown Brooklyn is named after the merchant family. The famous Fifth Avenue store, Arnold Constable, bears the family name in Manhattan. Documents in this collection show clearly that the Pierpont side of the family had strong ties to China and were pioneers of the New York China Trade.

The document that best demonstrates these ties is a handwritten guide to the China trade. This was written by Hezekiah Pierpont when he was in Canton in 1795 representing his family as ship's supercargo. In this document, written for those who would succeed him as supercargo, Pierpont described the details of trading in China. He discussed the hong merchants and the outside merchants. He talked about the various types of products such as chinaware, saying that it could be used as ballast. He also suggested some of the formality and ceremony that was a part of the life of those trading under the rigid rules of the Canton System. It is a fascinating glimpse of this isolated world at the very fringes of the China many of us have now learned to know.

Materials written by or relating to John Jacob Astor, the famous New York merchant prince, are also in the NYPL/RD collection. Among the items to be found in these files are letters and logbooks that describe the trade from both Astor's perspective and from the perspective of one of his captains.

The Oriental Division of the NYPL, housed on the second floor of the 42nd Street building, contains other materials on the China trade. Most of these are in Chinese. Librarian John Ma, one of those in charge of the collection, gives willingly of his vast expertise and provides the researcher with a basic sense of just what relevant material the collection contains.

The Economics Division contains vast quantities of official documents on microfiche and microfilm. It is here, in this collection located on the second floor, that the researcher will find those sections of the Parliamentary Proceedings that shed light on the early Canton trade. Among these documents are sets of verbatim reports of the hearings a parliamentary committee held before deciding to withdraw the East India Company's control of Western trade in Guangdong. The accounts of witnesses arguing for or against the East India Company's monopoly, as well as the questions of the committee members, give us insight into the power of the free trader bloc which was working for the redefinition of the Sino-British relationship in these years. The researcher will also find the relevant State Department materials. Thus the China
Trade scholar must spend time here fleshing out his research and gaining new perspectives from which to see this mercantile enterprise.

In the Annex on West 44th Street are housed the various periodicals one needs for research in this period. The most valuable of these are the monthly issues of *The Missionary Herald*, the American Board's monthly magazine for its home audience. Each monthly issue of *The Missionary Herald* (earlier called *The Panoplist*) contains accounts of the work of the Boston-based home board written by the ABCFM's president and his various secretaries. It also contains excerpts of field reports from missionaries in the Levant, on the islands of the South Pacific, and, most importantly, from the Canton station that was the home of the South China Mission.

The Research Division of the NYPL is located at 42nd Street and 5th Avenue. It is the home library of the Documents Collection, the Oriental Division, the Economics Collection, and the fabled third-floor reading room. The researcher also has access to the material in the general stacks that are made available for his (or her) examination in the Reading Room. The other place the researcher will visit is the Annex of the NYPL located on 10th Avenue and 44th Street. This annex houses certain key published and primary materials.

One may begin and end one's research of the Old China Trade at the NYPL and one will often discover that the materials examined suggest new problems even as they provide insights into those the researcher has already defined.

**Conclusion**

The Old China Trade collections found in Manhattan enabled this author to write a detailed portrait of the first Protestant missionary community in China. Other scholars, including those who are members of this panel and members of this audience, have also made use of them to trace the commercial history of the Fujian tea trade and the Philadelphia-China Trade. This essay has suggested some of the problems that one may address when studying the Old China Trade. It has also suggested how the collections found on the island of Manhattan can provide the researcher with materials that he can make use of when he (or she) studies and analyzes these diverse and interesting historical problems.

**END NOTES**


6Dilthy was a German historian who, writing in the early twentieth century, advocated seeing history through the eyes of the participants. Thus, in Dilthy's opinion, primary sources, particularly those containing the writer's reactions to events, are the main source of the historian.


8See David Abeel, *Journal of a Residence in China* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1834).


10The work of these three students of the China trade, as well as an article by Jane Kate Leonard, now appears in a special China Trade issue of *The American Neptune*, the journal of the Society of Maritime History. Jonathan Goldstein served as editor of this important issue. See also Jonathan Goldstein, *Philadelphia and the China Trade, 1683-1846: Commercial, Cultural, and Attitudinal Effects* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978).


12This is outlined in "Locating Materials in the Burke Library," one of a number of guides the library has available for the researcher. The guides are numbered and provide the visitor with the information he or she needs to know to use the library to best advantage.


