

Amoy Anqua (1696–1723) and the China Trade before the Rise of the Canton System

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ABSTRACT: Anqua was a prominent Chinese merchant who was active in Amoy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He supplied cargos to the ships of the East India companies as well as private vessels from India. In the early years of the eighteenth century, Anqua had a falling out with officials in Amoy which resulted in his business accumulating a substantial debt. He nonetheless continued to trade with foreigners and he owned a junk which sailed to Canton. In 1704, Anqua relocated to Ningbo and Chusan where he continued to supply cargos to foreign ships. He eventually gained the favour of an official in Beijing, who honoured him with a special licence to trade. In 1713, Anqua moved to Canton, but he was not able to gain a foothold in the trade there, as he had previously done in Amoy. In 1723, he returned to Amoy, and then disappears from the records.

Anqua's example provides us with a window into the early years of the China trade. His experience is reflective of a wider phenomenon where all foreign traders abandoned other Chinese ports, one by one, and removed their operations to Canton. These were the formative years before the rise of the Canton System.

KEYWORDS: China trade; Canton System; Xiamen (Amoy); Zhoushan (Chusan); Hong merchants; East India companies.

ANQUA AND THE TRADE IN AMOY, 1696–1703

Anqua was commonly referred to by foreigners as Amoy Anqua or Anco. The earliest reference I have to him is in October 1697, when he appears in the instructions to the supercargos of the British ship *Nassau*. When entering into trade at Amoy, the English supercargos

were told: “secure to yourselves Anco, or whoever else you find the most considerable Merchants on the place”.¹ It took many months to sail from Asia to Europe so the directors in London would have received news of Anco from the ships that traded in China in 1696 and returned to Europe the following year.² Entries below from 1703 to 1705 mention that the British had been trading with Anqua “for many years”, so he was likely involved in the commerce from the early 1690s.

There is some confusion in the British records about an Anqua in Canton and an Anqua in Amoy, which warrants some clarification. Morse has suggested that these

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two men may have been one and the same person but information presented here shows that this is clearly not the case.³ In 1702, for example, there is an Anqua trading in Canton and Amoy at the same time. The Anqua in Amoy made a contract on 24 September and the Anqua in Canton made a contract on 26 September.⁴ Moreover, there is a letter in the British Library from Leanqua and Anqua dated in Canton, 20 November 1710. Entries below show that Amoy Anqua was in Chusan at that time trading with the British.⁵ Thus, Amoy Anqua was clearly not the same person as Canton Anqua.

Another important distinction that needs to be made concerns the British companies operating in Asia. Prior to 1709, there were actually two companies that traded in China, the English Company and the London Company. They were joined in 1709 and merged into the English East India Company (EIC), which was the enterprise that had been in existence since 1600.⁶ While I recognise that there were separate companies operating in China during Anqua's time, it is often difficult to determine which one he was actually dealing with. Thus, for the period before 1709, I will simply refer to these men from England as British or English, without attempting to distinguish the company they belonged to. From 1709 onwards, I will refer to the British East India Company (EIC).

The *Nassau* arrived at Amoy in 1698, in company with the *Trumbull Galley*. The records that have survived from these voyages are incomplete and detailed information about Anqua does not appear until a couple of years later. In February 1702, Anqua was described by the English officers in Amoy as "a great Chinese Merchant, named Anqua". In 1701, Anqua contracted "for the sale of all their Lead, Cloth, Perpetuanos, Says, Cloth rashes, Glass-ware, Sword-blades, Clocks, Guns, and Pistols" all of which were imported by the British ship *Loyal Cook*.⁷ In 1702, we also learn that Anqua owned a junk that carried tea to Canton, so he clearly had other income besides the foreign trade.⁸

In exchange for the imports that Anqua received from the *Loyal Cook* in 1701, he agreed to supply "3,500

chests of copper", 20,000 pounds of raw silk, 300 piculs of Taiwan sugar, 300 piculs of sugar candy, and "about 9,000 Ounces of Gold".⁹ In later decades, we learn that copper and gold were strictly forbidden to export, but in this period the two metals were exported in large quantities.¹⁰ The export of copper was eventually stopped, but owing to the large profits that could be made from gold, it continued to be smuggled out of China up to the 1760s when its return on investments declined.¹¹

By the end of January 1702, the final shipment of Anqua's gold had still not arrived from Suzhou. He said it would come within ten days, but the officers of the ship *Dashwood* decided that they could not wait any longer and departed without the gold:¹²

*After supercargo Roberts arrived at Amoy in February 1702, he experienced much difficulty from the market being glutted with Europe goods, in disposing of his cargo, but had sold the whole to a great Chinese merchant, named Anqua, and was to receive, in return, three thousand five hundred chests of copper; twenty thousand pounds of Cabessa raw-silk, three hundred peculs of Tywan [Taiwan] sugar; three hundred peculs of sugar-candy, and nine thousand ounces of gold.*¹³

The British were now thinking that they needed a more permanent establishment at Amoy so supercargo Gabriel Roberts introduced the following argument to the Honourable Court in London:

*He [Gabriel Roberts] then informs the Court that Anqua assures him, the Emperor was willing to grant to the English the Island of "Coltemshew" [鼓浪嶼 Kulangsu in Fujianese or Gulangyu in Mandarin], half a Mile from Amoy, for a settlement to be formed there; and to permit the English Chief to decide Causes between his own people, and to state a certain rate of Custom proportioned to the Size of Ships: Also that the Emperor had commanded Anqua to prepare to go as his Ambassador to England.*¹⁴

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There are a couple of factors in this citation that deserve attention. The established practice in China was to separate the foreigners from the local population, which is what happened in Macao, Canton, Chusan, and elsewhere. In Amoy, foreigners were allowed to reside on the island of Gulangyu. Another promise was that the English chief would be granted the freedom to “decide Causes between his own people”, which meant that he would be allowed extraterritorial privileges. Both of these factors, residing in a specified location and governing itself, were standard Qing policy. We later see many examples of these factors being played out in Canton, and all foreigners were treated similarly so this was not just for the English. A third factor stated above was to pay “a certain rate of Custom proportioned to the Size of Ships”. This is a reference to the port fees, which were indeed based on a three-tiered rating system. The rates varied according to the length and width of the ships, with the smaller, third-rate vessels, paying much lower fees than the larger, first-rate vessels. Anqua clearly understood these policies and he was correct to state that these privileges would be freely granted to the English.

Roberts, however, had doubts about Anqua’s sincerity regarding the envoy question, and whether or not he was capable of arranging such a high-level exchange between Britain and China. It was suspected that Anqua made this proposition in order to delay the departure of the ships, because he was having trouble acquiring the remaining cargo for his contract. By early March, the remaining gold had still not arrived from Suzhou, and Anqua began offering whatever goods he had on hand instead.¹⁵ In the end, Roberts asked Anqua to sign a bond for 20,400 taels, which would be repaid in goods when the next ship arrived. The last British ship in port, *Loyal Cook*, then left Amoy.¹⁶

Although there were some delays, many complaints, and a few alterations made in the contracts, the trade in 1702 eventually came to an end. Anqua had delivered many of the items that the British ordered, such as raw silk, silk fabrics, tea, porcelain, sugar, alum,



gold, and a variety of other products. Anqua insisted on only one-third of the exports being paid for in bartered goods, and the remaining two-thirds to be paid in silver, which was “the established Custom here”.¹⁷ In these early years of the trade, some of the foreigners were purchasing Japan copper for ballast, which was brought to China in Chinese junks.¹⁸ Other ships purchased tutenague for the same purpose but owing to that product being in short supply, the *Cantebury* took in alum and sugar instead.¹⁹ After the ships left Amoy, the British left 15,000 taels in cash with Anqua to be used for investments for the following year.²⁰



Fig. 1: "Amoy Harbour, China". Sjöhistoriska museet, Stockholm (S 2763). <https://digitaltmuseum.se/search/?q=amoy&aq=owner%3F%3A%22S-SMM-SM%22>

As far as I know, there is only one contract that has survived from Anqua's trade, which I reproduce in Table 1. It provides us with more details of the vast array of products that Anqua dealt in each year.

The items shown in Table 1 are from/for two ships of the London Company, *Chamber Frigate* and *Aurengzeeb*. While the English usually purchased large amounts of tea in China, there is no tea listed in Table 1. The other English ships that were in China that year, and in other years, however, did indeed load large amounts of tea, so Table 1 is an exception. The only exports shown in Table 1 are raw silk, Japan copper,

and gold. The imports consist mainly of cloth, lead, luxury items, armaments, glassware, skins, and silver. This was a huge amount of trade for one man to engage in. If Anqua made a mere 5% on his sales, then this contract profited him more than 10,000 taels. For some of these items, however, he probably made 10% profit or more.

Nonetheless, not everything went as smoothly in 1702 as Anqua had hoped. After the Chinese junks had returned from Japan, he discovered that they had not brought back as much copper as expected. Raw silk was also scarce this year, so with the diminished

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Table 1

The English Supercargoes Contract with Amoy Anqua, 20 August 1702

Goods sold to Anqua	Units	Quantity	Price	Taels
broad cloth & cloth rashes	yards	30,111.50	1.40	42,156.10
perpetuanoes (fine)	pieces	15.00	13.00	195.00
perpetuanoes (long)	pieces	271.00	11.00	2,981.00
perpetuanoes (short)	pieces	729.00	10.00	7,290.00
druggetts	yards	6,664.75	0.40	2,665.90
calimancoes	pieces	200.00	10.00	2,000.00
sayes	pieces	200.00	10.00	2,000.00
camlets	yards	1,670.75	1.80	3,007.35
lead	piculs	1,958.42	3.00	5,875.26
looking glasses	dozen	21.00	16.00	336.00
looking glasses	dozen	39.00	5.50	214.00
looking glasses	dozen	36.00	4.00	144.00
looking glasses	pieces	60.00	3.50	210.00
telescopes	pieces	241.00	2.80	674.00
bottles	cases	6.00	14.00	84.00
spectacles	cases	144.00	0.20	28.80
rapiers	pieces	24.00	10.00	240.00
sword blades	pieces	300.00	1.20	360.00
guns	pieces	24.00		
double horse pistols	pairs	2.00		
pocketoons	pairs	12.00		
iron muskets	pieces	12.00		
double guns	pairs	4.00		
pocket pistols	pieces	12.00		
brass muskets	pieces	12.00		600.00
glass cakes & lumps	piculs	10.56	25.00	264.00
glassware	piculs	13.70	45.00	588.15
cony (rabbit) skins	pieces	4,190.00	0.20	838.00
beaver caps	pieces	202.00	2.00	404.00
missing entry	?	?	?	501.30
duccatoons	60 ounces	1,274.76	51.50	65,650.24
French Crowns	60 ounces	172.33	51.50	8,875.22
silver bars	60 ounces	694.53	51.50	35,768.34
reals of eight	60 ounces	770.99	51.50	39,706.20

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		Total Silver		150,000.00
		Total Goods		73,656.86
		Total Imports		223,656.86

Goods purchased from Anqua	Units	Quantity	Price	Taels
raw silk	piculs	500.00	132.00	66,000.00
Japan copper	chests	9,500.00	10.50	99,750.00
gold				57,906.86
		Total exports		223,656.86

Source: BL: IOR G/12/6, 859–860.

stock and strong demand prices rose. Anqua supplied what he could at the prices stipulated in his contract, but then had to appeal to the English supercargos for an adjustment in order to obtain the quantities they wanted. Thus, in the end, it is unclear to what extent he actually made a profit that year, as it is likely that he may have had to sell some items at near cost in order to fulfil his contract.²¹

Anqua was not the only one concerned about profits this year. Supercargo Dolbin also thought that he would lose as much as 60,000 taels. This amount, he feared, could not be made up in future voyages. The ships had to layover many months longer than expected owing to insufficient merchandise to load them. Supercargos Conly and Bignall were likewise concerned that they would be “great sufferers” from the many delays.²²

There were seven British ships at Amoy in 1702, three from Europe and four from India.²³ The *Canterbury* was the last to leave. Even though the ship had arrived on 16 August 1702, it did not depart until 20 April 1703.²⁴ The eight months in port meant that a lot of money was spent for the sustenance of the crew and house rent in Amoy, not to mention other voyages that had to be postponed because of the delays. Three or four months was a reasonable time to unload and load an East Indiaman so adding four months to the

time was expensive. Adding hurt to injury, the French captured the *Canterbury* in the Malacca Straits on its way back to India so, in the end, all of the investors of that voyage were losers.²⁵

While the scarcity of exports was a huge problem for the English, a glutted market on imports was a big problem for Anqua. With so much product in the market, it was difficult to sell the imports for a profit. At the end of the 1702 season, Anqua wrote a letter to the president of the English company, Catchpoole, to request the directors “not to send any more broadcloth for a year or two”, as the market had become saturated in those items for the past two years.²⁶ Catchpoole, however, answered that “he must bring cloth more in wear; and that when cloth would not vend, tea, piece goods, & Chinaware must be laid aside, so perhaps the remedy prove worse than the Disease”.²⁷ What Catchpoole was saying is that if he did not bring cloth, then he would not be able to buy exports, which meant that Anqua had to accept more cloth in the future, regardless of being overstocked. Otherwise, the company would not have the wherewithal to purchase exports from him and that would then be “worse than the Disease” of being overstocked. This was a dilemma faced by all Chinese merchants who were involved in foreign trade.

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While having so many ships in port in 1702 was certainly good business for Anqua, it attracted the attention of a King's merchant, who wanted a share in the profits. Supercargos Conley and Bignall of the ship *Canterbury*, wrote the following:

1702, Dec 8: Some days past arrived here [Amoy] one of the King's Son's Merchants to trade; but coming too late, he designs to return in a short time, after settling Matters, we presume, with the people here for next years. It is feared his coming here may prove as bad as the other's at Chusan, which wholly occasioned all our Mischiefs and Delays our people there met with; the Mandarins and Town Merchants being obliged to allow him 6/10 shares of their Contract.²⁸

We later discover that the "King's Son" is actually a reference to the "Emperor's son". Anqua had managed to maintain a hold on his trade at Amoy up to autumn 1703. In a letter dated 5 October of that year, supercargo Conly wrote that Anqua would "do his utmost efforts and employ all his Credit to comply with us".²⁹ Not long thereafter, however, a man claiming to have authority the Emperor's son to trade at Amoy (and was thus referred to as the "Emperor's merchant") caused a lot of trouble for Anqua. In an undated narrative that discusses the trade from 1703 to 1705, the author explains how Anqua was eventually forced out of the business, and had to leave Amoy altogether:

"y^e Canton is a much freer port y^e Amoy, & of quicker dispatch; (upon which our voyage depends). The reasons are y^e Emperorer's Son who acts with an arbitrary power, hath sent down a Merchant to Amoy, (who no Mandarin nor trader dare oppose) to engross all the trade of the English to himself, and for these two last years [1703-1704], the English at that Port, has had very great and intolerable abuses put upon them,

occasioned by the insulting power of this great Mandarine sent down by the Emperour's Son. Also Anqua, the chief Merchant of y^e place, whom y^e Comp^{ies} Ships were used to trade with for many years, hath had very great sums of money extorted from him by the Mandarines, in so much, y^e he not being able to comply wth his contract to the English, hath been obliged to quit the Port, and att y^e same time in debt to the Comp^{ny}, and private Merchants, not less than one hundred thousand tale": for which, combined with "man[y] other reasons", the Supercargoes resolved to go to Canton rather than to Emoy.³⁰

When the Emperor's merchant (called "Towya") tried to take over the trade, a fight broke out between him and another local merchant, Chanqua. The latter tried to gain authority from a higher source so that he could unseat Towya and become an Emperor's merchant of a higher rank. By September 1704, Chanqua had succeeded in his plan.³¹ Although Anqua had dominated the trade at Amoy up to 1702, by the end of 1703 he was effectively pushed out. Political finesse and connections to the imperial family were now much more important to commercial success than being a good businessman.

Before the British supercargos had come to this knowledge of what had happened at Amoy, their opinion of Anqua had already changed for the worse owing to the money he owed various British investors. In 1703, for example, there are a few entries in the British sources describing Anqua as "a base villain".³² In a letter dated 28 November 1704, the English Company demanded that Anqua repay the 10,498 taels that he owed to investors.³³ Supercargo Bignall, who was at Amoy in 1704, stated that "it is difficult to obtain the Debt due from Anqua, because he transacts his Business by Friends and relations".³⁴

Supercargo Conly of the *Canterbury* had also left 18,000 taels behind with Anqua, and after he lost his ship to the French, he was obviously very anxious

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to get his money back.³⁵ In early 1704, the ship *Toddington* was sent to Amoy with explicit orders to “receive on board what can be got from Anqua either of our debt, or the old company’s; we therefore expect you to deliver to them what you have got, or can get from Anqua for our account”.³⁶

Before turning to Anqua’s debt problems and his move to Chusan, there are several entries above that show a lively trade in luxury goods and armaments, which require some explanation. While the former items continued to be a part of the trade up to the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, the arms trade was rather short lived in China.

THE TRADE IN LUXURY GOODS AND MUNITIONS

The entries above from 1701 and the items listed in Table 1 show that luxury goods such as glassware and clocks were part of the trade from the beginning. It was important for Chinese merchants and officials to give presents every year to their superiors and a foreign mirror, clock, precious stone, or some nicely shaped coral branches, might serve that purpose well. While all of these kinds of presents are well-known to historians of the trade, what is less known is that foreigners gave pistols and rifles as presents as well, and traded openly in firearms in China.³⁷ Munitions such as guns, gunpowder, pistols, swords, sword blades, knives, carbines, muskets, and blunderbusses show up frequently in foreign import cargos. These weapons of war were regularly sold in China from 1685 to at least 1704.³⁸

I have not found a Chinese source stating exactly when armaments were “officially” banned from the trade. By the end of the 1701 season, Chinese attitudes towards the arms trade was indeed changing. The British supercargos at Chusan acknowledged that there were now problems in selling some of these luxury items. Company directors recommended “not to send [to China] any Coral or Amber, Looking-glasses or Sword-blades, nor any Guns or Pistols, except some well-gilded Pistols for Presents”.³⁹

Up to 1704, sword blades, muskets, and pistols can be found among British imports to China, but they disappeared thereafter.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, they continued to be offered as presents. In 1721, for example, the EIC supercargos of the ship *Morrice* “presented the Tawjen [at Canton] with a pair of pistols, and a case of Instruments” and gave the Hoppo “a gun”. The officers of the EIC ship *Cadogan*, which was anchored at Whampoa, gave the Hoppo “a silver watch and a fowling piece [rifle]” as gifts.⁴¹

By the 1720s, the sale in firearms had clearly been curtailed. In 1722, for example, some Manila traders were caught making guns in Canton. They were apparently intending to sell the firearms in China, which raised a huge commotion with city officials. The operation was shut down immediately and all of the guns confiscated. The foreign and Chinese persons who were involved in the matter were arrested and punished.⁴²

After this event in 1722, firearms curiously disappeared from the lists of presents offered to Chinese officials. In their place, many other luxury items continued to be brought to China such as coral, diamonds, pearls, rubies, mirrors, amber, clocks, watches, mechanical gadgets (sing-songs), rare birds and dogs, and a wide variety of other exotic objects.⁴³ In 1702, Englishman Dolben even managed to exchange “one great Irish Dog” for the port fees that were owed on his ship at the customs house in Amoy.⁴⁴

As the following entry suggests, these luxury items could cause foreigners and Chinese alike considerable disadvantages in their trade:

*1702, Feb 1: As to Glass-ware, Looking-glasses, Clocks, Sword-blades, Fire-arms, Prospect Glasses, and such like Toys ... are always a burthen upon the contract; and if forced upon the Chinese Merchants, though at reasonable Prices, the Company's Supercargoes are charged in proportion higher for such Commodities taken in return as have not had their Prices fixed by Contract.*⁴⁵

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In later decades, some companies tried to forbid their officers from bringing these luxury items because they created much distress to the Chinese merchants. If the Hoppo happened to fancy an exotic object aboard one of the ships, he would ask a Chinese merchant to purchase it for him at the latter man's expense. Some of these objects were very expensive, with prices ranging from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands of dollars. Chinese merchants would often refuse to trade with a ship unless the captain could guarantee that none of these luxury items were aboard.⁴⁶

Anqua traded in all of these items, which means he faced all of these problems. We have no records to show what was happening behind the scenes, so some reading between the lines is necessary to understand the pressures placed on Anqua when these luxury goods showed up in port. He would also be pressured to purchase them and offer them as gifts to officials. With the new incursions into the trade at Amoy in 1703, by the Emperor's merchants, and competition from other competitors, Anqua decided to leave Amoy and try his luck in other Chinese ports.

ANQUA IN NINGBO, CHUSAN, AND AMOY, 1704-1711

Figure 2 is a plan of Chusan harbour from the nineteenth century, but shows where the English had their factory in former times (on the right of the plan). The records that have survived from the trade in 1703 and 1704 are incomplete and can be somewhat confusing. Many of these records are just extracts that provide only bits and pieces of information from legible parts of damaged letters and instructions.⁴⁷ What is clear from the data is that after a year of fighting over the trade in Amoy, and being forced into the shadows, Anqua found himself unable to earn enough income to service his debts. Consequently, he moved to Chusan:

1704, Oct 20: We have also seen a letter from Mr Rolfe at Chusan upon the Northumberland

*Galley, giving an account that Anqua, who lately fail'd at Emoy, is now there; and has been very serviceable to him.*⁴⁸

*1705, Feb 21: Anqua, who was forced to leave Emoy, under the misfortune of not being able to pay his debts to the Old & New Compa[ny], as well as private gentlemen, is now settled at Chusan, and as Mr Rolph writes, was very serviceable to him with his sincere advice, and by going between him and the Mandarins as often as occasion required.*⁴⁹

While supercargo Rolph (also spelled Rolt) was at Chusan, he managed to wheedle 300 taels out of Anqua, which was applied to the debt he owed. When Anqua made the payment, he mentioned to Rolph that "his circumstance was so miserable that he and his Family must starve by the Payment of that sum".⁵⁰ This is the first reference I have found to Anqua's family. They were obviously depending on the trade for their sustenance. Even with his move to Chusan, it was going to take him a long time to overcome his debt burden. While we do not know the origin of all those debts, there is little doubt that government officials and the Emperor's merchant at Amoy were the cause of some of them.

Amoy was much changed after Anqua left. In a letter dated 4 January 1705, the author described the situation there as follows:

Amoy is quite changed since Anqua's gone, there being now no man of interest with the government or credit with the Japan Merchants, consequently none fit to have credit with us, when can help it. Anqua it is known would agree your Port Charges, buy your [home] Cargo, & sell your China Cargo in a afternoon which now is three or four months business, and even then the Merchants break their Contracts as it suits their purpose so that you cannot be sure of any commodity

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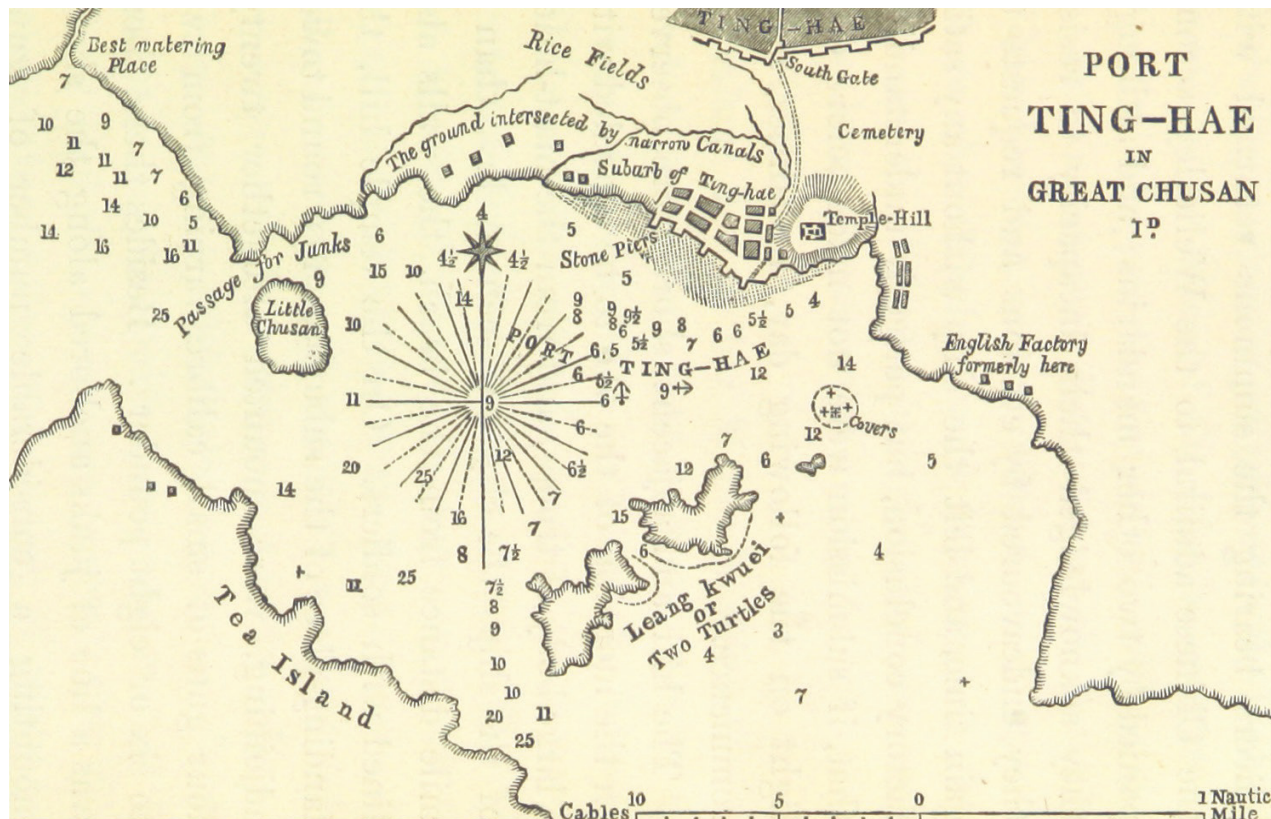


Fig. 2: "Plan of Chusan Harbour". John Francis Davis, *Sketches of China* (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1841), 285. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary/11018614053>

*till in the ship. This was our case though dealt with Shawban, Himco, and Chunqua, the most eminent merchants and they that had to do with those of less note, I doubt did not mend the matter, for whatever these merchants might be of themselves, are sure they met with oppressions from those above named, which some way must fall upon the purse of those that employed them.*⁵¹

What the entry above reveals is that Anqua was able to agree upon and carry out more trade in an afternoon than what was now taking them three or four months to accomplish in Amoy. The trust that the British once had in Anqua was now completely gone. The situation at Amoy was so precarious that written contracts were meaningless; the terms of trade might change in an instant, according to the temperament of

officials and the circumstances surrounding the trade at the moment.

The documentation continues to be spotty for years after Anqua left Amoy, but I will piece together what we can learn from the disparate data that have survived. In 1706, according to Roberts and Dolben, Anqua still owed the British traders 77,457 taels.⁵² Anqua sent a letter to the Court of Directors via the ship *Toddington*, which is mentioned in the Court Minutes on 9 May 1707.⁵³ Unfortunately, they did not reproduce the content of the letter — only that they received it. Concerns over this debt continue to show up in the British records indicating that Anqua's financial situation remained rather precarious:

1707, Feb 7: [from the Company in London, to the president and council of Fort St George, the

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paragraphs are numbered] 13. We are sorry you have such a melancholly view of our great Debt due from Anqua. We can say no more to it than what we wrote you last year and before to which we refer you.

1708, Apr 26: [from the Company in London, to the president and council of Fort St George, the paragraphs are numbered] 6. We note what you write touching Anqua's Debt and in particular that you have by M^r. Beavours Letter some hopes it may be recovered, it is a gre[at] loss to us already to be without the returns that s^ume would have made us. We rely on your endeavours to watch and lay hold of all opportunitys to get in what Part [of] it you can.⁵⁴

Up to at least 1709, Anqua was still unable to recover from his past misfortunes, and could not repay his debt to the English. As an incentive to the supercargos of the ships *Rochester* and *Stringer* which were dispatched to China in 1710, the Court of Directors agreed to allow them 10% of whatever money they could recover from Anqua.⁵⁵ The *Rochester* went to Amoy and Chusan and the *Stringer* to Whampoa, so the supercargos of the former ship were more likely to run into him.⁵⁶

In 1710, Anqua was in both Ningbo and Chusan. The following entries show some of the difficulties in dealing in the foreign trade at this time. These paragraphs were written in Chusan, but the contents could be applied to Amoy or Canton as well. The procedures and policies were not yet well established. Every time a ship arrived, there were usually different officials in charge, which meant the terms of trade had to be renegotiated all over again. In later decades, we find that it was illegal for officials to be involved in the trade, and to profit from it, but from the 1690s to the 1710s, these policies were not in force:

1710, Oct 10: Padre Goulette arrived from Limpo [Ningbo], and stated that he had seen Anqua, who promised to be at Chusan in a day or two; which

gave the Supercargoes some "hopes of trade", of which hitherto to there had been "no prospect". Next day however the Padre changed his tone; and said, that Anqua would not come, and advised them to deal with the Chunquan.⁵⁷

1710, Oct 12 and 13: Finding it impossible to come to terms with the Chunquan, the Supercargoes sent a letter by Padre Goulette to Anqua at Limpo; explaining their difficulties, and desiring him to hasten down. The Chunquan followed the Padre, in hopes as they conjectured of bringing Anqua over to his interest.

On the 17th Anqua arrived at Chusan; and told the Supercargoes, that after he had visited the Mandarins he would come to the Factory. Next day he sent the Linguist to bespeak their patience for a few days till he was fixed in a Hong. The Supercargoes however suspected, that the Mandarin of Justice, and the Chunquan had conspired to prevent Anqua trading with them; these Mandarins, to excite a prejudice against him, representing him to be a King's Merchant.⁵⁸

This reference to "King's Merchant" may indicate that Anqua had been granted a licence to trade by the Emperor. We find out later (see below) that he did indeed obtain this authority. The uncertainty of Anqua's role in the trade continued over the following months. None of the Chinese, including Anqua, wanted to use their own money to purchase the silk, porcelain, tea, and other goods that the British wanted. The reason for this reluctance was partially because all of the senior government officials who were responsible for permitting the trade to move forward, including the governor and Hoppo, wanted a share of the profits. And, of course, officials needed to be offered appropriate gifts, some of which were monetary, before they would agree to a meeting. Eventually it became clear to the British that nothing was going to happen unless they advanced their own money to send to the interior to purchase the items.

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The discussions and delays resulted in the ship missing its monsoon, and had to lay over an entire year until the winds changed. Anqua stayed in Chusan, even though the officials tried, off and on, to exclude him. They needed his connections to suppliers in the interior, and he was much better at dealing with the British owing to his many years of experience with them. The trade and negotiations dragged on into the autumn of 1711. Goods eventually arrived, but some items that were delivered were not what the British had ordered.

After months of fighting and arguing, Anqua eventually gave up and left for Amoy in September 1711. He did not return. It is unknown whether he benefitted at all from the many months he spent negotiating with the Chusan officials. The British were eventually forced to accept the items that were delivered to them, in exchange for the money they had advanced, even though many of the goods were not what they wanted. News quickly spread of the problems at Chusan, which resulted in British ships going to Canton instead. It was not until 1735, that another British ship was sent to Chusan.⁵⁹

I have no references to Amoy Anqua for 1712, but he shows up in Canton in 1713. However, when discussing Anqua's presence in that port, we need to keep in mind that there was another merchant there named Anqua who also traded with foreigners. It can be confusing when trying to figure out which one is being referred to. In the discussion below, I only mention the entries that can be assigned to Amoy Anqua with a high degree of certainty. In order not to confuse him with the other man, I will now refer to him as Amoy Anqua.

AMOY ANQUA'S CANTON YEARS AND FINAL RETURN TO AMOY, 1713–1723

In 1713, Amoy Anqua shows up in Canton trading with a private British ship. He did some trade with the free mariner John Scattergood and associates. An entry dated 31 October 1713 shows that Amoy

Anqua was paid 200 taels, with no explanation of what it was for. In 1714, he supplied Scattergood with seven chests of Bohea tea.⁶⁰ While this trade is a far cry from what he had done previously in Amoy, the entries nonetheless show that he was still in business in Canton and that he was able to raise some capital.

As far as the records reveal, the EIC never recovered the balance owed by Amoy Anqua. These debts were now ten years old so they may have just written them off. Amoy Anqua shows up in the EIC records in 1714, which shows that the Court of Directors were aware that he was now in Canton:

*1714, Dec 24: If old Anqua, who formerly belonged to Emoy, was at Canton, the Super-cargoes were to inform him, that the Court apprehended they would "have occasion to employ him in some affairs of importance the next year at Canton, and that he be ready to undertake the same on the arrival of our next Ship". If he was not at Canton, they were to enquire where he was, and inform him of the Courts intentions.*⁶¹

Nothing is mentioned about Amoy Anqua's former debt or what the Company needed him for. The records are silent for the next four years, but then the following entry appears in 1719–1720:

*What alarms them [the Chinese traders] as much as anything is the news of old Emoy Anqua, who is actually come out of Peking, as the Emperor's Son's Merchant, with a great Stock to buy up Tea and China Ware.*⁶²

With this new threat from Amoy Anqua, and other threats on the horizon, the Canton merchants were scrambling to shore up their defences in order to prevent anyone from grabbing their market share. In 1720, the locally licensed merchants in Canton joined together to form a merchant guild called the Cohong

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(Gonghang 公行). They drew up 13 articles of trade which had to be observed by everyone involved in the foreign commerce.⁶³ The guild restricted access to the trade to members only. Anyone coming from outside with special permission to trade from the Emperor like Amoy Anqua, had to conform to the Cohong's prices and policies. This stipulation effectively put the Emperor's merchant on the same footing as everyone else. While the local merchants and government officials might not have had the power to restrict an Emperor's merchant from access to the trade, they could insist on all merchants operating under the same rules. The Cohong allowed small shopkeepers who sold souvenirs and handicrafts to carry on their business as before. Those men were not deemed a threat to members or to the openness of the market. Chinaware dealers, on the other hand, were considered a threat so they were required to pay an excise tax of 30% on their sales to the Cohong "without regard to profit or loss".

Article 6 encapsulates the spirit of the Cohong, being an organisation put into place in order to protect the long-term reputation, viability, and growth of the trade:

6th. Although we do agree together, nevertheless some ill designing persons who have regard to nothing but their own interest, may find out means to deceive strangers, by selling base goods at a low price. These people when they arrive in their own country, must consequently lose their Capital; and by giving out such Merchandize as the produce of Canton, the ill report will soon spread itself over the whole world, and Foreigners will come no more hither: and thus for a little gain, these rogueries will obstruct the Customs of the Empire, and ruin the place [which is what happened at Amoy and Chusan]. For the future, therefore, when the Merchants send any goods to the ships, it shall be entered fairly in a public



Fig. 3: "Bird's-eye view of Canton". British Library (Map Library K.Top.116.22.2 TAB.) Public Domain. This view can be dated to c. 1770 (Van Dyke and Mok, *Images of the Canton Factories*, 85, no.12). <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/view-of-guangzhou>

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book; viz; such a Merchant hath sent aboard such goods, of such a weight; so many Chests or Baskets, to the end, that an examination be made. That if the Merchant of any Hong, by private agreement with the Linguist, would send aboard any bad Commodities for good, he may be punished.

The contents of this article are in stark contrast to how trade was conducted in Amoy and Chusan, where certain individuals, including government officials, took control of the trade for their own selfish interests and in some cases forced foreigners to take whatever merchandise they delivered, even if they did not want it and/or had not ordered it.⁶⁴ Word quickly spread that no one — regardless of whether they had permission from the Emperor or anyone else — would be able to storm into Canton and take over the commerce. Once this threat was alleviated, there was no longer a need for the Cohong and it was removed.

By the start of the 1721 season, the Cohong had been disbanded. But the spirit of how the trade should be conducted in Canton thereafter continued right up to the end of the Canton System in 1842. Merchants were punished if they, in any way, cheated foreigners, and merchants were always held responsible to deliver what they had promised, or at the very least, compensate foreigners for any difference in type, quantity or quality. In fact, Hoppo and other senior officials such as the governor's generals and governors repeatedly mentioned this to foreign traders in Canton, that they would personally guarantee fairness in trade and would punish any Chinese who violated that spirit.⁶⁵

Amoy Anqua's name appears again in the EIC Canton records in 1723:

1723, Jun 5: The Hoppo sent us Word that he designed to go to Wampo in two or three day's to measure the ship. We hear that the Foyen [governor] will oblige the Merchants that trade with

the Europeans to take all the goods of old Amoy Anqua's the Emperors Merch. (who is gone to Amoy) at unreasonable Prizes, they tell us there is about 600 Pecull of old musty Tea, & China Ware to the Amount of about six or seven thousand Taels.⁶⁶

After ten years of attempting to gain a foothold in Canton, Anqua finally returned to Amoy in 1723, and then there is no further mention of him. Having previously been deposed by the “Emperor's merchants” in Amoy, Anqua finally gained the title himself. In 1710, he was referred to as a “King's merchant” in Chusan so he may already have obtained this authority by then. By the 1720s, the trade had changed a lot from former years. Canton had now emerged as the dominant port where trade had become fairly standardised, with established procedures and protocols to follow. These initiatives made it much more difficult for an Emperor's merchant to arrive from Beijing, and demand a portion of the trade, as they had previously tried to do. The Canton System was now coming into its own, and developing in different direction than what Anqua had been accustomed to in Amoy and Chusan.

SUMMARY

We do not know what became of Amoy Anqua after he returned to Amoy. There is no reference to him in the British, French, Dutch or Ostend companies records after 1723. We also have no further references to his junk trade. As far as the records reveal, 1701 and 1702 seem to have been the height of his success. But the latter year may have also been his worst, because it seems that that was when he accumulated a sizeable debt. This outcome was certain to have had something to do with the Emperor's merchant arriving from Beijing that year, and the government officials who were claiming rights to a share of the trade.

What Amoy Anqua's example shows is that in these early years of the China trade merchants had the

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freedom to move about. Anqua appears to have left Amoy on his own accord and moved to Ningbo. Then he was requested to go to Chusan, which he did. When things were not working out for him in Chusan, then he moved to Canton. And when things soured there, he returned to Amoy. According to Zhao, the licensed merchants were supposed to have freedom to go to any port in China that was open to trade.⁶⁷

From the 1720s to the 1750s, however, this freedom of movement was gradually curtailed, especially in Canton. Hong merchants became licensed for life, and could not change occupations or retire without government approval. They had to stay at their posts until they died or until they bankrupted. Of course, all of them eventually died, and most of them also went broke. Sometimes the two events occurred at the same time.⁶⁸

By the 1760s, all of the Hong merchants had ceased travelling outside of China.⁶⁹ They could only go to visit family members in other provinces if they were not needed in Canton. During the trading season, they were required to be present and to remain in Canton until all foreign ships had departed. In contrast, however, we see Amoy Anqua moving about as he pleased. As

late as the 1730s, some merchants even defied officials' orders to return to Canton, after they had departed and left the trade.⁷⁰ But by 1760, this had all changed. Then the only option that Hong merchants had if they were ordered to return, was to abscond and go into hiding. Thus, along with the greater stability of the Canton trade, came more restrictions to Chinese merchants and a loss of personal freedom. The greater security to their businesses came at a price.

We are fortunate to have these bits and pieces of Amoy Anqua's life, which come entirely from foreign records. We do not have Anqua's Chinese name so it is difficult to look him up in those records without knowing his Chinese characters. I have found no Chinese records discussing a man like Anqua, but perhaps they do exist somewhere. His story is one of the best examples we have of the transition from a multiple port system in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to the basic structures of the Canton System emerging in the 1720s. It was a period of experimentation with many changes, and Amoy Anqua experienced both extremes. In fact, he had become so accustomed to these vicissitudes that he did not cope well in the more stable and regulated environment of Canton. **RC**

NOTES

- 1 British Library (BL): India Office Records (IOR) G/12/5, 608.
- 2 For a list of the British ships that traded in Asia, see Anthony Farrington, *Catalogue of East India Company Ships' Journals and Logs 1600–1834* (London: British Library, 1999).
- 3 Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635–1834*. 5 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926. Reprint, Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Co., 1966), 1: 135n1 and 2: 1.
- 4 BL: IOR G/12/6, 868, 916.
- 5 BL: IOR E/1/2 Miscellaneous Letters Received 1710, "Letter 117 Linqua and Anqua, merchants at Canton to the Court relating to the duties imposed by the Hoppo on foreign trade," fls. 214–215.
- 6 Morse, *Chronicles*, 1: 146. For a couple references to the two companies operating in China in the early 1700s, see BL: IOR G/12/6, 854–855.
- 7 BL: IOR G/12/6, 829.
- 8 BL: IOR G/12/16, entry dated 1702.12.06 at Canton states that

- 9 BL: IOR G/12/6, 829.
- 10 There are many references showing it to be illegal to export copper and gold from China. For one source that mentions both of them in the same sentence, see National Archives, The Hague (NAH): Canton 208, trade report dated 1763.01.25, 202.
- 11 Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade*. Vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011) (hereafter referred to as MCM 1), 18–19.
- 12 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1702.02.01, 830.
- 13 John Bruce, *Annals of the Honorable East-India Company*, Vol. 3 (London: Cox, Son, and Baylis, 1810), 510.

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- 14 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1702.02.01, 830.
- 15 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1702.02.01, 830.
- 16 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1702.02.01, 830; G/12/6, 1704.01.10, 831–832.
- 17 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1702.09.30, 916. See also *ibid.*, 915.
- 18 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1703.03.14, 913.
- 19 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1703.04.18, 917.
- 20 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1703.04.18, 917.
- 21 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1703.01.15, 862.
- 22 BL: IOR G/12/6, 919.
- 23 BL: IOR G/12/6, 913–915.
- 24 BL: IOR G/12/6, 913–915.
- 25 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1704.01.16, 921.
- 26 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1702.02.01, 829; 1703.02.10, 917; G/12/14; 1703.02.10, 912.
- 27 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1703.02.10, 917.
- 28 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1702.12.08, 915.
- 29 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1703.10.03, 918.
- 30 BL: IOR G/12/7, 976.
- 31 Morse, *Chronicles*, 1: 130–132.
- 32 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1703.12.13, 919.
- 33 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1704.11.28, 920–921. The original letter sent to Amoy can be seen in BL: IOR E/3/94, fls. 244r–244v.
- 34 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1704.11.18, 921. See also *Records of Fort St George. Diary and Consultation Book of 1703* (Madras: Government Press, 1934), 137–138.
- 35 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1704.01.16, 921.
- 36 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1704.01.16, 922.
- 37 When the British ship *Union* arrived at Amoy in September 1703, for example, they presented as gifts to the Chinese official (*Chanquon*) who came aboard, two barrels of gunpowder, “ten Muskets, two Pair of Pistols, ten Cutlasses, and a Spritsail”. BL: IOR G/12/6, 871.
- 38 In 1685, for example, among the trade goods that the British sold at Amoy were muskets, blunderbusses, pistols, and sword blades. BL: IOR G/12/16, no page numbers, but there are various entries to these items from August 1685 to January 1686.
- 39 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1702.02.01, 844.
- 40 BL: IOR G/12/7, 308, 316–318.
- 41 BL: IOR G/12/8, 1392; G/12/22, 1721.08.05, 7, 9.
- 42 Paul A. Van Dyke and Maria Kar-wing Mok, *Images of the Canton Factories 1760–1822* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015), 37. When the British arrived in Canton in July 1723, they noted that the Manila ship was still at Whampoa and “had been detain’d a whole year by ye Mandareens on Acco[un]t of mak[in]g fire armes in China against which there is a strict prohibition”. BL: IOR G/12/24, 1723.07.15, 16.
- 43 For a number of examples, see Huang Chao and Paul A. Van Dyke, “Hoppong Tang Ying 唐英 1750–1751 and the Development of the Guangdong Maritime Customs,” *Journal of Asian History* 51, no. 2 (2017): 223–256; and entries for “clocks”, “mirrors”, and other such items in the indexes of MCM 1; and Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Success and Failure in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade*. Vol. 2. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University, 2016) (hereafter referred to as MCM 2).
- 44 BL: IOR G/12/14, 1702.02.10, 92.
- 45 BL: IOR G/12/6, 1702.02.01, 829.
- 46 For some examples of the problems arising from these luxury goods, see references to “clocks” in the indexes of MCM 1 and 2.
- 47 The extracts in BL: IOR G/12/7 are often short and undated, making it difficult to know clearly what year is being discussed. Morse’s coverage of 1703 is brief as well. Morse, *Chronicles*, 1: 127–130.
- 48 BL: IOR G/12/7, 965.
- 49 BL: IOR G/12/7, 965–966.
- 50 *Records of Fort St George. Diary and Consultation Book of 1705* (Madras: Government Press, 1928), 153.
- 51 BL: IOR G/12/7, 1705.01.04, 1085.
- 52 Bruce, *Annals*, 3: 587.
- 53 BL: IOR B/48, 1707.05.09, 510.
- 54 *Records of Fort St George. Despatches from England 1706–1710* (Madras: Government Press, 1927), 19, 73–74.
- 55 BL: IOR G/48, 1709.12.23, 857; 1709.12.30, 865–866.
- 56 Farrington, *Catalogue*.
- 57 BL: IOR G/12/14, 1710.10.10, 122.
- 58 BL: IOR G/12/14, 1710.10.17, 123.
- 59 These long drawn out, off and on, negotiations of the trade at Chusan in 1710 and 1711, are described in nineteen pages of text, which, in the British view, could be summarised as a “labyrinth of misfortunes” (136). BL: IOR G/12/14, 120–139. See also Demetrius Boulger, ed., “Early English Voyages to Chusan,” *The Asiatic Quarterly Review* 4 (July–October 1887): 142–212.
- 60 National Archive, London (NAL): C/106/171 Scattergood v Raworth. This collection has many different types of documents, with no titles and no page numbers. For the references referred to here, see the account books for 1713 and 1714.
- 61 BL: IOR G/12/8, 1302–1303; Morse, *Chronicles*, 1: 150.
- 62 Morse, *Chronicles*, 1: 160. Morse did not provide the reference to this source, or the date, but it seems to be from late 1719 or early 1720.
- 63 An English summary of the 13 articles can be seen in Morse, *Chronicles*, 1: 163–164. The full text of the articles, in English translation, are in BL: IOR G/12/8, 1375–1380.
- 64 For lengthy discussions about the trade at Amoy and Chusan in the early years of the eighteenth century, see Morse, *Chronicles*, vol. 1.
- 65 In 6 out of the 13 articles of the 1720 Cohong, they mention that Chinese will be punished if they do not abide by the spirit of fair and honest trade. Morse, *Chronicles*, 1: 163–164. This promise was maintained to the end of the Canton System in 1842.
- 66 BL: IOR G/12/21, 1723.06.05, 29.
- 67 Zhao Gang, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean. Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684–1757* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2013), 120.
- 68 For many examples to Hong merchants failing, see MCM 1 and MCM 2.
- 69 Some of the small outside merchants continued to go abroad, but travel abroad by Hong merchants ceased. MCM 2: 8–9.
- 70 In the 1730s, for example, both Cudgin and Beaukeequa quit the trade in Canton and returned to their homes in Fujian. They were later requested by government officials in both Amoy and Canton to return to the trade, but they failed to show up. MCM 1: Chapters 8 and 11.