

On the Portuguese Trade in China, 1513-1520



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Once they had established a colonial government in India, the Portuguese made East and Southeast Asia the next objective of their expansion. As early as 1508, the King of Portugal instructed Diogo Lopes de Sequeira to collect information about China, which shows the king's intention to trade with China. In 1509, Sequeira and his companions made direct contact with the Chinese in Malacca, thus recognizing the possibility and prospects of the trade with China. After occupying Malacca, Afonso de Albuquerque, the second governor of Portuguese India, submitted a memorial to the King describing the benefits of the trade with China. In August 1512, he proposed that ships should be sent to China carrying pepper to trade for gold, silk, and rhubarb. In 1513-1514, Jorge Álvares successfully undertook the first commercial expedition to China. Afterwards, the Portuguese made four expeditions to China (in 1515-1516, 1517-1518, 1519-1520 and 1520-1521), with sizable gains; moreover, the Portuguese ambassador was permitted to enter Beijing. But with the outbreak of the Battle of Tunmen 屯门 in 1521 and the Battle of Xicaowan 西草湾 in 1522, the Portuguese were expelled from China. Thus ended the first stage of Sino-Portuguese relations.

A great deal of research has been done, by scholars both in China and abroad, on this stage of Sino-

Portuguese relations. However, the research has usually been focused on the ambassador Tomé Pires, and on identifying the exact location of Tamão; it seems that there has been no systematic research on Portuguese commercial dealings in China in this period, especially in terms of assessing the nature of these dealings. In his *Sino-Portuguese Trade from 1545 to 1644*, Dr. Tien-Tsê Chang devotes one long paragraph to describing the kinds of commodities traded by the Portuguese in China, but he does not provide a comprehensive assessment of its nature¹. In addition, in many works that focus on the identification of Tamão, we often come across assertions such as the following: it is impossible that Tunmen, being so close to Nantou 南头, could have been the base from which foreign merchants carried on illicit trade for such a long period². For these reasons alone, the question of the nature of the Portuguese trade in China merits a closer look. Given that information on this issue in the Portuguese sources is no more detailed than that which is available in Chinese documents, the present research has been conducted primarily among Portuguese sources, and confirmed by Chinese sources.

I. In 1513 (the 8th year of the reign of Emperor Zhengde 正德 of the Ming Dynasty), Jorge Álvares successfully made his first commercial voyage to China. In July of that year, his ship arrived at the Island of Tamão, situated at the mouth of the River Pearl³. Province officials permitted him to trade on board his ship, but prohibited him from proceeding to Canton.

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Having concluded his business with the Chinese, Álvares returned to Malacca in 1514 with a full hold of Chinese goods. According to João de Barros, before leaving Tamão, Álvares placed there a *padrão* of stone engraved with the Portuguese coat of arms⁴.

Álvares' expedition was a great commercial success. At the beginning of 1515, the Portuguese officials in Malacca communicated to Afonso de Albuquerque the results of this voyage, saying, "his ship arrived with rich cargo and carried on a good business." Among numerous commodities from China these officials emphasized white silk; other precious textiles, especially damask and brocade; musk; seed-pearls; porcelains; studding with nails; and sulphur and saltpetre. The last two products, being important components of gunpowder, were indispensable for the Portuguese⁵. Many other commodities also were mentioned, such as medicinal camphor, rhubarb, alum, copper, iron, coffer, and fans. As for the commodities that the Chinese sought, they pointed to five main categories: firstly, pepper, of which ten shiploads were transported to China annually; secondly, other spices such as clove, nutmeg and rosemary; thirdly, incense, camphor of Borneo, and brazil-wood; fourthly, elephant tusks, aloe-wood, white sandalwood, and black wood from Singapore; and finally, a great quantity of various textiles, such as camlet, scarlet cloth, and coloured woollen cloth⁶.

In a letter written in Cochin shortly after that voyage to China, Pedro de Faria reported the results of the voyage to the King of Portugal:

"A man named Jorge Álvares acted as captain and factor of a junk which brought back eight or ten thousand cruzados"⁷.

Regarding this pioneering visit of the Portuguese to China, Italian navigator Andrea Cosali, in his letter dated 6 January 1515, writes:

"During this last year some of our Portuguese made a voyage to China. They were not permitted to land, for they say 'tis against their custom to let foreigners enter their dwellings. But they sold their goods at a great gain, and they say there is as great a profit in taking spices to China as in taking them to Portugal; for 'tis a cold country and they make a great use of them"⁸.

Giovanni de Empoli, another Italian then in the service of the Portuguese, came to India from Lisbon in 1515, and in Cochin he met the Portuguese who

had returned from China. Thus in a letter he wrote from Cochin on 15 November of the same year, he also makes reference to this voyage:

"From Malacca have come ships and junks... They have also discovered China... which has the greatest wealth that there can be in the world. They have great order and law, and are very friendly towards us. The country abounds with all fine white silk, and it costs thirty cruzados the cantaro; damasks of sixteen good pieces, at five hundred reals the piece; satins, brocades, musk at half a ducat the ounce, and less. Many pearls of all sorts in great abundance, and many caps, so that from there to here there is made on them a profit of thirty to one"⁹.

Inspired by the success of this pioneering voyage, the Portuguese began making efforts to open up the Chinese market. In 1515 (the 10th year of the reign of Zhengde), Rafael Perestrello made another successful voyage to China. His ship anchored off the island of Tamão, and after concluding his business there he returned to Malacca in 1516. Pedro de Faria, in his letter to D. Manuel dated 5 January 1517, writes:

"Rafael Perestrello went to China carrying eighty or ninety bahares of pepper for himself, and he went there as captain and factor of three junks in which were loaded goods of Your Majesty... He brought back fifteen thousand cruzados for himself and twenty cruzados for Your Majesty"¹⁰.

This commercial expedition to China is also mentioned by Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, one of the Portuguese chroniclers of the 16th century, who describes it as follows:

"After Bartolomeu Perestrello's death in 1515, his brother Rafael Perestrello set out to discover the coast of China in a junk, carrying ten of ours among his companions. He arrived in China and returned to Malacca gaining very great profit from the merchandise that he carried. ...He came back from China with so great a gain that a profit of twenty to one was made on his rich cargo that he carried, and he also certified that the Chins [the Chinese] desired peace and friendship with the Portuguese, and that they were very good people"¹¹.

The voyage of Rafael Perestrello clearly demonstrated the importance of China as an eventual

HISTÓRIA

trade partner for Malacca. First, it confirmed that the Chinese were very good people and desired peace and friendship; second, it demonstrated the potential for enormous profit, both for the Portuguese royal family and for individual merchants; and third, it revealed the great potential represented by the Chinese market in terms of both exploitation and employment.

Heartened by the success of these first two voyages to China, the Portuguese took more important actions. In 1517 (the 12th year of the reign of Zhengde), not only did a fleet of eight ships commanded by Fernão Peres de Andrade arrive at Tamão, but a Portuguese ambassador was on board one of them. When they arrived, Duarte Coelho, another Portuguese who had come from Siam, conducted business with the Chinese at Tamão. According to the Chinese account, at the end of September, two great vessels “suddenly reached the post-station of Huaiyuan 怀远 in Canton, stating that they were from the country of the Feringis and had come for permission to pay tribute.” The officials of Canton

“reported this to the governor, Chen Xixuan 陈西轩, who came to Canton from Wuzhou 吾州, the governor’s residence. Owing to their ignorance of the Rites, the governor ordered them to receive instruction and practice in the Rites for three days in the Bright Filial Piety Temple (光孝寺 Guang Xiaosi) before granting them an audience. Having discovered that there was no such country as “Feringis” among the tributary countries recorded in *Da Ming Hui Dian* 大明会典 (The Complete Record of the Laws of the Great Ming), the mandarins wrote a memorial relating this to the court of Beijing.”¹²

Wu Tingju 吴廷举, the Commissioner of Civil Administration of Guangdong (*buzhengshi* 广东布政使), allowed the Portuguese to carry on normal trade in Canton. According to the Portuguese accounts, while they waited for authorization from the court in Beijing, the Portuguese were permitted to go ashore, and Tomé Pires and his entourage were settled in the residence of Gu Yingxiang 顾应祥, the Superintendent of Maritime Trade of Guangdong (*shibotiju* 广东市舶提举)¹³.

Having delivered the Portuguese ambassador to the governor of Guangdong, Peres de Andrade returned to Tamão at the beginning of 1518, where he repaired his ships and carried on trade. At Tamão there were

plenty of provisions and other necessities of life. From nearby islands, especially the Liukius, came gold and other precious merchandise, as well as contact with vessels originating from Japan and the Liukius. When Peres de Andrade returned to Malacca in October 1519, he was received with great ceremony due to his valuable cargo.

Regarding the results of Andrade’s voyage, a letter from D. João de Lima relates the following important information brought by Duarte Coelho from the coast of China:

“The Portuguese had been received very well in the coast of Canton. The captain-major had vended all the goods with very good gain and obeyed closely the instructions received from the King of Portugal”¹⁴.

Portuguese historians of the 16th century also mentioned this voyage. Castanheda writes that

“At the beginning of September of 1518 he took leave for Malacca with a rich cargo of gold and other things, and everyone in his fleet was becoming rich”¹⁵.

Barros’ account is more detailed:

“Fernão Peres left the Island of Trade with his fleet at the end of September of 1518... He entered in Malacca honourably. The arrival of Fernão Peres at Malacca was applauded by all the people, not only because he did things beneficial to the Portuguese in China where there are good prospects of gain for the Portuguese in Malacca, and from there he brought much more goods than he left there; but also because he provided munitions of all sorts being necessary for the City of Malacca. From this voyage the factor of Malacca and everyone who invested in his fleet made great money, both in China and in Malacca”¹⁶.

The successful voyage of Fernão Peres de Andrade further demonstrated to the Portuguese public the great potential of the Chinese market: China was not only the principal buyer of products from Southeast Asia (primarily pepper), but was also the major supplier of commodities which had a ready market in the regions from Malacca to Bengal and Gujarat.

In May of 1519 (the 14th year of the reign of Zhengde), Simão de Andrade left Malacca for China as the captain-major of a fleet of Portuguese vessels, accompanied by three junks; he arrived at Tamão in

HISTORY

August of the same year. These ships spent almost a year there, carrying on trade peacefully, for the sixteenth-century sources do not register any confrontations¹⁷. His fleet left the mouth of River Pearl in September or October of 1520 (the 15th year of the reign of Zhengde), and reached Malacca at the end of October. According to Gaspar Correia, “he returned from China very rich”¹⁸. Thus it can be seen that his voyage achieved commercial success even though he committed outrages at Tamão.

In April of 1519, the King of Portugal officially organized a China fleet, the captains of which were Jorge de Albuquerque, Rafael Perestrello, and Rafael Catanho, respectively. Apparently, among all the vessels destined for China, only that of Diogo Calvo reached the destination, for his ship appeared at Tamão in the middle of 1520 (the 15th year of the reign of Zhengde), where he met the fleet of Simão de Andrade on the eve of the latter's departure for India. Several other ships arrived at Tamão in June or July¹⁹. During the following months they stayed on the island, carrying on trade, and some of them entered Canton to trade as well²⁰. It was not until the outbreak of the Battle of Tunmen in 1521 that the Portuguese were ousted and fled to Malacca.

II. It is obvious that the first Portuguese voyages to China resulted in great commercial success. But what was the nature of the Portuguese trade in China during this period? Was it, as some scholars have argued, illicit activity conducted out of sight of the Chinese officials?

Tomé Pires, in his *Suma Oriental* (written in 1515-1516), took note of the commercial relations connecting China with Southeast Asia at the time, described the trade system in effect in Guangdong province, and recounted in detail the brisk commercial activities among the islands off the southern coast of China at certain times of year, thus providing us with very important evidence for determining the nature of the Portuguese trade during these early expeditions to China. He writes:

“Those ambassadors who have seals trade inside the city of Canton, and if not, they do it outside, some thirty leagues from Canton, and take the merchandise there from Canton.

Thirty leagues on this side of Canton, towards Malacca, there are some islands near the mainland of Nantou, where the ports are already allotted to each nation, viz., Pulo Tumon and

others. As soon as the said junks anchor there, the lord of Nantou sends word to Canton and merchants immediately come to value the merchandise and to take their dues, as will be told later. Then they bring them the merchandise made up from one part and another. Each one returns to his home.

Those from Malacca anchor there in the port of Tumon and those from Siam in the port of Hucham. Our port is three leagues nearer to China than the Siamese one, and merchandise comes to it rather than to the other.

As soon as the lord of Nantou sees the junks he immediately sends word to Canton that junks have gone in among the islands; the valuers from Canton go out to value the merchandise; they receive their dues; they bring just the amount of merchandise that is required; they receive their dues of twenty per cent on pepper, fifty per cent on brazil, the same amount on the Singapore wood, and ten per cent on the other merchandise...”²¹

From the account of Tomé Pires it can be seen that the ship of Jorge Álvares anchored at “Tumon,” and then the Chinese customs officials based in Nantou went on board for inspection, valuing the cargo and collecting customs duties. Having paid these duties, the foreigners obtained official permission to trade with the Chinese in the locality.

As for the commercial activities of Fernão Peres and his entourage in China, João Barros, the Portuguese chronicler of the sixteenth century, made a detailed account:

“On 15th August 1517, they arrived at the Island of Tamão, to which our people gave the name of Island of Veniaga, which means ‘merchandise’. This word has been accepted extensively there, so became the proper noun; the reason they call it like this is that all the foreigners who go to Guangdong Province would go to anchor there by order of the land, for it is three leagues from the mainland, and there the navigators obtain what they look for”²².

Fernão Peres and his men not only anchored and traded at Tamão, but also were permitted to land and trade in the city of Canton:

“Having received the Portuguese ambassador, the governors of Canton sent for Fernão Peres to land

HISTÓRIA

and participate in the reception ceremony. Fernão Peres declined this invitation, saying that according to the custom, he could not leave his ships, because he had taken charge of protecting them for his king; but he would order the factor of the fleet to go ashore with some goods instead of him; he asked permission for the factor to lodge in a house near the water's edge. The house having been arranged, Fernão Peres ordered the factor, his clerk and a few others of the fleet to go ashore with goods and carry on trade under the system in practice then, some of them were allowed to enter the city of Canton... Having put all the things in order, two events that happened soon afterwards caused him decide to depart from Canton... Because of those events he sent someone to say good-bye to the governors of Canton, saying that he would return to the Island of Tamão where his ships were anchored, in order to repair the ships that had been damaged in the last storm. He indeed did so. Having been received ashore, they obtained more provisions for repairing the ships than they would have on the riverbank of Lisbon"²³.

Castanheda made a more detailed account regarding this trade. He says:

"Having dispatched those letters, the Commissioner of Civil Administration of Guangdong, by order of the *tu-tam*²⁴, proclaimed in the city of Canton that all the people could do business with our people as they liked. No one was permitted to offend them, under pain of severe penalty; and he suggested that the Captain-Major order his ships, which were anchored off the Island of Veniaga, to come to Canton, since it is better to load and unload merchandise in the latter place than in the former. The Captain-Major declined this suggestion on the pretext that the ships were anchored there more safely than in Canton. And another reason was that he intended to return to that island if he were granted a place on land in which to keep the goods of the king of Portugal. He soon obtained a house; one clerk of the fleet went to lodge in it, and some others of ours also went there in order to load goods. Thus began the trade and friendship between the Chinese and our people; and our people went ashore and

felt very safe there. ...Seeing that the Chinese in the City were satisfied with the conversation of the Portuguese, Fernão Peres sent someone to the *tu-tam*, asking for permission to construct a house of stone and lime on the Island of Veniaga for the purposes of lodging the factor of the King of Portugal, keeping his goods, and avoiding damage by pirates at sea or thieves on land; and the *tu-tam* gave the license to him"²⁵.

The actions of Simão de Andrade on the island of Tamão revealed by default that the Portuguese trade in China was not illicit. João de Barros speaks of Simão de Andrade's activities in China, and from his work we read:

"In August of that year (1519) those four ships arrived in China and anchored in the port of the Island of Tamão where his brother had stayed. As we have pointed out, according to the orders of the City of Canton, they were not allowed to proceed further, therefore he did his business there. While he was there, some ships arrived from Siam, Cambodia, Patane and other places. They used to go there to trade, but Simão de Andrade prohibited them from selling their goods before he sold his, ...and [insisted that] others could load their cargo only after he had loaded his"²⁶.

In addition to a series of outrageous actions, he also refused to pay duties on his cargo:

"The mandarins who went to the Island of Trade to receive the customs dues by order of the mandarins of Canton begged to inform the king that when they had gone in such a year and day to collect the customs duties, there came Feringis with many arms and bombards, powerful people, who did not pay the duties according to custom; and they are constructing fortresses.

Another mandarin said that in the year 1520 on the Island of Trade the Feringis knocked off his cap, hit him, and seized him when he was going to collect the customs duties by order of the mandarins of Canton"²⁷.

From all the accounts quoted above we can see that during their visits to China, the Portuguese did their business with the Chinese under the system in practice then; the Chinese officials imposed duties on their cargoes and permitted them to trade with the Chinese in the locality. Although Simão de Andrade

HISTORY

attempted to break these customary rules, the officials of Guangdong province still allowed him to carry on trade in Tamão, and his fleet returned to Malacca safely in 1520.

III. The commercial activity of the Portuguese in China as recorded in the Portuguese documents corresponds closely to the system of foreign trade recorded in the Chinese sources. In fact, when the Portuguese first arrived in the Far East, changes had already occurred in the system of foreign trade in Guangdong province. After the termination of Zheng He's 郑和 expeditions, it had become more and more difficult to continue the traditional system of tributary trade in China. In 1509 (the 4th year of the reign of Zhengde), the department of foreign trade (*shiboshi* 广东市舶司) of Guangdong province began to impose duties on "tributary vessels" (*gongbo* 贡舶) and "private vessels" (*shibo* 市舶) in the same way; thereupon foreign private merchants were allowed to come to China to trade. That change was registered in *Guangdong Tongzhi* 广东通志 (The General Chronicle of Guangdong Province), compiled in the Jiajing 嘉靖 reign:

"The Department of Provincial Civil Administration (*buzhengsi* 布政司) notes having discovered that there was no *choufen* 抽分 [meaning "imposition"] on foreign vessels in any year from the Zhengtong 正统 reign through the Hongzhi 弘治 reign. But in the 4th year of the Zhengde reign, Censor-in-Chief (*duyushi* 督御史) Chen Jin 陈金 and other officials proposed imposing duties on the cargoes of the vessels from Siam, Malacca and Jishan at the same level of thirty per cent. The Ministry of Revenue (*hubu* 户部) recommended that the fine goods should be transported to Beijing and the bulky should be sold so as to provide for soldiers' pay and provisions"²⁸.

In 1514 (the 9th year of the reign of Zhengde), Wu Tingju, the Commissioner of Civil Administration of Guangdong Province, formulated regulations governing tribute and trade by foreign vessels²⁹, ordering local authorities "to impose customs duties on the cargoes of foreign vessels whenever they come"³⁰. Chen Boxian 陈伯献, a consultant in the Department of Civil Administration of Guangdong, objected to this regulation. After discussion of the issue in the Ministry

of Rites (*libu* 礼部), Emperor Wuzong 武宗皇帝 promulgated an imperial edict: "to prohibit and restrict foreign vessels; those that come outside of the appointed year should be held back and should not be required to pay duties, in order to avoid incidents"³¹. However, in 1517 (the 12th year of the reign of Zhengde), Chen Jin, the Governor and Censor-in-Chief of Guangdong and Guangxi (*xunfu lian guang duyushi* 巡抚两广督御史), together with Wu Tingju, Assistant Commissioner of Coastal Defence (*haidao fushi* 海道副使) presented a memorial to the throne, asking permission to impose duties on the cargoes of foreign vessels at a rate of twenty percent, following the practice of the Song Dynasty, or at thirty per cent according to the recent example; the fine goods would be transported to Beijing and the rougher goods sold to provide for the salaries and provisioning of soldiers. The Ministry of Rites sent a dispatch in response, permitting the imposition of duties only at the lower rate of twenty percent. That year, when the ships from Champa came to pay tribute, duties were levied on the additional goods carried in their ships, according to precedent³². The court also declared that the customs duty of 20% should be levied on both tribute vessels and private vessels; that the fine goods should be transported to Beijing and the rougher goods sold so as to provide for soldiers' pay; and that everything should be done in accordance with the old rules, not the more recent rules that would prevent such transactions³³. Accordingly, Wu Tingju's regulations were put into practice.

The first Portuguese voyages to China all shared two key characteristics: they co-operated with the merchants of Southeast Asia in fitting out vessels and forming joint fleets, and came to China under the guidance of Chinese living abroad.

Rui de Brito Batalim, in two letters written from Malacca to the Governor of Portuguese India and the King of Portugal on 6 January 1514, made reference to the first voyage to China as follows:

"During my tenure of office I sent for the bendahara and asked him if he agreed to send from here one junk laden with the goods of His Majesty to China... That bendahara said that he thought it was a good suggestion and that he would occupy one half of the junk with his goods. ...the goods of His Majesty and the bendahara were transported in the junk of

HISTÓRIA

Cheilata [a Chinese]; the Portuguese factor and clerk went there on behalf of His Majesty, and so did the others on the part of the bendahara; the tomungo and his father-in-law each loaded one junk for China respectively, Cheilata sent another one... all the junks jointly sailed to China...

One junk of Your Majesty sailed to China filled with pepper, half of which was for Your Majesty and the other half for the bendahara... Four junks sailed with it, and in the junk of Your Majesty there were two our people; one was the factor and the other was the clerk³⁴.

It is obvious that the first Portuguese voyage to China was carried out by junk, in partnership with the Malays and in the company of the Chinese junks captained by Cheilata.

Like the first, the second voyage to China was a joint action. The fleet of Rafael Perestrelo consisted of both royal vessels and private vessels, one of which belonged to Pulata, a rich trader from Malacca³⁵.

As for the third voyage to China, although the King of Portugal took more important action, there were still three ships of Malaccan merchants in the fleet captained by Fernão Peres de Andrade:

"In July 1517, Fernão Peres went to China in the ship *Espera* of two hundred tonnes... together with him sailed Jorge Botelho in a junk belonging to a merchant of Malacca named Curiaraja, Manuel de Araújo in a junk of another merchant of Malacca called Pulata, and in another one belonging to him sailed António Lobo Falcão³⁶.

Owing to the peculiarities of these voyages, the Portuguese had to follow the customary ways of the merchants of Southeast Asia in terms of anchoring their ships and exchanging commodities. In this respect the Portuguese had no other choice. As a matter of fact, during their visits to China, the Portuguese did their business under the regulations of Wu Tingju. It was not until the beginning of 1521 (the 16th year of the reign of Zhengde) that this situation changed.

At the beginning of 1521 (the 12th moon of the 15th year of the reign of Zhengde), Censor (*yushi* 御史) He Ao 何鳌, in his memorial to throne, censured Wu Tingju for his regulations:

"Our ancestors determined fixed terms for the presentation of tribute and permanent rules for

defence, so, few foreigners came to our land. However, Wu Tingju, the Commissioner of Provincial Civil Administration, on the pretext of lacking spices with which to pay tribute to the Emperor, allowed foreign ships to come in any year, and levied customs duties on their goods, which caused foreign ships to converge on the seaside and barbarians to crowd into the city of Canton³⁷.

Various contemporary documents show that many people condemned Wu Tingju for having given the Feringis permission to trade and thus causing the incidents. In 1529 (the 8th year of the reign of Jiajing of the Ming Dynasty), Lin Fu 林富, Censor-in-Chief of Guangdong and Guangxi (*liang guang duyushi* 两广督御史), presented a memorial to the Emperor:

"In the 12th year of the Zhengde reign the Feringis suddenly entered the County of Dongguan 东莞. Wu Tingju, Commissioner of Provincial Civil Administration, permitted them to pay tribute (carry on trade) and reported their arrival to the court, which constitutes a fault for failing to consult the valid rules³⁸.

Guoque 国榷, compiled by Tan Qian 谈迁, states:

"It was at Wu Tingju's request that customs duties began to be imposed on both tribute ships and private ships, which provoked discord among the Feringis, and it was said that Wu Tingju originated this wicked practice³⁹.

Ming Shan Zang 名山藏, by He Qiaoyuan 何乔远 gives the following account:

"In the 13th year of the reign of Zhengde (1518) the governor of Portuguese India expelled the king (of Malacca), Sultan Mahmud, and occupied his land, and then sent thirty persons to Guangdong to present tribute. And then Wu Tingju, Commissioner of Provincial Civil Administration and Assistant Commissioner of Coastal Defence, proposed to allow them in⁴⁰.

Having discussed the memorials of He Ao and others who opposed Wu Tingju, the Ministry of Rites submitted a dispatch to the Emperor as follows:

"It is suitable that on the arrival of the ambassador of Malacca, the Feringis' crimes of invading that kingdom and of causing perturbations in China should be condemned. The governor and *beiuo* 备倭⁴¹ of Guang should

HISTORY

be held responsible for neglecting their duties; the foreigners who stayed at the post-station of Huaiyuan from now on must be prohibited from doing business illegally; the foreign ships that arrive outside their appointed year for paying tribute should be expelled, and duties not levied upon them; and Wu Tingju, for his role in originating the incidents, should be suspended from his duty by the Ministry of Revenue, according to the rules⁴².

After reading this dispatch, the Emperor decreed that “all requests should be executed”. Accordingly, the Feringis were condemned for their occupation of Malacca; the officials of Guangdong were punished for neglecting their duties; Wu Tingju was suspended from his duties; and the tribute ships that arrived in Guangdong outside of the fixed time were turned away. It is obvious that both the Emperor and the courtiers had completely changed their attitude towards foreigners, and the foreign policy of the court had returned to the state it was in prior to the arrival of the Portuguese.

From the censures imposed upon Wu Tingju and the fact that he was suspended from his job, we can see that the Chinese mandarins indeed received customs duties on the cargoes of Portuguese ships, and allowed the Portuguese to trade with the Chinese. This point can be confirmed by the following sentence: “the defending officials requested that the duties be imposed as before⁴³”. It was not until after the death of Emperor Wuzong that the court ordered “the prohibition of the Portuguese tribute” and rejected the imposition of “duties on their cargo according to the rule⁴⁴”. This shows that it was not until the end of the Zhengde reign that the Portuguese were explicitly prohibited from trading in China.

In addition to all the accounts quoted above, there is another important source that is very well known but has been largely ignored until now. Yan Congjian 严从简, in his *Shu You Zhou Zi Lu* 殊域周咨录 (Complete Information on Foreign Countries), writes:

“He Ru 何儒, Inspector (*xunjian* 巡检) of Baisha 白沙 in the County of Dongguan, was ordered to the Portuguese ships to collect the customs duties, and met two Chinese, Yang San 杨三 and Dai Ming 戴明, who had been with the Portuguese for many years, and knew very

well the methods for building ships, casting cannon, and making gunpowder⁴⁵.”

This small item is noteworthy for two main reasons. First, it shows that He Ru was ordered to collect customs duties on Portuguese ships. As the most definite evidence for the nature of the Portuguese commercial dealings in China, it proves that the Portuguese were not engaging in illicit trade. Secondly, the imposition of duties and the casting of cannon were carried out by local officials in the county of Dongguan, which furnishes us with important evidence for the identification of the location of Tamão.

IV. From the above discussion we can reach the following conclusions: in the earliest stages of Sino-Portuguese relations, the Portuguese, like the merchants of Malacca, Siam and other countries in Southeast Asia, carried on normal trading activities under the commercial system then in force. Although Simão de Andrade did some outrageous things at Tamão, the Chinese officials did not immediately take political and military action against the Portuguese. In regards to the economy and commerce, Sino-Portuguese relations were still in the process of development. It was not until the beginning of 1521 that the situation changed. The regulation of tribute and trade proposed by Wu Tingju was abolished, and with this abolition ceased the normal trade of the Portuguese in China.

This conclusion has obvious implications for academic research. First, it demonstrates that it is misleading to consider early Portuguese commercial dealings in China as illicit, and thereby to identify Tamão with the island of Shangchuan 上川. Second, it is useful for understanding the real reasons behind the deterioration of Sino-Portuguese relations at this stage. As a matter of fact, when these relations reached beyond the economic and commercial level to the political and diplomatic level, differences between the two countries in terms of their ideas about the world system and external behaviour became determinant elements in shaping their relations. It was precisely these differences that caused the deterioration of Sino-Portuguese relations and the military conflict that later ensued. **RC**

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HISTÓRIA

NOTES

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