



A Visit to Macao, 1637

Peter Mundy



The well known traveller Peter Mundy visited China on board the expedition of Sir William Courteen, which sailed from

England in April 1636, under the command of John Weddell. The British ships arrived near Macao in July of the following year and stayed for six months before returning to Europe in January 1638. Peter Mundy was one of the managers of the expedition and in that capacity stayed in Macao for many weeks, conducting trade with the Portuguese. Thus, he had the opportunity of getting acquainted with the Luso-Chinese outpost, which at the time was one of the great port cities in maritime Asia. As he spoke Portuguese and Spanish, he was able to exchange views with the inhabitants of Macao. During his stay in the city he wrote copious personal notes in a diary that registered his impressions about several aspects of Macanese daily life that are absent from other sources of the time. The extensive manuscript of Peter Mundy's voyages is kept at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and was published by Richard C. Temple and L. Anstey, in 5 volumes, by the Hakluyt Society (*The Travels of Peter Mundy, 1608-1667*), in London, between 1907 and 1936.

Source: *Seventeenth Century Macau in Contemporary Documents and Illustrations*, edited by Charles R. Boxer [Hong Kong: Heinemann (Asia), 1984, pp. 43-68]. The text was updated by Rui Manuel Loureiro.

O conhecido viajante Peter Mundy visitou a China a bordo da expedição de Sir William Courteen, que largou de

Inglaterra em Abril de 1636, sob o comando de John Weddell. Os navios britânicos chegaram às proximidades de Macau em Julho do ano seguinte, ali permanecendo durante seis meses, até iniciarem o regresso à Europa em Janeiro de 1638. Peter Mundy era um dos feitores da expedição e nessa qualidade estanciou em Macau durante largas semanas, conduzindo as transacções comerciais com os portugueses. Teve assim oportunidade de conhecer o entreposto luso-chinês, então uma das grandes cidades portuárias da Ásia marítima. Como dominava as línguas portuguesa e espanhola, pôde trocar impressões com muitos dos habitantes de Macau. Durante a permanência nesta cidade redigiu copiosas notas pessoais, em forma de diário, registando as suas impressões sobre numerosos aspectos da vida quotidiana macaense, que não aparecem em outras fontes coetâneas. O extenso manuscrito das viagens de Peter Mundy, que se conserva na Bodleian Library em Oxford, foi publicado por Richard C. Temple e L. Anstey, em 5 volumes, nas edições da Hakluyt Society (*The Travels of Peter Mundy, 1608-1667*), em Londres, entre 1907 e 1936.

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A *CAPHILA*¹ DETAINED AND WHY

The said caphila [of ships from Canton] is said to be embargoed or detained for a great sum of money which the Chinese demand of the Portuguese, for building a vessel bigger than they had leave or warrant for. On diverse other occasions they devise ways and means to extort moneys from them, as for killing, wronging or abusing a Chinaman, there being a great many [Chinese] that live together in the town with them and near about them, having a Mandarin or Judge of their own to decide their differences.

THE LANTEAS OR *CAPHILA* ARRIVED FROM CANTON;
BAD SIGNS OF TRADE WITH THE PORTUGUESE

The 12th [July 1637] came the lanteas or caphila from Canton, being five long large lighter like vessels, laden with goods from that City where the Portuguese make yearly investments for the lading of their Japan fleet. These now come being for the furnishing of on the six ships aforementioned, which are to depart within these few days [to Japan]. Until then we are not likely to have any trade in this place. For since our anchoring here, no men of quality came aboard, the aforesaid Mandarin excepted, who came twice, also a young *cavaleiro*, and our daily and nightly watch boats, who with license bring us our provision from the City [of Macao], and perhaps a fisherman. Many Portuguese boats that go on pleasure pass by us or row around about us, but come not aboard, being forbidden, as they say, China stuffs not any to be brought to us on pain of excommunication. In these two passed days we careened all our ships, to make them clean, as also to kill the worm that consumes them in these seas.

THE PINNACE *ANNE* SENT TO DISCOVER BETTER HOPES
AMONG THE CHINESE

This evening, late, the pinnace *Anne* departed towards the river of Canton to seek for speech and trade with the Chinese, being debarred here by the Portuguese. In her went Captain Carter, Mr. Thomas Robinson, Mr. John Mountney and a selected crew².

REASONS OF THE PORTUGUESE NOT ADMITTING US TRADE

It is rumored that when the Japan fleet is gone we shall have practice, that voyage being the main upholding of this place, so they considering that if we

had free trading here would also traffic for Japan and that thereby theirs would decay. And so consequently prove their utter undoing makes them so unwilling to deal with us or that we should have any commerce at all with others in these parts. In so much that we are not suffered to come on shore. Nor any from thence to us, excepting the watch boats aforesaid.

A MANDARIN FROM CANTON WITH OTHERS COMES ABOARD

The 15th [July 1637] came three Mandarins or China officers from the town to accompany another which came from Canton, as he said, sent of purpose to be satisfied of the truth of what the others write, and having taken the number of our men [and] ordnance with an estimate of our moneys, etc., cargoes, they departed. They came in a big vessel with a kettle drum and a broad brass pan, on both which they beat, keeping time together. They had also on their vessel certain flags and streamers. Today came a vessel from Macassar belonging to the Portuguese and entered the town.

THE JAPAN FLEET SET SAIL

The 23rd of July [1637], at night departed the Japan fleet to sea on their voyage, and now [it is] expected we open admittance of trade, as we were encouraged by common report and private letters from some particulars only. But from the General of the City³ not a word since the last letter, which was a mannerly denial of trade under excuse that for want of order from the superiors, viz., the King of Spain and Viceroy of India, he could not do us that good office which otherwise he willingly would.

ADVICE TO BEWARE

The 26th [July 1637] came a letter from the Procurator of Macao, advising us to look to ourselves; that he was told the Chinese had intent to fire us if they could.

THE PORTUGUESE OPEN THEIR INTENTS MORE PLAINLY

The 27th [July 1637] came certain merchants from the General [of Macao], who understanding that we were discontented desired to know whether he had given us any cause or no, and whether that he had not long since given us our answer. That the Chinese would not permit any other nation [but the Portuguese] to

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traffic with them, nor the Spaniards themselves, although [they were] the same King's subjects. So that some five or six years since, as they relate, a Spanish ship coming from Manila was not suffered to enter [Macao], but [was] kept out with their ordnance, not suffered to trade. But that what they want at Manila the Portuguese in their own vessels may carry thither. Of this affront the Spaniards complained to the King, but these gave so good reason for what they had done that he allowed and confirmed their privileges. Moreover, the said merchants alleged there were no goods for our lading or turn, wondering of our coming hither, showing great discontent thereat and unwillingness of our longer abiding here. But I conceive they kept the main cause of all to themselves, which was that our coming in would quickly eat them out of all trade.

The 29th July [1637], four Englishmen and one Frenchman, which some few days since ran away from the fleet to the Portuguese, were by the General of Macao returned us back again, whether out of his own inclination or fear that we would detain Friars or other people of his we know not. For we had already seized on two of the watch which were released at the coming of our men.

DETERMINATION TO DEPART MACAO

In conclusion, finding but bad hopes from the Portuguese of any good to be done in matters of trade [...], we determined to leave the place and [the] Portuguese and to try what we could do with the latter.

OUR DEPARTURE FROM OUR OLD ROAD

The 29th July 1637. The day above said we came forth of our old road, having remained there near one month. The *Sunne* came aground and so stayed till next tide. The Friars, Churchmen, etc., sent us from town [Macao] very good ripe grapes and ripe figs such as we have in Europe. Here were also very [real] pears. Now at our going away came some Portuguese aboard to buy wine, etc., and sold some musk at 45 reales of eight the catty, which is near 20 ounces English [...].

OUR ADMIRAL ADVENTURED ON SHORE, HOW ACCOMPANIED AND RECEIVED INTO THE CITY OF MACAO

The 8th of October [1637] came another letter from the General and Council of the City [of Macao] brought by three persons of quality, whom we might have detained but did not, earnestly in treating and

requesting our Admiral, chiefly, and the rest of the Commanders of the fleet to come to Macao. There were many inconveniences, doubts and dangers cast if he went. And seeing none of the rest of the Commanders would go with him, he went alone, accompanied only with our Minister, the Purser of the *Dragon* and myself. We were conveyed in their own cho or China vessel. At our passing near the fort of St. Francisco we were from thence saluted with five great pieces of ordnance. And at our landing on the strand were received by the Council and the Ancients of the [city], conducting us to a very fair house wretchedly furnished with plate, biombos⁴, chairs, cots, hangings, etc.

BIOMBOS TO WHAT USE

Biombos are certain screens of eight or nine Feet deep, made into sundry leaves, which principally serve to divide a room or to sequester some part thereof, as also for ornament, placing them against the walls. They make a most delightsome show being painted with variety of curious lively colors intermingled with gold, containing stories, beasts, birds, fishes, forests, flowers, fruits, etc. They are commonly in two pairs, each part containing eight leaves or plates, some of them worth 100 reales of eight the pair, some more, some less.

A DINNER HOW SERVED IN [MACAO]

Our dinner was served in plate, very good and savory to my mind, only the manner much differing from ours, for every man had a like portion of each sort of meat brought between two silver plates, and this often changed, for before a man had done with the one, there was another service stood ready for him. Almost the same decorum in our drink, every man his silver goblet by his trencher, which were no sooner empty but there stood those ready that filled them again with excellent good Portuguese wine. There was also indifferent good music of the voice, harp and guitar.

THE CONCLUSION OF OUR COMING

After dinner we went to the Captain General's and from his he came with us to the Town [Senate] house, where [also] came a taquessy [*tijusi*], etc., Mandarins to confer about our business. In fine, it was concluded that four principal Portuguese should be appointed to go for Canton, there to negotiate our

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merchants' liberty, etc., [and other things] that [they] might concede us, as they said [...].

The 11th [October 1637] we weighed and fell down to the Enseada de André Feio, where we found the galleon of Manila whom we saluted and she us again. In this place the artillery yielded three excellent distinct echoes, one after the other, with such rattling and thundering as though the hills had come tumbling down, the land being close and high ground round about us.

A LIMITED TRADE OBTAINED AT LAST

In fine, we had permission from the Portuguese of a limited trade in Macao, so hired a house, settled people ashore, fell to following our business on all hands, selling our own commodities, as cloth, some incense, etc., buying and shipping of theirs, as sugar, green ginger, some stuffs, etc., butt until the end of this month nothing of import entered upon, by reason of the absence and trouble of our merchants [...].

THE GENERAL OF MACAO ENRAGED AGAINST US,
REVEILED US IN MOST BASE TERMS

The 26th December [1637], I was ordered by our Admiral [Captain John Weddell] and Mr. [Nathaniel] Mountney to certify the Captain General [of Macao] that we intended this night to come all off the shore. And that therefore he would cause a publication thereof to be made in the City, so that any that had accounts with us might come and clear them. In the way I met his Officer coming towards us with a message from him, so [he] went back again with me. But before I could get upstairs he met me, and before I could begin to speak, he fell a railing in a most violent manner, with uncivil and discourteous language, asking if we knew where we were, if we did not think ourselves in the King of Spain's dominion, or did know him to be General; whether we thought ourselves in London, miscalling us by the name of 'picaros, borrachos, traidores', etc., to say, 'rogues, drunkards, traitors', etc.; and that we should forthwith depart to our ships, and

that whomsoever he found ashore in the morning he would cause him to be hanged and confiscate all the goods found in the town. And so he left me without suffering me to speak one word.

THE SUPPOSED CAUSE

The occasion of this, his so extraordinary rage, was supposed to be because that in regard he had requested that no Portuguese nor their goods, Churchmen excepted, should pass on our ships for India, and that our Admiral had promised him so much, yet notwithstanding that, we had agreed to carry a great number of passengers and much wealth. For he would have had all on a vessel of their own, that the King thereby might have his duties, which now he was likely to loose, but none durst adventure for fear of the Hollander lying in the straits of Malacca⁵.

ARMED MEN SENT TO THRUST US OUT OFF TOWN

The messengers came back and delivered the General's mind to our principals at our house in the phrase aforesaid. At night came a great crew of his servants, all armed with swords, bucklers, guns, and lighted matches to thrust us out of Town at that instant. But we told them we had leave of the City [Senate] for two days longer to clear all. Then they departed.

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY HASTENS OUR GOING FORTH

The Council of the City also hastening our going hence, saying there were sundry choppes newly come from Canton, wherein they were commanded to putt us forth immediately. That night most of us went aboard.

WE ALL COME ABOARD

The 27th December [1637], we all came clean of the shore, it being just six months since our first arrival. **RC**

NOTES

- 1 *Cáfila*, from the Arabic *kafila*, was a word used in Portuguese to denote a caravan or a convoy of ships.
- 2 The British interlopers were trying to open trade with the Chinese, against the steady opposition of the Portuguese.
- 3 The captain general of Macao is meant here.

- 4 *Biombo*, from the Japanese *byōbu*, is a folding screen.
- 5 It was not uncommon that Portuguese travellers bound for Goa took passage on board English ships, so avoiding the possibility of mischance encounters with their Dutch foes, that roamed the Straits of Malacca in search of richly laden Portuguese ships coming from Macao.