

## *Tribute and Trade: China and Global Modernity, 1784–1935*

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**ABSTRACT:** This collection of articles transcends our usual time markers by covering the period from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Crossing the traditional historical barriers can often lead to new discoveries. When we explore interactions beyond traditional borders we often find continuities where there were previously only divisions and similarities where there were only differences. The case studies in this volume discuss a wide range of topics from economics, cross-dressing and extraterritoriality to personal biographies, Chinese art and Confucian education. They provide a broad view of China's interactions with the outside world over a 150-year period.

**KEYWORDS:** China trade; Extraterritoriality; Chinese art; Confucian education; Linguistic nationalism.

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*Tribute and Trade* is a collection of articles concerned with the China trade. I should state at the outset that Sydney University Press asked me to review this manuscript before it was published. I looked at it and then declined, because the editors were following the old Anglocentric narratives that have largely been replaced by more balanced studies. I mentioned this to the press but they decided to publish it anyway. Nevertheless, most of the chapters are well-researched and add significantly to our understanding of the China trade and East-West interactions and deserve more attention.

The subjects of the chapters are diverse and cover the period from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. In Chapter 1, Robert Markley examines 'China and the Problems of Political Economy in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*'. The 'problem that envelops Smith's characterization of China is that he must rely on textual evidence'.<sup>1</sup> Because of this limitation, Smith developed many misconceptions about farmers, artisans, boat people and the lower classes in general, depicting them in an unflattering light.

In Chapter 2, William Christie discusses

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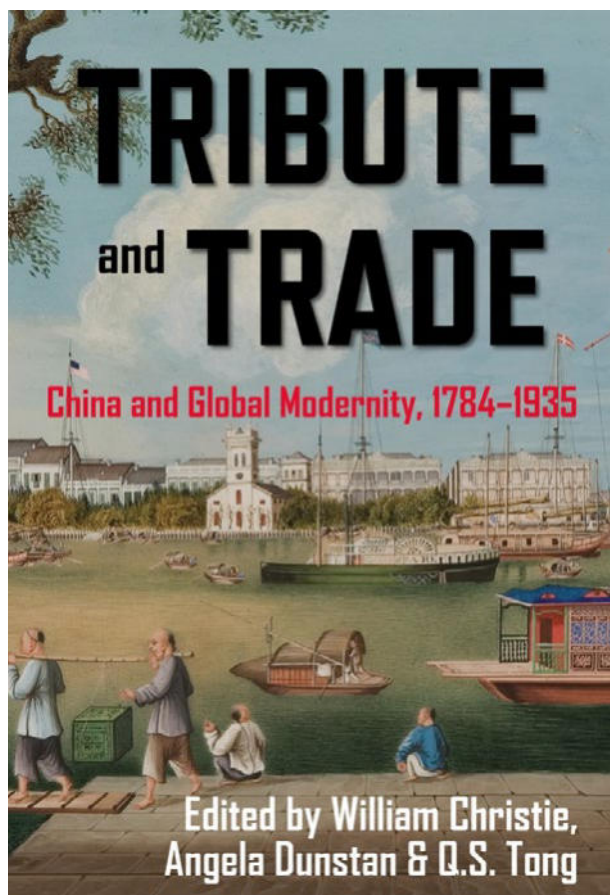


Fig. 1: The book cover.

the interesting topic of ‘Cultural Cross-Dressing in the House of Pankeequa’, but with some disappointments. The use of the unreliable memoir written by William Hickey, who stated that Americans had a flag and factory in Canton in 1769 (they arrived in 1784), automatically raises alarms. Hickey wrote his memoir 50 years after the fact from memory and it is full of fantasies. Many authors refuse to use this source, but Christie cites it without question. The author tends to follow the narratives of the previous century so he incorrectly states that it was illegal for Chinese to teach foreigners their language. Consulting recent histories would have helped the author avoid other false statements as well such as the Tongwen Hang (同文行) beginning

‘in the 1730s’ and that Pankeequa (潘啓官) was ‘flourishing by the 1750s’.<sup>2</sup> Recent research has shown that the Tongwen Hang did not exist before 1760 and that Pankeequa was 100,000 *taels* (兩) in debt by the late 1750s. In the earlier years, he traded out of the Dafeng Hang (達豐行). In the Introduction, Christie has numerous errors as well such as ‘the Chinese neither needed nor wanted to encourage and expand trade with the Europeans’,<sup>3</sup> which is just repeating misunderstandings from the previous century.

In Chapter 3, Q. S. Tong discusses the ‘*Lady Hughes* Affair’. Extraterritoriality is discussed at length, but without the understanding of what it actually was. Tong states that the surrendering of the British ‘gunner was viewed as a national disgrace’,<sup>4</sup> which was undoubtedly true. The real problem, however, was that the British officers in China did not have the authority to convict their men of capital crimes, which Tong does not understand. He rather attempts to define the conflict in terms of contrasts between individuals and communities and liberal versus non-liberal societies. The British had extraterritorial rights, but with the limitation that no Chinese be involved in any case and that the crime must be prosecuted in China. These were very liberal freedoms granted to all foreigners. Besides these misunderstandings, the author also repeats the age-old misconception that China insisted on a life for a life, which recent studies have debunked. There were degrees of homicide and some perpetrators were eventually exonerated and released owing to the evidence being inconclusive or the murdered victim having been found to be partially at fault. Christie and Tong’s chapters would have been accepted without question in the 1990s, but the research has moved far beyond these misconceptions in the past two decades.

Chapter 4 is written by Kendall A. Johnson, who discusses ‘American Mercantile Biographies

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and the Romance of Free Trade Imperialism'. Biographies present individual perspectives of wider issues, which provide us with a variety of different views about Sino-American trade. Johnson discusses the development of the trade from its inception in 1784 to the 1850s through the writings of several authors. He concludes by stating that 'through the filter of American mercantile biography, 1784 reflects a tangle of contradictions that troubles the phrase "free trade"'.<sup>5</sup>

In Chapter 5, James Watt discusses 'Mediating China in the Writings of Charles Lamb and Thomas Manning'. Lamb in England and Manning in Canton, were friends who communicated regularly with each other. Watt provides us with an interesting discourse between the two men, and shows us that there are plenty of stories 'about China other than those that were premised on antagonism and the expectation of future conflict'.<sup>6</sup> This approach deserves more attention in future studies.

In Chapter 6, Yinghe Jiang has 'A Discussion of Export Painting' and shows that there were basically three types, 'single painting, combined painting (consisting of several painting segments), and long scroll painting'.<sup>7</sup> The paintings reveal a 'hybrid culture shaped by Chinese and Western interaction'.<sup>8</sup> The artists were very open to exploring new genres — even the painting of nude women, which was considered by many Chinese to be immoral. Jiang's examples show Canton being truly a 'melting pot of cultural exchange' where new approaches and ideas flowed in both directions.<sup>9</sup>

In Chapter 7, Peter Kitson turns to an examination of John Francis Davis in China and the problem of the opium trade. Davis was the last president of the English East India Company's select committee, which was dissolved at the end of 1833. Kitson walks us through the events in China following the First Opium War (1839–1842), from the perspective of Davis's writings who 'was always

the servant of the Company or the crown'.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the chapter fits well with the volume's focus on Anglocentric sources, and shows how the British justified their actions.

In Chapter 8, Kang-yen Chiu returns to the topic of Chinese art through the collections and writings of novelist Walter Scott. Scott never went to China but was an avid collector of Chinese artefacts, from porcelain, lacquerware and novelties, to large sheets of wallpaper. Chiu shows that Scott integrated 'Chineseness into the foundation of his personal identity'.<sup>11</sup> In short, Scott's collection reveals him to have had a 'lively interest in China' but with a 'nuanced appreciation of the nation and culture'.<sup>12</sup> This is another approach that deserves more attention in future studies.

In Chapter 9, Dongqing Wang explores the 'Victorian Idea of Confucian Education', through the writing of a number of foreign authors, from novelists and politicians to missionaries. Focusing primarily on publications from the late nineteenth century, Wang retraces the arguments of the opponents and proponents to the 'imperial examinations' in China. The author argues that 'Orientalism played a central role in shaping revolutionary criticism and cultural conservatism alike',<sup>13</sup> which can only be explained by studying the broader discussions of education inside and outside of China. These literary approaches are refreshing and provide insights that cannot be found in traditional histories.

In Chapter 10, Elizabeth Hope Chang explores the life of Augustus Raymond Margary. In line with the Anglocentric theme, Chang argues that 'Margary's case cast light' on the 'wider dominion from the British perspective'.<sup>14</sup> Margary served as an interpreter in China in the late nineteenth century, and became a central player in the territory disputes and the redefining of the extraterritorial concept. 'Margary's personal

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narrative gives a false but instructive' view of 'place-making in the Victorian understanding of China'.<sup>15</sup> This was a time of endless changes taking place in Sino-Anglo policies and Margary was central to those developments.

The final chapter is by Lorraine Wong focusing on 'Linguistic Nationalism and Its Discontents'. The narrative moves forward into the early twentieth century and the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, with a focus on the writings of one of the founding members Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白). Wong shows that 'the Chinese Latinisation movement [...] were responses to actual and material changes of China in the real world of anti-colonial nationalist struggles'.<sup>16</sup> The Latinisation of Chinese characters was, of course,

very controversial and Qu and his colleagues were instrumental in determining the outcome.

All in all, those chapters are a rich source of information about China's interactions with the outside world. Some readers may find the domineering echoes of British opinions and lack of balance with Chinese views to be somewhat distasteful, but all of those ideas are, nonetheless, representative of the period in question. Moreover, there are a couple chapters that discuss issues outside of the British sphere of influence. The variety of case studies from both the pre- and post-Opium Wars periods, presented from various academic perspectives, makes the volume a valuable contribution to the study of China and East-West interactions. **RC**

## NOTES

- 1 William Christie, Angela Dunstan, and Q. S. Tong, eds., *Tribute and Trade: China and Global Modernity, 1784–1935* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2020), 52.
- 2 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 62.
- 3 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 6–7.
- 4 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 101.
- 5 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 144.
- 6 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 163.
- 7 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 173.

- 8 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 162.
- 9 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 173.
- 10 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 204.
- 11 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 215.
- 12 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 224.
- 13 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 241–242.
- 14 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 246.
- 15 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 270.
- 16 Christie, Dunstan, and Tong, *Tribute and Trade*, 277.

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