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**Private enterprise and the China trade:  
British interlopers and their informal networks  
in Europe, c.1720-1750**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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I dedicate this work to Tabea and Moritz with all my love.



### **Author's declaration**

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree at another university. A shortened and revised version of Chapter Five of this thesis has been published prior to thesis submission: Meike von Brescius, 'Worlds Apart? Merchants, Mariners, and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe', in Maxine Berg et al. (eds), *Goods from the East, 1600-1800: Trading Eurasia* (Basingstoke and New York, 2015), pp. 169-180. I have also drawn on my thesis research to write my part in the co-authored article with Maxine Berg, Timothy Davies, Felicia Gottmann, Hanna Hodacs, Chris Nierstrasz, 'Private Trade and Monopoly Structures: The East India Companies and the Commodity Trade to Europe in the Eighteenth Century', in Emily Erikson (ed.) *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 29: Chartering Capitalism: Organizing Markets, States, and Publics (2015), pp. 123-145.

### **Note on dates and currencies**

Dates listed in the text and footnotes have been rendered with the year beginning 1 January, rather than the 25 March, as was common in Britain until c.1750. Dates in contemporary letters and account books that appear, for example, as 14 February 1726/27 have been written as 14 February 1727. Foreign terms, where used, and the names of vessels, are italicised. British interlopers dealt with many different currencies. Where deemed necessary, I have rounded and converted the sums to £s.

## **Abstract**

Access to China and its wealth of manufactured goods was long sought by the European ‘monopoly Companies’, yet a direct and regular trade between Europe and the South China coast was only established around the turn of the eighteenth century. By focusing on the private trade and interloping activities of British-born China traders, this thesis shows how this branch of commerce took root and expanded within a transnational European trading arena between c.1720 to 1750. Interlopers, or free agents, I argue, played a highly integrative role for the development of European markets for Chinese goods and the networks of supply and capital that underpinned the trade. British-born Canton traders, who were operating in the smaller interloping East India Companies established close connections between Britain and the continent and between the different ‘national’ East India Companies. Private trade records, merchant letters, and East India Company materials form the large source base of this study and are used to analyse the ways in which cross-border mobility encouraged the transfer of expertise, capital, and information between different East India ventures. Methodologically, this work draws on, and builds upon the extensive scholarship on networks and the transnational. It is not biographical, yet follows a number of key individuals and their largely overlapping networks in order to shed light on the question how Canton traders (and British-born interlopers in particular) operated in the European market place – not merely as collective importers of foreign consumer goods, but as independent merchants, whose trade in Chinese goods ranged from wholesale buying and selling, brokering, smuggling, and the fulfilment of special commissions for clients across Europe.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

When Vasco da Gama sailed from the Atlantic around the Cape of Good Hope to India in 1497-98, he not only discovered a new sea route between Europe and Asia, he also opened up a new world of commerce that during the following centuries would essentially shape European consumption, manufacturing and ultimately industrial production.<sup>1</sup> While goods from the East had reached Europe much earlier via the continental 'silk roads', the end of the fifteenth century initiated the direct maritime trade of European powers with the East Indies. At its beginning, the Spanish and Portuguese crowns established a *de facto* monopoly for the lucrative maritime spice trade with the Far East; soon other nations, including the French, Dutch and English, aspired to secure a share of the immense profits that the imports of eastern consumer goods promised to any trading nation in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

While Portugal had founded the *Estado da Índia* as an imperial enterprise to conduct commerce and raise revenues in Asia for the metropolitan crown, other European countries chose a different model to organize their trade with the East: from the early seventeenth century onwards, first the English (1600) and then the Dutch (1602) founded East India Companies, initiated by private merchants that sought and ultimately secured royal privileges and a national monopoly for all direct trade between their respective states and the whole of Asia. Of the newly founded

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis developed out of the European Research Council project, *Europe's Asian Centuries: Trading Eurasia 1600-1830*, based at Warwick University and led by Prof. Maxine Berg. I wish to acknowledge the important discussions with the various team members that helped me to develop this thesis. For first results of our research, see Maxine Berg (ed.), with Felicia Gottmann, Hanna Hodacs, Chris Nierstrasz, *Goods from the East, 1600-1800 Trading Eurasia* (Palgrave, London, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Flores, 'The Iberian empires, 1400-1800', in Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks (eds), *The Cambridge world history, Volume 6: The construction of a global world, 1400-1800 CE. Part I: Foundations* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 271-296.

trading companies, the French venture was the odd one out. In 1664, the monarch Louis XIV launched the first *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* as a state enterprise, which was open to investments from the merchant community, but was closely supervised by France's larger-than-life minister of finance, Jean-Baptiste Colbert.<sup>3</sup>

Since the early seventeenth century, the different companies sought increasingly to establish also trade with China. For this purpose, they tried to emulate the Portuguese, who had successfully settled in Macao, in that they equally aspired to gain a foothold on the South China coast.<sup>4</sup> Their attempts to establish a regular trade and presence in China proved, however, futile until the late seventeenth century, when Canton emerged as the most open and 'flexible' port for foreigners.<sup>5</sup> At a time when Chinese inter-regional trade with Southeast Asia flourished again, following the repeal of the 1656 ban on overseas trade, Europeans were now able to negotiate terms of business with Chinese officials and merchants that both sides could meekly accept.<sup>6</sup> 'In the early years of this new commerce the initial negotiations between foreigners and Chinese took place in Macao Roads', outside of Canton.<sup>7</sup> At this stage, the representatives of each foreign ship had to negotiate their terms separately, a process that requested tact, diplomacy and flexibility on both sides. Not before

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<sup>3</sup> The definitive study on the many French East India Companies is the study by Philippe Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005).

<sup>4</sup> 'Emulating' is certainly a euphemism in this context, considering that the VOC tried to replace the Portuguese at Macao by force in an ultimately unsuccessful attack in 1622. See, George Bryan Souza, *The Survival of Empire: Portuguese Trade and Society in China and the South China Sea, 1630-1754* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> However, Canton was initially not the only one: during the first decades of the burgeoning China trade, the port cities of Amoy (Xiamen) and Tinghai (Ningpo) rivalled Canton as a landing point for European merchants, who also sought to play one port against the other to secure the best trade conditions. See, Weng Eang Cheong, 'The Age of Suqua, 1720-1759: The Early Hong Merchants', in Karl Reinhold Haellquist (ed.), *Asian Trade Routes: Continental and Maritime*. Studies on Asian Topics No. 13. Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies (London, 1991), pp. 217-218.

<sup>6</sup> The Kangxi emperor lifted the ban on overseas trade in 1683, leading to 'the restoration of the junk trade's important role in the Asian carrying trade'. On this new *laissez-faire* policy towards overseas trade, see Weng Eang Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton: Chinese Merchants in Sino-Western Trade, 1684-1798*, (Richmond, 1997), p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the South China Coast 1700-1845* (Hong Kong, 2005), p. 8.

1700 did Europeans start to conduct a more systematic, yearly trade with the Middle Kingdom via Canton, which came to be the only trading place open to foreigners.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, the precise mechanisms, rules and conventions that defined the later characteristics of the famous ‘Canton system’ were still to emerge.<sup>9</sup> What thus followed was a period of experimentation and familiarization with the opportunities and limits of the China trade – both in Asia *and* Europe. Crucially, this phase of experimentation continued well into the eighteenth century, and was not only shaped by the English East India Company (EIC), which became the dominant player in the long run. On the contrary, in the first decades of the century, a number of smaller, rival companies were founded in different European states that were making their imprint on the landscape of Sino-European commerce.<sup>10</sup> Some were there to stay, others disappeared under political pressure, but all of these new companies were populated by British interlopers: renegades, political refugees and transients from all walks of life.

This new era of increased competition in the East Indies trade coincided with the opening of regular trade relations with China around the turn of the eighteenth century. The sheer novelty and excitement of the China trade were felt by consumers in north-western Europe who marvelled at the great influx of decorative objects, new materials and unfamiliar tastes from distant ‘Cathay’.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the China craze also hit

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<sup>8</sup> The Dutch first sought to engage in direct trade with China, yet ultimately opted to have the Chinese bring their goods (such as tea) to their base in Batavia until 1729, when direct trade through Canton was resumed; see Yong Liu, *The Dutch East India Company's Tea Trade with China, 1757-1781* (Leiden and Boston, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Weng Eang Cheong, *The Hong Merchant of Canton: Chinese Merchants in Sino-Western Trade, 1684-1798*, (Richmond, 1997), p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Between 1719 and 1820 the tea trade increased by a factor of 23’, and the small Companies that specialised in the China trade played a weighty role in the process according to Leos Müller, ‘The Swedish East India Company – Strategies and Functions of an Interloper’, in Markus A. Denzel, Jan de Vries, Philipp Robinson Rössner (eds), *Small is beautiful? Interlopers and Smaller Trading Nations in the Pre-industrial Period* (Stuttgart, 2011), pp. 73-93, p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> David L. Porter, ‘Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35:3 (2002), pp. 395-411; Maxine Berg, ‘Asian Luxuries and the Making of the European Consumer Revolution’, in Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (eds), *Luxury in*

those more intimately involved in overseas trade. Access to China was restricted by a patchwork of different national monopoly companies, but ambitious merchants and mariners repeatedly tried to make inroads into the trade by organising voyages independent from the old companies. The epicentre of interloping activities moved from Britain to the continent in the aftermath of the Acts of Union between England and Scotland in 1707, when the Scottish Darien Company and the New East India Company – disappeared from the scene.<sup>12</sup> Britons who did not find favour with the EIC then increasingly sought other alliances on the continent.<sup>13</sup> British interlopers, which included a large number of Jacobite refugees from Ireland and Scotland, as well as English Catholics and other marginalised groups, were soon collaborating with merchants in France, Spain, the Low Countries and further afield to pursue their overseas interests.

During the war of the Spanish succession (1701-14), private merchants from St Malo (including Irish nationals) bought licences from the official, but heavily indebted French company in order to conduct trade in the East.<sup>14</sup> Two other players appeared on the scene in 1730 and 1731 respectively: the Danish and Swedish East India Companies, both of which were long-lived enterprises, which – as recent research makes clear – grew out of private transnational initiatives.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, such

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*the Eighteenth Century. Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods* (Basingstoke and New York, 2003), pp. 228-244; Jessica Hanser, 'Teatime in the North Country: Consumption of Chinese Imports in North-East England', *Northern History*, XLIX:1 (2012), pp. 51-74. For the wider impact of Asian textiles in Europe and the ways in which Governments tried to protect their own industries, see Beverly Lemire and Giorgio Riello, 'East & West: Textiles and Fashion in Early Modern Europe', *Journal of Social History*, 41:4 (2008), pp. 887-916; Felicia Gottmann, *Global Trade, Smuggling, and the Making of Economic Liberalism: Asian Textiles in France, 1680-1760* (Basingstoke, forthcoming 2016).

<sup>12</sup> After a period of conflict, the New Company merged with the old East India Company to form the entity that is best known today, the Honourable East India Company (EIC). Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident a Canton au 18ième siècle, 1719-1833*, 3 vols., 1 (Paris, 1964), pp. 160f; the Darien Company, or The Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies, did not actually manage to send any ships to the East Indies.

<sup>13</sup> Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, vol. 1, p. 88.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> Already during the 1720s, a long list of foreign projectors had approached the Swedish monarch with similarly ambitious schemes, yet without gaining his final approval. See, Christian Koninckx,

chartered companies often emerged out of private trading schemes of European merchants and were then only retrospectively given royal protection – as in the case of the Austrian Ostend Company, founded in 1722, whose merchants had already sent ships to China since 1717 on a yearly basis.<sup>16</sup>

The present thesis looks at the formative period of the China trade between c.1720-1750. It argues that ‘free agents’ were at the heart of this emerging and expanding trade. ‘Free agency’ is a portmanteau term, put forward by Cátia Antunes in 2012 to describe different forms of resistance or subversion used by individuals and their informal networks against the monopoly trading structures that dominated long-distance commerce in the early modern period.<sup>17</sup> In her reading, free agents were border-crossers who sought out contacts and alliances that were suitable to their commercial goals, and which were not necessarily based on national, ethnic, religious or local solidarity. The strategies used by free agents included the cooperation with monopoly companies or state agencies by entering the latter as official servants – a position that was then used by free agents to advance their own private trade and that of their extended contacts and trusted trading partners. British interlopers active in foreign East India Companies in the first half of the eighteenth century – who present the main actors of this thesis – fit neatly into this new

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*The First and Second Charters of the Swedish East India Company (1733-1766). A Contribution to the Maritime, Economic and Social History of North-Western Europe in its Relationships with the Far East* (Kortrijk, 1980), pp. 36-39; Leos Müller, ‘Strategies and Functions of an Interloper’, esp. pp. 74-81; Stephan Diller, *Die Dänen in Indien, Südostasien und China (1620-1845)* (Wiesbaden, 1999), pp. 116-18. The Danish Asiatic Company had existed in different incarnations since the seventeenth century. A good entry article to the history of the Danish overseas trading companies is Kristof Glamann, ‘The Danish Asiatic Company, 1732-1771’, *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 8:2 (1960), pp. 125-149.

<sup>16</sup> Jan Parmentier, ‘The Private East India Venture from Ostend: The Maritime and Commercial Aspects, 1715–1722’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 2 (1993), pp. 75–102.

<sup>17</sup> For the programmatic article that introduced this new concept, see Cátia Antunes, ‘Free Agents and Formal Institutions in the Portuguese Empire: Towards a Framework of Analysis’, *Portuguese Studies*, 28:2 (2012), pp. 173-185. More research is expected to come out of her ongoing ERC research project entitled ‘Fighting Monopolies, Defying Empires 1500-1750: a Comparative Overview of Free Agents and Informal Empires in Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire’, which takes place at the University of Leiden between 2013-2018.

framework of analysis. The reason is that both their cooperation with the British merchant diaspora on the continent as well as their cooperation with other interloping nations was key to their commercial success.

By focusing on the *transnational* European context of the China trade as my chosen unit of analysis, I consciously move away from the traditional Company literature (deserving as it is) with its emphasis on national interests and political concerns. The existing body of literature on private enterprise in the Canton trade has by and large focused on the latter part of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century: the coming of the Americans, the political implications of the Opium trade between Bengal and China, the twilight of the EIC monopoly and the ways in which the ideology of ‘free trade’ became a matter of national importance and, ultimately, a *casus belli*.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in stark contrast to the existing literature on the East India Companies and the China trade more generally, I am focusing on the involvement of Canton traders (and British-born interlopers in particular) in the European market place – not merely as collective importers of foreign luxuries, but as independent merchants, whose commitment to East India goods ranged from wholesale buying and selling, brokering, smuggling, peddling and the fulfilment of special commissions for sedentary merchants and individual consumers alike.<sup>19</sup> Private trade thus encompassed a large variety of activities that happened outside of Asia, yet which were linked to Canton, as Company servants enjoyed direct access to goods and commercial information in that port.

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<sup>18</sup> Unsurpassed in this context is Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42* (Cambridge, 1951). A more recent study that also considers the European political context of the changes happening in Asia is James R. Fichter, *So Great a Profit. How the East Indies Trade transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge: Mass., 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Elements of their engagement as wholesalers in Europe are discussed in Meike von Brescius, ‘Worlds Apart? Merchants, Mariners, and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe’, in Maxine Berg et al. (eds), *Goods from the East, 1600-1800: Trading Eurasia* (Basingstoke and New York, 2015), pp. 169-180. On their involvement in the smuggling of tea to Britain and as buyers at regular SEIC auctions in Gothenburg see the essay of Hanna Hodacs and Leos Müller, ‘Chests, Tubs, and Lots of Tea: the European Market for Chinese Tea and the Swedish East India Company, 1730-1760’, *ibid.*, pp. 277-293.



By tracing the transnational informal networks of British-born China traders in Europe, I seek to uncover the many and often hidden mechanisms by means of which money, goods, and information were entering and leaving the circuit of trade with China. A history of British interlopers and their extended connections also brings places back on the map that have received little or no attention by Company historians, but which were, as this thesis argues, of vital importance for the organization of private trade in the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

This thesis, then, puts the figure of the free agent/private trader squarely into the story of British commercial expansion. Yet, it does so by stressing the unforeseen consequences that the practice of interloping had for the making of a pan-European trading arena for Chinese goods. In what follows, I will first introduce the main actors of my study by critically discussing their place in the existing body of literature, and by outlining the rationale for analysing them from a radically different perspective. I will then move on unpicking the areas and research questions to which this thesis directly contributes by discussing the concepts and historiographical developments that have influenced this work in distinctive ways. The introduction will finally turn to the source base of the work, the methodological decisions made, followed by a short overview of the contents of each chapter.

### *Supercargoes: commercial polymaths of the China trade*

The success of the smaller ‘interloping’ East India companies in the first half of the eighteenth century lay partly in their ability to absorb capital and expertise from their more mature competitors. Investors from St Malo, the Low Countries, Germany,

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<sup>20</sup> A thorough analysis of Cadiz as a crucial nodal point for the China trade is provided in Chapter Three.

Sweden and Denmark entered the China trade at a critical moment in time – by forming state-protected companies that could offer employment and unique financial prospects to a highly skilled and experienced workforce from Britain, France, and Holland, who were willing to trade under a foreign flag. The significant migration of experienced, expert traders between the companies created lasting and powerful connections between those merchant corporations, while those connections were often established on a personal, not official, level.<sup>21</sup>

By selecting one group of highly significant actors for Europe's trade with the East, this work is especially concerned with British interlopers engaged in the China trade, who were working in foreign East India Companies during the period between the 1720s-1750. Among the large numbers of British merchants, soldiers and sailors engaged in foreign services at the time, I have picked out a group of maritime traders with special status and authority in the China trade. Who precisely were these people that shaped the direction of commerce with China and the distribution of goods in Europe? The China trade was relying more than any other long-distance trade at the time on mobile agents called 'supercargoes', who accompanied the Company ships and their cargoes from Europe to China and back. They were overseas agents, yet – as this thesis argues – they were also substantial merchants in their own right. Undoubtedly, they belonged to the commercial elite in Europe.<sup>22</sup>

The management of Company affairs in China lay in the hands of these supercargoes. This chiefly included the selling and buying of merchandise on behalf of their employing Company – with all the intricacies involved. That is, even though supercargoes were furnished with rather detailed instructions about the kind of products the Company managers hoped they would purchase in China on their

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<sup>21</sup> This argument is developed in Chapters Two and Three of the present thesis.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, vol. 1, pp. 359-364.

behalf, the realities of trade gave them a great deal of freedom to disregard such recommendations, as long as their decisions were deemed to be in the interest of their employers in Europe. Supercargoes thus reigned supreme in the direct trade between Europe and China.

Novices entered the trade as writers or assistants of a specific supercargo, an experience that allowed them to study the conventions of the trade, and to prove their diligence in keeping the books (protocols, commercial diaries and ledgers), and in writing or copying letters on behalf of their superiors. For the Canton trade in particular, merchants had to acquire the ability to work in a team, as important decisions were taken together by all supercargoes of the same Company. Only after several trips to Asia could one hope to be given full responsibility as a supercargo – which also entailed receiving the considerable privileges that went with that position. The commercial agents of the Company (which included supercargoes and their assistants) were recruited in Europe. They often came from prominent merchant families with close connections to Company managers and shareholders and were not necessarily ‘young’ and certainly not inexperienced when they first entered the China trade. On the contrary, Canton traders usually had already been respected overseas merchants in their own right before turning to the East Indies trade, coming usually from a background as wine traders, mercers, bankers, and similar professions.<sup>23</sup>

Patronage networks were key for aspiring supercargoes in gaining one of the few lucrative positions on a ship bound to China. As contemporary analysts knew, there was simply no entry into the China trade without winning the patronage of a

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<sup>23</sup> The diverse trading interests of eighteenth century overseas merchants are discussed in Jacob M. Price, ‘What Did Merchants Do? Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660-1790’, *Journal of Economic History*, 49:2 (1989), pp. 267-284.

powerful director.<sup>24</sup> This was, of course, not only true for the China trade, but for the East Indies trade as a whole.<sup>25</sup> Company careers were forged by the strategic use of letters of introduction, presents, bribes, marital alliances and blood relation in addition to considerations of character, experience and education. Supercargoes, a group of elite maritime traders, vested with special authority in the context of the China trade, were no exception to the rule.

Detailed information on the careers and social background of British-born supercargoes is exceedingly hard to come by.<sup>26</sup> Often, their names are mentioned in general studies about the China trade, but then there is hardly any information about them as private traders.<sup>27</sup> There is a lot of future research to be done on unravelling the extended family connections, consumer identities, and socio-political places of China traders in the eighteenth century; studies that would need to build on the recent developments in British imperial history, with its programmatic turn to ‘collective family biographies’.<sup>28</sup> Familial responsibilities and extended kinship networks were a social and emotional reality for China traders that structured and sometimes set limits to their entrepreneurial activities. Although the focus of the thesis lies in many ways in discovering trading patterns and practices among China supercargoes as private

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<sup>24</sup> Geronymo de Uztariz, a well-informed economic thinker from Spain, wrote about the conditions in the VOC in the mid-eighteenth century that ‘the generality of the [Company servants] are relations, or allied to, and often creatures of the directors’ – a statement that holds true for the other Companies, too. Don Geronymo de Uztariz, *The Theory and Practice of Commerce and Maritime Affairs. Written originally in Spanish ... translated from the Original by John Kippax*, 2 vols. (London, 1751), vol. 1, p. 188.

<sup>25</sup> H. V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756-1833* (Cambridge, 2006), esp. pp. 121-123. For a detailed treatment of the importance of the EIC patronage system for the Scottish elite from the 1720s onwards, see George McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State: The Scottish Elite and Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> For the reconstruction of a whole range of interloping careers, see Chapter Two of the thesis.

<sup>27</sup> Christian Koninckx, *The First and Second Charters of the Swedish East India Company (1733-1766). A Contribution to the Maritime, Economic and Social History of North-Western Europe in its Relationships with the Far East* (Kortrijk, 1980), esp. pp. 341-45.

<sup>28</sup> Margot Finn, ‘Anglo-Indian Lives in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33:1 (2010), pp. 49-65, p. 52.

entrepreneurs in Europe, I incorporate some, whenever possible, relevant information on family ties in the hope that such leads will be taken up in future research.

The only short monograph that exists about a British supercargo/captain in the period of this study is concerned with Thomas Hall, a British interloper in the Ostend Company who managed to return to England, and who became one of the chief ship's husbands for the EIC. Conrad Gill's *Merchants and Mariners*, published in 1961, successfully revealed the various strands of private business in which Hall was engaged as a supercargo/commander in the merchant fleet of the EIC and Ostend Companies.<sup>29</sup> This was as ship-owner, speculator, re-exporter, and tea merchant. However, Gill's work was criticised at the time for its lack of historiographical engagement.<sup>30</sup> Philip L. White claimed that the account of the life and commercial activities of Hall (and a number of other sea merchants) was 'factual rather than interpretive', and lacked the essence of historical scholarship, the ability to develop a thesis.<sup>31</sup> After its publication, *Merchants and Mariners* therefore soon fell into oblivion.

Yet, from today's perspective, the judgement of the book's faults would probably be milder. A fitting framework for Gill's study would now be the recent development of 'biographically framed global and imperial histories' <sup>32</sup> as championed by Natalie Zemon Davis, Linda Colley, Emma Rothschild, and Miles Ogborn.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Gill rather elegantly combined the history of the Atlantic trade

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<sup>29</sup> Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners of the 18<sup>th</sup> century* (Westport: CT, 1961).

<sup>30</sup> Holden Furber, 'Review of Merchants and Mariners of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, by Conrad Gill', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 4:1 (1963), pp. 133-34.

<sup>31</sup> Philip L. White, 'Review of Books: Merchants and Mariners of the 18th Century, by Conrad Gill', *The Journal of Economic History*, 23:1 (1963), pp. 98-99.

<sup>32</sup> Margot Finn 'Anglo-Indian Lives in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', p. 53; Finn provides a very helpful analysis for this historiographical shift towards family and individual biographies and the ways in which they inform social history today.

<sup>33</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Tricksters Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York, 2006); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York, 2007); Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton and Oxford, 2011); Miles Ogborn, *Global lives: Britain and the World, 1550-1800* (Cambridge, 2008).

with the worlds of the private trader in China, India and Europe – told through the eyes of Hall and his connections. As such, the material he unearthed and the insights he gained can still make a contribution to a number of fields today, not least by bringing together the worlds of the seafaring community with those of sedentary merchants. I am following Gill in his view that both worlds were intertwined. However, my study differs from his in both focus and frame of analysis. Instead of attempting to write the biography of a single merchant through the letters of his correspondents, I am rather concerned with linking the loosely connected lives of British interlopers to larger developments of the time. Again, the discovery of patterns and informal cross-company networks is thus given more weight than the unique career trajectories of single individuals.

With regard to their family background, trading activities and privileges within the monopoly trading system, China supercargoes were closely connected to another group of maritime traders active in the Euro-Asian trade, which have received a great deal more attention by scholars and novelists in the past: the commanders of East India ships.<sup>34</sup> Even though there is a problematic tendency especially in the English historiography on the China trade to see commanders and supercargoes as essentially antagonistic players (an assessment that goes back to H. B. Morse's *Chronicles of the East India Company*), I argue that there are many more points of convergence between them than has previously been recognized.<sup>35</sup> In fact, in the early eighteenth century, a commander could become a supercargo and vice

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<sup>34</sup> A proliferation of studies focusing on commanders has appeared in recent years, including Jean Sutton, *The East India Company's Maritime Service, 1746-1834: Masters of the Eastern Seas* (Woodbridge, 2010); H. V. Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit: Commanders of East Indiamen as Private Traders, Entrepreneurs and Smugglers, 1760-1813', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 19 (2007), pp. 43-88; Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600-1757* (Princeton, 2014); a recent prosopography of VOC captains is the first attempt to understand the social background of VOC commanders and career paths. Jaap R. Bruijn, *Commanders of Dutch East India Ships in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1926).

versa if the specific knowledge and experience required was demonstrated.<sup>36</sup> This type of role reversal was, in fact, nothing unusual. By contrast, a merchant who also had navigational skills and experience in managing an international crew was highly employable in the longest of all oceanic trade routes known at the time. The situation only changed in the second half of the eighteenth century when, as Holden Furber insists, '[t]here was a steady trend toward differentiation of function. Supercargoes tended to remain supercargoes and captains remained captains'.<sup>37</sup>

As men-on-the-move, supercargoes and commanders encountered similar trading opportunities in Asia and Europe and both groups made ample use of their private trade privileges on board of the Company ships. Taken together, much of the private trade happening on board of the Company ships was shipped on account of these two elite groups of maritime traders, sometimes in partnership.<sup>38</sup> A recent study of English Company commanders has conclusively shown how members of this 'small maritime aristocracy' acted as entrepreneurs and vital connectors in expanding markets in Britain and Asia.<sup>39</sup> H. V. Bowen's work was path breaking in that he presented 'the first detailed reconstruction and analysis of the extensive private activities conducted by the commanders of [English] East Indiamen'.<sup>40</sup> Although Bowen's study focused on a later period and was mostly concerned with EIC commanders trading to British India, yet this pioneering article provides ample opportunities for comparisons with the privileged place of the supercargoes in the China trade before 1760.

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<sup>36</sup> Quite a few individuals discussed in this work travelled between those two jobs. See, the brief lives in the appendix.

<sup>37</sup> Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (Minneapolis, 1976), p. 295.

<sup>38</sup> For examples of such partnerships, see Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners of the 18th Century*, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> H. V. Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit', p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

This thesis is much influenced by Bowen's work and seeks to transplant some of the tools used in his article – notably the matching of private and Company records to get away from repeating Company regulations to discovering actual practices – into a different period and geographical domain. Yet, I am also developing his ideas further by including commanders and supercargoes within the same framework of British private trade activities, and by paying due attention to the links between both groups. However, this thesis puts greater focus on the transnational environment China traders were operating in, which responds to a shortcoming in Bowen's otherwise remarkable essay from 2007. After Bowen brought the worlds of Company commanders closer into view, it is now high time to shed light also on the private trade activities of the unquestioned leaders of the early China trade: the Company supercargoes.

The tasks of a Canton supercargo were manifold, complex, intellectually demanding and altogether unusual for the time. A supercargo represented a 'curious mix between commission agent, entrepreneur and diplomat'.<sup>41</sup> We will come back to the supercargo's role as private entrepreneur, but first we have to establish the formal job profile, which was markedly similar for supercargoes in all European East India Companies active in China during the first half of the eighteenth century. In order to gain a position of such importance and authority in the first place, candidates had to demonstrate an unusually high degree of literacy, multilingualism, and cultural sensibility on the one hand, as well as exceptional commercial skills, organisational capabilities and a sense of leadership on the other.<sup>42</sup> As formal representatives of the Company directors at home, supercargoes placed orders with Chinese wholesale

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<sup>41</sup> Maxine Berg, Timothy Davies, Meike von Brescius (née Fellingner), Felicia Gottmann, Hanna Hodacs, Chris Nierstrasz, 'Private Trade and Monopoly Structures: The East India Companies and the Commodity Trade to Europe in the Eighteenth Century, in Emily Erikson (ed.) *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 29: Chartering Capitalism: Organizing Markets, States, and Publics (2015), pp. 123-145, p.134.

<sup>42</sup> Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, p. 31.



merchants, local craftsmen and shopkeepers. They supervised the product development, quality control and the adequate packing of the fragile cargoes, which had to reach Europe in perfect condition after seven to nine months at sea.

Demands on the skills of supercargoes were considerable: ‘besides having [the] complete mental equipment of the banker, the supercargoes had to know the quality of goods’ which were deemed suitable for consumption in Europe. H. B. Morse, the first historian to analyse the difficult task of supercargoes in the early China trade, furthermore noted: ‘They must know whether raw silk offered to them was worth 150 taels a picul, or only 145; whether the tea was of such quality that they could pay 2s. 6d. a pound ... whether the weft of woven silks should have the same strength as the warp; whether China root was better white, or tinted pink; whether vermilion at 42 taels or quicksilver at 42 taels was the better purchase.’<sup>43</sup> In other words, detailed commodity knowledge was necessary to balance Chinese offers against European demands.<sup>44</sup> In making their decisions, supercargoes also had to reckon with the competition of European producers, as in the case of raw silk that was produced in Italy in large quantities so that – if offered cheaply – the Chinese raw silk could easily become unprofitable for the Companies.<sup>45</sup>

Having an eye for the marketability and novelty of a particular design or product from the kilns of Jingdezhen or the Canton painting studios was a key advantage in the highly competitive fashion market in Europe. One important element of the China trade was indeed its focus on the decorative arts both for

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<sup>43</sup> Hosea Ballou Morse, ‘The Supercargo in the China Trade about the Year 1700’, *The English Historical Review*, 36:142 (1921), pp. 199-209, p. 202.

<sup>44</sup> The supercargoes usually received musters from different merchants in Canton for the goods needed, which allowed them to compare the quality and price of the goods. See, for the use of musters and patterns, IOR/G/12/33, Diary and Consultation Book of George Arbuthnot, Whichcott Turner, ... a standing Council for the management of affairs in China anno 1732’, pp. 25-37.

<sup>45</sup> Orders and Instructions given by the Court Directors of the East India Company ... to Mess Nathanael Torriano, etc. 10th of Dec 1731.’ IOR E/3/105, Instruction 91, p. 189.

sartorial use and interior decoration.<sup>46</sup> Taste, a concept so powerfully propagated and debated by eighteenth-century writers and self-acclaimed connoisseurs, was therefore something supercargoes had to exercise by translating it into their commercial decisions, for instance when asked to chose the colour combinations for silk bed spreads and petticoats or by choosing this or that type of heel for an order of embroidered shoes in Canton. Fashionable decisions of that kind were connected to product innovation, but were also prone to high risks. Fashions were – as they are today – partly unpredictable, partly the outcome of deliberate variations on a successful design.<sup>47</sup>

Like other overseas traders in Asia, supercargoes had furthermore to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural commerce as well as the conventions of an increasingly sophisticated art to record and represent business transactions in early modern Europe.<sup>48</sup> Fluctuating prices and exchange rates, the peculiar bookkeeping system of their employing company, endless calculations, and the many different currencies that passed through their hands in Europe and Asia made their work laborious and prone to costly mistakes. For assistance in these matters, supercargoes

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<sup>46</sup> The most extensive body of literature available about the early China trade is one that focuses on the objects of trade from an art historical or curatorial perspective. Among others, see Margaret Jourdain and R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1950); Christian J. A. Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (The Hague, 1982); Friederike Wappenschmidt, *Chinesische Tapeten für Europa: Vom Rollenbild zur Bildtapete* (Berlin, 1989); David Sanctuary Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader: the private market in Chinese export porcelain illustrated from the Hodroff collection* (Minneapolis, 1994); and most recently, Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses* (London, 2014).

<sup>47</sup> There is a vast body of literature that deals with the early modern fashion industry and the ways in which Asian products were incorporated, imitated, transformed, marketed, displayed and consumed in Europe. Key publications in this field include Maxine Berg, 'In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 182 (2004), pp. 85-142; Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2005); Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and luxury markets: the marchands merciers of eighteenth-century Paris* (London and Malibu, 1996); Natacha Coquery, *Tenir boutique à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: luxe et demi-luxe* (Paris, 2011); Giorgio Riello, 'The Indian Apprenticeship: the Trade of Indian Textiles and the Making of European Cottons', in idem and Tirthankar Roy, (eds), *How India Clothed the World. The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500–1850* (Leiden and Boston, 2009), pp. 309-346.

<sup>48</sup> Pierre Gervais, Yannick Lemarchand, and Dominique Margairaz (eds), *Merchants and Profit in the Age of Commerce, 1680–1830* (London, 2014).

made ample use of the professional literature available to them at the time, which sometimes amounted to a small library that accompanied these ‘commercial polymaths’ on their journeys. In fact, quite a few of these men were avid readers who pursued pastimes that were in line with the ideal of the gentleman scholar in the eighteenth century. An interest in navigation and astronomy was widespread not only among the commanders of East Indiamen, but was widely shared by supercargoes, too. As educated members of the commercial elite, they displayed a host of genteel interests, including French literature, but also history, politics and the study of nature. China supercargoes as a group were thus as unusually educated for their time as they are invisible in the literature on early modern commerce today.<sup>49</sup>

An added complexity of the supercargoes’ dealings in Canton sprang from the fact that they had to operate in constantly changing conditions of trade. In the period of this study, the ‘Canton system’ was far from set and monolithic. Rather, it constantly developed further out of the (at times conflicting) interests of Chinese officials in Canton and at the imperial court in Beijing, Chinese wholesale merchants (*hong* merchants), and European traders present in the city.<sup>50</sup> This meant that first-time European supercargoes, and those who had left China and returned after a few years, had to face and cope with a bewildering range of ever-new regulations. When taken together, these could produce within the span of only a few years, in the words of the English supercargo and multiple times Canton-trader Samuel Blount, ‘such a

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<sup>49</sup> While the intellectual interests of supercargoes, e.g. in Chinese natural history, culture and politics, do not form a central part of this thesis, it should be noted that this dimension of their mobile lives has received only scant attention so far in the literature, but constitutes an interesting field of insights into cross-cultural perceptions and encounters between Europe and China in the eighteenth century. For a recent attempt to understand the kind of knowledge produced by SEIC servants in China, see Lisa Hellman, ‘Using China at Home: Knowledge Production and Gender in the Swedish East India Company, 1730-1800’, *Itinerario*, 38:1 (2014), pp. 35-55.

<sup>50</sup> The most detailed analysis of these different interests and the ways in which they impacted on policies such as the formation and eventual dissolution of the Co-hong (guild system) in Canton from 1760-1771, see Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Foreign Trade*. Contrary to the traditional literature on that subject, Van Dyke argues that the Co-Hong was intended to secure both competitive prices in Canton and to insure that sufficient products (esp. tea) were available to foreigners.

total alteration in the transacting business at this Place [Canton], that I am almost in my present circumstances as great a stranger as if I had never been in it.’<sup>51</sup>

In their role as merchants and diplomats, newly arrived supercargoes had to quickly familiarize themselves with recent regulatory shifts and novel legal restrictions (and the ways to circumvent them).<sup>52</sup> Usually, returning supercargoes would inform the next group of merchants expected to arrive at Canton about the state of operations and everything that was necessary for the newcomers to pick up the trade. Sometimes, however, the routine exchange of letters and instructions failed, which caused great trouble to the newly arrived supercargoes. Yet, the latter did not simply have to accept those novel legal restrictions, but rather needed to possess the diplomatic skills and contacts to collaborate with other European merchants in the city to join forces and oppose any Chinese discrimination deemed unacceptable. (One should add that supercargoes often did not understand the background of new regulations; time and again, they simply assumed it was detrimental to their interest, even when this was not the case.)<sup>53</sup> At times successfully, they thus tried to renegotiate trade restrictions as a pan-European force. The English East India Company directors indeed repeatedly reminded their supercargoes of the importance to keep well with their colleagues who were working for other companies in the light of their own weakness in negotiating effectively with the Chinese. At one point, the directors bluntly informed a group of EIC employed supercargoes that:

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<sup>51</sup> IOR R/10/5, Diary and Consultation Books of Resident Supercargoes, 1761-69, 1761/2, July 7th, 1761, p. 3. Samuel Blount had served as supercargo at least one time before, as the EIC registers of private trade reveal. IOR/G/12/56 p. 93.

<sup>52</sup> See, Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1926), vol. 1, p. 183.

<sup>53</sup> Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, pp. 3-4.

Though we expect you do all you can in a Mercantile way to disappoint both French, Dutch and Dane, you must always consider, we are in amity and alliance with them here (at Canton), and therefore you must act so warily as not to give public offence or occasion any embroil between you, that may bring your selves into trouble and us into expense.<sup>54</sup>

Such words of caution were probably unnecessary, since the general atmosphere between the supercargoes at Canton with its foreign factories (a combination of apartments and warehouses) in close proximity to one another, was comradely. (Quarrels and occasionally violent encounters between the different crews mostly occurred at Whampoa, where all East Indiamen lay at anchor and the common sailors were living throughout their stay in China.)<sup>55</sup> Due to the confinement of Europeans to a small strip of land and with little diversion from the daily business, evening entertainments among the Europeans, which occasionally included also Chinese merchants and *compradors* (licensed provision purveyors), formed the main source of amusement. The bills for dinners and musical entertainments that supercargoes incurred during their stay at Canton were a matter of debate for much of the eighteenth century and suggests that the Europeans indulged in cross-company sociability, whenever possible.<sup>56</sup>

Yet, supercargoes also needed tact and good commercial instincts in their dealings with Chinese merchants in Canton. For any contract and commission signed

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<sup>54</sup> IOR E/3/105, 1730, Orders and Instructions to James Naish, Nathaniel Torriano, Philip Middleton, Abraham Wessels, Richard Moreton and Thomas Fytche, Council for China 4 Dec. 1730, Instruction 70, p. 23.

<sup>55</sup> See, Hosea Balou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1 (London, 1910), p. 101; idem., *The Chronicles of the English East India Company*, Vol. 1, (1926), pp. 168-69.

<sup>56</sup> Cross-company visits and the habit to dine with one's friends in the other Companies is detailed in the travel account of the SEIC supercargo and director Colin Campbell. Paul Hallberg and Christian Koninckx (ed.), *A Passage to China: Colin Campbell's Diary of the First Swedish East India Company Expedition to Canton, 1732/33* (Göteborg, 1996), pp. 132-34.

to secure Chinese goods, it was of vital importance to ascertain the creditworthiness of one's business partner. This was not only of significant importance for one's own contracts (as money lending was very much part of the commercial culture at Canton), but it potentially also determined future transactions and orders placed during the next trading season by the Company one worked for. Rumours about the financial impotence of a particular merchant spread quickly in Canton – a place where nothing could be kept a secret for long.<sup>57</sup> The different trading companies shared their linguists with the other Companies and there was simply no way to avoid commercial information to be passed on. The sharing of information between Europeans were equally open. In fact, the supercargoes and captains of each nation knew exactly what others had loaded on their ships to Europe. New products and designs were quickly copied and the guarding of musters was very difficult indeed.

The assessment of the reliability of Chinese merchants was, however, significantly complicated by the fact that – unlike the Jesuit missionaries at the court of Beijing – European traders in Canton were not allowed to learn Chinese. Indeed, serious punishment awaited any Chinese individual who endeavoured to teach a foreigner Cantonese or Mandarin.<sup>58</sup> This meant that all European traders had to rely on a handful of 'linguists' (translators) as go-betweens, who were chosen by the Chinese.<sup>59</sup> Around 1700, the Chinese linguists were still communicating with the Europeans in Portuguese. Yet by 1730, pidgin English which was in fact an 'amalgam of many of [the] languages' spoken at Canton had been adopted by the Chinese of high and low status and by European traders, for it facilitated the conduct of business and the sharing of information.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, direct communication

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<sup>57</sup> See, Chapter Four of the thesis.

<sup>58</sup> Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*, pp. 78.

<sup>59</sup> The term 'linguist' was used by contemporary China traders.

<sup>60</sup> Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*, pp. 80-82.

especially with Chinese officials remained a desideratum for Europeans, which explains the repeated attempts of individuals – like the English Company servant James Flint – to learn the Chinese language in secrecy. In 1741, after having lived in Macao for three years already, Flint asked the English supercargoes who were present in Canton at the time for permission and financial support ‘to stay another few years in China to learn to read & write and Endeavour to make myself acquainted with the Mandareen, as well as the Common language that is talk’ed in this Place’; Flint was ultimately severely punished by the Chinese for his endeavour to carry English trade to a different Chinese port.<sup>61</sup> Under these circumstances, testing the commercial trustworthiness of Chinese business partners was evidently a delicate matter, and yet belonged to the crucial tasks of supercargoes eager not to waste resources or become a victim of fraud or bankruptcy.

Dealing with the uncertainties of trans-cultural commerce was, however, certainly not the only delicate balancing act that supercargoes had to achieve. Rather, also their precise relationship with the European-based Company directors was a matter of constant re-negotiation. Episodes of outrage and blatant mistrust between the headquarters and specific Company servants – or even larger groups of employees – were generally much more concerned with the Companies’ permanent settlements especially in India and South-East Asia.<sup>62</sup> Here, EIC merchants stayed sometimes for decades in a row without ever coming under the eyes of their employers. Unsurprisingly, this could create significant mistrust at the European company headquarters. When, for instance, the English Company director Josiah Child wrote to the Madras Council (which consisted of British Company servants

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<sup>61</sup> On the James Flint Affair and its impact on Chinese foreign policy at Canton after 1757, see Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong, 2011), p. 435. Quoted from: IOR/G/12/49, p. 24.

<sup>62</sup> Ian Bruce Watson, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659–1760* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1980). For the case of the VOC see, Chris Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company: The Dutch East India Company and its Servants in the Period of its Decline (1740-1796)* (Leiden, 2012).

turned private traders) in 1687, he thought that his employees were intentionally ‘perverting or misconstruing, procrastinating or neglecting our plain and direct orders to you, as if you were not a subordinate but a coordinate power with us’.<sup>63</sup> Such rifts occurred less with supercargoes in China, not least because until the 1750s, they did not stay in Canton for long, but rather shuffled back and forth and thus were more answerable to the concerns of the European-based directors.<sup>64</sup>

*Private trade and monopoly structures: a network perspective*

Occasional tensions between Company directors and supercargoes as their formal representatives indicate a significant split between personal and corporate interests. Because supercargoes were also private traders, their trading interests were not necessarily aligned with those of their employing Company. The conflicts that emerged from this particular constellation – in which supercargoes constantly had to change hats as Company representatives and private traders – can be traced through official Company records, such as the lengthy instructions that were given to the small band of supercargoes who were appointed each year.<sup>65</sup> Economists and organisational theorists have studied exactly this interplay of potentially clashing interests between employers and distant employees – usually in the context of the

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<sup>63</sup> Kirti N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660–1760* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 77. Cited in Julia Adams, ‘Principals and Agents, Colonialists and Company Men: The Decay of Colonial Control in the Dutch East Indies’, *American Sociological Review*, 61:1 (1996), pp. 12–28, p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> An exception here is the French case. Duvelaer de la Barre and Francois (Francis) Rothe, supercargoes of the Compagnie des Indes were both living in Canton/Macao for many years in a row before 1750, thus commencing a trend that was gradually taken up by all other Companies.

<sup>65</sup> Threats of dismissal and financial punishments were the ultimate weapons Company directors had against fraudulent practices and incompetence of individual Canton traders. Concern was articulated when private trade goods, which were also traded by the Company, were bought cheaper or sold much better at Company auctions. See, for instance, the case of EIC Captain Hurst on the *Royal Bliss*, IOR G/12/8, instruction 68 for the supercargoes in 1712/13. Signed, London, 19 December 1712.



modern (multinational) firm.<sup>66</sup> But the availability of systematic data for the different East India Companies has also attracted the attention of sociologists and institutional economists, who produced a series of interventions in the recent Company literature, dealing specifically with the principal-agent problem.<sup>67</sup>

This thesis contributes to discussions about the relationship between principals and agents in early modern long-distance commerce in a specific way, in that it stresses the *positive* impact that private trade activities could have for the success of an employing company. The Swedish East India Company is taken as an example to show that the private trade of her employees (the dominant group consisted of British interlopers at the time) was beneficial to Company concerns in a number of key areas of its economic activity. Private trade, the thesis argues, encouraged product innovation, the development of lucrative niche markets for Chinese export wares in Europe, and helped to consolidate the position of the SEIC in relation to its European competitors, as her agents shared private information, contacts and clients with the principal.<sup>68</sup>

The repeated migration of British interlopers from one employing company to the next had lasting effects on the composition of these free agents' commercial networks in Europe. It is from their transnational wanderings on the continent that supercargoes derived commercial strength, as they thus gained privileged access to multiple markets at home and abroad, while operating under the changing roofs of

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<sup>66</sup> For instance, Hein Bogaard and Marketa Sonkova, 'Principal-Agent Relationships in Multinational Banks: Evidence from Executive Appointments' (August, 2013), electronic resource available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2261752>.

<sup>67</sup> Pablo Casas-Arce and Santhi Hejeebu, 'Job Design and the Benefits of Private trade', University of Oxford, Department of Economics, *Discussion Paper Series*, 204 (2004); Emily Erikson and Peter Bearman, 'Malfeasance and the Foundations of Global Trade: The Structure of English Trade in the East Indies, 1601-1833', *American Journal of Sociology*, 112:1 (2006), pp. 195-230; Julia Adams, 'Principals and Agents', Ann M. Carlos, and Stephen Nicholas, "'Giants of an Earlier Capitalism": The Chartered Trading Companies as Modern Multinationals', *The Business History Review*, 62:3 (1988), pp. 398-419; Ann M. Carlos, 'Principal-Agent Problems in Early Trading Companies: A Tale of Two Firms', *The American Economic Review*, 82:2 (1992), pp. 140-145.

<sup>68</sup> See the discussion in Chapter Four of this thesis.

competing monopoly Companies. The supercargoes' informal networks to wholesale merchants, investors, smugglers and wealthy clients in Britain and on the European continent was beneficial for their temporary employers, too, since private trade goods were sold at their auctions yielding income without bearing the commercial risk.

Stressing the symbiotic relationship between Company and employees – principal and agents – is one of the most recent and most dynamic developments in the literature on the East India Companies. Emily Erikson in particular has put forward a new reading of the private enterprise of EIC commanders in Asian waters, who, she insists, expanded British trade by deviating from the routine shipping paths of the Company to conduct private trade elsewhere.<sup>69</sup> Her study explores the systemic impact of individual malfeasant behaviour onto a larger trading network (the British intra-Asian trade). Her study comes to the conclusion that '[m]onopoly rights were not the key to Company success; it was the partial abrogation of those rights (to private traders) that became the foundation of England's commercial success in Asia.'<sup>70</sup> She argued that private trade changed the structure and reach of English trade in Asia, not in any straightforward way, but rather as an unintended by-product of individual malfeasant behaviour.

In many ways, Erikson's work builds on an earlier strand of literature that detailed the relationship between private traders and the (English) East India Company, and their part in the transformation of the East India Company into a territorial power. The pioneering works of Holden Furber, Peter J. Marshall and Ian Bruce Watson have already highlighted the crucial agency of British private traders in establishing first England's commercial dominance in the so-called country trade,

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<sup>69</sup> Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600-1757* (Princeton, 2014).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

and second its political and military hegemony over parts of the subcontinent after 1757.<sup>71</sup> What is new about Erikson's research is that she turns the lamentable effect of individual acquisitiveness into an interpretative framework that allows us to see the relationship between private and Company trade as a system that was efficient and expanding *because* it operated in concert.<sup>72</sup>

Erikson's method is that of a historical network analysis (as sociologists call it), which favours quantitative data. A body of published sources, the EIC ships' logs, enabled her to chart and visualise contractions and expansions in the EIC (private) trade network in Asia between 1600-1757. By tracing diversions from the regular shipping routes of Company ships in Asia, Erikson was able to show how the private trade activities of Company commanders generated a more complex trading system over time, a network structure that interfered with and extended the regular trading routes scheduled by the EIC directors in London. This shift in focus from trade routes to trading networks is important, yet her framework has left out, or greatly simplified, elements of the workings of trade, which are, as this work will show, absolutely central to understanding British commercial expansion in the Asian trade.

First, Erikson problematically projects national borders into a complex trading environment in which identities were in flux and multi-national associations the rule.<sup>73</sup> This is mainly due to a misconception on her behalf about how private

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<sup>71</sup> Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (Minneapolis; London, 1976); Peter J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1976); Ian Bruce Watson, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760* (New Delhi, 1980).

<sup>72</sup> Independent of her study, this point has also been the finding of a jointly-written article by the members of the ERC project 'Europe's Asian Centuries', led by Maxine Berg. See, Maxine Berg, et. al., 'Private Trade and Monopoly Structures'. The theme is equally explored in Chris Nierstrasz, *Rivalry for Trade in Tea and Textiles: The English and Dutch East India Companies (1700-1800)* (Basingstoke, 2015).

<sup>73</sup> Andrew MacKillop, 'Europeans, Britons, and Scots: Scottish Sojourning Networks and Identities in Asia, c.1700-1815', Angela McCarthy (ed.), *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities Since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2006), pp. 19-47.

trade operated on the ground. For instance, she wrongly assumes that all deviations from the regular shipping paths were the result of the single-mindedness of the commander on board a Company ship. Some familiarity with merchant correspondence and private accounts books would have led her to doubt whether commanders always or ever went to new places on account of their own recklessness alone. Commanders did not have a single principal (the Company), as she assumes, but many principals often from different European and sometimes Asian kingdoms on whose behalf they acted in addition to pursuing their own enterprises. It is the multiplicity of agency relations which Erikson sacrificed for presenting a seemingly unambiguous dataset of British trade in Asian waters.

In reality, however, the composition of principals, and thus the money put on board her 'English' Company ships, was multi-national and multi-ethnic. If this is true for the intra-Asian trade, this thesis demonstrates that the transnational is also the appropriate framework for understanding the direct trade between Europe and China. Erikson's wider arguments are still important, yet need to be qualified in the future by a nuanced analysis of the comparative success of British nationals in using local resources and by cooperating effectively with other Europeans across the trading Companies.

A contemporary analogy might help to clarify the complexities that could have been incorporated by Erikson into her study. The officers of today's merchant marine, who serve on large container ships, commonly differentiate between so-called bus and taxi routes. In the case of the former, a container ship follows a fixed route with relatively few stopovers, which might be roughly comparable to the Company ships involved in the *direct* trade between Europe and Asia in the eighteenth century. This service, however, is complemented and made more efficient by a host of other container ships. These operate on an opportunistic schedule, like a

taxi. They are called into ports when a suitable cargo is available, thereby making efficient use of the space available. This, again, might be roughly comparable to the Company and privately chartered ships engaged in the country trade back in the 1700s. The employees on board are hired for a certain amount of time (nowadays for a period of up to six months), during which they manage a large turnover of goods. The flags present-day container ships carry do not adequately represent either the composition of the crew, nor the nationality of those who chartered the ship – nor indeed the place to which the profits go. The majority of container ships today belong to the German merchant fleet. However, only 370 ships out of over 3,000 such ocean going vessels actually carry a German flag.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the ships engaged in the intra-Asian trade in the eighteenth century were operated and financed by different people who were certainly not all British subjects.

Second, Erikson's birds-eye view on trading networks really comes at a price. Her plan was to 'reveal how individual lives intersect and cumulate into larger institutional structures and historical patterns'.<sup>75</sup> While she employed an innovative strategy to demonstrate such 'micro-macro linkages' through a software-supported network analysis, her actors, however, remain name- and faceless. For historians interested in the workings of trade and the social embeddedness of economic action (to use the influential term coined by Mark Granovetter)<sup>76</sup>, this kind of approach is therefore of limited attraction. By contrast, this thesis evolves on a much smaller-scale, and therefore comes to quite different and important conclusions. By means of a group portrait of British interlopers, this thesis demonstrates how informal

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<sup>74</sup> Instead the German-owned ships (which might be chartered by other nationals, to be sure) most commonly hoist the flag of Liberia or Antigua Barbuda.

[http://www.reederverband.de/fileadmin/vdr/images/Daten\\_und\\_Fakten/infopool/downloads/pdf/10-Flaggenstruktur.pdf](http://www.reederverband.de/fileadmin/vdr/images/Daten_und_Fakten/infopool/downloads/pdf/10-Flaggenstruktur.pdf), last accessed: 8.1.2016.

<sup>75</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, p. 286.

<sup>76</sup> Mark Granovetter, 'Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness', *American Journal of Sociology*, 91:3 (1985), pp. 481-510.

networks actually operated within a landscape of competing chartered Companies, instead of merely tracing their geographical contours from a distance, as Erikson's work did.

Historical trading systems produced changing landscapes of risks, exigencies and opportunities that individual traders struggled to navigate. If we lose sight of the individuals (including their successes, struggles, and failures), we also lose sight of the characteristics of their trading worlds. I therefore favour a network approach that gives due weight to interpersonal relationships between individual economic actors by considering them also as social beings.

Key inspiration for my work comes from the burgeoning fields of Atlantic business history and scholarship on merchant diasporas, whose proponents share an interest in the constitutive elements and troubles of merchant networks, which are looked at 'through a social as well as an economic lens'.<sup>77</sup> In their theoretical assumptions, Atlanticists – and scholars influenced by them – commonly build on the influential work of the economic sociologist Mark Granovetter on social ties.<sup>78</sup> In recent years, much debate has been devoted to the key issue why merchants, who exchanged letters to do business but who might have never met in person, should ever trust one another. In the light of research that follows Granovetter's work, the reason is found in the power of social relations, which merchants could not escape

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<sup>77</sup> Timothy Davies, *British Private Trade Networks in the Arabian Sea, c.1680-c.1760* (unpubl. PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2012), p. 13. See, also the work by Xabier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World. Spanish Merchants and their Overseas Networks* (Rochester, 2010). David Hancock, 'The Trouble with Networks: Managing the Scots' Early-Modern Madeira Trade', *The Business History Review*, 79:3 (2005), pp. 467-491; Richard L. Kagan and Phillip D. Morgan (eds), *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800* (Baltimore: MD, 2009); Cátia Antunes and Filipa Ribeiro Da Silva, 'Cross-cultural Entrepreneurship in the Atlantic: Africans, Dutch and Sephardic Jews in Western Africa, 1580-1674', *Itinerario*, 35:1 (2011), pp. 49-76.

<sup>78</sup> Mark Granovetter, 'Economic Action and Social Structure'.

from. This has led to the insight that ‘cheating is avoided because the social price to be paid would be too costly [...] or because social control is too high.’<sup>79</sup>

The opposing school of thought, whose members are affiliated to the International Society of *New Institutional Economics* (short: NIE), instead stress the importance of economic *institutions* in creating commercial trust and encouraging impersonal exchanges. Contracts and other legally enforceable arrangements are thereby given more weight than social norms that arise from social ties.<sup>80</sup> There is a progressive element in-built in the work of NIE scholarship. That is, one of the key assumptions is the idea that the implementation of rational economic institutions such as courts (in contrast to communal punishment) leads to greater levels of trust, which in turn would encourage trade and economic growth.<sup>81</sup> This assumption also underlies the NIE school’s historical quest for explaining ‘the rise of the West’, an aim that is not a great concern in the literature on networks and social embeddedness so far.

The works of historians such as Avner Greiff and Douglass C. North have been critically debated for some time now for their under-socialised views on commercial exchange, and the ways in which they differentiate between modern and archaic forms of trust in trade.<sup>82</sup> Scholarly contributions on the functioning of cross-cultural commerce, in particular, have taken issue with the crude distinction between

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<sup>79</sup> Tijl Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks: Eighteenth-Century Diamond Merchants* (London, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge, 2006); and Douglass C. North, ‘Institutions and Economic Growth: An Historical Introduction’ in Jeffry A. Frieden and David A. Lake, *International Political Economy: Perspectives on Global Power and Wealth* (London, 2000), pp. 47-59.

<sup>81</sup> Gregory Clark, ‘A Review of Avner Greif’s *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade*’, *Journal of Economic Literature*, XLV (2007), pp. 727-743.

<sup>82</sup> Paul R. Milgrom, Douglass C. North and B. R. Weingast, ‘The Role of Institutions in the Revival of Trade: The Law Merchant, Private Judges, and the Champagne Fairs’, *Economics & Politics*, 2:1 (1990), pp. 1-23; an important and critical voice regarding Avner Greif’s work on *Institutions and the Path to Modernity* is Jeremy Edwards and Sheilagh Ogilvie, ‘Contract Enforcement, Institutions, and Social Capital: the Maghribi Traders Reappraised’, *Economic History Review*, 65:2 (2012), pp. 421-444.

archaic and modern forms of trust. They have done much in showing the efficiency of local and communal ties for global trade.<sup>83</sup> The studies of David Hancock, Xabier Lamikiz, Tim Davies and others have also proven that there is a way to accommodate the individual and his social embeddedness within larger narratives of global commerce.<sup>84</sup> The result is a slight, but important shift in perspective. By ‘establishing the historical agency exerted by networks of trade, finance and information, the role of the individual entrepreneur is taken out of its cadre of rationality and self-interest to be inserted into a theory in which cooperation and interaction are the crucial forms of agency.’<sup>85</sup>

Such a focus on interaction and relationships is arguably more in line with how early modern merchants saw their own business evolve. As Tijl Vanneste has rightly emphasized, commercial relationships in the early modern period were built on the notion of reciprocity and on mutual interest. Indeed, a well-functioning relationship between ‘correspondents’ within a network structure (who could live thousands of miles apart) was typically non-hierarchical, multifunctional and often personal, as David Hancock observed. Thus, members of a network ‘were not directed by or responsible to others in the way they would be to superiors in a hierarchy’.<sup>86</sup> Instead, their business relationship was characterised at least at the outset by reciprocity, which manifested itself in the way in which they acted on each other’s behalf.

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<sup>83</sup> Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, 2009).

<sup>84</sup> David Hancock, *Citizens of the World*; Francesca Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*; Timothy Davies, *British Private Trade in the Arabian Sea*; Sebouh Aslanian, ‘Social Capital: “Trust” and the Role of Networks in Julfan Trade: Informal and Semi-Formal Institutions at Work’, *Journal of Global History*, 1:3 (2006), pp. 383-402.

<sup>85</sup> Tijl Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks*, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> David Hancock, ‘The Trouble with Networks: Managing the Scots’ Early Modern Madeira Trade’ *Business History Review*, 79:3 (2005), pp. 467-491, p. 484.



The merchants of this study, a group of British free agents active in the China trade, were able to act on behalf of multiple principals in their homelands and within wider Europe, in addition to pursuing their own ventures. It is this constant changing of hats by which merchants and mariners managed to be the principal in some, and the agent in other commercial transactions that represents one of the building blocks of early modern long-distance commerce.<sup>87</sup> In order to serve their contacts effectively, merchants performed a great deal of agency tasks, which were not limited to business matters alone. The sending of gifts, forwarding of letters, assisting with legal issues, finding placements for each other's kin, and so on, were all perfectly acceptable ways to 'personalize the relationship ... [by] eliding the distinctions between business and personal domains'.<sup>88</sup> Favours were given and returned, following a balance sheet approach to social relations.

For a fact, it was relatively 'flat' principal-agent relations that were the ubiquitous feature of long distance trade in the period of the present study. Indeed, one could argue that monopoly companies with their centralised administration and vertical hierarchies were, in a sense, an oddity in the otherwise decentralised trading world navigated by most early modern entrepreneurs in Europe (and Asia). Centralised warehousing, decision-making, and the selling of goods at fixed intervals were important features of all the chartered Companies engaged in the Sino-European trade.<sup>89</sup> However, there were myriad ways in which this structure of contained competition was undercut. The creation of monopoly structures remained

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<sup>87</sup> The multiple functions that early modern merchants (négociants) fulfilled for each other all contributed to their income. See, Yannick Lemarchand, Cheryl McWatters and Laure Pineau-Defois, 'The current account as cognitive artefact: stories and accounts of la maison Chaurand', in Pierre Gervais, Yannick Lemarchand and Dominique Margairaz (eds), *Merchants and Profit in the Age of Commerce, 1680-1830* (London, 2014), pp. 13-31.

<sup>88</sup> Hancock, 'The Trouble with Networks', p. 480.

<sup>89</sup> Maxine Berg, 'Luxury, Luxury Trades, and the Roots of Industrial Growth: A Global Perspective' in Frank Trentmann (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 173-191, pp. 184f.

an ideal rather than a reality, perhaps because it was in tune with the political and economic aims of early modern states, but arguably less so for pre-modern capitalists. A highly complex yet uneven system of mobile agents, factors and brokers underpinned the seaborne trade within Europe for centuries. It thus needs to be stressed that the agency system, with its emphasis on mutual interest and reciprocal favours, was not a marginal phenomenon: rather, it was the norm.<sup>90</sup>

The China trade is exemplary for the kind of productive competition that developed out of the co-existence of Company and private trade, leading to the establishment of more and more European port cities that acted as financial centres, transit points and staple markets for Chinese export wares and supplies destined in return for markets across Asia. Even though the Companies were at pains to centralise the Asia trade and thus to limit access along the way to and from Asia, by creating ‘corridors’ and fixed gateways, they ultimately failed to survey and control the involvement of a wide range of intermediaries who collaborated with Company employees out of smaller port cities on the continent and in Britain.<sup>91</sup>

Private trade networks thus reveal a more complete map of routes and nodes that shaped the China trade in the first half of the eighteenth century. They also bring out the social and transnational elements of the China trade in ways that a traditional history of the chartered Companies as national containers could not reveal. A qualitative network analysis, so effectively used in the recent literature on early modern commerce in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, is still absent from the literature on the Canton trade.<sup>92</sup> This thesis tries to make a first step towards applying some of

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<sup>90</sup> For a fine study of agency relations in the eighteenth century, see Gedalia Yogeve, *Anglo-Dutch Jews and Eighteenth Century Trade* (Leicester, 1978).

<sup>91</sup> See Chapter Three of this thesis on alternative geographies of trade and the special role played by Cadiz in coordinating private trade initiatives.

<sup>92</sup> Of particular importance are David Hancock, *Citizens of the World*; Søren Mentz, *The English Gentlemen Merchant at Work: Madras and the City of London, 1660-1740* (Copenhagen, 2005); Timothy Davies’ thesis on British trade in the Arabian seas effectively used qualitative network

the Atlanticists' insights to highlight the important links and interdependence of British Canton traders and the wider merchant community in Europe. More specifically, the present work deploys a qualitative network approach to explore how individual supercargoes build up alliances and created niches for their private trade by appropriating the opportunities of multiple East India Companies for their advantage. In that regard, the thesis differs methodologically and analytically from Erikson's work, not least because it considers how private traders played, in a sense, one company against the other – by constantly seeking the best terms of (private) trade and by so doing turning into a flexible, pan-European workforce that could shift between different employers, always seeking to maximise their benefits.

### *Accessing privileges*

Free agents operated, as Cátia Antunes has rightly insisted, only partly in illegality. In fact, much of their profits came from using and maximising privileges through cooperation with state monopolies or through the appropriation of their power and infrastructure as direct representatives.<sup>93</sup> In this context, it is crucial to acknowledge the existence of different legal privileges granted to supercargoes in each company. These legal restrictions and opportunities were not monolithic, but rather changed frequently, time and again opening up space for entrepreneurial supercargoes eager to exploit potential niches for their private trade. To be sure, such private trade of Company representatives (and especially of supercargoes) was not grudgingly tolerated, but rather actively encouraged by company directors, since it secured the

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analysis in order to flesh out both the local rootedness of the traders' decision making, and the prime importance of letter-writing for their participation in transcontinental or global merchant networks. See idem, *British Private Trade in the Arabian Seas*; Timothy Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks and Metropolitan Connections', in Maxine Berg (et al.), *Goods from the East*, pp. 154-167.

<sup>93</sup> Cátia Antunes, 'Free Agents and Formal Institutions', p. 181.

good will of these powerful ‘commercial polymaths’. That is, like their colleagues in India, China supercargoes received salaries from their respective companies that were totally inadequate with regard to their skills, tasks and overall responsibility.

This obvious discrepancy was somewhat cushioned by a variety of rewards and privileges supercargoes were free to make use of. As the early historian of English private trade in Canton, Earl H. Pritchard, wrote, ‘supercargoes were paid in a variety of ways aimed at encouraging their efficiency and zeal for the company’s service’.<sup>94</sup> Besides a small salary, their remunerations included, from 1731 onwards, a *commission* on the prime costs of the return investment from Canton, the exact percentage of which was fixed for each individual according to his rank; then, a so-called *allowance* to generate interest by investing money into the Company stock; ‘the *permission* to take out silver with which to buy gold’, and finally the *privilege* to use up some cargo space for their own goods on board Company vessels.<sup>95</sup>

The direct and indirect payment of supercargoes in the other European companies was comparable, but not identical to the English case. The French, Danish and Swedish companies also allowed their supercargoes and navigating officers to conduct private trade in goods (called *pacotille* or *petit port-permis*).<sup>96</sup> A plethora of unwritten rules and privileges opposed rather strict-sounding regulations in all companies. In fact, the research conducted by Bowen, Pritchard and others suggests that despite the many restrictions and constraints that were put in place to safeguard the profitability of the chartered companies in China, private traders had considerable

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<sup>94</sup> Earl H. Pritchard, ‘Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth-Century (1680-1833)’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1:1 (1957), pp. 108-37, p.109.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. The key texts that outline the development of the supercargo’s pay in the EIC are Hosea Ballou Morse, ‘The Supercargo in the China Trade’, pp. 199-209 and Earl H. Pritchard, ‘Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (1680-1833)’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1:1 (1957), pp. 108-137, and idem and ibid. (Concluded), 1:2 (1958), pp. 221-256. For the first comparative article on private trade regulations, see Berg, Davies, Fellingner, et al., ‘Private Trade and Monopoly Structures’.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

space for manoeuvring. If we compare the situation in the different companies (as private traders did themselves), we see that every alteration of private trade regulations created a new set of opportunities which individual Company servants were quick to discover and use to their own advantage. Moving from one company to the next, a strategy repeatedly used by the actors of this study, can thus be understood as shopping around in order to secure the best terms for private trade.

Evidently, the important role supercargoes played was mirrored in this range of rights and privileges, which these agents knew how to exploit – with significant consequences not only for their personal enrichment, but also for the development of European demands for Chinese goods and the portfolio of the official Company trade. First, however, we have to understand the insufficient place that existing scholarship has given to these crucial figures in the trade between China and Europe in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Until now, supercargoes have received surprisingly limited attention by Company historians, especially with regard to their role as private traders active in both the direct trade to Europe and the intra-Asian trade.

### *The supercargo in historiography: problems and perspectives*

Hosea Ballou Morse (1855-1934), a customs official and historian of China, published the five-volume work *The Chronicles of the English East India Company trading to China* between 1926-29.<sup>97</sup> This oeuvre stands as a critical study of the long-term development of British trade in China. While attention is given to the Company supercargoes, they are, however, mainly considered in their role as

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<sup>97</sup> Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: MA, 1926).

Company representatives. Morse, for his study, transcribed much of the EIC's official documentation on the day-to-day workings in Canton, sources that were written by the supercargoes themselves and which followed an established convention of noting down the particulars directly related to the Company commerce. At the same time, it should be noted that supercargoes did *not* write about their own private trade in these official diaries in great detail.<sup>98</sup> By confining himself to the 'official voice' of the British supercargoes, Morse therefore explored only a limited aspect of these traders' commercial activities. In the relevant first volume, which encompassed the period between 1637-1753, we learn a great deal about the relationships between the subsequent teams of supercargoes and the Chinese officials (though only through the eyes of the former). Yet, we learn next to nothing about their mercantile backgrounds, their families, business partners, and transnational activities.

The horizontal relationships between the Company servants of the English and other European Companies, which, as this thesis argues, created the distinct dynamic of the early trade in Canton, are equally absent from Morse's account. The *Chronicles* are very much written from the perspective of a nineteenth-century civil servant, who interpreted the experimental and unpredictable twists and turns of commerce in the first half of the eighteenth century as a mere phase towards a more orderly world of exchange. Indeed, in his words, the early Canton traders formed a mere 'training school from which were taken the select committee at Canton, 1780-1834, who were the finest representatives that England could have desired of her mercantile community'.<sup>99</sup> The supercargoes of the early China trade, instead, appear as imperfect civil servants, whose at times malfeasant or self-interested behaviour

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<sup>98</sup> The only evidence of private trade to be found in these records are the 'manifests of private trade', the limitations of which we will discuss later on.

<sup>99</sup> Morse, 'The Supercargo in the Canton Trade', p. 209.

brought the Company repeatedly into trouble. Hence, while Morse's account offered a wealth of insights into the Company's dealings in China, an achievement to be acknowledged, this thesis can build only to a certain degree on his 'official story'. Rather, it will seek to consider much more thoroughly the private correspondence networks and activities of supercargoes. It will thus challenge the specific understanding of private trade that Morse established and later Company historians echoed in their work: private trade as supposedly a marginal and largely detrimental practice to Company commerce and efficiency.<sup>100</sup>

In 1957, Earl H. Pritchard made the first and only attempt so far to reconstruct the long-term development of the private trade of EIC Canton traders, including minor officers, commanders and supercargoes in the period between 1680-1830.<sup>101</sup> Using the *Chronicles* primarily as a source publication, Pritchard added information from the 'manifests of private trade' and surviving entries on the value of private trade in the Company's *Cash and Commerce Journals*. The former comprised lists of articles registered by members of the Canton factory, commanders, and high-ranking officers to be sent to Europe on their account. Pritchard responded to the partial nature of this type of source by selecting years for which the documentation was denser than for others.

What is problematic, however, is that Pritchard invokes the impression that the figures he calculated from this sketchy source base were representing a true image of the EIC private trade. His article heavily focused on official regulations, which are mentioned in the Company by-laws, minutes and the Canton diaries, yet for establishing what was actually traded privately, he limited his enquiry to those goods that were *officially* registered. In contrast to Bowen's work on Company

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<sup>100</sup> Koninckx, *The First and Second Charters*; Pritchard, 'Private Trade between England and China'.

<sup>101</sup> Idem.

commanders, Pritchard did not use a single private document to check the completeness of the 'manifests of private trade'. Entries in private cash books and diaries consulted for this thesis, then, make clear that the value of Company records for understanding private trade in goods is rather limited, which need to be put in conversation with matching (often private) sources in order to assess their reliability.

The same problem arises in the work of the Company and maritime historian Christian Koninckx, who has provided the most comprehensive study on the Swedish East India Company's activities to date.<sup>102</sup> For want of a serious engagement with private trade records, Koninckx concluded that the private trade of Company servants returning from China 'did not as a rule attain any extraordinary dimensions but in many cases also did not permit of any detailed analysis, chiefly because the consignments involved were of minor importance or indeed negligible.'<sup>103</sup> This thesis takes serious issue with such a broad and misleading claim. It therefore uses the detailed records that were left by a long serving supercargo of the said Company (a Scottish-born interloper by the name of Charles Irvine), who happened to have kept also a great deal of material for befriended colleagues, as a counterpoint to Koninckx's gross underestimation of the scope and scale of private trade, which was conducted by supercargoes in the early decades of the SEIC trade to China.

Much of what has been written on the private trade of British Canton traders by historians in the twentieth century more or less relied on the transcriptions that Morse had made from the EIC records.<sup>104</sup> An important exception is Paul A. Van Dyke, who has worked with primary sources in all European company archives to unearth a great deal of new material for several monographs on the economic and

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<sup>102</sup> Koninckx, *The First and Second Charters*.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>104</sup> Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*; idem, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*.



cultural encounter between foreigners and the Chinese in the South China Seas. Van Dyke, however, has not considered the European end of the trade.

Instead, a focus on European (or rather national) patterns of display, polite sociability, and the ‘problematic’ aesthetic of Chinese export art has been characteristic for the large and highly specialised curatorial literature on Chinese export art. Art historians and curators have displayed some interest in the private trade of commanders and supercargoes, as the chief importers of those goods that have survived in today’s museum and private collections.<sup>105</sup> These are often objects of exceptional beauty or workmanship, such as wallpaper and lacquerware, armorial porcelain, customized furniture and fashionable trinkets from painted fans to ivory snuff boxes. It is by now commonly accepted that these objects were brought into markets and households by enterprising individuals, and not companies. However, when, and by whom exactly is rarely known. Even the functioning of the Company auctions and the place of private trade within them is hardly understood. This is no doubt a challenging and in most instances impossible task to bring all pieces of the puzzle together: the placement of an order, locating the precise object, identifying the name of the client and the name of the importer, the costs involved, the year and circumstances of production and the domestic display and rearrangement. But, even though we are still very much at the beginning of tracing the life cycle of Chinese export wares, yet a closer investigation of the private traders who ordered, transported, sold or gifted them – is perhaps a useful starting point. A study on supercargoes and their business practices, like the present thesis, is therefore also making a contribution to this wider field of Chinese export art in Europe.

This overview of the historiography available on supercargoes and the private China trade in the period before 1760 has clearly exposed the need for a scholarly re-

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<sup>105</sup> Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader*.

assessment of private enterprise in this particular trading context. The overall importance of private trade within the context of Sino-European trade has been much neglected. Although important inroads have been made by scholars such as Bowen, Pritchard and others, we are far from fully understanding the role played by supercargoes, commanders, and other Canton traders as private entrepreneurs.

A particularly large lacuna concerns the Company servants' involvement in the intra-European trade as wholesalers, commission agents, brokers and smugglers. In fact, we know next to nothing about their informal networks in Britain and on the continent, which – considering the frequent travels of supercargoes and other maritime traders – were necessarily of prime importance for the operation of their business. A focus on British traders who worked at least for some time in the service of foreign Companies has the advantage of bringing out more clearly the sustained impact that migration and interloping had for the formation of informal networks, which connected the different trading entities on a personal and often subversive level.

#### *Source material*

The unconventional careers of British interlopers who traded under (changing) foreign flags often brought fortunes to their families. Yet, fame and dignity were often achieved only by the next generation. Perhaps inevitably, the archival footprint of British interlopers in the China trade is puny in comparison to the private and public records that were kept of their heirs, who succeeded in becoming respectable politicians, directors, governors, and military commanders of the Anglo-Indian empire by the late eighteenth century. The early interloping adventures of classic East India Company families: Metcalfe, Cumming, Campbell of Cawdor, Pike, Ouchterlony, Hume, Harrison, Forbes, and Arbuthnot had by then been forgotten (or

had become family secrets). Indicative for this archival and historiographical fall into oblivion is the fact that the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* contains not a single entry about the subjects/agents of this study – although quite a few of them lay the foundation for dynastic grandeur. The objects of their trade, by contrast, have survived in significant numbers. Canton trade heirlooms such as armorial porcelain, reverse mirror paintings and carved ivory works were often kept by the families.<sup>106</sup> Yet the context of their acquisition and the careers connected to them remains largely untold, often to this day – for the most part because the private correspondence, commercial ledgers and shipping records which detail their importation has largely been destroyed.

It is therefore somewhat telling that the single largest collection of private papers relating to the early China trade that is known today belonged to a Scottish-born interloper who had no children of his own and who never married. As a central figure that appears throughout this thesis, the correspondence and business papers of Charles Irvine of Drum (1693-1771) were safely stored within the walls of a thirteenth-century castle, ten miles west of Aberdeen, until after the Second World War. Then members of the Irvine clan decided to sell the largest part of this collection to the James Ford Bell Library in Minneapolis (Minnesota), which specialises in maritime trade.<sup>107</sup>

This collection, which forms the main, though certainly not the only archival pillar of this study, incorporates several thousands of documents that directly relate to the China trade between 1731 and the 1760s, and also to private trading activities connected to it. The Irvine/Rose papers chiefly include business correspondence that

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<sup>106</sup> The ‘East India company at Home’-project led by Prof. Margot Finn brought together a team of academic researchers with a larger community of independent scholars, museum curators, family historians and descendants to create a collection of case studies, which detail the material connections between the British country house and the Anglo-Indian empire between roughly 1757-1857. See, <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/case-studies-2/> (last accessed: 20 December 2015).

<sup>107</sup> I am thankful to Hanna Hodacs and Leos Müller, who brought this archive to my attention.

covers both the incoming letters and a significant number of copy letters and drafts by Charles Irvine. The same collection also provides commercial ledgers, current accounts (credit/debit accounts), invoices, receipts, bonds and insurance contracts, and shipping records of two kinsmen, who were both employed in the service of the Swedish East India Company (SEIC) in China as supercargo and officer respectively: Charles Irvine of Drum and his nephew James Rose of Clava. What is more, Irvine, who was a close confidant of the two Scottish SEIC directors, Colin (1686-1757) and Hugh Campbell (16??-1754), also kept a great many documents that relate to Company commerce, making it possible to compare formal regulations with actual private trade imports in the SEIC through the extremely rich textual fabric of the Rose/Irvine papers.

This material, by and large still untapped, provides key evidence for reconstructing Charles Irvine's entry into the China trade, his privileged place within the SEIC, and his transnational connections to banking houses, investors, wholesalers, clients and agents involved in the finance, import and re-export of Chinese commodities. The Irvine papers also provide a unique view on the intricate business practices, successes and failures of a great number of other interlopers employed in the East Indies trade who belonged to Irvine's business networks. Even though this is an archive based on the collecting practices of two individuals, it can thus shed light on many more lives and careers involved in the experimental phase of the China trade between 1731 up to the 1760s.

This uniquely rich collection has not entirely escaped the attention of historians. Paul A. van Dyke, for instance, has used a few letters and contracts relating to the Chinese merchants.<sup>108</sup> Leos Müller has drawn on the Irvine papers in an overview article about the involvement of Scots in the Swedish East India

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<sup>108</sup> Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*.

Company.<sup>109</sup> Finally, Douglas A. Catterall has looked in detail at materials relating to the Atlantic connections of a kinsman of Charles Irvine, John Rose, as well as into letters concerning James Forbes of Alford's bankruptcy in 1756/57.<sup>110</sup> Not yet in print, Hanna Hodacs has made use of the Irvine papers in her forthcoming history of the Scandinavian trade in tea and silks in the eighteenth century.<sup>111</sup> Yet, despite this recent interest in the Irvine papers, this archive remains largely underexplored.

The present study furthermore draws upon a variety of other primary sources, ranging from visual and textual documents to material artefacts. Of particular importance were the museum collections of the Peabody Essex Museum, in Salem Massachusetts, and various country house holdings entrusted to *The National Trusts* of England and Scotland.<sup>112</sup> Twenty-one volumes of Swedish East India Company auction catalogues originally held in the Swedish National Archive in Stockholm (Riksarkivet) have been digitalised and put on open access in the *Warwick Digital Collections* as part of the output of ERC-funded project 'Europe's Asian Centuries: Trading Eurasia, 1600-1830' in 2014. These printed auction records were examined to find additional evidence for the systematic involvement of supercargoes and commanders as importers, agents and independent buyers of Chinese goods in Europe.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Leos Müller, 'Scottish and Irish Entrepreneurs in Eighteenth-Century Sweden. East India trade and iron', in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier, and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century* (Gent, 2007), pp. 147-174.

<sup>110</sup> Douglas Catterall, 'The Worlds of John Rose: a Northeastern Scot's Career in the British Atlantic World, c.1740-1800', in Angela McCarthy (ed.), *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2006), pp. 67-94.

<sup>111</sup> Hanna Hodacs, *Silk and Tea in the North. Scandinavian Trade and the Market for Asian Goods in Eighteenth Century Europe* (forthcoming, Basingstoke, 2016); first results for which she also drew on material in the Irvine papers are already published in Hanna Hodacs and Leos Müller, 'Chests, Tubs, and Lots of Tea – the European Market for Chinese Tea and the Swedish East India Company, c.1730-1760', in Maxine Berg, with Felicia Gottmann, Hanna Hodacs and Chris Nierstrasz (eds), *Goods from the East, 1600-1800*, pp. 277-293.

<sup>112</sup> See Chapter Four on the special commission business.

<sup>113</sup> To be accessed under: Warwick Digital Collections, 'Sales catalogues of the Swedish East India Company 1733-1759', <http://contentdm.warwick.ac.uk/cdm/landingpage/collection/swedish>. This source has primarily been used for Chapter Four.

The thesis also draws on a range of sources in the India Office Records, the National Archives in Kew, and in local record offices in England, in particular. Members of the Irvine network appear in different contexts in these archives, making it possible to compare their career paths with those of Irvine himself. Important insights have been gained by examining wills and inventories accessible through the public record offices. Colin Campbell's travel narrative of the first SEIC journey to Canton, which he accompanied in the dual position of Company director and chief supercargo has been annotated and published (and so is Campbell's will), providing valuable insights into the prominent place of British merchants in the wider orbit of the SEIC.<sup>114</sup> Besides the private papers consulted, much use has been made of the India Office Records at the British Library for contextualising the private trade records of supercargoes and commanders. Especially the relevant volumes of the *Diary and Consultations of the Council in China* (G/12 series) and the *Canton Factory Records* (R/10) have been examined in detail. Yet, letters addressed to the Court of Directors (particularly in E/1/18-51 and E/3/99-108) also contain detail on private trade activities and have thus been used accordingly.

Important collections for this study were finally unearthed in the *Chancery Masters Records* that are kept at the National Archives in Kew. For instance, the very revealing documentation in the case Moreton vs. Newnam (C103/192), which includes possibly the only surviving private trade sales catalogue of the English East India Company (1732) has been used, among other important sets of documents.<sup>115</sup> Among them is the large collection of private papers belonging to Thomas Hall, which lay the foundation for Gill's *Merchants and Mariners* in 1961. These papers

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<sup>114</sup> Paul Hallberg and Christian Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China - Colin Campbell's diary of the first Swedish East India Company expedition to Canton, 1732-33* (Gothenburg, 1996); Alexander A. Cormack, *Colin Campbell 1686-1757. Merchant, Gothenburg Sweden. His will annotated. A Scoto-Swedish study* (Aberdeen, 1960).

<sup>115</sup> The National Archives, C107/154 John Searle, EIC supercargo in the China trade 1750-86: account books, wills and papers; C112/24 Account book of Nathaniel Torriano.

have never been indexed or paginated. There are bundles of letters for each correspondent. Yet, a chronological order has never been attempted. This meant that finding the letters relating to the China trade and Hall's connections with the European continent took time, but ultimately proved rewarding in the sense that I found that there is considerable overlap between the friends and business partners of Hall in London and the Low Countries and the figures that appear in the Irvine papers.<sup>116</sup> In fact, when taken together, these two collections provide a good overview of who belonged to the wider net of British interlopers on the continent. They also provide fresh evidence about the key financiers, wholesalers and suppliers who collaborated with the Ostend and Swedish ventures during the period of this study.

### *Plan of the study*

In order to achieve a multifaceted analysis of the private trade activities of British interlopers in the early China trade and the role that informal networks played in directing the flow of capital, information, and commodities within a transnational arena, this thesis is divided into four interlinked chapters. Chapter Two sets out to compare and connect the lives and careers of a number of British interlopers active in the early China trade by means of a 'group portrait'. Key inspiration for this chapter came from David Hancock's study of twenty-three London overseas merchants active in the Atlantic trade, who were associated in business and private life to varying degrees of intensity.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The Hall papers comprise four densely packed boxes. The material is scattered between C103/130-132 and C111/95.

<sup>117</sup> David Hancock, *Citizens of the World. London merchants and the integration of the British Atlantic community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge, 1995).

Chapter Three turns to the concrete organization and financing of the private trade of Company supercargoes by exploring a particularly important city for cross-Company activities that has been overlooked by the existing scholarship on the China trade so far: Cadiz. I argue that Cadiz represented an important node for cross-Company activities, and many of the British interlopers that stand at the heart of this study had connections of different types with this port. I therefore use this city as a means to develop a more systematic account of the functioning of the trade while mapping the geographies of British private trade in a pan-European trading arena.

Chapter Four finally turns to one important element of the private trade activities of Canton supercargoes: the special commission trade. It argues that special commissions encouraged product innovation, and that the influx of myriad niche and high quality products was a speciality of the private trade during the period this study covers.

Chapter Five discusses the wholesale and re-export trade for Chinese goods by zooming into the interdependent relationship between Canton traders and sedentary merchants in Europe. The precise mechanisms are explored by which commercial information was exchanged about suitable markets, and how the collaboration between Company servants and wholesale merchants impacted on the Company auctions.



## Chapter II

### British Canton traders, c.1720-1750: a group portrait

Charles Irvine was markedly relieved when the ship *Freden* approached Dover on 1 September 1747. It was then nearly three years ago that he had set sail from Gothenburg to go on his farewell voyage to Canton. With his fifty-four years and over six journeys to the East for the Swedish East India Company alone, Irvine was a veteran of the China trade. Unfortunately for him, his final voyage took a great deal longer than intended. In fact, he was ‘detained’ in Canton ‘a year beyond my computation’, because all Swedish vessels missed their passage in the following season.<sup>118</sup> (Irvine’s letters to Colin Campbell and his nephew John Irvine indicate that he remained in the company of Edmund Roth, his ‘very good friend’ Pierre Duvelaer de la Barre, and three other supercargoes of the Compagnie des Indes, Francois Roth, Mr Jazu, Mr Boissiere, some of whom were regular business partners of him). Charles Irvine as chief supercargo was left behind in Canton to look after the factory, gather intelligence, and prepare the arrival of the next fleet of East Indiamen that were expected to enter the Pearl River in the summer of 1746. Such unexpected delays were part and parcel of the life of a merchant mariner.

The hazards that China traders had to overcome during their careers at sea differed from those that most international merchants experienced, who orchestrated their trading ventures from the relative safety of their metropolitan counting houses. Death and disease were constant companions of ‘East Indians’, a fact that induced many of them to record their earthly possessions perhaps more frequently than most contemporaries, and to draft their last wills many times over. For instance, John

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<sup>118</sup> Charles Irvine (Canton) to Colin Campbell (Gothenburg), 16 January 1746, letter book 1746-47, James Ford Bell Library (FBL), University of Minneapolis, Minnesota; Charles Irvine (Canton) to John Irvine (Batavia), 23 February 1746, *ibid*.

Searle, supercargo of the EIC in the 1750s and 1760s, left detailed instructions to his wife before every voyage he undertook on behalf of the Company, detailing his financial situation, outstanding debts and interests and how she should proceed ‘Should I tipp off before I get to China’ – or on his way back.<sup>119</sup> In India, a resident Company servant expected to attend two or three funerals per week. For the generation of merchants entering the English Company service in India between 1700-1724, Santhi Hejeebu has calculated that ‘the chance of dying within the first five years was 31%.’<sup>120</sup> On China ships, the death toll lay at an average of ten per cent per voyage for much of the eighteenth century.<sup>121</sup> Supercargoes and high-ranking officers certainly enjoyed more comfort during the voyage, with a small cabin on their own and better food and drink at the captain’s table than the lower orders on board were given. Yet, illnesses spread equally to the roundhouse and ravaged officers and humble seamen alike.

The life of a merchant mariner was rough, and most men looked forward to moving ashore as soon as they acquired a ‘competence’ that allowed them to settle down somewhere in reasonable comfort. Even if Charles Irvine was in 1747 not yet considering retiring from business altogether, he looked forward to a less erratic lifestyle. Indeed, as he noted in confidence to a British correspondent in Madras in January 1746, ‘it is most certainly true that I had given over all thoughts of coming more to China but my Friends (the directors of the SEIC) thought proper, more for my Interest then for their Service that I should make this one Trip more.’<sup>122</sup> During

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<sup>119</sup> The National Archives, Kew, Chancery Masters’ Exhibits, C107/154 account books of John Searle, supercargo in the China trade, 1750-86.

<sup>120</sup> See Pablo Casas-Arce and Santhi Hejeebu, ‘Job Design and the Benefits of Private Trade’, University of Oxford, Department of Economics, *Discussion Paper Series*, 204 (2004), p. 27.

<sup>121</sup> Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600–1800*, vol. II: Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion’ (Oxford/Minneapolis, 1976), p. 408.

<sup>122</sup> Charles Irvine (Canton) to Samuel Greenhough (Madras) 31 January 1746, letter book 1746-47, FBL, Minn. His ‘friends’ were the directors of the SEIC, Colin & Hugh Campbell, Hendrik König and Niklas Sahlgren.

the past fourteen years, Irvine had spent much of his time travelling – mostly to and within Asia. However, business and family matters also required regular visits of him to London, Aberdeen, Lorient and Nantes, Hamburg, Ostend, Cadiz and Amsterdam. It is this excessively mobile lifestyle that, among other things, connected the small band of Europeans engaged in the China trade.



Fig. 2.1 Portrait of Charles Irvine of Drum (1760). Painted by Cosmo Alexander (1724-1772). Oil on canvas, 77.2 x 63.1 cm, The National Trust of Scotland, Drum Castle.

Through a combination of legal and illicit trading activities, the merchant mariner Charles Irvine (1693-1771) had managed to acquire a substantial fortune and widespread contacts to merchants and markets across Europe, Asia and the Americas (Fig. 5.1). His long and, despite the occasional setback, successful career as a Canton supercargo provided him with enough capital for becoming an investor in other people's enterprises. Indeed, China traders like Irvine were often borrowers and lenders at the same time. They lent smaller sums of money to fellow traders in Asia and relatives at home, whilst taking up greater sums for making their purchases in Canton for sale in Europe. After retiring from the active service as a mobile agent of

the SEIC in 1747, Irvine was now free to seek new business opportunities and to further strengthen his stake in the European market for East India goods.

This staying ashore led Irvine to engage more frequently in illicit schemes, despite his personal reservations against such practices. While Irvine had repeatedly stressed his ‘natural aversion to Paddling (sic!) & having to do with Smugglers’, he nonetheless became a big player in the contraband trade to Britain from 1743 onwards.<sup>123</sup> Irvine had already acted as an active buyer of contraband goods at the SEIC auctions much earlier, but his purchases of Bohea tea – which sold readily in Britain on account of its cheapness – grew when he was finally able to set up base in Gothenburg in autumn 1747. His transformation to becoming a sedentary wholesale trader was now completed, but his prominent position in the European market for Chinese consumer goods had been carved out long before.

Considering the course of Irvine’s career, with ‘all the disappointments that have happened’ along the way,<sup>124</sup> his late success as much as his more humble beginnings are part of a larger story about a group of restless traders who set out to challenge the claim to power of the two giants of the East India monopoly trade, the EIC and the Dutch VOC. The Aberdonian merchant Charles Irvine of Drum is in many ways an exemplification of the kind of trader who was drawn into the orbit of the China trade during the hazy days of interloping activities in the first half of the eighteenth century. Irvine was ambitious, well educated, opportunistic, powerfully connected, clannish, and a Jacobite, who lived in exile. Yet, like many other interlopers, he struggled to find his secure place in the world.

Irvine was haunted by the past. In his particular case, it was the real or imagined decay of his family’s former glory that formed the chief subject of his

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<sup>123</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), 9 April 1743, letter book, 1742-43, FBL, Minn.

<sup>124</sup> Edmund Heath (London) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 29 September 1739, CIC/1739/5a.

personal grief. News of the Jacobite Rising in 1745 had trickled through to him at Canton via the English ships, yet Irvine was anxious to hear from his Scottish friends in London about the fate of his relations, whom he presumed must have been involved in the fighting. On his homeward journey in 1747, Irvine informed George Ouchterlony, his main agent and comrade in London, that

[o]ne of the man of war gave us the Gentlemens Magazine for June last in which I find the total subversion of my Family/: which has been mouldering away for a century past or more:/ was reserved to be completed in my days: the will of God be done, this is [a] great addition to the many sensible mortifications I have had since I last saw you.<sup>125</sup>

Past experiences of financial ruin, or struggles to repay large debts, accompanied most of the interlopers in the China trade, as we will see further on in this chapter. Irvine was no exception to the rule. The precariousness of the interlopers' existence was heightened by the fact that they moved from one place to another, often without having any previous knowledge of the local language or any particular attachment to the new environment. Consequently, British interlopers often remained strangers in those places that they only temporarily called their home. Perhaps in response to their frequent social marginalisation, they sought out or intensified their connections with traders who came from similar backgrounds, or indeed shared this restless existence.

Charles Irvine, who had settled in Gothenburg in 1732, never felt quite home in Sweden. Yet, by 1758, aged sixty-six, he was still uncertain where he should spend

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<sup>125</sup> Charles Irvine (on board the *Freden*) to George Ouchterlony (London), 1 September 1747, letter book 1746-47.

his twilight years. His friends in London, George Ouchterlony, Elizabeth Campbell (the widow of Colin Campbell, the Scottish director of the Swedish East India Company) and Patrick Garden, repeatedly addressed the subject, hoping Irvine would find ways to settle in their neighbourhood at Angel Court or Richmond.<sup>126</sup> In 1758, Ouchterlony wrote:

I pray for your own & Friends sake quit that frozen climate, the death of our worthy friend Mr. C. C. [Colin Campbell] puts an end to that attachment & let us have the pleasure of seeing you on this side of the Water which I am sure would be more for your Health & when you will not doubt of meeting with hearty welcome.<sup>127</sup>

The ‘high degree of internal solidarity’ that Edna Bonacich found to be a general characteristic of diasporic business communities also captures the relationships between different sub-groups among the interlopers.<sup>128</sup> Unsurprisingly perhaps, Irvine’s personal network incorporated a large number of Scots. This did not mean, of course, that he shunned away from doing business with Englishmen or with merchants from other national background. Yet, his circle of trusted intimates showed a strong predilection for his countrymen (Table 2.1). This list has been compiled on the basis of qualitative rather quantitative evidence from Irvine’s copious correspondence. Unfortunately, Irvine’s will has not been found. Counting the frequency of letters between correspondents (an important measure in

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<sup>126</sup> Charles Irvine (on board the *Freden* off Scilly) to George Ouchterlony (London), 24 August 1747, letter book 1746-47, FBL, Minn.

<sup>127</sup> George Ouchterlony (London) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 26 January 1759, CIC/1759/2a.

<sup>128</sup> Edna Bonacich, ‘A Theory of Middlemen Minorities’, *American Sociological Review*, 38 (1973), pp. 583-94, pp. 585f.

quantitative network analyses) cannot shed light on matters of intimacy. Intimates often saw each other on a regular basis, which made letter writing hardly necessary.

As Bonacich insists, ‘since they plan to return, sojourners have little reason to develop lasting relationships with members of the surrounding host society, but they have every reason to keep deeply alive the regional and broader ethnic ties, for these relationships will persist in the future towards which the sojourner points.’<sup>129</sup> There is something about this future orientation (and the escaping of the past) that directed the interlopers’ unbounded and opportunistic commercial behaviour. Bonacich’s analysis of the impact this forward-looking had on business portfolios and consumption patterns among foreign middlemen minorities also pertains to the British employees of the smaller interloping East India companies, and also to other free agents connected to them.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 586.

**Table 2.1 Charles Irvine's circle of intimates during his time in Sweden**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Family ties</b>
Arthur Abercromby	London/Gothenburg	Scottish	
John Arbuthnot	London/Dunkirk	Scottish	
Colin Campbell	Gothenburg	Scottish	
Hugh Campbell	London/Gothenburg	Scottish	
Gilbert Elliott	Gothenburg/Castelbar	Scottish	
Patrick Garden	London	Scottish	Cousin
Robert Garden	London	Scottish	Cousin
James Gough	Cadiz	Irish	
John Irvine	Aberdeen	Scottish	Nephew
George Kitchen	Gothenburg	Scottish	
Jonas Malm Erickson	Gothenburg	Swede	
George Ouchterlony	London	Scottish	
John Pike	Gothenburg	Scottish	
James Rose	Aberdeen	Scottish	Nephew
Petter van Utfall	Gothenburg	Swede	
Jacob v. Utfall Jeansson	Gothenburg	Swede	

In their commercial concerns, interlopers favoured the 'portable or easily liquidated livelihood' derived from middlemen occupations such as trading, brokering and money lending.<sup>130</sup> As a result, they showed reluctance to tie up their money in the host country for too long. Irvine's investments were organized around particular China voyages and not for longer. However, towards the end of his career as a supercargo, Irvine was careful to invest in English East India Company shares, thus channelling parts of his fortune back to Britain for the interest and security it brought.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Edna Bonacich, 'A Theory of Middlemen Minorities', p. 585.

<sup>131</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to George Ouchterlony (London), 30 September 1747, letter book 1746-47. *FBL*, Minn.



Whilst the acquisition of land was a desirable prospect for Irvine, too, as his late interest in farming and cattle herding in Ireland suggests, he could not bring himself to invest his money into an estate, or any industrial venture. His close intimate and commercial agent in London, the afore-mentioned George Ouchterlony, had moved into the manufacturing of coarse linen and sailcloth. Irvine was always interested in its development, but never thought of moving into production himself. He thus wrote to the former: ‘Pray send me to Gothenburgh ... how your manufactures goe on, tho’ I can’t say that I shall make much use of them; yet I love to hear how the world goes & it will amuse me: an old coachman loves to hear the Clack of the whip.’<sup>132</sup>

Another commonality between many interlopers and Bonacich’s ‘middlemen’ was their thrift. At least some were willing ‘to suffer short-term deprivation to hasten the long-term objective of returning to the homeland’ with savings to allow them to settle there in style.<sup>133</sup> This was, however, certainly not true for everybody. Thomas Hall, for instance, invested in ostentatious clothes, furniture and equipment whilst living on the continent as his numerous tailor’s bills indicate. Yet, the lifestyle of the majority of interlopers is better captured in the case of Charles Irvine. Although he became an expert in the luxury trades, he did not surround himself with splendour. Rather, he was more concerned with accumulating capital for his later life and the members of his extended family in Scotland, which prevented him from spending his profits on sumptuous clothes, horses or coaches. His commissions for wearing apparel underline his personal modesty, which at times astonished even close friends. For instance, Colin Campbell (Fig. 2.2) noted in his will that Irvine should, after the former’s death, finally accept ‘my Gold Snuffbox that Her Majesty the present

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<sup>132</sup> Charles Irvine (on board the *Freden*) George Ouchterlony (London), 1 September 1747, letter book 1746-47, FBL, Minn.

<sup>133</sup> Bonacich, ‘A Theory of Middlemen Minorities’, p. 585.

Queen of Sweden did me the honour to present me, with Her Majesty's Picture that is in it', and also 'some things of greater value that I had formerly ordered for him [Irvine], which he afterwards told me that he absolutely would not receive'.<sup>134</sup>



Fig. 2.2 Portrait of Colin Campbell, 1686-1757, director of the Swedish East India Company (1731-1757). By Johan Joacim Sträng (1755); source: Göteborgs Stadsmuseum.

Interlopers often had more than their own wellbeing in mind. As a matter of fact, they often became the chief supporters of a greater number of people back home, including cousins, nephews, godsons, foster children, and the offspring of friends and business partners. Considering his frequent travels, Charles Irvine directed George Ouchterlony to help whenever the latter was to be approached by one of Irvine's numerous relations who were short of money. After Ouchterlony had assisted one Alexander Irvine with his plans to study in Paris, Irvine wrote:

I do not know that I have any more Nephews that can come in your way in my absence but if any of them whether known to you or not should at any time

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<sup>134</sup> Cormack, *Colin Campbell*, p. 13.

stand in need of fifty Pounds, a little more or less I entreat you to let them have it on my account ... for it grieves me to see a parcel of young men lost for want of a Small matter to help them forward.<sup>135</sup>

Family responsibilities loomed large in the correspondence of British interlopers. Arthur Abercromby of Birkenbog (1707-1761), a SEIC supercargo for many years, was congratulated by his friends on his appointment to accompany a VOC vessel to China late in his life, as they were well aware of Abercromby's mounting concerns about the financial situation of his relatives in the North. Abercromby, who had to support a large family back in Banff (in Murrayshire), would be, as they hoped, 'once more in a fair way of being rich or Master of an easy Fortune which he very well deserves being a very friendly good Man & after your [Irvine's] Example ready to do for all his Relations'.<sup>136</sup>

During Charles Irvine's long career in the China trade, he was almost constantly on the move, a life-style that prevented his full integration into Swedish society. Without wife or children, he too strove to support his Scottish friends and extended family. In an obituary, published in the Aberdeen Journal shortly after his death in Scotland in 1771 aged 78, Irvine was simply characterised 'as sometime an eminent merchant at Rouen, afterwards a member of the Swedish East India Company at Gottenburgh',<sup>137</sup> a description that suggests a rootedness which did not adequately reflect Irvine's circumstances, but rather his life-long aspiration. Instead, it is Irvine's extensive wanderings on the continent and in Asia that were the cornerstones of his existence.

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<sup>135</sup> Charles Irvine to George Ouchterlony (London), 10 December 1743, letter book 1743-44, FBL, Minn.

<sup>136</sup> George Ouchterlony (London) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 19 December 1758, CIC/1758/48a, FBL, Minn.

<sup>137</sup> Cited in Alexander A. Cormack, *Colin Campbell 1686-1757 Merchant, Gothenburg, Sweden. His Will – Annotated. A Scoto-Swedish Study* (Aberdeen, 1960), p. 33.

*E pluribus unum?*

While each trader's life was in a sense unique, this chapter pertains that there were important similarities, shared experiences and practices among British interlopers in the European East India Companies during the first half of the eighteenth century. When we trace patterns and career trajectories beyond all individual complexities, it becomes indeed evident that the lives of these mobile merchants can provide a unique perspective on the opportunities and risks, as well as the conventions of a trade that captured the imagination of contemporaries like perhaps no other branch of European overseas commerce.<sup>138</sup> What unites the mobile merchants of this chapter is that they were all interlopers, free agents, who were born in the British Isles and migrated to the European continent. There, they connected intimately with the smaller European trading companies – whilst always maintaining contacts with their home in Britain.

Surprisingly few of the people who joined the smaller companies were London-bred. Yet, surprisingly many were gentle-bred, though they often came from not very eminent branches of the landed elite. It is the predominance of Scottish and Irish merchants among the British interloping community that is perhaps most remarkable, and so are the ways in which regional, ethnic, and family ties to North Britain were integrated into the workings of the China trade. Mobility was arguably the most important asset in developing a successful business, as these interlopers moved between markets, met clients, and sought out agents in different places across Europe who would sell Chinese goods on their behalf. By focusing on this

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<sup>138</sup> The products that reached Europe from China played no small role in defining Europe's vision of China and its people. See, Anne Gerritsen and Stephen McDowall, 'Material Culture and the Other: European Encounters with Chinese Porcelain, ca. 1650-1800', *Journal of World History*, 23:1 (2012), pp. 87-113.

community of British-born interlopers involved in the Sino-European trade, we certainly do not turn to a negligible group of traders. Similar to David Hancock's London overseas merchants, who worked at the heart of the expanding Atlantic economy, these China traders were 'restless forward- and outward-looking' citizens of the world.<sup>139</sup>

What this chapter intends to do is to recover some of the elements that united and separated interloping China traders from other commercial players at the time. Although the characters that will be introduced in this group portrait were anything but conventional traders, they had a similar outlook and faced the same privileges and risks. Like Hancock's 'associates', their businesses evolved 'independently, albeit along parallel lines'.<sup>140</sup> The timing of the China trade, with its fixed intervals, regular sales and dependence on the monsoon winds, provided a common framework of activity. What is more, the number of European supercargoes who were appointed each year was sufficiently small to make sure every private trader/Company agent got to know their competitors personally. China traders were members of largely overlapping networks, and the bonds between British interlopers across the Companies were particularly strong. The connections that existed between them render them an ideal group for a closer analysis. Yet, we will also see how important connections were forged between British interlopers and other expatriate merchants on the continent. A group portrait can thus help to draw out the vital and little understood *Lebenswelt* of British Canton traders more generally in the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, p. 25.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>141</sup> My approach is very much influenced by David Hancock's group portrait of 23 'associates' active in the Atlantic trade, who were contemporaries of the China traders discussed here and who came from similar backgrounds.

The social fabric of trade is more than a mere backdrop for commercial activity: it is the source for change. As business historians know well, it can be exceedingly difficult to fit the study of individual merchant careers into a larger narrative of economic development. For the history of the China trade, this practice of ‘mediat[ing] between the mass and the individual’, and between ‘statistics and biographies’, has been more successful in studies about the latter part of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries.<sup>142</sup> This can partly be explained by the greater availability of primary source material on individuals involved in the trade. A vast historiography has studied the entry of the Americans and the gradual decline of the Canton system from the 1780s onwards.<sup>143</sup> In some ways, it is the scholarly work on this later period that has overshadowed – and in some ways distorted – our understanding of an earlier time of commercial interaction. The eighteenth century was the era of the East India Companies, but it was also a time of enterprising individuals who traded from within and independently of these trading structures. The movers and shakers that feature so prominently in the history of the Atlantic economy and colonial India existed for the China trade too. Yet, surprisingly, the merchants and mariners who defined the formative period of the Canton trade have received little attention so far.<sup>144</sup>

Part of the privilege of working for one of the big or small East India Companies was the prospect of integrating one’s personal network into the trade, and

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<sup>142</sup> Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, p. 8. A recent successful attempt of analysing large-scale developments by means of a micro-historical approach was made by Jessica Hanser in her PhD thesis on two British ‘country traders’ active in the Canton trade in the second half of the eighteenth century; Jessica Hanser, *Mr. Smith Goes to China: British Private Traders and the Interlinking of the British Empire with China, 1757-1792* (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2012).

<sup>143</sup> To name but a few recent studies, James R. Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2010); Paul A. Van Dyke (ed.), *Americans and Macao: Trade, Smuggling, and Diplomacy on the South China Coast* (Hong Kong, 2012).

<sup>144</sup> In exploring the illustrious careers and activities of various Chinese merchant dynasties active in the Canton trade, Paul A. Van Dyke has contributed a vast and growing oeuvre for understanding the key Chinese players in the early decades of the Canton system. See, Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845* (Hong Kong, 2005); Idem., *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong, 2011).

to find placements for talented and not so talented family members. As elsewhere, established players looked ‘for ways to use institutions to limit entry, reduce risks, and raise profits.’<sup>145</sup> In this regard, British interlopers were no different from their colleagues in the EIC. As soon as they were in a position of influence and relative prosperity, they were busy in advancing the material interest of their circle of intimates, often by excluding others. The great importance of interpersonal relationships for the structure and development of the China trade is, however, hardly ever addressed in the existing literature. In order to gain insights into the inner workings of this trade, this is precisely where we have to begin our inquiry.

This chapter uses the careers of a group of loosely connected Canton traders in the first half of the eighteenth century as its point of departure in order to present a different perspective on the early modern China trade. Whereas the ‘associates’ in Hancock’s study advanced from marginal men from Britain’s periphery to successful and patriotic citizens, the people who feature in the following analysis held a more ambivalent relationship with Britain’s metropolis. The China traders presented here were participating in globally-operating merchant networks that were formed on the back of ethnic, familial, or – in the case of many Scots and Irishmen – often political or religious ties, which impacted on their trading activities as much as it set limits to their loyalty to any one Company.

Their commercial success lay partly in the fact that they came up with ever-new strategies to evade government regulations, and to avoid paying ‘unnecessary’ taxes or duties by operating out of ill-controlled places and free ports. The shifting geography of trade that resulted from their sojourning activities is developed more fully in Chapter Three, but the social embeddedness of their trading activities

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<sup>145</sup> Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660-1700* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 56.

deserves detailed consideration here. It will be shown that the personal friendships with individual directors and colleagues on board and elsewhere was more important to these interlopers than their loyalty to a particular flag. Yet a word of caution is due: the aim of the chapter is not to homogenize the life paths of merchants and mariners involved in the trade in Chinese export wares. On the contrary, it is as important to highlight the differences between them. Indeed, the diverse backgrounds and commercial specializations that individual merchants brought to the trade added significantly to the pool of expertise and the dynamic of the China trade as a whole.

The coming section discusses the commercial and maritime training of China traders and, where possible, considers their social background, since the outlook of their families often determined the ways by which they entered overseas trade in the first place. We will further consider how this varied group of British merchants and mariners actually became interlopers. What were the conditions of their recruitment, their personal motives and familial strategies? As we will see, a few were driven to the continent out of necessity. The majority of interlopers had already some knowledge of the trade through previous employments either as Company servants of the EIC, or as ‘country captains’ and ‘free merchants’ in Madras and elsewhere in Asia. Different aspects of the *Lebenswelt* of British expatriates will be explored in the following sections, which look at patterns of commercial association, friendship and sociability among China traders; the widespread phenomenon of acquiring multiple passports and identities; the role of cross-Company networks.



### *Ways into the China trade*

Becoming an interloper in the East Indies trade was hardly a long-term plan or an explicit aim in the life of many British, French and Dutch merchants and navigating officers. Nonetheless, many accepted the offer of a group of investors based at Antwerp, Amsterdam or Ghent to accompany their ships to the East Indies shortly after the War of the Spanish Succession was concluded in 1714, and trade could flourish once more on the continent. Following the Peace of Utrecht (1713/14), the Southern Netherlands were ruled by the Habsburg Empire, and for a number of years after the war, conditions looked promising for venturing into the long-distance trade eastward in which many states in north-western Europe were already engaged. A number of successful private voyages to China conducted by French and Irish traders from St Malo raised hopes for financial gain in the Austrian Netherlands, too.<sup>146</sup> The great excitement about the prospects of overseas trade was very much a 'European post-war phenomenon', and projectors throughout the continent were approaching governments to support their ingenious schemes.<sup>147</sup>

One of these schemes was the idea to found what would later become the Ostend Company, which was ultimately established in 1722. The financial risk of the Ostend Company and the private ventures that preceded it lay with a diverse group of financiers, including well-known bankers from the Netherlands, Flanders and Brabant such as Pierre Proli, P. J. Cloots, Jacques de Pret, Paul Charlé and the

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<sup>146</sup> Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident a Canton au 18ième siècle, 1719-1833*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1964), vol. 1, p. 153; David Bracken, 'Piracy and Poverty: Aspects of the Irish Jacobite Experience in France, 1691-1720' in T. O'Connor (ed.) *The Irish in Europe, 1580-1815* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 127-42.

<sup>147</sup> Holden Furber, 'East India Companies', in Paul H. Kratoska (ed.), *South-East Asia. Colonial History* (London and New York, 2001), pp. 269-314, p. 288.

Maelcamp brothers. These were joined by a group of Irish Jacobite exiles, including Thomas Ray, the Sarsfield brothers, and Patrick McNeny.<sup>148</sup>

What these investors needed were bold and experienced traders who could turn the Ostend venture into a success. The obvious place to look was among the ranks of the existing Companies, as they featured every trading season ‘many more candidates than there [were] places’.<sup>149</sup> This surplus of expertise and capital especially in Britain and the Netherlands encouraged the migration of highly qualified personnel to the provincial port of Ostend. The bodily risks were high under whatever flag traders decided to travel, yet the prospects of quick promotion and the amount of private trade allowed to individual servants differed significantly from one Company to the other and from person to person.<sup>150</sup> Regulations were often formulated in ways that suggest a degree of standardisation in the organisation and limitation of private trade.

Yet, China traders notoriously disregarded regulations. The directors themselves were willing to turn a blind eye to breaches in regulation of their personal protégés. Thus, some ‘animals’ were clearly more equal than others. The financiers in the Southern Netherlands knew all too well that they had to offer competitive terms in order to attract able and ambitious people from abroad. Yet, who were those people who dared to take the personal risks in establishing trading factories in Asia that were to operate in close proximity and direct competition with the established and heavily armed VOC and EIC? From what social and commercial background did these men come from?

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<sup>148</sup> Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>149</sup> Anon. (London) to Charles Irvine and Captain Thomas Neilson (Gothenburg), 14 October 1737, Irvine papers, CIC/1737/8a.

<sup>150</sup> Maxine Berg, Timothy Davies, Meike Fellingner et al., ‘Private Trade and Monopoly Structures’, esp. pp. 129-133.

Two of the key figures in the Ostend venture were the brothers Alexander and Abraham Hume. They were born in Ayton, Berwickshire, in a place that was rather unfavourably described in 1762 by the Scottish diarist James Boswell as ‘a dirty little village’.<sup>151</sup> As sons of a Quaker laird, the Humes belonged to the Scottish landed gentry, but were outsiders in religious regards.<sup>152</sup> As young men they would have been excluded from membership in one of the traditional livery Companies, but at the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were plenty of options to gain a commercial training elsewhere. For an apprenticeship in overseas and wholesale trade, as well as for the service in the English East India Company, they were eligible candidates. It is unknown where the Hume brothers received their first commercial training. Yet, it is likely that Alexander – who was ten years older than Abraham – went out to France or the Southern Netherlands for some time, since he wrote and read French fluently when he entered the service of the Ostend Company a few years later.<sup>153</sup>

The Hume brothers were representative for many British interlopers who found employment in the Ostend and later Swedish East India companies, in that they came from a provincial yet elevated social background, on Britain’s economic periphery, in Scotland.<sup>154</sup> What they lacked was the start-up capital to launch an overseas business on their own. What they were given, however, was a great deal of social capital in the form of a solid commercial education, and widespread contacts to merchants in London and abroad. It is fascinating to see which families looked

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<sup>151</sup> James Boswell, *London Journal 1762-1763*, edited by Frederick A. Pottle (Yale, 1950 [repr. 2004]), entry for 15 November 1762, p. 42.

<sup>152</sup> Andrew MacKillop, ‘Accessing Empire: Scotland, Europe, Britain, and the Asia trade, 1695-c.1750’, *Itinerario*, 29:3 (2005), pp. 7-25, p. 16.

<sup>153</sup> The ‘Espece de Journal tenu par Mr. Hume’ is one of many documents and letters written by Alexander Hume in French that are still preserved among the Ostend Company records at the *Stadsarchief Antwerp*, G.I.C. 5617.

<sup>154</sup> On kinship networks and economic migration among Scots in the period, see the articles by Andrew MacKillop, Douglas Catterall and others in Angela McCarthy (ed.), *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities since the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York, 2006).

west to the Atlantic trade, while others were keen for their youths to enter the service of the EIC or the intra-European trade. Most likely, individual family connections decided upon such choices at an early stage. There are, of course, many Scottish families who were represented in both trading worlds of Asia and the Atlantic, yet a preference for specific geographical regions and commodities prevailed nevertheless. Robert Hume, who was most likely the father of Alexander and Abraham, seems to have been involved in the management and insurance of East Indiamen from early on, operating from a counting house in Tooley Street, Southwark.<sup>155</sup> As the works of Jean Sutton and Huw V. Bowen have shown, the 'shipping interest' of London formed a close-knit group of families who were able to limit outside competition for much of the eighteenth century, and who formed powerful alliances with and also took part in the commercial management of the EIC.<sup>156</sup> Between 1717 and 1720, Alexander Hume worked in the EIC's maritime service, most likely as a junior supercargo or mate.<sup>157</sup> The early experience of trading in the East was to be his entry ticket into a scheme that promised quick promotion and unusually high profits.

In 1719/20, together with a small group of Britons and Irishmen, Alexander Hume decided to quit the EIC service and travelled to Ostend to meet their new employers. Thomas Hall, Captain John Harrison, Captain James Tobin, George Kitchin, James Naish, Charles Morford and the latter's uncle, Captain Charles Pike, were among the vanguards of a movement that expanded in the following years to include many more former EIC servants.<sup>158</sup> All of the aforementioned traders had a

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<sup>155</sup> See Holden Furber, 'East India Companies' in Paul H. Kratoska (ed.), *South East Asia. Colonial History* (London and New York, 2001), pp. 269-314; p. 299.

<sup>156</sup> Jean Sutton, *Lords of the East: The East India Company and its Ships (1600-1874)* (London, 1981); Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit'.

<sup>157</sup> Anthony Farrington, *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers, 1600-1834* (London, 1999), p. 401.

<sup>158</sup> There was also a great influx of Dutch and French traders, some of whom feature in the small prosopographical study done by Jan Parmentier, *Het gezicht van de Oostendse handelaar. Studie van*

strong practical connection to the sea, and a deep-rooted interest in shipping and navigation. With regard to the practices of interloping, it is worth noting that during the first half of the eighteenth century, the professional boundaries between commanders and supercargoes were still pretty blurred. George Kitchin, Thomas Hall, James Naish and Charles Pike served interchangeably in both positions over the course of their seafaring careers, following opportunities and privileges rather than the logic of different professional paths, that of either a merchant or mariner, as it is usually assumed.

The unique perspective on interlopers in the China trade – men who changed the employing Company once, twice, or in some cases up to three times during their careers – can help us to understand to what extent practical expertise (that is knowledge of navigation, trading experience, book-keeping as well as language skills) was a commodity or asset with which merchant mariners could advertise their individual value to a new employer. As the example of the Ostend venture showed, a supercargo, who was also a skilled navigator, was very employable in a landscape of mushrooming Companies and private initiatives whose promoters all tried to get a foot into the market for Asian goods.

Regarding the Ostend Company and their British employees, it is possible to distinguish between a first wave of recruitment that happened roughly between 1717-1720, which included mostly officers and commanders with previous experience in the East Indies trade. This can be distinguished from a second wave that followed in the years after the royal charter was granted in 1722, through which people with rather different trading portfolios and experiences were able to join. Many traders who joined the Ostend venture right at the beginning, and who were crucial in

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*de Oostendse kooplieden, reders, en ondernemers actief in de internationale maritieme handel en visserij tijdens de 18de eeuw* (Oostende, 2004).

implementing the necessary trading structures, subsequently facilitated the entry of friends and relatives. The latter followed in the footsteps of the former, but often had less or no previous experience in the Indies trade. What looked like a decline in ‘skilled labour’ in the recruitment practices of the Ostend Company was actually an indication of a quickly maturing trading enterprise.

First, as trade from Ostend expanded, there was an increased need for writers and assistants who were only expected to master the basics of accounting, have good arithmetical skills and a ‘good hand’, as they had to record transactions and copy letters for their superiors in the Company. These requirements were in place for all overseas trading activities, and many institutions and private tutors provided courses that the young men destined for a commercial career would receive as their first training.<sup>159</sup> Such junior positions were often manned with family members or protégés of those who were already well established in the Company. It was through these mechanisms that not only professional hierarchies were implemented that were similar to those of the big East India Companies, but also that a new generation of young traders were ‘brought up’ in the business of interloping in the China trade.

Second, during the last wave of recruitment from 1722 to the suspension of the Ostend charter in 1728, there was also a noticeable influx of ‘career changers’ who were well connected in the worlds of finance or commodity trades, both of which were important for the East India trade. An exploration of these personal connections helps us to understand the vital links between the Eurasian and Atlantic trades, and this not only with regard to the supply of export commodities and silver via a host of intermediaries in North-western Europe and Cadiz, but also regarding

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<sup>159</sup> For a detailed discussion of the merchant’s training and the development of a specialist educational literature for young traders, see Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies*, pp. 86-90; Natasha Glaisyer, *The Culture of Commerce in England, 1660-1720* (Woodbridge, 2006).

the return distribution of Chinese goods throughout Europe and the New World. A number of these – often little studied – figures will be introduced in the following.

Merchants with a background in the wine, silver, textile and iron trades were perhaps novices in the commerce to China, but they brought vital contacts and experiences with them into this new and dynamic branch of business. Many China traders were first and foremost merchants active in the intra-European trade, a background that had a lasting impact on their trading activities also after they found a way to participate in the growing commerce with Canton. To take an example, the brothers Thomas and John Adam Coppinger, who joined the Ostend venture after 1723, had been part of the expatriate Irish Jacobite community in Ostend and Dunkirk, and had acted as crucial players in the Anglo-French trade in brandy and wine.<sup>160</sup> After they had entered the China trade on behalf of the Ostend and later the Swedish East India Company, they became major wholesalers of tea in Europe, while keeping their stake in the trade in alcoholic beverages. The wine and beer trades were perfectly compatible with the East Indies commerce, as large supplies for the ships' companies and factories in Asia were needed.

In all Companies, in fact, we find supercargoes and officers who were deeply involved in the trade in beverages, often with a strong regional focus on Portugal, Spain, France, Britain, or the Low Countries. Charles Irvine, whom we have encountered at the beginning of this chapter, was for much of his career an eminent wine merchant at Rouen. Irvine operated in partnership with Robert Arbuthnot, an important Scottish banker in France, before he added the China trade to his field of expertise. According to Alexander A. Cormack, the Rouen trading house of

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<sup>160</sup> On their connection to Thomas Ray, Patrick Sarsfield, Charles Hennessy and the Rothe (Roche) brothers, see Jan Parmentier, 'The Sweets of Commerce: The Hennessys of Ostend and their Network in the Eighteenth Century', in David Dickson et al. (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and overseas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Ghent, 2007), pp. 67-91, esp. pp. 72-74.

Arbuthnot had been trading in wine and Scottish salmon, before it, too, became involved in the China trade. Yet, it is unclear whether Arbuthnot and Irvine were active as financiers, suppliers, or buyers at the French auctions.<sup>161</sup>

Similar trajectories of merchants who only later during their careers turned to the opportunities of the China trade can, also be traced amongst the servants of the English East India Company. Frederick Pigou, Nathaniel Torriano and Stephen DeVisme for instance – all EIC supercargoes at the time – came from families with strong links to the continent through their engagement in the import of French wines to England.<sup>162</sup> Their last names also suggest a family history of earlier migration to England.

Amongst the second wave of people who joined the Ostend Company, there were also a number of Britons who had previously been working as stockbrokers and financial agents in London and Amsterdam, and who were, in the words of a contemporary merchant, ‘drawn into those chimerical schemes’, in which so many investors lost a fortune: the South Sea Bubble of 1720.<sup>163</sup> Colin Campbell of Moy (1686-1757) and Robert Hewer (died in 1746), merchants for whom we have more detailed evidence, belonged to this latter group of traders who found their way into the China trade through personal networks, but without having any specialised trading knowledge in East India goods.

Both Campbell and Hewer came to the European continent in financial distress. The heavy debts they had accumulated through financial speculation, and

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<sup>161</sup> Cormack, *Colin Campbell, 1686-1757: Merchant, Gothenburg, Sweden. His will annotated*, p. 33f.

<sup>162</sup> Torriano married a daughter of Pierre Proli, the Ostend financier, and had a Chinese armorial dinner service made to celebrate the union of both houses.

<sup>163</sup> Robert Hewer (London) to Thomas Hall (Ostend), 4 October 1720, Chancery Masters’ Exhibits, box C 130/132, also cited in Conrad Gill, *Merchant and Mariners*, p. 18. A new interpretation of this Company was offered in Helen J. Paul, *The South Sea Bubble: an economic history of its origins and consequences* (London and New York, 2010).



their inability to pay them off, were their main reasons to flee Britain.<sup>164</sup> In the case of Robert Hewer, it was one creditor in particular who threatened him with imprisonment, if he was unable to pay his large debt of £5800, Colonel Archibald Hamilton.<sup>165</sup> Temporarily, Hewer had to rely on the hospitality and support of two friends from London, Thomas Hall and Charles Morford, who had already been trading under the Austrian flag for some years. Morford, Hall and Hewer (who was originally from Plymouth) belonged to the same shipping circles in London, and their previous acquaintance certainly had an impact on how they promoted each other's interests. In 1723, Thomas Hall (1692-1748) managed to secure a position for Hewer as supercargo on board the Canton ship *Marquis de Prié*, on which he himself held the command. This elevated position on board allowed Hewer to recover good parts of his fortune and to pay off his creditors at home in Britain in the course of a few years. After Hewer's first voyage to China, it was Hall who bought up large parts of the former's *pacotille* in order to sell the goods off little by little to individual consumers and wholesalers on the continent. This personal arrangement enabled Hewer to pay back his bonds fairly quickly, and also brought in enough cash to invest in the export cargo for a new journey in 1725/26.<sup>166</sup> What looks like an instance of selfless behaviour probably turned to good account for Hall. The great intimacy of their letters, however, leaves no doubt that the two became close friends and not only trading partners.

Both Thomas Hall, who had been working as a commander and supercargo for the Ostend Company since 1719, and Robert Hewer came from a similar mercantile background and were by no means outsiders regarding their political

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<sup>164</sup> For the centrality of personal debt and credit in English culture and social life, see Margot C. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>165</sup> See Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, p. 48.

<sup>166</sup> Thomas Hall's Ostend transaction book details his purchases and sales between voyages and encompasses the time between 1723-1726. PRO C111/95, *The National Archives*, Kew.

alliances, religion or social kudos. Protestants, whigs without political ambitions, they belonged to the proud merchant class of London, who frequented the Jerusalem and Lloyds coffee houses and were always on the lookout for new commercial opportunities abroad. In a way, they were the least likely candidates to be attracted by interloping – yet personal ambition and financial necessity played a powerful role in attracting also a few men to the business of interloping who otherwise had no difficulty to integrate themselves into London's commercial society. To take an example, James Naish equally belonged to London's elite shipping circles. Naish moved back and forth between the positions of commander and supercargo, and was, at the time when he decided to join the Ostend venture, already well integrated into the English East India Company.

Robert Hewer was the younger son of a prominent merchant in Plymouth.<sup>167</sup> After his father's death in 1743, he and his brothers found, hidden in a corner of his house, '£6,600 & upwards in money that hath lain there many a year untouched'.<sup>168</sup> The hoarding of cash was perhaps not unusual in times during which money could occasionally be scarce and banks as an institution were not trusted and used by all merchants to the same degree. This amount, however, was exceedingly high and gives us a good idea of the family background of young Robert.<sup>169</sup> In cultural terms, Hewer was a keen 'improver'. After his time at Ostend, Hewer travelled to Italy to learn the language. There he also developed an understanding of fine arts. After setting up house and trade in France as a dealer in East India goods, he was finally

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<sup>167</sup> Robert Hewer senior was three times elected as mayor of Plymouth between 1709-32. In his will, he gave practically his entire fortune to his eldest son John. PRO/11/727 Will of Robert Hewer, Merchant of Plymouth.

<sup>168</sup> Robert Hewer to Thomas Hall, 3 June 1743, quoted in Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England. A Study in International Trade and Development* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 319.

<sup>169</sup> Considering that his son Robert lost his fortune of £40,000 almost at once, as all of it was invested in shares and bonds, the trust of his father in the security of banks was probably affected. Robert Hewer's letters to Thomas Hall in C103/132 give detailed insights of his heavy losses in the crash of the South Sea stock between July and September 1720, an episode that he described as 'a melancholy circumstance, [which] hath almost broke my heart.' Cited in, Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, p. 48.

able to return home, thanks to the mediation of his friend Thomas Hall, allowing him to settle his last debts and to arrange a reconciliation with the British crown and Court of Directors in London.<sup>170</sup>

For the rest of his career, Hewer remained a part-time trader with a continuous interest in shipping and trade in East India goods, while he settled down in England as a full-time country gentleman. His short career as an interloper was to have great impact on his later life, as he was enabled to buy a fine estate near Plymouth and to reintegrate into polite society in London and Devon in no time.<sup>171</sup> Hewer's letters to Thomas Hall, after they had both returned to Britain, were larded with accounts of his new country lifestyle, his reading habits (he was especially keen on Voltaire and Racine), and polite sociability. Hewer shared a passion for Chinese porcelain with his friend, the young Duke and Duchess of Bedford, who lived at Woburn Abbey. Robert Hewer moved between his countryseat near Plymouth (Manadon) and the City of London. He never seems to have made plans to marry, but rather enjoyed his existence as an old bachelor.<sup>172</sup>

Another British-born interloper who was to get enlisted in the service of the Ostend Company and who would later play also a crucial role in the Swedish venture was Colin Campbell of Moy. Campbell did not have much experience with maritime trade before he joined the Ostend Company at some point around 1723.<sup>173</sup> In his earlier career, he had been more interested in the stock market, and had specialised in

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<sup>170</sup> Upon the settlement, he personally wrote to one of the EIC directors from Paris, requesting permission to cross the Channel in order to resettle in England. Robert Hewer (Paris) to Matthew Decker (London), 17 August 1731, BL, IOR/E/1/22 ff. 169-170v, letter 94.

<sup>171</sup> For a vivid account of Hewer's social life back in Britain and his close friendships with several aristocratic families and prominent East India merchants, such as Governor Pitt with whom he travelled to Paris for entertainment, see also Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, pp. 137-40.

<sup>172</sup> See the two bundles of letters from Hewer to Hall in The National Archives, Kew, Thomas Hall vs. Hallett, C103/130 and C103/132.

<sup>173</sup> On Colin Campbell's connection to the Ostend venture, see Paul Hallberg and Christian Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China. Colin Campbell's*, pp. xix; xxi.

financial services as a broker in London.<sup>174</sup> His background as a clerk, and his familiarity with banking and speculative trading in bills of exchange, bonds and insurance policies, made him an ideal candidate for his later position as a Company director of the SEIC. Colin Campbell, and the many investors in Scotland and London for whom he was acting, were hit hard by the bursting of the South Sea Bubble. Throughout the rest of his life, he paid off debts, whilst accumulating an enormous fortune on the side. The last claims were only settled by his executors *post mortem*, as he had made provisions to satisfy all those who had lost money through his advice in the notorious summer of 1720.<sup>175</sup> As Campbell's will makes clear, he also gave generously to various charitable bodies both in Sweden and England, and provided ample means for the purpose of erecting a church in Gothenburg – a gift to and memorial for the growing community of worshipping Britons in that town.

The influx of merchants into the China trade who, like Hewer and Campbell, had an intimate yet sometimes also ill-fated connection to the rapidly expanding world of banking and speculation, is significant, as it adds nuance to the common perception of merchant mariners as agents who simply acted on behalf of the companies and individual investors, but who lacked a distinct entrepreneurial profile themselves. To be sure, the variety of ways by which British merchants entered the China trade was considerable. However, what is striking is that most men were recruited from a pool of individuals who were exceedingly progressive in their commercial decisions, and who were familiar with all those commercial innovations that more traditional commodity traders feared and cursed.

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<sup>174</sup> Leos Müller 'Scottish and Irish Entrepreneurs in Eighteenth-Century Sweden', in David Dickson et al. (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ghent, 2007), pp. 147-175, p. 151.

<sup>175</sup> Cormack, *Colin Campbell, 1686-1757: Merchant, Gothenburg, Sweden*, p. 10.

Yehiel Prager, a prominent diamond merchant in Amsterdam, represents well the more cautious and in many ways ‘conservative trader’ who dominated the landscape of overseas trading well into the latter part of the eighteenth century. Prager tried everything to prevent the young folks who ran the family’s Philadelphia house from getting involved in the bills and exchange business, instead of focusing on the exchange of goods. His conservatism in these matters is shown in the reminder he gave to his nephews abroad in a letter dating from 1784, which stressed the slow progress one should expect from one’s trade: ‘Respectable merchants do not concern themselves with it [the trade in bills of exchange] and you cannot get rich in one year. A merchant needs time and then respect comes of itself.’<sup>176</sup> Among the China traders under consideration here, such reservation towards speculative trading was hardly ever expressed. Born between the 1680s and 1720s, they represented a group of curious and experimental merchants who seem to have felt comfortable in the world of high finance as well as with the intricacies of commodity trading. In that, they were an unusual lot.

Although Colin Campbell – the newly arrived ‘Ostender’ – lacked practical experience in the East Indies trade and was personally ‘not acquainted with [the] sailing of a ship & other sea affairs’<sup>177</sup>, several members of his family were already trading in Asia and had forged valuable links to high-ranking members of the different European East India Companies. Thus, while Colin Campbell was a latecomer in the business of long-distance trade (being already in his mid-thirties), he had the social capital in the form of personal networks, and also the commercial background, to navigate this dramatic shift in his career with the utmost success.

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<sup>176</sup> Cited in Gedalia Yogeve, *Diamonds and Coral*, p. 203.

<sup>177</sup> Paul Hallberg and Christian Koninckx (eds), *Colin Campbell’s diary*, p. 12.

Colin's older brother Hugh was a successful country trader who seems to have had the status of a 'free merchant' in the Madras Presidency in the 1720s. Even though most of Hugh Campbell's business papers and correspondence are likely to have been destroyed, we can still get a glimpse of his trading activities in India through the chance survival of an account book of an anonymous merchant of Madras, in which Campbell figures prominently.<sup>178</sup> In the 1720s, Hugh Campbell personally accompanied and invested in many 'country voyages' between Madras and Canton. At the same time, as Colin Campbell accompanied the first SEIC ship to China in 1732, his brother was joining the last Ostend ship to China, the *Duke of Lorrain*.<sup>179</sup> He returned to Europe in the late 1720s, just in time for getting involved in the formation of the Swedish East India Company.<sup>180</sup> Country traders such as Hugh Campbell were able to build up an intimate knowledge of the China trade, as they often stayed in Canton or Macao for prolonged periods of time. It is therefore not surprising that these Britons who already operated at the margin of the monopoly system formed another important pool of experts, which small trading Companies were eager to have on board.

Before we turn to the history of the Campbell family, a note is due on the contexts in which European country traders like Hugh Campbell pursued their commercial schemes in the East. There, they acquired the vital expertise that was a precondition for their later interloping careers. Fort St. George in Madras was then under control of the EIC. However, as one of the most important trading enclaves on the Indian Coromandel Coast, the population of traders in Madras was always

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<sup>178</sup> See FBL, Minn., 1725 oEa, 'Account book of an anon. merchant in Madras, 1720-25'.

<sup>179</sup> The National Archives, Kew, C111/95, Hall vs Hallett, Thomas Braddyll (Fort William College, Calcutta) to Hugh Campbell, 20 January 1732/3.

<sup>180</sup> Gill, *Merchant and Mariners*, p. 101.

mixed.<sup>181</sup> In fact, as Holden Furber has convincingly shown, the number of people who belonged to the ‘floating “seafaring” group outside the English company’s service’ significantly outnumbered the civil servants who were officially part of the EIC trading establishment in Madras during the 1720s by a ratio of more than 2:1.<sup>182</sup> Country traders like Hugh Campbell were crucial intermediaries who cooperated with ‘Ostenders’ and other interlopers as well as with EIC servants during their time of commercial operations in the East Indies. They encouraged direct links between servants of different European Companies, and were a key driving force in the expansion of trade between different nodes of the Asian trading system.<sup>183</sup>

The Campbell brothers of Moy in Moray traced their ancestry to a powerful Scottish noble family, the clan of Cawdor, and through them to the noble family of Argyll.<sup>184</sup> The headquarters of the clan, Cawdor Castle, lies mid-way between Nairn and Inverness, just off the coastline of the Moray Firth. The impressive drawing rooms, staircases and bedchambers of the medieval castle still feature a great deal of Chinese and Indian furnishings and decorative objects. Unfortunately, the curators of the castle have concentrated their research almost entirely on the families’ paintings and tapestry collections. By contrast, almost nothing is known about the origins of the Chinese porcelain collection and lacquer works, the silk and cotton bed-hangings. Colin and Hugh Campbell were both raised in Edinburgh as sons of a prominent lawyer, and must have enjoyed a good education and commercial training. Both their parents originally came from the northeast of Scotland – like so many other traders

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<sup>181</sup> Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (Minneapolis, 1976), p. 301. For an excellent description of Madras as a cross-cultural trading place, see Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550-1800* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 78-111.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> The vital role of the ‘country trader’ and especially the ‘sea captain’ for the expansion of British trade in Asia in the first part of the eighteenth century has been stressed by Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade*, esp. pp. 273-97. More recent studies that consider the impact of the country trade for the economic rather than political development of the Euro-Asian trade include the study of Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*.

<sup>184</sup> Alexander A. Cormack, ‘Colin Campbell 1686-1757’, p. 30.

who served in the Ostend and later Swedish and Prussian East India Companies. The family did not seem to have any obvious connections to East India circles in London. Yet, the oldest brother Archibald was a sea captain, which suggests some inclination in the family towards overseas trade.<sup>185</sup> As a Presbyterian, Colin Campbell had no great trouble in integrating into Swedish society. Yet, specific religious followings never seem to have been a guiding principle of his commercial networking with other merchants, as he was happily doing business with Protestants of various denominations, Jews, and also with both Scottish and Irish Catholics. He was closely involved in Jacobite circles and shared a number of close friends with Charles Irvine, among them George Ouchterlony, Arthur Abercromby and John Pike.

The careers of the Campbell brothers mirror in some way those of the Hume brothers from Berwickshire, in that they all managed to develop out of a position of weakness into one of great influence and wealth. Although interlopers *par excellence*, the Humes and Campbells became widely respected by fellow traders as ‘honest gentlemen’, and even achieved royal recognition through the granting of a title of nobility and the bestowal of numerous awards from England and Sweden respectively. (Colin Campbell’s tokens of royal recognition encompassed several likenesses from the Swedish couple royal Frederick I. and Ulrika Eleonora, in addition to jewelled emblems. His brother was granted the title of Count Hugh Campbell in recognition of his services for the SEIC and the national economy.) By offering their expertise to investors on the continent, and not to the directors of the EIC or VOC, both brothers managed to gain a lot more leverage than most of their colleagues at home in Britain could ever claim. As Andrew MacKillop has succinctly

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<sup>185</sup> Biographical information on the Campbell’s is rather scarce, and a lot of unsupported claims are to be found in the SEIC historiography. The most reliable source is Cormack, *Colin Campbell*. Cormack provided key data from Scottish birth and burial records and summarised the information given by Hugh and Colin Campbell themselves when they applied for naturalization in Sweden in 1731 and 1736 respectively.



put it: 'For the Hume dynasty, as well as Colin Campbell, successful Asian commerce after 1707 meant Europe, not Britain, and their subsequent careers vindicated that judgement.'<sup>186</sup>

After Alexander Hume's initial success in India, by which he accumulated two very profitable cargoes for the investors in the Southern Netherlands, he was in the superior position to dictate – rather than to negotiate – his future terms of employment.<sup>187</sup> In return for his services, Alexander Hume demanded a personal remuneration that stood in stark contrast to those offered, for instance, to other high-ranking merchants in the EIC. The influence and extraordinary privileges that a number of British interlopers enjoyed during their time on the continent turned them into attractive trading partners for members of the big Companies. For instance, Jan-Albert Sichterman, the Governor of Bengal for the VOC in the 1730s and 1740s, used his contacts to interlopers like Irvine to procure also Chinese export wares for his vast collection of Asian porcelain and furniture.<sup>188</sup>

The lack of practical experience among the investors in Europe led to their willingness to bestow a great deal of responsibility onto Alexander and later also onto Abraham Hume, in return for lavish rewards. In 1726, Alexander was appointed Governor of the Ostend Company in all of the trading posts in Bengal and on the Coromandel Coast, which included those trading posts he was yet to establish. Before he went out to India for the third time on behalf of the Ostend Company, he was in the position to ask for

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<sup>186</sup> Andrew MacKillop, 'Accessing Empire: Scotland, Europe, Britain, and the Asia Trade', p. 24.

<sup>187</sup> Om Prakash, *European commercial enterprise in pre-colonial India (The New Cambridge History of India: II.5)* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 261-67.

<sup>188</sup> The regular exchange of gifts and commissions is documented in the correspondence between Irvine and Jan Albert Sichterman. See, for instance, idem (Fort Gustavus, Chinsura) to Charles Irvine (Canton), 15 January 1743, CIC/1743/3a and Sichterman to Irvine, 7 January 1742, CIC/1742/2a.

a salary of f [florins] 1000 per month to start 6 months before departure, 7 ½ per cent commission on all such effects as shall be brought home for ye Company's account sent from Bengal or ye Coromandel Coast ... one chest of the usual size allowed to the commanders ... which chest shall be delivered immediately on the ships arrival unopened and unexamined.<sup>189</sup>

In addition, Alexander Hume secured 'half the salary and privileges' for his younger brother who accompanied him to India. In order to deliver the best possible results, Hume also took it upon himself to give directions on the composition of the outward cargoes and provisions on board. Thus, Hume made sure he was in charge also of those elements of the trade, that were usually decided by the directors in Europe. What seems rather odd at first glance, namely to ask for the delivery of 'one chest of the usual size ... unopened and unexamined', is actually quite significant.<sup>190</sup> Supercargoes always carried musters, models, and written instructions for special commissions and their own commercial experiments with them to China – and they took measures in protecting their ideas from the eyes of curious competitors. They could lock the compartments of their writing desks, but otherwise it was probably difficult for them to order that their chests also remained 'unexamined', as Hume insisted. In fact, a supercargo's writing desk was the only piece of luggage that was considered strictly private and was only to be opened upon the death of the owner. In 1732, the EIC supercargoes noted such a case in the Company diary, confirming that they had

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<sup>189</sup> Cited in Indira Narang, 'The Ostend Company's Records and the "Instruction" of Alexander Hume', *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 4:17 (1967), pp. 17-37, p. 20.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

[o]pened Mr [George] Arbuthnott's Scritore which was sealed up after his decease, & Capt. Elliston delivered us the Papers that were found therein relating to the Hon.ble Companies Affairs & at the same time he requested that one of the Council might be present at the taking of the Inventory of his things, which we agreed to & appointed Mr Liell for this purpose.<sup>191</sup>

From other cases, we know that merchant mariners carried not only their commercial ledgers, personal letters and notebooks with them, but also an up-to-date will, and said drawings or musters for their purchases.<sup>192</sup> The death of George Arbuthnot is commented on in Colin Campbell's travel journal and reveals the small world inhabited by China traders – a world in which cross-Company friendships and family bonds loomed large. Upon arrival of the SEIC ship in China in 1732, Campbell wrote that one of the English mates, one Mr Baron

surpriz'd me with the very disagreeable news of the Death of an Intimate friend & old Acquaintant of mine whom I had great Respect for, I mean Mr George Arbuthnot Chief SuperCargo of the 4 English ships bound for China, who had dy'd aboard the Linn in sight of the Islands not far from Macao, where he was buried, which gave me great Concern.<sup>193</sup>

George Arbuthnot was, in fact, the half brother of Robert Arbuthnot, the Jacobite banker and former employer of Charles Irvine at Rouen, and of Dr John

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<sup>191</sup> IOR G/12/33 (1731-32) Diary and Consultation Book of George Arbuthnot, Whichcott Turner, John Starke ... and Thomas Liell a standing Council for the management of affairs in China anno 1732', p. 65.

<sup>192</sup> Upon the death of Captain Richard Pinnell, the latter's personal papers plus an inventory of all his material possessions were sent to London, where they were presented as evidence of a court case. The National Archives, Kew, C108/414 Bundle of letters concerning Captain Richard Pinnell commanding the East Indiaman 'Elizabeth' in 1746.

<sup>193</sup> Hallberg and Koninckx, *A Passage to China*, p. 89.

Arbuthnot, the famous London physician and satirist and a great friend of Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope. George Arbuthnot's mother was Catherine Ouchterlony, a fact that well demonstrates the close connections between the northern Scottish families Ouchterlony, Arbuthnot, Irvine and Campbell – whose combined 'China interest' in the 1720s and 1730s reached from the French Compagnie des Indes to the Ostend, Swedish and English East India Companies.

*New companies and old India traders: the demise of the Ostend and the rise of the  
Swedish East India Company*

Even though small interloping enterprises like the Ostend or the SEIC were regarded with envy and sometime outright hostility in London, Amsterdam and Paris, it is still important to recognise that on a personal level, the friendly contact between traders in Canton in particular was hardly tainted. The Ostenders repeatedly rented a *hong* – a combined dwelling house, office and warehouse space for the supercargoes and their assistants and servants – next door to the EIC, and joint entertainments and dinner invitations were the rule rather than the exception.<sup>194</sup>

Yet, sociability and private association could not stop the political conflicts that arose in Europe over the competition from Ostend. This provincial port had successfully attracted funds and expertise from across Europe and promised to be a role model for ever new initiatives that attempted to cut into the profits of the larger Companies, and which suddenly spoiled the markets for Chinese wares through

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<sup>194</sup> Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, p. 25.

enhanced competition and availability of supplies.<sup>195</sup> By 1709/10, the EIC directors were already aware of the fact that '[t]ea is the commodity on which the Chief part of our expected profit ... depends'.<sup>196</sup> At that time, the VOC was still supplying not just their home market with tea, but also the German lands and the Low Countries. The situation changed with the entry of the Ostend and Scandinavian Companies.

The steady downward development of the prices for black and green teas soon became an issue for the large East India Companies, but was also a hotly debated topic amongst the wider wholesale community in Britain and on the continent. Merchants in the Netherlands were particularly pessimistic about the prospects of the tea trade with so much added competition.<sup>197</sup> When supplies were particularly high one season, the profit margins of those who had purchased their lots at the continental auctions became so slim that only smuggling to Britain promised a reasonable profit. The importance of tea was such that London and Amsterdam became united in their goal to fight the unwelcome competition from Ostend.<sup>198</sup> The untimely end of the Ostend venture should, however, not blind us to the fact that this transnational association of private traders had revolutionised the European market by introducing cheap Bohea tea for the masses – the demand thereby created certainly outlived all of the trading Companies.

After a few years of trading, the diplomatic pressure in Europe on the Holy Roman Emperor – who had confirmed the trading privileges of the Ostend Company in 1722 – became too great, and the charter of the Company was ultimately

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<sup>195</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), 9 April 1743, Letter book, 13 November 1742-28 July 1743.

<sup>196</sup> 'List of Goods to be provided at Chusan by the Supra Cargo's of the Rochester', British Library, IOR E/3/96, pp. 289-291.

<sup>197</sup> See the letters on the development of the tea market in Europe by Senserf & Co, Diedrick Smith and Van Berchem and W. L. Pietersoon, agents of Captain Thomas Hall and Captain Charles Pike, in The National Archives, Kew. C 103/132 and C 103/ 33.

<sup>198</sup> An analysis of the distinct dynamics behind the tea trade in this period is offered by Chris Nierstrasz, *Rivalry of Trade in Tea and Textiles*, pp. 54-90.

suspended. Also the Ostend trading factories in India were abandoned, and a great many individuals were suddenly free-floating and looking for other opportunities and employments. The China trade was continued for some time under the cover of 'neutral flags' (such as the Prussian one in 1731), but the risks were too great for attracting sufficient funds in the long run.<sup>199</sup>

The Ostend Company, however, had overall been too successful that this could be the end of the story. Consequently, a number of investors, intermediaries and Company servants were able to continue their involvement in the China trade by shifting their core business to the newly established SEIC from 1731 onwards. Some Swedish historians have overly stressed the national outlook of the Company that opened its headquarters in Gothenburg. Christian Koninckx, for instance, generally downplayed the transnational nature of the SEIC by stating that '[t]here do seem to be connections between the two companies (the Ostend and SEIC), but certainly no officially-organised transfer of men, of materials or of capital from one to the other.'<sup>200</sup> By contrast, this study claims that the continuities in personnel and financial backing leave no doubt of its deeply transnational nature. As a commercial enterprise, the SEIC relied indeed heavily on the import of trading expertise and navigational skills from abroad. The Company's demand was satisfied not only by hiring former Ostenders, but also by profiting from the wider networks of those who had previously traded in the East under different flags.

The EIC directors were aware of the danger of loosing the Humes once more to another rival Company, and therefore offered them to come back to the British Isles against the payment of an agreed fine. Alexander and Abraham both accepted the price put on their disloyalty and paid the £1,500 demanded by the EIC

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<sup>199</sup> Gerald B. Hertz, 'England and the Ostend Company', *The English Historical Review* XXII (1907), pp. 255-79, esp. p. 276.

<sup>200</sup> Idem, *The First and Second Charter*, pp. 16f.

directors.<sup>201</sup> They thus managed to continue their East India career now from the heart of Britain's expanding empire. The family's connection to the EIC was significantly strengthened in the 1730s when Alexander was elected a member of the Court of Directors, next to being among the most active 'ship's husbands' for the EIC in the first half of the eighteenth century. Alexander's younger brother Abraham headed the London Assurance Company, was a Member of Parliament between 1747-68, and was ennobled to the rank of Baronet of Wormleybury, Hertfordshire in 1767.<sup>202</sup> Sir Abraham was also acting as a managing owner for the EIC from 1746/7 until his death in 1772. The Hume family was acting as principal owner/manager for more than twenty ships between 1752/3 and 1786/87.<sup>203</sup> Abraham's younger son, Alexander, continued this family tradition, but was also working for the EIC as a China supercargo in the 1760s.<sup>204</sup>

Repatriation was thus possible and desirable for those interlopers who had accumulated enough money to live upon the interest of their fortunes or who saw possibilities for starting a profitable business in London. The careers of the Hume brothers, Thomas Hall, Robert Hewer and James Naish present memorable examples of former interlopers who returned to the British Isles and continued to prosper there. In fact, as we shall see later on, they profited enormously from the experiences and contacts forged during their residence on the continent and in Asia. The majority of traders, however, who had joined the Ostend venture, did not return to Britain. Instead they continued to be an opportunistic and highly mobile workforce, who

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<sup>201</sup> Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, p. 47.

<sup>202</sup> The National Archives, Prob 11/981; the will of Sir Abraham Hume Bar.t of Wormley, Hertford.

<sup>203</sup> See the entries on charter parties signed by Alexander and Abraham Hume in the Company Court books starting from 11 October 1752, in IOR B/72, p. 165 through to 2 September 1878, in IOR B/94, p. 204. More entries are in Anthony Farrington, *Catalogue of East India Company ships' journals and logs 1600-1834* (London, 1999), appendix 1.

<sup>204</sup> 'Thomas Fitzhugh, Samuel Blount, Nathaniel Garland, Alexander Hume, Mann Horner, Thomas Smith and William Rous appointed Resident supercargoes for the year 1764.' British Library, IOR R/10/5 Diary and Consultation Books of Resident Supercargoes.

shifted their capital and expertise from one Company to another over the course of their careers. Their nomadic lifestyle, the experience of repeated displacement, and the impermanence of their everyday life and material world allows us to understand the impact that global trade had on these *flexible subjects* and to focus on the mechanisms and moral regimes that were in place that provided structure and a portable home to Canton traders.<sup>205</sup>

*Britons abroad, interlopers at home: transnational careers in the making*

If there is one thing that unites the British China traders under consideration in this study, than it is their nomadic lifestyle. As we have seen, frequent relocation, disappointment in, or at least obstacles to, their great ambitions characterized the beginnings of their mercantile careers. A lack of financial support and opportunities at home drove many of the young men to London and further on to the continent. Between their mid-teens to their early twenties, they developed commercial skills and different degrees of knowledge about navigation, which formed the entry requirements for finding civil employment in the East Indies trade. What distinguishes China traders from most of their adventurous colleagues in Europe, the Americas, and other parts of the East Indies, is that they were more likely to work for more than one, and sometimes up to three different, national trading Companies over the course of their active careers.

Cross-Company mobility has never been charted systematically, neither for the British nor for any other group of European traders. Yet, it provides a crucial context for our group portrait of British free agents, showing that they were indeed

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<sup>205</sup> I have borrowed this conceptual term from the social anthropologist Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham and London, 1999).



part of a larger movement. Table 2.2 summarises the widely scattered information available about eighty British interlopers active in the continental Companies during the period of this study. This list is, however, likely to be incomplete in at least three important ways, but it can give nonetheless a useful impression of the mobility of China traders at the time.

The first reservation of the list is that there were probably more British people employed as supercargoes, commanders and officers, but their names have not been recorded or preserved, or the spelling of their names might have been nationalised in ways that prevented their identification as British subjects. Second, even though it has been attempted to fully trace the different career moves for each individual, my overall focus on the EIC, the Ostend and the Swedish East India Companies meant that I was able to dig out a greater range of materials concerning the personnel of those Companies than for the Danish or Dutch Companies. That said, if the secondary literature on the latter two is right, British people did not play a significant role as commercial agents or navigating officers in either of them. The Danish Company instead attracted larger numbers of Dutch and French interlopers.<sup>206</sup> The French Compagnie des Indes was, according to Holden Furber, the Company with the least influence of foreigners overall.<sup>207</sup> Yet, it is entirely possible that a few people in this list might have actually also worked for the VOC, Dutch or French Companies at some point, which I may not have been able to recognise.

Third, I have included some ‘borderline cases’ such as Charles Pike. Even though only his brother John was actually employed as supercargo by the SEIC, Charles was so vitally involved in the organisation of the first voyages from Gothenburg, both practically and financially, that I have decided to include him in

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<sup>206</sup> Erik Gøbel, ‘Dutch Influences on the Danish East India Company, 1616-c.1629’, in Jan Parmentier (ed.), *Noord-Zuid in Oost-Indisch perspectief* (Zutphen, 2005), pp. 177-186.

<sup>207</sup> Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade*, p. 211.

the table. No doubt, a list that would also include the financiers and administrative staff behind the continental Companies would expand this group of merchants even further.<sup>208</sup> Yet, many of the British financiers and wholesalers who were part of the networks of interlopers are treated separately in chapter Three.

Hence, even though the data presented here is not exhaustive for the reasons mentioned, it still shows a clear, and I believe accurate, image of whereto most of the British free agents went abroad. British traders who did not find favour with the EIC, or who were impatient to reach a higher position in the Company hierarchy, undoubtedly moved to the smaller interloping Companies. On rough average, interlopers moved around 1,47 times between employers. The number of people who actually returned to the EIC after an interval on the continent was small. By contrast, the number of people who moved from the Ostend to the Swedish Company was far greater. The Ostend, Danish, Swedish, and later also the Prussian Company were all in great need of foreign expertise, and the private trade privileges they granted to supercargoes looked much more attractive than in any of the established Companies.

Few historians have recognised that foreign influence – be it in the form of employments, contacts, expertise or capital – and cross-Company mobility represented a distinct advantage for national ‘monopoly’ Companies in the eighteenth century. One exception worth mentioning in this context is Louis Dermigny’s magisterial *La Chine et l’Occident*, a three-volume tome that endorsed a comparative perspective by looking at the different East India Companies’ activities in China over the *longue durée*. Dermigny looked at the smaller interloping Companies in a separate chapter of his study, but evidence for cross-Company

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<sup>208</sup> Yet, many of the British financiers and wholesalers who were part of the networks of interlopers are treated separately in Chapter Three and Five.

collaboration is nonetheless woven into the fabric of the narrative throughout.<sup>209</sup>

While Dermigny did not focus on the migration of expert traders per se, or on their private trading activities or informal networks, he nonetheless acknowledged the fact that cross-Company collaboration was an essential part of the China trade. In contrast to Hosea Ballou Morse, he thus paid due attention to the international or foreign elements of the trading Companies – their *apatridité* – and saw the migration of personnel between different national trading bodies as a strengthening rather than a weakening factor for the Companies' commercial success.<sup>210</sup>

The composition of the crews on board European merchant ships has been explored in greater depth in recent years.<sup>211</sup> We know that the community of seafarers on board East India Company vessels was often strikingly international. Common sailors were constantly moving between the Companies – as the high levels of desertions in Asia indicate. Large numbers of Germans, but also Asian lascars crews, were employed on board of East India ships from early on.<sup>212</sup> Yet, mobility among the maritime and mercantile elite, that is among commanders, supercargoes and officers, has been neglected in the literature – although the impact on the Companies' commercial success was certainly greater, considering their prime importance in commercial decision-making. For the British maritime elite, which is represented in Table 2.2, we can say something about their backgrounds, and thus about what kind of people were more likely to seek employment under foreign flags.

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<sup>209</sup> Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et L'Occident*, vol. 1, pp. 160-199.

<sup>210</sup> Idem.

<sup>211</sup> For a state of the art discussion on seafarers' mobility, desertion and its legal and performative framework in the early modern period, see Maria Fusaro, Bernard Allaire, Richard Blakemore and Tijn Vanneste (eds), *Law, Labour, and Empires Comparative Perspectives on Seafarers, c. 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2015).

<sup>212</sup> Matthias van Rossum, 'A "Moorish world" within the Company. The VOC, maritime logistics and subaltern networks of Asian sailors', *Itinerario*, 36:3 (2012), pp. 39-60; Roelof van Gelder, *Das ostindische Abenteuer, Deutsche in Diensten der Vereinigten Ostindischen Kompanie der Niederlande (VOC), 1600 - 1800*. Aus dem Niederländ. von Stefan Häring. Hrsg. von Albrecht Sauer und Erik Hoops (Bremerhaven and Hamburg, 2004).

**Table 2.2: British interlopers and cross-Company mobility, 1710s-1750s**

blue = Scottish      yellow = English      DAC = Danish East India Company      SEIC = Swedish East India Company  
green = Irish      no colour = unknown      EIC = English East India Company      VOC = Dutch East India Company

Name	Free Merchant in Asia	EIC	VOC	Ostend Company	Compagnie des Indes	SEIC	DAC	Prussian Company	Total number of moves
Arthur Abercromby			x			x			2
Mr Baron		x				x			2
Charles Barrington		x				x			2
Gerard Barry				x		x			2
George Bellenden						x			1
Ninian Brice						x			1
Andrew Brown				x					1
Francis Brown				x					1
William Brown						x			1
Archibald Campbell						x			1
Colin Campbell	x			x		x			3
Daniel Campbell						x			1
Dougal Campbell						x			1
Hugh Campbell	x			x		x			3
Thomas Combes				x					1
John Adam Coppinger				x		x			2
Thomas Coppinger						x			1
Alexander Cumming						x			1
Andrew Deuchar						x			1

Name	Free Merchant in Asia	EIC	VOC	Ostend Company	Compagnie des Indes	SEIC	DAC	Prussian Company	Total number of moves
<b>Walter Dormer</b>				<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>Archibald Duff</b>						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
William Elliott		<b>x</b>				<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>Gilbert Elliott</b>						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Captain George Elphinstone</b>		<b>x</b>				<b>x</b>	<b>?</b>		<b>2</b>
<b>John Forbes</b>		<b>x</b>				<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>	<b>3</b>
Joseph Foster				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
<b>Charles Graham (alias Brown)</b>				<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>
John Greenfield						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
Thomas Gregory						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
Captain Roger Hald				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
<b>Captain Thomas Hall</b>		<b>xx</b>		<b>x</b>					<b>3</b>
John Harris								<b>x</b>	<b>1</b>
John Harrison		<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>					<b>2</b>
<b>Robert Hewer</b>				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
<b>Alexander Hume</b>		<b>xx</b>		<b>x</b>					<b>3</b>
<b>Abraham Hume</b>		<b>xx</b>		<b>x</b>					<b>3</b>
John Hume				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
James Hume				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
Maddeson Hunt						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Charles Irvine</b>					<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>

Name	Free Merchant in Asia	EIC	VOC	Ostend Company	Compagnie des Indes	SEIC	DAC	Prussian Company	Total number of moves
<b>John Irvine</b>						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
N. Irvine						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
? Jackson				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
William? Johnson		<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>					<b>2</b>
<b>Captain George Kitchin</b>		<b>?</b>		<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>John Ley</b>				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
Alexander Maccauley						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>James Maule</b>						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
John Metcalfe		<b>x</b>				<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>
Captain R. Mitchell				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
<b>James Moir</b>						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Charles Morford</b>				<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>
Mungo Murrey						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>John Neagle</b>				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
William Nairn		<b>x</b>				<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>Captain James Naish</b>		<b>xx</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>					<b>4</b>
N. Ouchterlony						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Thomas Ouchterlony</b>						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>
Captain Ed. Pearson				<b>x</b>					<b>1</b>
<b>Charles Pike</b>		<b>?</b>		<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>John Pike</b>				<b>x</b>		<b>x</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>James Rose</b>						<b>x</b>			<b>1</b>

Name	Free Merchant in Asia	EIC	VOC	Ostend Company	Compagnie des Indes	SEIC	DAC	Prussian Company	Total number of moves
Alexander Ross						x			1
Gustaf Ross						x			1
Walter Ross						x			1
Edmund Rothe	x				?		x		2
Francois Rothe					x				1
George Savage				x					1
James Steward						x			1
James Tobin		?		x					1
John Thomson						x			1
Thomas Thomson		x				x			2
John Fotheringham						x			1
Jean Louis Tournac						x			1
Peter Waldo		x		x					2
Captain John Widdrington		x				x			2
Ethelred Williams						x			1
John Williams		x				x			2
William Williams						x			1
John Young						x		x	2
Average moves:									1.49
Number of individuals: 80									

## Sources for Table 2.2:

'Liste des Sujet nés en Grande Bretagne, qui sont employer dans le Service de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales de Suede', anon., Charles Irvine papers, shipping records, FBL, Minn.; Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, vol 1, esp. pp. 165, 172, 178-79, 183, 189; Leos Müller, 'Scottish and Irish Entrepreneurs', pp. 149-63; Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, p. 17, pp. 41-47; British Library, IOR/E/3/110 ff. 296-300 Orders and Instructions to Thomas Thompson, supercargo bound to China; E/3/93 ff. 104-05, 10 November 1699; Instructions to William Johnson, Supercargo of the Wentworth, bound for Canton; E/1/28 ff. 286-287v, letter 146 concerning EIC supercargo Peter Waldo; E/1/16 ff. 16-17v, dated 6 Jan 1725, letter 8. William Elliott in London to the Court of Directors requesting to carry out £200 to Bengal for his own account; IOR/Z/E/4/34/Y26: 1753-1767 regarding the Prussian supercargo John Young and his requesting assistance from the Court of Directors in London for the recovery of debts; Arthur Abercromby (London) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 10 June 1758, FBL, Minn., CIC/1758/29a, box 6a; 'Förteckning över kompaniets skepp under 1 och 2 oktrojerna', Göteborgs Universitetsbibliotek: Svenska ostindiska kompaniets arkiv (arkivnr H 22:1, ligg. fol.), accessed online: 13 December 2015  
<http://www.ub.gu.se/samlingar/handskrift/ostindie/dokument/document.xml?id=30>

What is striking is the great number of Scots (marked in blue) that appear in Table 2.2. For the EIC, the surge of Scottish people in the Anglo-Indian military and civil service has been explored by George MacGilvary and, most recently, by Ellen Filor.<sup>213</sup> However, this outward movement to the continent, and from there to China and India, ran parallel to – or rather even anticipated – what we see was happening in the EIC a few decades later. The clustering of families from the north-east of Scotland, around Montrose, Stonehaven, Aberdeen, and the Moray Firth is particularly striking in the Swedish East India Company. This underlines the fact that there indeed existed long-established commercial contacts between the west coast of Sweden and Scottish coastal towns to the East, from Eyemouth (a great landing place of contraband teas) to Banff (a remote hub for the off-loading of continental goods) and Inverness in the north.

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<sup>213</sup> Ellen Filor, *Complicit Colonials: Border Scots and the Indian Empire, 1780-1857* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2014); George MacGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State: The Scottish Elite and Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2008).



Among the interlopers captured in our list were also Irish nationals (marked in green) and quite a few Englishmen (marked in yellow). Future research will hopefully seek to discern how large the proportion of Catholics was among the latter. Walter Dormer was certainly one of them.<sup>214</sup> Those merchants whose birthplaces could not be clarified with any certainty are left uncoloured. Finally, those individuals whose names are marked in bold in this list appear also in other parts of this thesis. They were either part of the extended Irvine network or that of Thomas Hall – or indeed they featured in both, as in the case of the Hume brothers, Charles Pike, Charles Morford, and the brothers Hugh and Colin Campbell.

For the most part, interlopers seem to have come from religious or political minority groups (Jacobites, ‘Papists’ and Quakers were all represented in significant numbers), who escaped constraints at home, such as second-class citizenship in England, and who managed to accumulate wealth overseas from which a larger family network could profit in the long run. Others were unable to thrive on private trade in the foreign Companies, and were easily trapped in their role as interlopers with little prospect of ever returning home. This group included, among others, John Forbes of Alford, who was declared bankrupt in 1755 and headed to Venice after having been employed in the EIC, SEIC and Prussian Company before; James Moir of Stoneywood, a wanted Jacobite, who was a user of the English poor box at Gothenburgh, and Charles Morford, a drunkard, who, according to Colin Campbell, was repeatedly referred to as a problematic case in the Irvine/Campbell correspondence, but who was kept in employment in the SEIC as he had little prospects to do anything else.<sup>215</sup> Like Hancock’s Atlantic traders, these interlopers

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<sup>214</sup> The connection of the Dormer family in Antwerp to the Anglo-Indian diamond trade has been the subject of a fine study by Tjil Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks*.

<sup>215</sup> Colin Campbell (Gothenburgh) to Charles Irvine (Lorient), 31 July 1742, CIC/1742/5a; Colin Campbell (Gothenburgh) to Charles Irvine (Lorient), 7 August 1742, CIC/1742/8a.

often came not from the centre of power – that is London – but rather from remote parts of the newly unified British Empire.

*Flexible citizens: nomads of the Canton trade*

Early modern China traders were mobile, but not stateless. In order to profit from the commercial opportunities that the smaller Companies offered, foreigners such as the British-born traders under consideration here often became naturalised subjects of another monarch, by taking up residence abroad, and by promising to support and not to betray the state that offered them protection. ‘The history of citizenship – that is, the idea that all individuals should be members of a particular state to which they owe allegiance and which, in turn, gives them protection and guarantees their rights – has been inextricably linked to the rise of the modern nationstate’.<sup>216</sup> Yet, early modern historians have long argued that passports were commonly used before 1793, when the French developed a fully-fledged system for monitoring cross-border mobility.<sup>217</sup> For the early eighteenth century and the China trade in particular, passport stories exist in abundance and help to show the frictions that existed between the mobile identities of notorious border-crossers (our interlopers) and the semi-defined framework of formal citizenship in the early modern period.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Manfred Berg, ‘Book review of Andreas Fahrmeir, *Citizenship: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Concept*. (New Haven, 2007)’, *American Historical Review*, 115:2 (2010), pp. 511-512, p. 511.

<sup>217</sup> Andreas Fahrmeir, *Citizenship: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, 2007), p. 47.

<sup>218</sup> Contemporary sources used the term ‘natural-born subject’ or ‘denizen’ rather than citizen. Contemporaries also distinguished between residents and strangers or aliens, see House of Lords, *Great Britain. An act to prevent His Majesty’s subjects from subscribing or being concerned in encouraging or promoting any subscription for an East-India Company in the Austrian Netherlands; and for the better securing the lawful trade of His Majesty’s subjects to and from the East-Indies* (London, 1723), reprinted in *The Statutes at Large, From the First Year of the Reign of King George the First, To the Ninth Year of the Reign of King George the Second...*, vol. 5 (London, 1786), p. 328. The contemporary usage of these terms are also discussed in Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, *The Forgotten*

In order to enter the SEIC service, foreigners were encouraged to apply for naturalisation in order to be able to reside permanently, trade, and own land in Sweden. Naturalisation also made foreigners eligible to seek positions in Government or the state administration.<sup>219</sup> Many, but not all, interlopers took up this plea. John Pike's and Thomas Neilson's naturalisation papers were kept among the shipping records of Charles Irvine, and those for Colin and Hugh Campbell have equally been preserved.<sup>220</sup> Those who did not plan to establish themselves for long in Sweden, and who boarded the ships of the SEIC elsewhere, were still furnished with passports, detailing the planned itinerary of their journey and the royal protection they enjoyed during their trip. A collection of such passports has survived among the business records of Charles Irvine (see Fig. 2.3). In fact, every time Irvine travelled outside of Sweden, he applied for a royal passport, as 'these were usually valid for one journey'.<sup>221</sup> Yet, how did passports look like in the early modern period, for what purpose were they used, and how did they differ from the standardised and internationally accepted passport format we are used to today?

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*Majority. German Merchants in London, Naturalization and Global Trade 1660-1815* (translated from the German by Cynthia Klohr) (New York and Oxford, 2005).

<sup>219</sup> Andreas Fahrmeir, *Citizenship*, p. 18.

<sup>220</sup> FBL, Minn., Irvine papers, Box 11, shipping records, item number 31-1i and 31-2i; Alexander A. Cormack, *Colin Campbell (1686-1757) merchant, Gothenburg, Sweden*.

<sup>221</sup> Andreas Fahrmeir, *Citizenship*, p. 49.



documents over which the state held a ‘monopoly.’<sup>222</sup> During the first half of the eighteenth century, passports were still the former, letters of recommendation, which ‘contained a request for assistance, sometimes on a pre-printed form with blanks for the name, personal details and route’. Charles Irvine’s passport (*Rese-pass*) for China in 1736 detailed the itinerary of the planned journey, Irvine’s status on board the ship and in China (supercargo), and also the name of his principal – the Swedish East India Company. The document was signed by Bengt Ribbing, a nobleman and Major-General of the Swedish infantry.<sup>223</sup>

One of the reasons why so many British-born interlopers took up passports and naturalisation papers was that these documents gave authority to the traveller, as they confirmed his rank and status, and thus ensured a privileged treatment in case of detainment. Passports were signed by high-ranking members of the royal administration or even by the monarch, and thus suggested that the traveller had ‘access to court’, a key marker of elite status.<sup>224</sup> And since rank was often considered to be more important than nationality, royal passports had their specific function among the mobile elite in Europe.

For maritime traders, a passport could function as a kind of work permit *avant la lettre* – a document that stressed the legality of their employment. Yet, for interlopers, the possession of a royal passport did not necessarily protect them from hostilities, as the Porto Novo incident – in which Charles Irvine was involved – clearly shows.<sup>225</sup> That the authority of foreign documents could be questioned also pertains to documents that evidenced the naturalisation of interlopers in Sweden.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 47. Fahrmeir sees 1793 as the watershed year, the moment when the French first implemented a national passport system to control cross-border movements.

<sup>223</sup> A Henry Ribbing wrote to Charles Irvine in 1739 to thank him for taking on a private commission of porcelain for both Ribbing’s wife and sister. Henry Ribbing (Gothenburg) to Charles Irvine (Cadiz), 29 August 1739, CIC/1739/2a.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>225</sup> Conrad Gill, ‘The Affair of Porto Novo: An Incident in Anglo-Swedish Relations’, *English Historical Review*, 73:286 (1958), pp. 47-65.

‘The British legal system assumed that releasing subjects from the “natural and perpetual” allegiance acquired at birth was impossible.’<sup>226</sup> Thus, a British-born trader who could fully document his allegiance and rights as subject of a foreign monarch was still considered to be a British subject. In the context of the East Indies trade, this meant that he was considered an interloper – the consequences of which were felt by several people mentioned in Table 2.2.

In 1723, the problem of interloping was directly addressed in Britain by ‘[a]n act to prevent His Majesty’s subjects from subscribing or being concerned in encouraging or promoting any subscription for an East-India Company in the Austrian Netherlands’.<sup>227</sup> Interlopers were considered to be all British-born subject who operated under ‘a foreign commission’ in the East Indies trade. Yet, also other kinds of contacts to the smaller Companies, such as shareholding, were considered unlawful. A slightly shortened version of the act was reprinted and thus ‘revived’ in 1732, in view of the establishment of the Swedish venture.<sup>228</sup> Charles Irvine kept a copy of the 1723 act among his personal papers, which certainly represented a salutary reminder of the serious punishments that awaited him in case of being arrested.<sup>229</sup> The arm of the law did reach to Asia, where a few high-ranking members of the established Companies were taking measures to curtail the unwelcome competition of their countrymen.

In 1734, Thomas Combes and Thomas Thomson, two English-born members of the SEIC, were captured by the British at Porto Novo (south of Madras on the Coromandel Coast), detained in Fort St. David and then transported to London on account of their illegal activities in joining the SEIC. Other British members of the

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<sup>226</sup> Fahrmeir, *Citizenship*, p. 25. English contemporary sources used the terms ‘natural-born subject’ or ‘denizen’ rather than citizen.

<sup>227</sup> *An act to prevent His Majesty’s subjects from subscribing or being concerned in encouraging or promoting any subscription for an East-India Company in the Austrian Netherlands*, p. 326.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 601.

<sup>229</sup> FBL, Minn. Charles Irvine Papers. Box 11, shipping records, item 23-1j.

SEIC had managed to escape to Tranquebar, the neutral Danish trading post. Yet their possessions were seized when the British attacked their newly established factory at Porto Novo.<sup>230</sup> Most of their colleagues on the SEIC vessel *Ulrica Eleonora*, who had travelled to Bengal to trade on behalf of the Company, were equally affected by the hostility of the English and Dutch traders stationed in India. After having been chased away by British ships from the Indian coast, Captain Petter van Utfall and his remaining crew (which was already few in numbers) were forced to stop at Cochin – then under Dutch control – for fresh water and food. Thomas Ouchterlony, a Scottish mate, was put in charge of the task.<sup>231</sup> The Dutch in Cochin, however, refused to sell provisions to the ‘Swedes’ and detained Ouchterlony and thirteen of his companions, thus further reducing the number of people who could work the ship. Somehow, Van Utfall and Irvine – who was the only supercargo left on board – managed to steer the ship to Madagascar, where they bought provisions and were able to recruit fifteen lascar sailors for the long return journey to Gothenburg.<sup>232</sup>

As becomes clear from these examples surrounding the Porto Novo affair, the legal status of interlopers was precarious, as they could not hope to be fully protected either by the country under whose flag they travelled, despite seeking travel documents or papers proving their naturalisation. Nor were they considered to be legitimate British traders, who deserved the protection by the EIC and the Crown. As such, they were indeed *apatrides* (the term used by Dermigny) or *Heimatlose*, a concept that only came into use after the Second World War, but which perhaps

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<sup>230</sup> Conrad Gill, ‘The Affair of Porto Novo’, p. 53.

<sup>231</sup> Thomas Ouchterlony rose to become a sea captain years later and was, as a relative of George Ouchterlony, directly involved in a number of smuggling voyages to British shores.

<sup>232</sup> Conrad Gill, ‘The Affair of Porto Novo’, p. 53

captures best the delicate position that this mobile workforce had throughout their interloping careers.

Having said that, the interlopers' precarious legal identity also opened up a number of advantages. Formal membership to a national monopoly Company provided access to the profits of Company commerce, and generated myriad ways in which private enterprise could be advanced. Navigating their way through an incoherent system of early modern citizenry, China traders were notorious for accumulating increasing numbers of documents (naturalisation papers and passports for their travels), which testified to their status and changing identities as residents in different places. The widespread, and at some point almost respectable, practice among interlopers to change the employing Company, and with it their formal status as subjects or citizens, sometimes led to considerable confusions about their 'national identity' and legitimacy as traders.

Depending on the situation in which they were asked to clarify their status, China traders could perform and document multiple identities. Part of this 'performance' of different national belongings was the fact that especially supercargoes – whom we have called 'commercial polymaths' in this thesis – were often multilingual. Their generally good education, cosmopolitan interests and readings habits as well as prolonged stays in different countries on the continent allowed most of the British interlopers to master different European vernaculars. This plurality of language mastery undoubtedly increased their space for manoeuvring, and helped them time and again to *convincingly* perform multiple national belongings – a vital asset especially in moments of crisis. However, this 'in-betweenness' could also backfire, and cast suspicion on interlopers precisely because they could not be easily identified as clearly belonging to one specific nationality.



A case in point is the Catholic Irishman Edmond Rothe (Roche), a Jacobite from Wexford who had moved to France according to his own statement in 1730, yet who became naturalised only in 1759 by a letter of Louis XV.<sup>233</sup> There were not many naturalisations happening in France in a single year in the period of this study, since only wealthy ‘aliens’ could afford taking this step in the first place. In France, ‘the procedure cost more than 350 *livres* (the equivalent of three years’ salary for a skilled Parisian craftsman)’.<sup>234</sup> Apart from periods in which naturalisation regulations were temporarily eased to attract specific professional groups, religious refugees or specific members of foreign national communities, individual naturalisation remained a privilege of the elite.<sup>235</sup>

Although it is unclear whether Rothe ever received an official commission from the French East India Company, he was active in the East Indies for decades.<sup>236</sup> His brother Francis (François) repeatedly visited China on behalf of the Compagnie des Indes as one of the supercargoes.<sup>237</sup> In 1741, Edmond, together with thirty bags of silver worth 30,000 Mexican dollars, was among the private passengers on board of the Swedish ship *Göteborg*, bound for China.<sup>238</sup> Just off Tenerife, however, the officers of a British ‘privateer’ searched the ship, as Britain was at war with Spain at the time. After an interview with Edmond Rothe, they arrested him and confiscated his treasure, because they thought (or at least claimed) that he was a Spanish citizen.<sup>239</sup> It would indeed be interesting to know – yet it is impossible to establish precisely – in what language he was speaking to these British officers. Considering

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<sup>233</sup> See the genealogy of ‘Edmond de ROTHE, le chevalier de Rothe’, in the electronic database GeneaNet, <http://gw.geneanet.org/pierfit?lang=fr&p=edmond&n=de+rothe> (last accessed: 27 December 2015).

<sup>234</sup> Andreas Fahrmeir, *Citizenship*, p. 12.

<sup>235</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that the majority of those who sought naturalisation in England were of a merchant background. See, Margit Schulte Beerbühl, *The Forgotten Majority*.

<sup>236</sup> It is most likely that he had visited China for the first time as a private trader, out of St Malo.

<sup>237</sup> Francis Rothe later rose to become a director of the French East India Company. He was naturalised already in 1740. <http://gw.geneanet.org/pierfit?lang=fr&p=francois&n=de+rothe>.

<sup>238</sup> Christian Koninckx, *The First and Second Charter*, p. 107.

<sup>239</sup> This episode is described in Christian Koninckx, *The First and Second Charter*, pp. 107-108.

Rothe's background as an Irishman who had lived in Paris and Cadiz, his accent might have been hard to allocate for the members of the English man of war. Rothe was capable of speaking in French, Spanish and English, but probably also in Gaelic. For a fact, the English officers did not believe that he was a Frenchman, although he could produce a French passport.<sup>240</sup>

Rothe was, generally speaking, certainly a rather notorious figure. In 1745-46, he is known to have lived at Macao, while it is unclear how he managed to get there in the end. He was acting as a 'free merchant' in the country trade at least for some time. His correspondence to Irvine reveals some of his wanderings. In 1748, he was selling tea in Batavia, on joint account with Charles Irvine. In 1759, Irvine received a letter from Rothe written from on board the *Elsineur*, an East Indiaman of the Danish East India Company.<sup>241</sup> Then, in 1766, Edmund Chevalier de Rothe informed Irvine that he had retired to Paris.<sup>242</sup>

How useful the acquisition of multiple documents of identification could be is suggested by the unstable though possibly not precarious career of Auguste Tabuteau (1696-1755), alias Anders Taubeltou.<sup>243</sup> Tabuteau was a Huguenot, whose family was originally from La Rochelle, but fled the country following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. They settled in Amsterdam, where Auguste was born. He acquired citizenship in the Netherlands, but moved to London as a young man where he became a naturalised British subject at some point in the early 1720s in order to engage in the colonial trade otherwise closed to him as a Dutchman.<sup>244</sup> In 1724, Auguste Tabuteau married the daughter of another Huguenot merchant from La

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>241</sup> Edmund Rothe (on board the *Elsineur*) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 16 July 1759, CIC/1759/30a.

<sup>242</sup> Chevalier Edmund Rothe (Paris) to Charles Irvine (Aberdeen), 23 April 1766, CIC/1766/23a.

<sup>243</sup> For details on Auguste Tabuteau's employment in the SEIC, see Jan-Erik Nilsson, 'The last voyage of the East Indiaman *Gotheborg*, 1743-45', electronic resource, <http://gotheborg.com/project/crew.shtml> (last accessed: 26 December 2015).

<sup>244</sup> On the consequences of the Navigation Acts, see Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies*.

Rochelle. He enlisted in the service of the SEIC (for the purpose of which he was again naturalised), sailing to Bengal on board the *Fredericus Rex Suecia*. In 1743-44, he was first supercargo of the SEIC in Canton on the ill-fated voyage of the *Göteborg*, which sank outside the home harbour of Gothenburg, filled with a rich cargo from China. He disappeared from Sweden soon after, as enquiries were made whose fault this disastrous incident was.

Yet, Tabuteau went out to China again in 1749, this time on behalf of the VOC.<sup>245</sup> His frequent relocations were made possible by the simultaneous holding of multiple formal and informal identities: as a 'French' refugee, a citizen of Amsterdam, a naturalised British subject and a naturalised Swede, he could move about in Europe and Asia, pursuing his trading ventures under many different flags while being able to escape if something went wrong! This, then, was clearly an existence shaped by the imperatives of global commerce as well as a willingness to take personal risks.

Flexibility and opportunism are, according to Aihwa Ong, key features of the late modern capitalist. In her thought provoking study of Hong Kong elite families and their weakness for foreign passports, she revealed the underlying motives and practices of transnational agency. The multi-passport holder is, for Ong, 'an apt contemporary figure', who escapes the political or economic constraints at home by developing strategies of migration and capital accumulation abroad, without cutting the ties to his (or her) place of origin, family and culture. These ties to home continue to shape the identities of flexible subjects in the form of cultural norms, kinship obligations and communal discipline.<sup>246</sup> The cultural logic of transnationalism is, in Ong's view, shaped by these 'mutually reinforcing dynamics of discipline and

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<sup>245</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag (Netherlands), Dutch East India Company, archive 1.04.02, inventory number 6238: Hartekamp Hauptbuch und Journal, 1749, folio 2.

<sup>246</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, p. 20.

escape', as it generates a flexible attitude towards citizenship among border-crossers.<sup>247</sup>

Flexible citizenship is a concept that neatly captures the opportunistic behaviour of interloping China traders during the first decades of the eighteenth century. In some respects, they were forerunners of the capital nomadism that characterises today's global economy. Some, and mostly privileged, early modern traders and businessmen were not that different from their late modern counterparts in the way they sought to overcome the economic constraints and political landscape of their upbringing by adopting a nomadic lifestyle, which followed the call of commercial opportunities created by an increasingly connected trading world. Like today's Asian elites analysed by Ong, British interlopers in the first half of the eighteenth century were tightly integrated into extended family networks and regional alliances. Their repeated displacement on the continent and in Asia did not cut these social ties.

Flexible citizens primarily looked out for commercial opportunities for themselves and their families. Yet, as a consequence, their mobile careers had a more systematic impact on the functioning of the China trade as a whole. British interlopers on the continent – and in fact all foreign subjects engaged in cross-Company migration – played an important mediating role. Crucially, they did not only enable the exchange of information between the different Companies. Rather, British interlopers could also be used as 'vehicles' for an efficient communication between servants of the English EIC present in Canton, who sought to transmit letters back to the English Court of Directors in London. In this case, it was not uncommon for EIC supercargoes in Canton to entrust their communications to the Court of Directors in Leadenhall Street to British interlopers, who were formally

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

enlisted in the service of other Companies – yet who, as fellow Englishmen, were nonetheless trusted to safely deliver the communications back to London. This is what happened in 1742, when the EIC supercargoes Forbes, Scarth and Oliver entrusted Charles Irvine (of the SEIC) to carry the official bill of lading of the EIC ship *York* to Gothenburg, from where Irvine was expected to forward the documents to London.<sup>248</sup> Apparently, it was deemed more important to send this piece of commercial intelligence as early as possible to London than to wait for an EIC servant to carry it home.

At times of crisis, the nationality of an interloper was of critical importance and, as we have seen, multiple and therefore competing loyalties became an issue. Yet, as everyday trading practices are concerned, free agents were more likely to be considered as neutral traders, with whom members of staff of different Companies felt free to do business, and through whom a great deal of services could be requested. To give an example, Charles Irvine, a British interloper in the Swedish East India Company, was acting as a messenger for numerous other traders on his home journey from Canton in 1747. On board the *Freden*, Irvine wrote to the Amsterdam merchant bankers Thomas and Adrian Hope that

Being charged by our common friend Francis Roth<sup>249</sup> with two packets of Letters for you & and a letter for Messrs Gough & Company of Cadiz I thought I could find no better occasion of conveying them safe & speedily to your hand, than by one of your Companys [i.e. the VOC] 2 Ships The Lackerland & Hoff Dune from Canton; with whom we very opportunely fell in Company about 25 a 30 Leaguers to the westward of Scilly. Presuming it will put you to

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<sup>248</sup> BL, IOR/G/12/49. Diary of the Consultations and Transactions in China, in 1741-42, p. 35. Irvine was acquainted with the English supercargo John Forbes and Captain Lascelles.

<sup>249</sup> A British-born supercargo in the French Company.

no charge I have at the same time taken the liberty to enclose 8 other [letters] committed to my ears by other friends; which I entreat you will put in the post office and favour me with a few lines to Gothenburgh when this comes to hand... If I can in return be of any Service to you in Gothenburgh I shall be ready to doe it.<sup>250</sup>

As might be expected, private correspondence too flowed freely between members of the different Companies. Irvine routinely carried packages of goods (as we will see in the following chapter) and parcels of letters with him to Europe, on behalf of people he had just met as well as for those with whom he was more intimate. Irvine's status as an interloper did not impact on his privileged position within informal trading networks. Irvine, and other free agents like him were not excluded from British trading circles, neither in Europe nor in Asia. On the contrary, they played a crucial role in connecting Britain with the continent via the extended networks they established during their mobile careers.

To sum up, this chapter has drawn a group portrait of a number of British interlopers on the European continent involved in the China trade during the first decades of the eighteenth century. While it has not been my goal to homogenise the lives of these interlopers in any way, a number of important insights into the careers of many of the nomads among the China traders became nonetheless evident. First, it was shown that many ways could lead to Canton. As no specific training existed for European China traders at the time, those who entered this branch of business often used their previous networks and commercial expertise to succeed in the new trade. In this way, commercial practices already tested and mastered by merchants for the

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<sup>250</sup> Charles Irvine (on board the *Freden*) to Thomas & Adrian Hope (Amsterdam), 24 August 1747, letter book 1746-47. FBL, Minn.

intra-European, the Mediterranean or the Atlantic trade could be transferred to the pursuit of trade with China. What became equally clear is that many merchants sought to combine their older networks and specialisations with their new eastern ventures, thus merging different commercial networks and geographies in their businesses. The China trade was thus intimately connected to already existing distribution networks and channels of trade, and became at the same time more diversified, while its reach increased.

Second, it has become clear that while these British interlopers had a precarious legal and social status during their sojourning, their fragile position could at the same time offer opportunities they readily exploited. In view of the existence of legal loopholes, interlopers could adopt a number of different national identities and legal appearances, depending on specific times and personal circumstances. The available spaces for legal manoeuvres led a number of interlopers to change Company service more than once, even up to three times, a striking proof of the professional mobility that the early decades of the still developing China trade encouraged. This was directly linked to different privileges and legal regimes that the smaller East India Companies offered to willing interlopers. The regulations and privileges for China traders – especially for those merchants higher up each Company's hierarchy up to the rank of supercargoes and captains – differed markedly between the states. This plurality of legal regimes was by no means accidental, but should rather be read as a conscious strategy of the directors of the interloping Companies to attract the service of experienced China traders, not least from within the ranks of the EIC and the VOC.

### **Chapter III**

#### **European geographies of private trade: the case of Cadiz**

It is hard to understand the European context of the China trade if we only interpret the headquarters of the different East India Companies as strategic nodes for Company and private trade activities. Important as the headquarters were as administrative centres, much of the illicit trade and regular provisioning on Company ships happened elsewhere. Every stop along the trade routes was a potential place to do business for those on board. There were, however, a number of coastal cities and settlements in Europe that developed a more systematic role for Company servants and their private commercial networks. This chapter looks at the interplay between both well-known port cities and other less likely settings for the China trade in Europe – those ports that rarely appear in the existing literature but which nonetheless played a significant role for the supply and organisation of the private trade in Chinese consumer goods in particular.

The emergence of smaller interloping East India Companies between the 1710s and 1730s expanded and altered the geography of the China trade to a significant degree. For private trade in particular, it is during the first half of the eighteenth century that we can note a distinct rise in importance for places such as Cadiz, Antwerp, St Malo, Dunkirk, Ostend and Hamburg. As we have seen in the previous chapter, free agents relied on a wide net of trusted suppliers, investors, commercial agents and kin, whose whereabouts can be reconstructed by the chance survival of letters in the private collections of individual Company servants. These collections of correspondence provide information not just on the mobility of people connected to the China trade but they also allow us to reinstate places on the map that have received very little attention by Company historians so far. By focusing on



familiar and unfamiliar sites for the flow and accumulation of information, merchandise and money destined for the Sino-European trade, I argue that we gain a fuller understanding of the practices adopted by private traders at the time. This perspective also allows for a better understanding of the ways in which their informal networks established alternative geographies of finance and distribution that helped to turn a marginal trade in luxuries into a systematic and innovative part of Europe's growing commerce in exotic foodstuffs and manufactured consumer goods.

The central case study concerns Cadiz, the silver city of Europe. The chapter will trace its mercantile functions with regard to the China trade and its wider connectedness to the centres of interloping activities in western and northern Europe. So far, the role of Cadiz in the Canton trade has never been studied explicitly. East India Company historians, who mention the town only in passing, refer to it as a mere stopover where fresh provisions and additional silver were uploaded. Yet, there is simply no notion in the existing body of literature of the crucial place and involvement of the merchants in town in financing China cargoes, in arranging private loans, and in enabling cross-company activities. This chapter, then, places Cadiz at the centre of its analysis, and goes on from there to reconstruct the interloping networks within which the city operated and flourished. Based on the analysis of private correspondence, diary entries, shipping and insurance records, this chapter characterises Cadiz and its foreign merchant community as a vital entrepôt, smuggling haven and financial centre for the China trade.

The rise, decline and revival of maritime cities has often been analysed in the context of a city's infrastructural and institutional developments, which were at times more or less able to accommodate demographic change, new commercial practices, commodity circuits, and the integration of foreign merchant communities.<sup>251</sup> Set in a comparative framework, port cities represent convenient units of analysis for investigating economic change over the *longue durée*.<sup>252</sup> A classic example is that of London, which by the early eighteenth century had taken over much of the carrying trade in colonial goods – and which prior to that had been championed by Amsterdam.<sup>253</sup> London, as Ormrod and others have argued, also dominated the important Baltic trade by the turn of the eighteenth century, transforming the city into Europe's capital for commerce. Most comparative works on trade, to which the studies by Ormrod and Israel belong, operate within a national framework by pitting the relative strength of one city (or country) against the comparative weakness of another.<sup>254</sup>

The study of networks presents a shift of perspective from drawing comparisons to establishing connections. A focus on the connections *between* different maritime cities needs to privilege the human actors who created and maintained commercial links, primarily the local merchant communities. An actor-centred approach to trade is capable of challenging or qualifying trade statistics and

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<sup>251</sup> Patrick O'Brien (ed.), *Urban Achievement in Early modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam and London* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>252</sup> Francois Gipouloux, *The Asian Mediterranean. Port Cities and Trading Networks in China, Japan and Southeast Asia, 13th–21st Century* (London, 2011); an attempt to provide a framework for comparing and connecting European and Asian port cities was made by Masashi Haneda (ed.), *Asian Port Cities 1600–1800. Local and Foreign Cultural Interactions* (Singapore and Tokyo, 2009).

<sup>253</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585–1740* (Oxford, 1989, repr. 2002).

<sup>254</sup> The vocabulary used is particularly striking in Israel's work for its bold generalisations. Phrases such as: 'the Dutch entrepot blossomed, Rouen sank back and Hamburg's recently flourishing rich trades with Spain and Portugal rapidly shrank' are not easily found in the network literature with its microhistorical interest. Jonathan I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585–1740* (Oxford, 1989, repr. 2002), p. 43.

macro-economic narratives. Yet, to construct a forceful counter narrative on the basis of surviving correspondence between members of a business network is exceedingly difficult. Having said that, network studies still fulfil an important role by complicating the picture of international trade. Instead of privileging nations as ‘natural’ units of analysis (as they still are for many economic historians), attention is paid to particular trading routes and nodes as sites for multinational interaction. Early modern port cities were dotted with foreign enclaves or diaspora communities and were connected through them to the wider world.

The communities that merchants formed in European port cities (and overseas) undoubtedly played a formidable role in cultivating the connections between their ancestral homeland and their place of (temporary) residence. Contemporaries repeatedly commented on the fact that the despatch of national subjects to distant ports was vital for the organisation of cross-border trade and advantageous for the domestic economy.<sup>255</sup> Members of a single merchant house could put a ‘new’ place on the map for their fellow countrymen and existing contacts. If the trade looked profitable, others followed suit – bringing their own network of correspondents with them. This, in turn, diversified the trade links of the town to a considerable degree. Hence, London interests, for instance, were promoted by British traders based in Cadiz, Hamburg, and Dunkirk, etc., who, again, relied upon a diverse set of contacts, both locally and internationally.

Port cities were spaces where capital, goods, commercial expertise and information were concentrated (and constantly changed hands) to an unusually high degree. The existence of a built infrastructure for trading purposes, such as a suitable harbour and repair facilities, warehouses and auction rooms, exchange and coffee

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<sup>255</sup> Xabier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth Century Atlantic World. Spanish Merchants and their Overseas Networks* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 2-3.

houses, were crucial institutions also for merchants and mariners who spent but short periods of time in a foreign port. The reliability and transparency of local customs and trade regulations ideally helped to encourage commercial links between European cities and states, but personal trust (so important for the formation of business networks) still depended on the familiarity with particular merchants in town.<sup>256</sup>

For an overseas merchant, the decision to move one's business to a new place was dependent on a number of considerations. Among the most important concerns were the security of his property and his personal safety and, of course, that of his family and employees. The neutrality of a coastal town in times of war was desirable, but rarely a given. Religious tolerance, tax advantages for foreign residents and the proximity to markets and waterways also impacted on the decision of merchants to relocate, or to leave the business with an agent in town. Such individual considerations alone, however, do not explain why specific networks privileged certain places and avoided others. It was the specific composition of the merchant community and the existing trading potential of a specific town that could cause even large networks to move on to a new place or trading route.

The entrance of Cadiz into the China trade provides an especially illuminating example of how commercial networks were built on local expertise and contacts on the one hand, and on foreign interests and distant connections on the other. As will be shown, the wider networks of the foreign merchant community in town were central to the city's turn towards China from the 1710s onwards. After some time, however, Cadiz merchants came to represent not only the interests of

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<sup>256</sup> Mark Granovetter's work on social ties has had a great impact on the writings of economic historians interested in trust and the nature of early modern networks more generally. Mark Granovetter, 'Economic Action and Social Structure: the Problem of Embeddedness', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 91:3 (1985), pp. 481-510. See also Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660-1700* (Cambridge, 2010), esp. pp. 90-112.

Flemish, French, British and Dutch investors (whose agents they were), but they also developed a stake in the China trade themselves.

Cadiz's involvement in the China trade was closely linked to the surge of interloping activities in Europe from the 1710s onwards – whereby merchant bankers in the Low Countries, France and the Netherlands created a strong incentive for experienced East India traders from Britain, France and the Netherlands to move abroad and to shift their expertise to one of the interloping companies. Their trading schemes were organised, financed and manned transnationally. Cadiz, a neutral port in the landscape of competing East India Companies, became a common hub for the organisation of private and Company trade, yet it relied on its intimate connections to other places in Europe, such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, Paris, Gothenburg and London. It is this interplay between Cadiz (or more precisely its foreign merchant community), a number of other port cities, and the highly mobile workforce engaged in the China trade that will be fleshed out in this chapter. The case of Cadiz will help to reveal the transnational context of the China trade in Europe.

### *Cadiz*

By 8 [o'] clock in the morning we got to Anchor in cadiz Bay ... As I was preparing to go shore, there came aboard in a Spanish Boat two of our SuperCargos, Mr Brown & Mr Pike with some others[.] They inform'd me that there was a strict Imbargo lay'd upon all merchant ships by orders of the [Spanish] Court ... For the greater privacy I went ashoar with our SuperCargos in the same Boat that brought them aboard ... I got into Town without being question'd at the Gate, & went directly to Lodgings which Mr Brown had

provided for me at a friend's house. From thence we went directly to our merchant from whom I receiv'd sundry Letters that had been waiting me there some time from some friends. The merchants having the money all ready, the first thing we set about was to see it weigh'd, which we did immediately & press'd them to get it shipp'd as soon as possible.<sup>257</sup>

In this seemingly unspectacular passage from the travelogue of a Scottish supercargo, there are many mechanisms alluded to that can illuminate the varied and significant roles that Cadiz played for the organisation of both private and Company trade in the early decades of the eighteenth century. The author of the diary was none other than Colin Campbell, and this was certainly no ordinary stop at Cadiz. Rather, it was made by the very first ship of the newly founded Swedish East India Company (SEIC) heading to China; the stakes and fears therefore ran high. Campbell and his allies may have preferred to avoid stopping at Cadiz at all and rather to leave Gothenburg for Canton directly. Yet Campbell was forced to lay anchor and disembark at Cadiz nonetheless, given the essential assets he needed to procure in that vital Spanish port city for the upcoming journey to Canton. It is worth exploring in some detail who the two other supercargoes that he mentions – 'Mr Brown & Mr Pike' – actually were, and why they and seven other British subjects entered the Swedish ship only at Cadiz. It is also worth considering what exactly Campbell sought to gain in the city, and how he and his confidants went about it while seeking the utmost 'privacy' (i.e. secrecy) regarding their doings.

The latest members of the crew, the two supercargoes, had good reason to enter the ship in secrecy. Mr John Pike was an Englishman, and hence strictly forbidden

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<sup>257</sup> Paul Hallberg and Christian Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China. Colin Campbell's Diary of the First Swedish East India Company Expedition to Canton, 1732-33* (Gothenburg, 1996), p. 14.

from providing his services to the Swedish East India Company scheme. As a precautionary measure, Colin Campbell had actually brought with him a set of documents (a passport for travellers) signed by a high-ranking member of the Swedish admiralty, which confirmed that these English supercargoes were naturalised Swedes.<sup>258</sup>

The family of the 'Swedish' supercargo John Pike belonged to those prominent shipping circles in London which had joined the Ostend venture from early on. (Fig. 3.2) Captain Charles Pike, John's brother, was a close friend of Thomas Hall and the Hume brothers, and had commanded the *St. Joseph* in 1723, after having been employed as a supercargo on other Ostend journeys to China. Charles Pike was also instrumental in planning and supervising the first journeys of the newly founded SEIC as a financier and consultant, without any intention of going to China himself. A big fish in the tea trade, he provided detailed instructions to Company employees about what exactly was needed to establish a trading factory in Canton, with whom one should do business, and how one could test the quality of the tea leaves presented by the Hong merchant.<sup>259</sup> His brother John, who was in 1732 waiting to go out to China on account of Colin Campbell and the other directors of the SEIC, was not new to this trade either. He appears to have been on the payroll of the English East India Company before. The Pike family was thus well positioned, not least by having yet another kinsman, Borlace Pike, stationed at the English factory at St. Helena as her Governor – and a nephew in London (Charles Morford) waiting to join his uncle in Sweden after only a short career with the Ostend Company.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> The naturalisation papers of John Pike and Captain Thomas Neilson have survived in FBL, Minn., Irvine papers, Box 11 shipping records, items 31-1i and 31-2i.

<sup>259</sup> Charles Pike to Charles Irvine, 29 January 1733, CIC/1733/8a.

<sup>260</sup> 'Mr Morford' is mentioned by Colin Campbell as one of the officers who had waited in Cadiz to join the Swedish ship from there; Hallberg and Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China*, p. 21.

Family connections of that kind mattered for three reasons. First, the placement of family members in different trading Companies and port cities provided continuous access to Asian goods for the family unit, and this, crucially, via different channels. Second, the geographical spread of family members and trading partners provided more diverse, quicker, and certainly more reliable commercial information than the directors of the individual Companies could claim at times. Third, cross-Company investments were easily undertaken by remitting and circulating capital between family members whose activities time and again cut across the structure of the different trading Companies.



Fig. 3.1 Portrait of John Pike. Canton, 1743. Reverse mirror painting in a carved wooden frame decorated with gold. Copyright: Sjöhistorika Museet, Gothenburg.



Besides John Pike, the excerpt from Colin Campbell's diary makes clear that another supercargo was secreted on board the SEIC ship: a certain 'Mr Brown'. His background equally deserves consideration. The reason is that Campbell's notes make very clear that Brown's real family name was not Brown at all, but rather Graham. However, neither a supercargo called 'Graham' nor 'Brown' appears on the list of (former) SEIC employees, drawn up in 1740 in the midst of the diplomatic struggle between Sweden and England following the Porto-Novo affair.<sup>261</sup> One possibility is that Graham died before the list was drawn up; the other possibility is that he had returned to England by that time and that his friends in Gothenburg were sensible enough to protect his identity and one-off involvement in the Swedish scheme. In any case, during the SEIC venture, it is clear that Graham *alias* Brown was convinced that it was best to travel in disguise precisely because his real background prevented him from doing so in the open.

By travelling individually to Cadiz from provincial ports such as Deal in Kent – rather than going to Gothenburg directly to join the SEIC ship to China there –, Mr 'Brown', Mr Pike, and a number of other British Ostenders, managed to reduce the risk of being arrested by British authorities. Rumours spread too quickly in London, and departing from the capital would have certainly aroused suspicion among East India circles. In fact, the directors of the English EIC fully expected the Swedish venture to be a continuation of the Ostend Company. Thus, they actively tried to prevent certain known individuals, such as the Hume brothers, from attaching themselves also to this *new* competitor by making a generous counter-offer.<sup>262</sup>

However, the directors did not have the names of all interloping offenders, and often

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<sup>261</sup> The official list of British subjects in the SEIC service was preserved among the papers of Charles Irvine. Especially illuminating, of course, are those individuals who do not appear in there. Among others, Hugh Campbell, one of the 'secret' directors in Gothenburg and a key financier of the scheme, is not mentioned at all. As he was hoping to return to England without negotiating a tremendous fine for his interloping activities, his name was never mentioned.

<sup>262</sup> Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, p. 47.

remained ignorant about the latter's future plans and present whereabouts, thus allowing people like Graham and Pike to lend their expertise to the smaller companies for specific voyages, while keeping their place of residence in England in the hope that their appearance in Canton would not be revealed and held against them upon their return.<sup>263</sup> The extended Ouchterlony family, for instance, kept positions and investments afloat in several companies, while their headquarters always remained in London. As far as the regular correspondence between him and Charles Irvine reveals, none of the family members ever got into trouble because of their activities abroad.

A particularly striking case was that of James Naish, the supercargo who has left the greatest paper trail of all supercargoes in the East India company records. James Naish, a former EIC, Ostend *and* VOC captain/supercargo, returned to London in the late 1720s, without being interrogated or punished for his interloping in any way. On the contrary, he was soon put into commission by the Directors in London as chief supercargo of the China fleet going out in 1730. Exploiting this 'plum position' to its fullest potential, Naish illegally brought home a great deal more gold than was allowed, and was even accused of having presented fictitious purchasing prices to the Company, and pocketing the difference himself. Only this serious accusation of a fellow member of council in Canton let to his permanent dismissal from the English Company's payroll. The jealous George Arbuthnot – who himself had several members of his family engaged in the continental Companies – would have been surprised at the moderate financial punishment that Naish negotiated after a long and tedious lawsuit.

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<sup>263</sup> See, for an excellent treatment of this whole affair, Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, pp. 110-17.

During the 1720s and early 1730s, there was enormous concern in London about British subjects moving to the continent and attempting ‘to show’, in the words of the then secretary of the EIC in London, ‘the fflanderkins [sic!] (and others nations) the way to the East Indies’.<sup>264</sup> These worries were widely shared among the Gentlemen Seventeen in Amsterdam and the directors and state officials in Paris, who also knew that a great number of their countrymen were seizing the opportunity to travel under Habsburg protection.<sup>265</sup> This period of intense discussion and legal action seems to have been followed by a more pragmatic view on the nature of the job market for East Indians.<sup>266</sup> An indication of the extent to which this breach of terms may have been normalised may be found in the fact that quite a few British subjects who had served the Swedish, Dutch, and Danish companies for some time retired to England or lived there between voyages in perfect tranquillity.

The level of continuity between the Ostend Company (which was closed down for good in 1730) and the SEIC (founded the year after) becomes especially clear when we look at the role of Cadiz for provisioning the ships with silver, foodstuffs, merchandise, insurance papers and so forth. From Colin Campbell’s diary, we learn that the two supercargoes, a British-Ostend sea captain called George Kitchin, and a small band of young Jacobites from the North of Scotland (who were hired as assistants to Campbell) had already been waiting in town for some three weeks. During that time, they had organised suitable accommodation ‘at a friend’s house’, and also the supply of greater quantities of ‘Sherry or Xeres wines’, which

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<sup>264</sup> Thomas Wooley (London) to Thomas Hall (Ostend) in 1731, cited in Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, p. 43.

<sup>265</sup> Dermigny, *La Chine et L’Occident*, vol. 1, p. 166.

<sup>266</sup> After long negotiations following the so-called Porto Novo affair, whereby the *Ulrica Eleonora* was taken as a prize on the Coromandel Coast in 1733, a treaty was signed in October 1740 between the Swedish and British Crown that solved this ongoing conflict peacefully, by prohibiting further British merchants from sailing with SEIC ships – while those already enlisted in Swedish service were allowed to continue to do so according to the agreement reached. Leos Müller, ‘The Swedish East India Company – Strategies and Functions of an Interloper’, in Markus A. Denzel, Jan de Vries, Philipp Robinson Rössner, ‘Small is Beautiful? – Interlopers and smaller trading nations in the pre-industrial period’ (WSWB 213) (2009), pp. 73-93, p. 78.

were considered a necessary part of the officers' diet on board and in China.<sup>267</sup> As foreign visitors to the town, those allies of Campbell had to rely on members of the local merchant community as go-betweens for whatever business they wanted to engage in. Being able to fall back on familiar contacts thus proved crucial, as their stay in Cadiz was but short. Indeed, in order to secure the necessary supplies for the upcoming voyage in that port city in time, a great deal of arrangements had already been made in writing.

The short passage above from Campbell's diary also mentions some 'friends' and 'merchants' who are said to have organised the supply of silver now waiting to be 'weighed', minted and shipped aboard the Swedish ship *Fredericus Rex Suecia* – and this despite the 'strict Imbargo lay'd upon all merchant ships by orders of the [Spanish] Court'. In order to avoid being forced into Spanish service 'to carry out a secret mission in the Mediterranean', the Swedish captain had to pretend to be the commander of a 'King's ship', or man of war. '[I]n order to carry on the farce the better', Colin Campbell had 'order'd the Captain to put on his best Cloths & come ashore in his Pinnace' to meet the local Governor for an interview, showing him the fake ship pass and the commission letter from 'his late Majesty'.<sup>268</sup> In doing so, he was reluctantly aided by James Gough, a resident merchant of Catholic Irish descent, whose language skills allowed him to act as an intermediary by answering the governors' questions according to Campbell's direct instructions. Lying about the true identity of a foreign ship was certainly a risk, yet it was one that Gough was willing to take – albeit only after some initial scruples.<sup>269</sup> His financial commitments to the Swedish venture, however, left him no choice. Hired as an agent, he undertook to supply the large stock of silver for the Company and private trade on board this

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<sup>267</sup> Hallberg and Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China*, p. 16.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

Swedish China vessel. Gough acted certainly not only during this instance as an important intermediary. On the contrary, James Gough & Co provided services to a large number of China traders across the boundaries of the different East India Companies. The private correspondence of Charles Irvine includes many letters received by Irvine, but for some years we also have copies of the letters he wrote to James Gough & Co. There is also a collection of bills of lading, various bottomry bonds and the detailed instructions by Colin and Hugh Campbell for Charles Irvine with regard to the formers' arrangements with the Cadiz merchant house.

That Campbell and his allies chose to organise the resources and provisions in Cadiz for their upcoming voyage to Canton reflects an important development of the time: during the early decades of the eighteenth century, Cadiz became a 'natural place' for *all* China traders (except the Dutch) to buy provisions and to stock up on silver.<sup>270</sup> More than that: we will see in the following pages how Cadiz also became a key site for a flourishing passenger traffic to the East, and a vital node for the exchange of information and the hiring of personnel. It was also a place where cross-Company money-lending took place, and a port where goods from all over Europe were sent in order to cater for the specific needs of enterprising private traders on their way to the east. Such a thorough analysis of the city's functions will allow us to better understand the importance Cadiz had gained by the second decade of the eighteenth century for the China trade, both for the workings of the different East India Companies and for private activities.

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<sup>270</sup> Louis Dermigny confirms that the French and Scandinavian ships used to touch at Cadiz. Idem, *La Chine et l'Occident*, vol. 1, p. 249. Although VOC ships did not usually stop at Cadiz, Dutch merchant houses were still involved in the supply of China traders from other nations. With regard to the SEIC, Konickx stated that no less than '38 ships called at Cadiz to take on their cargo of silver' between 1731-1766. Idem, *The First and Second Charters*, p. 120.

### *Flows of silver from a network perspective*

When the *Casa de Contratación* moved from Seville to Cadiz in 1717 as part of an ambitious reform of the Spanish colonial system, the flow of commodities from Latin America was also diverted to Cadiz. Silver shipments from the rich mines of Mexico now poured into the town, attracting a sizable community of foreign merchants who hoped to gain access to the lucrative re-export trade of colonial produce as well as taking part in the financial service sector of the city. The crucial role of foreign merchants as commission agents in town was fully acknowledged by contemporary analysts:

[C]omme il n'y a que les Espagnols qui ayent droit d'envoyer des marchandises aux Indes Espagnols ... la plûpart des Marchands de Cadis ne sont Presque que des Commissionaires auxquels les Marchands des Pays Etrangers envoient leurs marchandises pour les charges eu leur nom pour l'Amerique, & leur envoyer les Piastres & autres marchandises qu'ils recoivent en retour.<sup>271</sup>

In 1730, a traveller to Cadiz furthermore noted: 'There is no place in Europe where there is such an abundance of money and where it changes hands so quickly'.<sup>272</sup> Its access to colonial silver defined the nature of the city's commerce with the rest of Europe. Even though Cadiz did not have a purpose-built Exchange like London or Amsterdam had at the time, Cadiz was all about the insurance business, exchange and speculation. Merchants of various kingdoms and religions

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<sup>271</sup> Jean-Pierre Ricard, *Le Négoce d'Amsterdam: Contenant tout ce que doivent savoir les marchands et banquier, etc.* (Rouen, 1723), p. 525.

<sup>272</sup> Original quotation: 'No hay sitio en Europa donde el dinero sea más abundante y corra más'. Cited in Manuel Bustos Rodríguez: *Los comerciantes de la Carrera de Indias en el Cádiz del siglo XVIII (1713-1775)* (Cádiz, 1995), p. 16, my translation.

simply met out in the open on the *Calle Nueva* twice a day to meet underwriters, brokers and potential clients.<sup>273</sup> Even though a profusion of goods other than silver were landed in Cadiz, these goods scarcely left the harbour and warehouse premises of the merchants in town. As Ruiz Rivera and García Bernal have put it, Cadiz was ‘an entrepôt and nothing else’.<sup>274</sup> There was no industry in and around the city for the processing of colonial goods such as sugar, and no textile manufacturers, who could have produced goods for national or international markets.<sup>275</sup> This orientation out to the sea partly explains the dominance of the foreign merchant communities in town. The hinterland of Cadiz merely produced agricultural products, which were sold on to seafarers and merchants who entered the port. The city’s impressive harbour overlooked the Atlantic, enabling vessels of all sizes to lay anchor there (see Fig. 3.2).



Fig. 3.2 View of the City of Cádiz, Gabriel Bodenehr, Augsburg around 1700. Source and copyright: Klaus Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, p. 196.

<sup>273</sup> Klaus Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel 1680-1830* (München, 2004), p. 94.

<sup>274</sup> The original quotation reads: ‘Cádiz era la máxima expresión de puerto franco, a saber, el puerto y nada mas que puerto donde se intercambiaban, embarcaban y desembarcaban mercancías’. Julián B. Ruiz Rivera/ Manuela Cristina García Bernal, *Cargadores a Indias*, (1992), p. 264, my translation.

<sup>275</sup> Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, p. 87.

The privileged place of Cadiz in the Atlantic trade altered the economic outlook of the city, which had traditionally enjoyed strong links with the Mediterranean and various European ports, including Marseille, St Malo, and Cork. The special relationship with Ireland and its merchants, for instance, helped Cadiz to sustain vital exchanges with the British Isles in times of war between England and Spain.<sup>276</sup> Such intra-European trade links continued to impact on the composition of the large foreign population of Cadiz. In fact, foreigners made up 13 per cent of the city's total population in 1714; and a great part of that 13 per cent was registered as merchants, their assistants or clerks.<sup>277</sup>

Particular trading privileges were granted in Cadiz to Catholic merchants from across Europe, who were given resident status in town and who could own property. During the first half of the eighteenth century, however, only very few of these foreign Catholic merchants were authorised to trade directly with the Iberian colonies across the Atlantic. It is safe to say that the naturalisation of foreigners was not exactly encouraged by the Spanish crown. At least ten years of marriage to a Castilian woman and residency for more than twenty years in Cadiz were among the legal requirements to be eligible for entering the Spanish monopoly trade as a naturalised subject.<sup>278</sup> Yet, these rather stringent requirements did not prevent foreigners from dominating the silver trade in town, not as official members of the colonial merchant guild (*Consulado de Cargadores de Indias*), but rather as intermediaries who bought and exported the silver illegally.<sup>279</sup> The contraband trade

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<sup>276</sup> Óscar Recio Morales, 'Identity and Loyalty: Irish Traders in Seventeenth-Century Iberia', in Dickson et al, *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks*, pp. 197-210.

<sup>277</sup> Klaus Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, p. 98.

<sup>278</sup> According to Diaz Blanco and Maillard Álvarez (2008), referenced in Pilar Nogués-Marco, *Bullionism, Specie-Point Mechanism and Bullion Flows in the Early Eighteenth-Century Europe*, p. 65.

<sup>279</sup> Ana Crespo Solana, 'A Network-Based Merchant Empire: Dutch Trade in the Hispanic Atlantic (1680-1740)', in Gerd Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman (eds), *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800 Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden and Boston, 2014), pp. 139-58, esp. pp. 150-52.



took such measures that by the 'mid-18th century foreign wholesale merchants computed more than 80% of the total net income gained by trade in Cadiz', a large proportion of which involved the export of New World silver.<sup>280</sup>

Pilar Nogués-Marco's research into Cadiz' black market for silver and the arbitrage business connected to it allows us to situate the China trade within this wider history of contraband silver flows. In her doctoral thesis, completed in 2010, she has identified a network of large-scale smugglers in Cadiz, as well as the means by which they managed to buy silver cheaper than the officially fixed rate. Nogués-Marco found that the biggest players involved in the export/smuggling of silver from Cadiz were found among the city's French and Franco-Irish merchant houses.<sup>281</sup> The French houses in particular formed powerful cartels which were cemented by inter-marriage and regional association.<sup>282</sup> The key sources of her research were the half-monthly price reports that correspondents in Cadiz sent to the Roux merchant house in Marseille – who were the recipients of large amounts of silver throughout the eighteenth-century.<sup>283</sup>

The Roux brothers happened to be active in the Levant trade, but they did not entertain connections to China or India (which is perhaps unsurprising considering the strategic position of Marseille in the Mediterranean). Was this perhaps the reason why Nogués-Marco did not see any direct link between the Cadiz merchant houses and maritime Asia? This is less a criticism than a salutary reminder of the limitations of a network-focused approach, in that it produces a distinct and often partial

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<sup>280</sup> Pilar Nogués-Marco, *Bullionism, Specie-Point Mechanism and Bullion Flows in the Early Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, 2010). p. 66.

<sup>281</sup> The merchant names and their importance was established by the analysis of correspondence to the Roux merchant house of Marseille, which was a major recipient of shadow silver. The Roux records are held in the archive of *La Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Marseille*.

<sup>282</sup> The majority of merchants came from Brittany (St Malo) and Provence. Nogués-Marco, *Bullionism*, pp. 102-111.

<sup>283</sup> On the pragmatics of the illegal trade, see *ibid.*, pp. 81-90.

geography of trade that reflects the location and commercial interests of the members of a specific network, but not necessarily those of other networks involved in the same branch of trade. Having said that, it is the plurality of network studies that helps to detect crosslinks between co-existing or competing networks. Thus, although each network study only highlights a fragment of the big picture, in the long run we get much closer to the commercial world inhabited by individual traders.

### *The Cadiz merchant community and the China trade*

Regarding Nogués Marco's list of merchants who reported black market prices for silver in Cadiz to Roux, it becomes clear that quite a few of these informants and smugglers mentioned in this context were also involved in the supply of silver for the Canton trade. Among the correspondents of the *Maison Roux* were Jacques Gough et Cie, Boby LeGobien et Cie, Guillaume & Joseph Masson and Co as well as Casaubon, Béhic et Cie.<sup>284</sup> All of them were involved in the supply of silver for the SEIC and in the informal arrangement of loans and the supply of treasure to private traders on their way to China.<sup>285</sup> Other notable houses that managed the provision of China ships at Cadiz and that seemed to have operated *independently* of the Roux network included Robert Main & Co, Nicholas Langton (later Carew, Langton & Co.), Galli, Belloni & Company and the two French counting houses of Galart & Co. and Barbou & Besnier.<sup>286</sup> One should add though that the supply of passing East India ships at Cadiz was only one leg of their silver business. Cadiz merchant houses also sent consignments of silver directly to London and Amsterdam, not least on

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<sup>284</sup> Nogués-Marco, *Bullionism*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>285</sup> See table 3.1: list of merchant bankers at Cadiz and their silver supplies for the SEIC China ship *Stockholm*, in 1740.

<sup>286</sup> See the index to Charles Irvine's correspondents.

behalf of the Company directors of the EIC and VOC. In England, as Gedalia Yogeve reminds us, silver for export to India and China ‘had to be in foreign coin because export of English money and of silver bars was prohibited.’<sup>287</sup> However, considering the many wars and crises of trade between England and Spain throughout the eighteenth century, this channel of supply stood on shaky ground.<sup>288</sup>

Table 3.1 provides a comprehensive list of merchants who provided silver to the SEIC ship *Stockholm* in 1740, all of which were members of the large foreign merchant community at Cadiz. Gough & Co, Masson & Co and Galart & Co were the top suppliers in 1740. In fact, these three merchant houses had already served the Swedish Company and its private traders for a decade by this point. What Table 3.1 clearly illustrates is the extent to which the ‘Swedish’ China trade relied on the involvement of local merchants from across Europe. Flemish, French and British houses were dominant among this heterogeneous group. This may not come as a surprise, if we consider the fact that merchants of these nations were also chiefly involved in the interloping activities for entering the China trade at the time. There is no reason to believe that this particular constellation of suppliers (as it appears in this snapshot of 1740) was in any way atypical. It remains to be hoped, however, that similar sources for the other Companies will be found to reveal the composition of suppliers involved in the China trade via Cadiz – as silver brokers, agents and financiers. What seems to be beyond doubt is the fact that the connection between Cadiz and Canton relied heavily on the presence and connections of the foreign merchant communities in Cadiz. In fact, Spanish names are almost absent from the records consulted, making it perhaps understandable why the Spanish historiography on Cadiz’s trade has never considered its strategic role in the trade with the Far East.

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<sup>287</sup> Yogeve, *Diamonds and Coral*, p. 125.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

From the perspective of foreign silver traders and our free agents, however, the city looked out to the Atlantic, but China was in plain view.

**Table 3.1**  
**List of merchant bankers at Cadiz and their silver supplies for the SEIC China ship *Stockholm*, in 1740.**

<b>Supplied by</b>	<b>Nationality of the supplier</b>	<b>Payments in: marcs, onzes, piasters</b>	<b>Value in riales</b>
G. J. Masson	French	<b>4526,2,4</b>	38242,3,5
Robert Main & Comp.	English	1756,2,9	15111,17,4
E. & J. Galart & Comp.	French	<b>6002,2,4</b>	50712,18,10 2/3
Galli, Belloni & Comp.	Italian	677,1,1	5721,1,9
J. J. Proli	Flemish/Italian	1367,7,1	11557,16,8
Jean Schmidts	Flemish?	202,5,11	1712,10,3
Boby Le Gobein & Comp.	Flemish?	417,0,0	not recorded
Barbou & Besnier	French	390,6,11	3302,1,11
Ley & Vanhalen <sup>289</sup>	Irish, Flemish	241,0,2	2096,7,7
James Gough & Comp.	Irish	<b>7679,7,0</b>	not recorded
Gustav Ross & Gough & Co	Scottish, Irish	1896,15,0	23281,7,10
<b>Collated bill for the silver on the <i>Stockholm</i>:</b>		<b>25153,49,32<sup>290</sup></b>	

Source: Computed from 'Account of Treasure received aboard the Ship *Stockholm* for account of the Swedish East India Company', Cadiz 1740. Shipping records (40-66d). Irvine Papers.

Fortunately, biographical information about the background of Cadiz merchants involved in the China trade exists in a few cases. For instance, The French nationals, Juan Casaubon (also known as Jean Cazabon) and Juan Behic (Jean Behu) settled in Cadiz in 1720 to trade with the Spanish Americas. Together with a number

<sup>289</sup> These are probably Lorenzo Ley and his son-in-law Juan Van Halen. See, Manuel Bustos Rodriguez, *Cádiz en el Sistema Atlántico. La ciudad, sus comerciantes y la actividad mercantil (1650-1830)* (Madrid, 2005), p. 209.

<sup>290</sup> The presentation of foreign currencies is rather different in contemporary sources. In today's terms, the rounded total sum is 25,153 Mexican dollars.

of minor partners they formed the trading firm *Casaubon, Behic et Cie*. Behic came from Bayonne and married locally. His wife Josefa Potenciana Pain was a rich heiress, and her father Gilo Pain was an important figure in the French merchant community.<sup>291</sup> Pain's other daughter Manuela Juana married another powerful silver smuggler in Cadiz in 1746, the St Malo merchant Guillaume Macé.<sup>292</sup> Little is known about the background of Jean Casaubon – apart from his striking success in business. The merchant house of Casaubon & Behic achieved the highest net income in town, which amounted to 40,000 pieces of eight in 1771.<sup>293</sup> (Hugh Campbell regarded them as the most eminent merchants in Cadiz well before that date.) Since the reputation of merchants was not necessarily connected to the legality of their dealings, it should come as no surprise to discover that Casaubon and Behic were also among the chief smugglers in town.

Another case for which bits of information are available about those houses that supplied the interloping companies and private traders with silver is that of Guillaume and Joseph Masson – who were among the top suppliers for arriving China ships in the 1730s and 1740s. The merchant house's yearly income, which was assessed by the Castilian government for the introduction of a single tax based on wealth, lay at 35,000 pieces of eight in 1771.<sup>294</sup> Regarding their previous careers, we know little more than that the family originated from Orléans. Joseph Masson's presence in Cadiz under the Spanish name *Juan Mazón y Compañía* can be traced from 1713 onwards. 'In the consular list of 1765 Antoine Masson appeared as an attached merchant of the (St Malo) Merchant House Verduc, Vincent.'<sup>295</sup>

A good example of the transnational outlook of British houses in Cadiz is that

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<sup>291</sup> Margarita Garcia-Mauriño Mundi, *La Pugna entre el Consulado de Cádiz y los jenízaros por las exportaciones a Indias (1720-1765)* (Seville, 1999), p. 264.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>293</sup> Nogués-Marco, *Bullionism*, p. 79.

<sup>294</sup> Nogués-Marco, p. 67 and 79.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

of the Gough Family, who were not only silver brokers in Cadiz but were also keenly involved in the trade to the Far East. James (or Jacques) Gough, and also his brother Edward (Edouard) Gough, belonged to the small but potent group of Irish traders whose Catholic background had allowed them to establish close ties with the enemies of the English crown, though at same time without hindering them from trade with English Protestant subjects.<sup>296</sup> Living at Cadiz, and thus at a crossroad of official and private trade east- and westwards, merchants like James Gough thus enjoyed unrivalled access to the fruits of the European expansion. As men on the spot, they received requests for a wide variety of financial, personal, and commercial services from merchants from all parts of Europe, who were preparing to go to the East, or who were wishing to send merchandise to the Spanish colonies. At the same time, these Cadiz-based merchants were able to use these contacts to invest in Oriental and colonial goods themselves.<sup>297</sup> Robert Main & Co., for instance, received a consignment of Indian fabrics and ready-made clothes such as ‘waistcoats and breeches embroidered with silk’ worth 1,100 silver dollars in 1736 from Charles Irvine.

British houses figure less prominently in the business records of the Roux merchants, but that does not mean that they were not important. Already in 1712, Robert Allen, a promoter of the South Sea scheme pointed to fact that England (meaning Britain) greatly profited from the work of the merchant houses in Cadiz who supplied the Galleons with ‘great Quantities of our Manufactures’.<sup>298</sup> The author

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<sup>296</sup> Óscar Recio Morales, ‘Identity and Loyalty: Irish Traders in Seventeenth-Century Iberia’, in Dickson et al, *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks*, pp. 197-210, p. 201.

<sup>297</sup> ‘Invoice of Sundry Goods and Merchandise loaded on Ship Three Crowns Peter V. Utfall Master, and are consigned to Mr Robert Main & Co. at Cadiz’, 28 January 1736, Shipping documents, Irvine Papers. Messieurs Galart and Comp. clandestinely sold a parcel of Indian embroidered cotton caps in Cadiz, which they had received from Hugh Campbell. As in France, there was a total ban on Asian textiles in Spain, including both silks and cotton as early as 1718 by royal decree.

<sup>298</sup> Robert Allen, *Who Resided Some Years in the Kingdom of Peru (when part of title of volume)*, *An Essay on the Nature and Method of Carrying on a Trade to the South-Sea* (London, Printed, and Sold

even took some pride in the fact that his countrymen ‘found means to remit privately to their Principals in England’ the extracted bullion from Cadiz.<sup>299</sup> Although the idea of bi-lateral trade relations still dominated the economic thinking of writers at the time<sup>300</sup>, in practice profits were often achieved by multilateral trading schemes and partnerships. British traders in Cadiz were not just linked to London, as the straightforward representatives of interested parties in England. Instead, the arbitrage business in which they engaged was bound up with a number of other cities in Europe, among them Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg and Antwerp. This meant that the general patterns and geographies of trade became more complex in the eighteenth century. ‘The growth of the commission, linked with the provision of financial and shipping services’ tended to decentralize trading patterns, a development that affected the business of overseas merchants everywhere.<sup>301</sup>

It is therefore important to remember that British expatriates in Cadiz were connected to the British Isles through trade and family communication, but at the same time they entertained diverse networks on the continent. To be sure, it was upon such transnational networks that British interlopers in the China trade often came to rely for raising money and to sell their goods upon their return from China.

### *Cadiz enters the China trade*

The beginning of Cadiz’s involvement in the China trade is likely to go back to the contacts between the French and Irish merchant communities in Cadiz on the one

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by John Baker, at the Black Boy in Pater-Noster-Row, 1712), p. 17. This essay was dedicated to the Lord High Treasurer of Great Britain, Robert, Earl of Oxford.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>300</sup> David Ormrod writes that ‘[b]efore Isaac Gervaise produced his System or Theory of the Trade of the World in 1720, mercantilist writers consistently failed to provide an adequate description of the existing multilateral payments’. Idem., *The Rise of Commercial Empires: England and the Netherlands in the Age of Mercantilism, 1650-1770* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 74.

<sup>301</sup> Ormrod, *The Rise of Commercial Empires*, p. 68.

hand, and the Franco-Irish cluster of private traders operating out of St Malo in Brittany on the other.<sup>302</sup> In 1712, a group of private traders from the port city of St Malo – inhabited by no more than 20,000 people at the time – ‘took over from Paris the monopoly of the French East India Company’, albeit only temporarily.<sup>303</sup> This state-led trading body had become increasingly defunct from 1701 onwards and ceased to organise and finance expeditions on its own. Instead the French state granted licenses to private entrepreneurs for voyages to India and China. The merchants from St Malo and others who joined them from Dunkirk and elsewhere were highly successful in defending French interests in the China trade, at a time when the direct trade with Canton was still at an early stage. For convenience and in order to circumvent French import restrictions on textiles, the Chinese cargoes of the St Malo ships were actually landed and sold at Ostend – cementing the close connection between the two interloping port cities.<sup>304</sup> St Malo, France’s ‘cité corsaire’, had also enjoyed close links to Malouin merchants in Cadiz for decades past and was able to organise the steady flow of silver that was needed in Asia (but also in Europe) at the time.<sup>305</sup>

The Cadiz merchant house of Gough & Co had possibly already catered for the needs of the Malouin China traders.<sup>306</sup> (For instance, The Gough family was connected by marriage to one of the most notorious Malouin trading families at

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<sup>302</sup> Dermigny states in passing that ‘[d]es maison de Cadix ont participé aux voyages français à Canton par la Mer du Sud, et celui du Compte-de-Lamoignon (a Malouin ship), en 1714-1718, a été effectué pour le compte du Languedocien d’Andalousie Étienne Gilly’. Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l’Occident*, vol. I, p. 192.

<sup>303</sup> Bromley, *Corsairs and Navies 1660-1760*, p. 280.

<sup>304</sup> Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l’Occident*, vol. I, p. 167.

<sup>305</sup> Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore, 2000), p. 113.

<sup>306</sup> Edward Gough (the elder), originally from Waterford in Ireland, appears to have been an established merchant in Cadiz and Cork at least since 1685. We know that he maintained regular business correspondence with John and Helena Aylward, at St Malo, and other Irish traders in France, Ireland and Spain. See Arundel Castle Archives, The Aylward Papers, 1672-1717, Business Correspondence, bundle 45, Letters to John Aylward from Edward Gough in Cadiz, Apr. 1685-Sept. 1688, Aug. 1696.



Cadiz, the Walshes, originally from Dublin). The trajectory of the family certainly gives us good reason for such speculation. James Gough was born and baptised in St Malo on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1692.<sup>307</sup> The involvement of his family in the St Malo trade to India and China would be anything but surprising considering the small number and close-knit community of Malouin peers who lived in Cadiz at the time. We know for sure, however, that the family was active for the Ostend Company in providing Spanish silver and provisions.<sup>308</sup> Edward Gough jr., resident merchant in Dunkirk, was a shareholder of the Ostend Company.<sup>309</sup> Edward Gough's business was closely connected to that of his brother James in Cadiz.<sup>310</sup>

The Gough family was equally well established in London, yet its connections far exceeded ties to the British capital. Two members of the family served subsequently as EIC directors in the first half of the eighteenth century. One Harry Gough became a director in 1736 and was reappointed several times until 1750.<sup>311</sup> Intriguingly, Richard Gough, the only son of the EIC director (who became a notable antiquarian), married one of the daughters of Thomas Hall, esq. of Goldings, Hertfordshire – the ship-owner and former Ostender – who we have encountered in Chapter Two. Captain Charles Gough repeatedly sailed the EIC vessel *Richmond* to China as commander from 1731 onwards and a Richard Gough

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<sup>307</sup> Ref. AHMC, Cabildo p. 13. Cited in Samuel Fannin, 'Spanish Archives and Source material', transcribed for the *Irish Genealogical Research Society*. [http://www.irishancestors.ie/?page\\_id=926](http://www.irishancestors.ie/?page_id=926) (last accessed: 22 August 2015).

<sup>308</sup> Jan Parmentier, 'The Irish Connection: The Irish Merchant Community in Ostend and Bruges during the late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, 20 (2005), pp. 31-54, p. 41.

<sup>309</sup> Christian Pfister, 'Dunkerque et l'Irlande 1690-1790', in Dickson et al., *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks*, pp. 93-114, p. 106.

<sup>310</sup> Hallberg and Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China*, p. 16.

<sup>311</sup> East India Company, *Court Book* No.B/64, (labelled 57) April 1736 – March 1738, 8 April 1736. My thanks go to Georgina Green, who generously provided me with an excellent transcript of the Court Books. For details on the marriage, see Arthur Jones (ed.), *Hertfordshire 1731-1800 as recorded in the Gentleman's Magazine* (Hatfield, 1993), p. 207. There was also a Richard Gough who was elected director in 1702, but there seems to be no family relation to the Irish Gough's. See, East India Company, *Court Book* No. B/47, 22 July 1702 – 19 April 1705.

travelled to Canton as supercargo on board the *Winchester* in 1740.<sup>312</sup> The Goughs are exemplary for other British family businesses that extended their networks first to Spain, Holland, the Low Countries, and France, and later also to Scandinavia and Germany, in order to remain afloat in times of war and to reap the profits from selling in markets that would otherwise have been closed to them. The Pike, Metcalfe and Harrison families, for instance, were similarly successful in placing their kin in the EIC as well as in foreign Companies. Cadiz, St Malo, Dunkirk, Antwerp, Amsterdam and Ostend offered both the necessary infrastructure and the right composition of entrepreneurial individuals to engage in the business of interloping effectively.

There is thus a great deal of circumstantial evidence, albeit scattered, that points to the connection between Cadiz and St Malo for the private trade to Asia. Unfortunately, no research that would allow us to establish exactly when and how Cadiz started to become this vital nodal point for the China trade has been done to date. (Tracing the beginning of novel trading geographies is generally difficult. The role of specific merchants and smaller networks in this process has been meticulously researched for a case study of Madeira and the trans-Atlantic wine trade, in which Scots played a major role).<sup>313</sup> In the case of Cadiz and the China trade, what we do know, however, is that the city's role was well established with the formal appearance of the Ostend Company in 1722.<sup>314</sup> It is thus likely that Thomas Hall, James Tobin and the other members of the first Ostend ship to Canton – the

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<sup>312</sup> The private trade of both Captain Charles and Richard Gough were registered in the Canton diaries of the English East India Company, to be found in IOR/G/12/40 pp. 100f. and IOR/G/12/48 p. 70, respectively. Charles Irvine was definitely acquainted with Captain Gough, as his copy letters in 1736/37 make abundantly clear. Letter book, *Three Crowns*, Irvine papers.

<sup>313</sup> David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven, 2009).

<sup>314</sup> Don Geronimo de Uztariz comments in 1724 on the export of Mexican and Peruvian silver to Asia by the Ostend Company in his 'The Theory and Practice of Commerce and Maritime Affairs'. Written originally in Spanish ... translated from the Original by John Kippax, (London: John and James Rivington, 1751), 2 vols, vol. 1, p. 61.

*Prince-Eugène* that arrived in Canton in 1718 – had already touched at Cadiz. A closer investigation of the Asian provision trade at Cadiz is long overdue, since neither the literature on Spanish overseas trade nor the historiography on the different East India Companies has provided an account of the city's strategic role for the direct trade with China. By focusing on the multiple commercial functions of the city, I argue that Cadiz became a crucial linchpin for cross-Company activities, as it emerged, from the first quarter of the eighteenth century onwards, as a nodal point where most ships bound for the East Indies eventually passed by or stopped for some time.<sup>315</sup>

#### *Cadiz as an entrepôt*

The broad array of services available in Cadiz certainly made it an attractive port of call for merchants and mariners who sought to increase their outbound cargo and capital stock. Crucially, this was often done without the knowledge of their employers back home at the respective company headquarters. Wine and liquors, oil, capers, almonds, raisins, citrus fruits, pistols, and luxury products from Italy were all available in this town, and shipments of French and English textiles suitable in modest quantities for the Chinese market equally arrived in Cadiz through the help of a string of intermediaries. Orders were made by Company supercargoes by writing to Cadiz merchant houses for the supply of goods. It is, however, worth noting here that the transport of such goods destined for China did not necessarily have to take place on the ships of one's own employing company. Rather, most, if not all, China traders entertained friendly relationships with colleagues working for other East India Companies, which could mean that they sometimes asked one another for the favour

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<sup>315</sup> We can include Port St. Mary, a settlement further north within the Cadiz bay area, in our analysis.

of receiving merchandise on each other's behalf, be it out of convenience or out of necessity.<sup>316</sup>

Duvelaer de la Barre, a former French supercargo who was able to buy a magnificent estate in France in the mid-1740s after only three trips to China, did not hesitate to draw on the service of former colleagues in the EIC, who undertook to remit 50 'shoes of gold' on his behalf to England in 1751.<sup>317</sup> More mundane enquiries were perhaps even more widespread. This was the case, for instance, in 1758, when shortly after receiving his appointment as chief supercargo of the VOC China fleet, Arthur Abercromby, a Scot formerly in the service of the SEIC, wrote to two of his colleagues in Gothenburg with a casual enquiry that was intended to circumvent the restrictions of his employers in Amsterdam. Abercromby knew that the Swedish ships would go to China via Cadiz, and that whoever was in charge on board, would have the opportunity to receive from the hands of 'Messrs. Careux, Langton & Comp.' a load of Sherry and butter on his account, trusting that 'I can depend upon what these Gentlemen will send aboard to be good.'<sup>318</sup>

A good overview of the personal provisions taken on board at Cadiz is given in the regular communications between the master of a SEIC ship (moored at Whampoa) and the chief supercargo of the Swedish factory, who was residing at

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<sup>316</sup> This is where Company records are particularly useful as they feature many cases in which goods were seized on suspicion that they actually belonged to foreign subjects. For instance, IOR/H/497, p. 13, 205 contains papers 'connected with the claim for the release of gold belonging to Andrew Reid, illegally brought from Canton by Captain Gostlin of the Sussex and seized under the pretence that it belonged to a Frenchman, M. Duvelaer de la Barre', 1738-45.

<sup>317</sup> 'Diary and Consultations of the Council in China', *British Library*, IOR/G/12/53, p. 67. 'Shoe of Gold, in *Commerce*, an ingot used as money in China. Gold is here considered as merchandize; it is sold in regular ingots of a determined weight, which the English call *shoes of gold*; the largest of these weigh 10 taels, and the gold is reckoned 94 touch (that is 94 parts fine in 100)'; from Abraham Rees, *The Cyclopædia: Or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, 39 vols., vol. 32 (London, 1819), without pages.

<sup>318</sup> Arthur Abercromby (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 4 November 1758, CIC/1758/42a1.

Canton in 1736.<sup>319</sup> The latter repeatedly asked for provisions to be sent down to the factory, which belonged to different members of the factory and their friends in the adjacent hong. Luckily, the owners of each parcel are detailed in a number of surviving copy letters. Entries such as: ‘One Cask Brandy belonging to the French Supracargoes’, to be delivered to the Swedish factory, are to be found in abundance, which give us a fairly good idea how the culture of cooperation on a personal level permeated the formal competition between the companies.<sup>320</sup>

Not all ships had to lay anchor in Cadiz in order to enjoy the replenishing of their stores. Supply vessels from Cadiz were also sent to the open sea to cater to the needs of passing EIC vessels that sought to avoid calling at its main harbour. The illicit trade of commanders and supercargoes was often carried out this way, according to the conclusive findings of H. V. Bowen. A fleeting encounter at sea that involved the un- or uploading of goods from one ship to the other had to be well-planned, of course, and there was always the risk of being reported by members of the crew that were not involved in the smuggling activities. Bowen collected reports of this kind, which were brought before the Committee of Private trade in London between 1762 and 1771. From these reports we learn that many of the cases of outbound smuggling on English EIC ships are registered to have happened in the Cadiz bay area, and also further south near Madeira and Tenerife.<sup>321</sup> The sending of smaller supply vessels that were carrying provisions and contraband was thus part of the service provided by the foreign merchant community in Cadiz.

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<sup>319</sup> See, for instance, Charles Irvine (Canton) to Petter Von Utfall (Whampoa), 27 August 1736; Charles Irvine (or his assistant) (Canton) to Peter Von Utfall (Whampoa), 22 September 1736; Copy letters, *Three Crowns*, 1736-37.

<sup>320</sup> Charles Irvine (Canton) to Petter von Utfall (Whampoa), 30 August 1736. Copy letters, *Three Crowns*, 1736-37.

<sup>321</sup> H. V. Bowen, ‘Privilege and Profit’, p. 65, table 3.

The same mechanisms that proved useful for private trade could also be used for the benefit of the Company trade. When Colin Campbell arrived at Cadiz in 1731, he ordered the Swedish captain to keep the vessel at a safe distance from the harbour whilst he was joining the other British crew members on land. There, at a distance to the harbour, the Swedish ship waited for the *Hannibal*, an English ship that had a cargo (likely of textiles) on board, which had been ordered by Campbell in his role as Company director.<sup>322</sup> Bearing in mind that Campbell sought to keep the true identity and destination of the Swedish vessel secret, all uploading of goods and the minting of coins had to be conducted clandestinely. (In order to safeguard that the silver was not discovered, additional precautions were taken. In 1736, for instance, Robert Main & Co delivered eleven bags of silver to the value of 9,914 Spanish dollars (or 102,083 riales) on board the ship the *Three Crowns*. This shipment of silver coins, however, appears in the stack of receipts relating to the voyage as a delivery of 'New Mexico hard lemons'.<sup>323</sup> Crucially, the secret provision of the Swedish ship which was held to be a man-of-war was only made possible through the involvement of experienced supercargoes who, in turn, were able to rely on Cadiz merchant houses as intermediaries that were familiar with the needs of this particular branch of business. In order to understand the logistics of trade and the role of Cadiz therein, we ought to acknowledge the continuities between one interloping adventure to the next and the privileged position of Cadiz within global trade networks.

Foreign merchant houses here were able to cater for the needs of the East Indies trade, because Cadiz was already tightly integrated into the intra-European and Atlantic trade systems. This brought a profusion of agricultural products and

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<sup>322</sup> Hallberg and Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China*, p. 16.

<sup>323</sup> See the four invoices signed by Robert Main & Co on 22 March 1736. FBL, Charles Irvine shipping records, 1733-59, box number 11.

manufactures to Cadiz. The emerging China trade in the early eighteenth century was heaped on top of an already wide-ranging portfolio of business activities available to foreign merchants in this town and should therefore not be seen in isolation. The distinct composition of the merchant community in Cadiz, with its accumulation of interloping entrepreneurs such as Malouins, Flemish merchants, Catholic Englishmen, Scots and Irishmen (many of whom were Jacobites in exile), however, helped to shape certain trading practices specific to the China trade that remained in place for much of the eighteenth century.<sup>324</sup> Most importantly, Cadiz merchant houses took on a mediating role in facilitating cross-company activities – a point that will be explored in more detail over the following pages.

What did the supply pattern look like, who was involved, and where did the European goods come from that were transhipped in Cadiz? The chief goods that came on board in Cadiz for both the Company and private trade were silver (from Mexico or Peru), textiles (from France and England), and foodstuffs (from France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Scotland and Ireland). Moreover, there was a wide range of consumer goods traded such as ‘Portuguese snuff’, ‘elephant’s teeth’, incense, glass beads and bottles, pistols and other fine manufactured wares that were taken on board in Cadiz by individual Company servants and passengers either as gifts or commodities.<sup>325</sup> Yet, the bulk goods are the ones that interest us here most, for they had to be ordered in advance and were traded in a systematic manner.

Well in advance of their actual arrival in Cadiz bay, supercargoes and captains advised their suppliers in Europe to send consignments of goods suitable for

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<sup>324</sup> The ‘interloping activities’ of the French and British traders are much better understood for the Atlantic trade. See, J. S. Bromley, *Corsairs and Navies*; Stein and Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War*; José Ignacio Martínez Ruiz, ‘¿Cádiz, Jamaica o Londres? La Colonia Británica de Cádiz y las Transformaciones del Comercio Inglés con la América Española (1655-1750)’, *Stud. his., H.a mod.*, 33, 2011, pp. 177-202.

<sup>325</sup> Charles Irvine (on board the *Calmar*) to George Ouchterlony (London), 10 December 1743, letter book 1743-44.

China or India to Spain, where they could be conveniently unloaded without the interference of Company inspectors and Customs officials, who always sought to examine the cargo of outgoing vessels in their homeport according to the updated regulations of the respective company.<sup>326</sup> The Companies often prohibited the export of certain types of goods they wanted to sell themselves in China, thus forcing the servants to either look out for alternatives or to find ways by which they could circumvent these regulations in their homeport.

In Sweden, Company servants also tried to get around paying the Crown duties. Technically at least, all textiles, wine, and other merchandise for export from Gothenburg had 'to be declared to the customs, stored in the Company's warehouse and kept sealed until shipment when a recognition of 1/8%' had to be paid by the exporter.<sup>327</sup> Sending goods to Cadiz was thus one way for Company servants to avoid declaring prohibited articles, to avoid paying duties or to simply augment their outbound investment. Cargo space was not an issue for ships bound to China; in fact, many Company ships left Europe half empty. Considering that the ships of the SEIC were significantly larger than the EIC vessels that were sent to China in the first half of the eighteenth century, it becomes clear why the volume of private trade was less of an issue for the Company directors in Gothenburg.<sup>328</sup> The composition of the private cargo, however, was far more important.

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<sup>326</sup> Wilkieson gives news of an accident on board the ship that had perpetuana (a durable woollen fabric that contemporaries called 'perpets') on board, but was apparently plundered by an English crew on its way to Cadiz. See, Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 30 January 1740, CIC/1740/22a; in 1740, Campbell was concerned in this large shipment of 'perpets' to the value of £15,000 and gave instructions about what to do if they did not arrive in time to be shipped to China. Colin Campbell (Gothenburg) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 10 February 1740, CIC/1740/31a; George Ouchterlony delivered yellow broad cloth from England to be taken to India as early as 1732. Charles Flescher – alias George Ouchterlony (London) to Charles Irvine (Cadiz), 30 December 1732, CIC/1732/5a.

<sup>327</sup> Hallberg and Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China*, p. xv.

<sup>328</sup> The cargo capacity of EIC vessels was usually stated to be between 450-499 tonnes, which was certainly an underestimation. See, Jean Sutton, *Lords of the East*. Instead, newly built SEIC ships like the *Göteborg* had a carrying capacity of up to 1,000 tonnes. Koninckx, *First and Second Charters*, pp.



In order to appease vociferous critics at home, and to redress the negative trade balance with China, the English EIC tried to fill at least ten per cent of the outbound cargo of each ship with domestic manufacturers. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the overwhelming majority of the Company investment (around 90 per cent), however, still consisted of silver.<sup>329</sup> In addition to the Company exports and the private trade of their servants, the EIC also granted licenses to London merchants who shipped coral, silver, and precious stones to India and China in return for Indian diamonds. Sometimes, they also allowed English entrepreneurs to test the market for new export goods by granting one off licences for their sale abroad. It was actually rather difficult for the Company to sell their manufactures (consisting mostly of woollen fabrics) at any profit in China. It is therefore not surprising that the interference of Company servants in this fragile branch of the Company trade was considered a cardinal sin.<sup>330</sup> The export goods that were most in demand among private traders and the different companies were specific types of light woollen fabrics – worsted (perpets) and woven (broadcloth and long Ells) – that were produced in England and France in the fine qualities that could be sold in China. Preferred dyes for the Chinese market seem to have been yellow and orange.<sup>331</sup> The quality of the dyes and the particular assortment of the fabrics were key to their success, and hence a typical point of discussion between sedentary suppliers and our men on the move.<sup>332</sup>

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156-58. On the difficulties to assess the true tonnage of East India ships see Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, vol. I, pp. 202-207.

<sup>329</sup> Hosea Ballou Morse, 'The Supercargo in the China Trade about the Year 1700', *The English Historical Review*, 36:142 (1921), pp. 200f.

<sup>330</sup> Jessica Hanser, *George Smith goes to China: British Private Traders and the Interlinking of the British Empire with China, 1757-1792* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2012), pp.183-85.

<sup>331</sup> Charles Flescher – alias George Ouchterlony (London) to Charles Irvine (Cadiz), 30 December 1732, CIC/1732/5a;

<sup>332</sup> George Ouchterlony (London) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburgh), 26 January 1738, CIC/1738/2a; Colin Campbell (Gothenburg) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 10 February 1740, CIC/1740/31a;

A few examples must suffice here to illustrate what transpired on a regular basis with regard to the supply of European textiles for Chinese markets. Mr Thomas Wilkieson, a Scottish resident merchant in Amsterdam, repeatedly ordered English ‘perpetts’ and ‘Aix-la-Chapelle [broad] cloth’ on account of the Campbell brothers, Auguste Tabuteau and Charles Irvine and had them shipped to Cadiz.<sup>333</sup> Jean Cossart et fils & Bouwer, merchants in Amsterdam also sent French textiles for export together with musters for their own commissions of Chinese silks to Cadiz merchant houses for further processing.<sup>334</sup> The quality of the goods alone, however, did not secure safe profits for European textiles in China. The market was very limited and the competition between private traders was fierce. Knowing roughly how much would be brought to Canton in a given season was therefore a key concern for those planning to make a large investment in textiles rather than silver. Thomas Wilkieson, who was busy preparing Irvine’s consignment of Aix-la-Chapelle broad cloth for Cadiz had instructions to take into account what he knew about what other China traders were planning to buy of that fabric. Somewhat speculatively, Irvine wrote:

I am never [one] for prying into other Peoples affairs, but I suspect that some People have already ordered some such Goods, if so I will hold only to the Sum above mentioned (5 to 6000 guilders), but if you have no knowledge of

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Charles Irvine (Gothenburgh) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), 13 August 1743, letter book 1743-44.

<sup>333</sup> A mere 60 pieces of Aix-La-Chapelle cloth cost £219. See, Charles Irvine (London) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), 28 September 1743, letter book, 1743-44. Tabuteau and Irvine had previously operated in partnership in financing a large consignment of long Ells and broadcloth for export to China, costing them each £408. See, Charles Irvine (Gothenburgh) to Hugh Campbell (Gothenburgh), 23 August 1743, letter book, 1743-44.

<sup>334</sup> Jean Cossart et fils & Bouwer (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Cadiz), 18 February 1740, CIC/1740/35a.

other orders for such goods you may goe as far as eight thousand Guilders for my account & if possible I may still enlarge the quantity.<sup>335</sup>

Such passages make it clear that individual Canton traders were dependent on sedentary merchants in Europe and the kind of information they were able to gather about the supply and demand for certain goods. However, private traders were equally dependent on the collaboration of merchants in Cadiz, who received and processed the goods in their name.<sup>336</sup> While being stuck in China for a year longer than planned, Charles Irvine could still rely on the services of James Gough & co at Cadiz who handled a consignment of French goods on his behalf and organised its safe passage to Canton. On 4 January 1746, Irvine reported to Cadiz that '[m]y Pacotille from Paris came safe last year by the French Ships'.<sup>337</sup> He was especially fortunate to receive his merchandise via the French East India ships as 1745 proved to be a particularly black year for the SEIC – since both of their China ships that season were wrecked on their voyage out to China.<sup>338</sup> News of the events spread to India as well, prompting one of Charles Irvine's friends at Madras to enquire about the personal consequences for Irvine, who was at Canton at the time. Irvine replied to Samuel Greenhough in his usual dry manner that 'I was no otherwise loser by the two outward bound Swedish ships, than losing my time here, but I Shall suffer more or less by that lost homeward bound, for money lent on here; & by a fire that

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<sup>335</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), 13 August 1743, letter book, 1743-44.

<sup>336</sup> 'Charges at Cadiz for Sundries from Dunkirk for Robert Main & Comp.'s account', 25 May 1740. Shipping documents, item 40-36s.

<sup>337</sup> Charles Irvine (Canton) to James Gough (Cadiz), 4 January 1747, letter book.

<sup>338</sup> Paul A. Van Dyke, 'The Yan Family. Merchants of Canton, 1734-1780s' in *Revista de Cultura* 9: Macao and the Pearl River Delta (2004), p. 38.

consumed  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the City of Gothenburgh in January last, by which Some of my Debtors lost considerably. No help but patience.<sup>339</sup>

Besides woollen cloth, wine was another staple good of the Indies trade that was handled by Cadiz merchant houses. English commanders were granted permission to ship Madeira wines freight-free, in case they were ordered to go there, whereby the directors in London simply legalised a practice that they could in any case not control.<sup>340</sup> The supercargoes and officers of the SEIC also bought a great deal of wine in private trade, for which they seem to have paid no freight.<sup>341</sup> Anglo-Swedish supercargoes like Irvine, Abercromby, and John-Adam Coppinger, who were experts on wine and familiar with the trade, ordered a more diverse range of European wines for their own consumption and potential customers in the European settlements.<sup>342</sup> Both George Ouchterlony in London and Wilkieson in Amsterdam managed the shipment of wines to Gothenburg and Cadiz for several members of the SEIC. In 1743, Irvine ordered from Wilkieson, '2 casks of your grey Peace', '4 hogheads of the best Claret you can lay your hands on in bottles & that it be as bright as a ruby; the value of 200 bottles more or less' and 'good Rhenish & like quantity of Mosell wine', worth about £1000.<sup>343</sup> At Cadiz, supercargoes and captains could buy additional supplies, especially of Sherry, a part of which at least was bought for the Company account as provisions for the journey and their stay at Canton.

A significant aspect of the trade in Cadiz is that it served both Company *and* private trade. Even though individual commissions might have been trifling in some

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<sup>339</sup> Charles Irvine (Canton) to Samuel Greenhough (Madras), 8 January 1747. Letter book 1746-47. Irvine Papers.

<sup>340</sup> H.V. Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit', p. 48.

<sup>341</sup> Paul Hallberg and Christian Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China*, p. xv.

<sup>342</sup> On the involvement of the Coppinger family in the smuggling trade of Swedish teas into Britain via Ostend, see Jan Parmentier, 'The Sweets of Commerce', pp. 72-74. See also David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>343</sup> Charles Irvine (London) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), 28 September 1743, letter book, 1743-44.

instances, the large number of transactions that could be fulfilled there against the payment of commission fees (usually 1 per cent of the sum of each transaction), in the short period of time in which the China ships lay in the harbour, made it a lucrative business for foreign merchant houses to engage in (Fig. 3.3). The sample in that figure shows one typical transaction between Irvine and James Gough & co as supplier of goods.

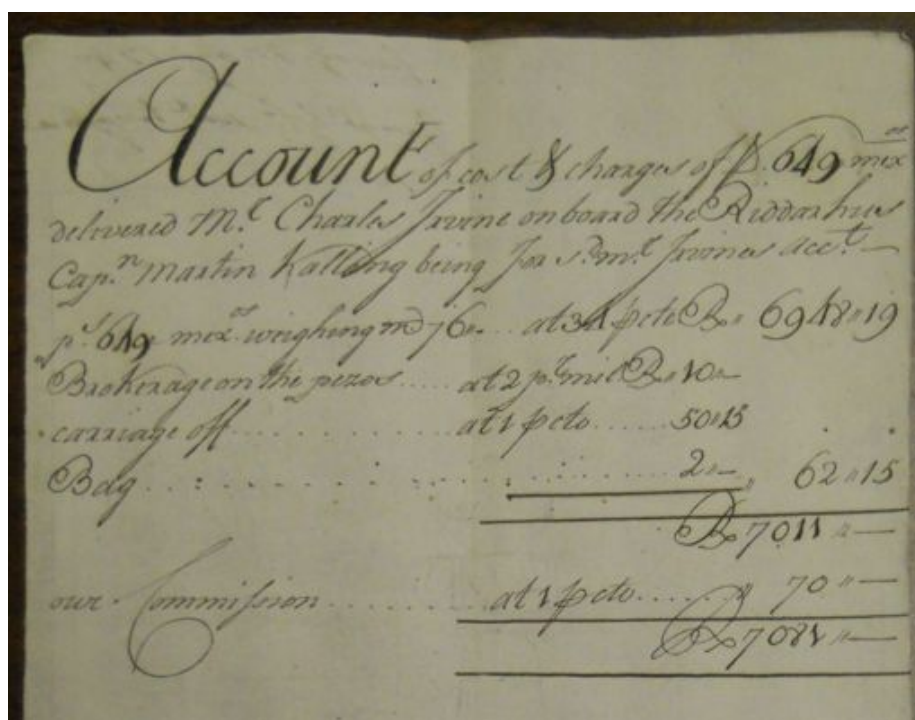


Fig. 3.3 'Account of cost & charges' payable to James Gough & Co at Cadiz, May 1741.

On behalf of the Swedish Company during the voyage of its first ship to China, Campbell and the other supercargoes arranged the entire provision of silver in Cadiz – a pattern that persisted throughout later voyages (see Table 3.2: Silver Cargoes of the Swedish East India Company between 1733 and 1765). Also the uploading of English textiles and the buying of fresh meat (and livestock such as goats and chicken), water, bread, greens, butter, brown potatoes, dried and fresh fruit, wine and sundry marine stores for the journey took place in the Spanish port

city.<sup>344</sup> Supplying a ship with upwards of a hundred men on board was certainly a costly endeavour. In 1736, James Gough & Co.'s bill for the supply of sundry necessities on board the *Stockholm* amounted to 11,161 Riales.<sup>345</sup> In addition, each of the supercargoes had their own arrangements with the merchant houses, with regard to the supply of silver coins for their *pacotilles*.

**Table 3.2: Silver Cargoes of the Swedish East India Company between 1733 and 1765**

Expedition N°	East Indiaman's name	Year	Silver cargo in Spanish currency		Value in silver dollars (daler silvermynt)
2.	<i>Drottning Ulrica Eleonora</i>	1733	—	—	51,490 d.smt.
10.	<i>Riddarhuset</i>	1740	35,200 Mexico Pesoes	—	105,036-11 2 3
11.	<i>Stockholm</i>	1740	6,550 Mexico Pesoes	—	195,437-5 1 3
12.	<i>Fredericus R. S.</i>	1740	67,150 Mexico Pesoes	52 chests	227,215-26
13.	<i>Götheborg</i>	1741	—	—	632,290-25 2 3
14.	<i>Calmar</i>	1741	—	43 ch. + 1 bag	
15.	<i>Drottning af Sverige</i>	1742	45,200 Mexico dollars	—	—
16.	<i>Götheborg</i>	1742	—	47 chests	—
17.	<i>Riddarhuset</i>	1743	40,000 Piasters	44 chests	105,805-8
18.	<i>Calmar</i>	1743	— Mexico dollars	43 chests	—
19.	<i>Fredericus R. S.</i>	1743	— Mexico dollars	57 chests	—
22.	<i>Lovisa Ulrica</i>	1746	173,838 25 32 Mex. doll.	—	634,316-16
24.	<i>Adolph Friedrich</i>	1746	210,631 Mexico dollars	(45) chests	688,024-20 2 3
25.	<i>Calmar</i>	1746	229,628 1 4 Mexicans	—	750,088-11 2 3
31.	<i>Lovisa Ulrica</i>	1749	—	32 chests	—
32.	<i>Adolph Friedrich</i>	1750	—	47 chests	—
34.	<i>Prins Carl</i>	1750	204,199 Pesos duros	—	—
36.	<i>Hoppet</i>	1752	—	41 chests	—
39.	<i>Prins Carl</i>	1753	(from London & Amsterdam)	—	—
51.	<i>Rikstens Ständer</i>	1760	(part from Gothenburg)	—	—
52.	<i>Friedrich Adolph</i>	1761	200,000 Pesos fortes	(49) chests	—
54.	<i>Stockholms Slott</i>	1762	290,000 hårda Mexico dahlér	73 chests	—
61.	<i>Stockholms Slott</i>	1765	300,000 Real de plata	75 chests	—

Source and copyright: Koninckx, *The First and Second Charters of the Swedish East India Company*, p. 196.

Christian Koninckx bravely attempted to reconstruct the development of silver supplies for the SEIC ship by ship. Unfortunately, Koninckx did not mention where this silver was bought. It is likely, however, that most of the bullion was contracted in Cadiz. For the period between 1733 and 1765, he thus collected

<sup>344</sup> Hallberg and Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China*, p.18.

<sup>345</sup> 'Account of provisions & other charges made for the Swedish East India Company Ship the three Crowns Capt. Peter von Utfall bound for China by orders & for account of Mr. Charles Irvine', March 1736, item: 36-14d, Irvine papers, shipping records.

information in eight different Swedish archives to come up with figures on the silver cargoes of twenty-three vessels, the results of which are presented in Table 3.2. If we compare his data with our private records, however, we see that they do not match. As the surviving material in the Irvine papers makes clear, Koninckx's figures are grossly incomplete. For the *Stockholm*, for instance, Koninckx only found evidence of 6,550 Mexican dollars that were put on board in 1740. Yet, our table 3.4, which details the names of the Cadiz suppliers, shows beyond doubt that the bills amounted to *at least* 26,153 Mexican dollars that year. This is also how we can best interpret Koninckx's table, not as absolute figures but rather as approximations. His figures give evidence of the silver that was definitely on board, but the actual amounts probably exceeded those by a large margin. If we believe his table, there was a dramatic increase in silver on board SEIC ships from 1746 onwards – the year the royal charter was renewed. Koninckx suggests that such increasing amounts of silver simply reflect the greater cargo space available on later voyages of the SEIC. Yet does this explain the sudden and exponential rise of silver between 1743 and 1746? Actually, no. My own hypothesis is that the method of recording private silver on board changed with the new charter, and that the figures Koninckx presented for the years between 1733 and 1743 are far off because they do not take into account the large amounts of silver that were put on board by the directors, supercargoes, passengers, etc. for their private trade and as private investments in the Company stock.

We can briefly stay with the year 1740, for which we have relatively dense data, in order to extract some figures to underline the argument above. In 1740, Colin Campbell wrote what he called 'a private memorandum' to Charles Irvine, which gave detailed instructions about Campbell's personal investment in silver and English textiles for China. Irvine routinely acted on behalf of the Campbell brothers

in their role as private investors. Campbell's instructions accompanied Irvine from Gothenburg to Cadiz and further on to China, detailing the vast amounts of silver that were put on board the three SEIC ships that were sent out to China in 1740 for the private account of one of the directors. Colin Campbell writes that:

I am to be concerned in the Stock of each Ship £ B.lo<sup>346</sup> 15000 of which Mr James Gough & Company have orders to provide in New Mexico Dollars the Amount of **15000** Sterling for the Ship *Stockholm* & as much for the *King Frederick*. As for the other £15,000 B.lo for the *Ridderhuys* I allot my share of the Perpetts expected from England & my part of what Mr Wilkieson may remit you on account of the Cloth that has been lost, and out of my part of what may Still be sent to Cadiz. [...] You are to pay for me to Suqua at Canton the Amount of the Silks & Chinaware I brought and sold here for him with according to the annexed Account make (scanty?) B.lo 4,599 paying him in Mexico Dollars at some value as you buy them at or find them to be at when you are at Cadiz. (...) In case you should be disappointed in the Perpetts from England dye and that there may be wanting Sufficient to make up £15,000 Stock on the *Ridderhuys* & to pay Suqua, I must desire you to take up for me as much as may be wanting at Bottomry.<sup>347</sup>

In other words, the expected silver cargo for a *single* trader amounted to just under 50,000 Mexico dollars in 1740 – overshadowing the Company bill for silver by a large margin. Comparing private records with those that have survived for the SEIC therefore reveals how large the share of private investments was in the

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<sup>346</sup> A bottomry loan was a type of sea loan to which we will return later in this chapter.

<sup>347</sup> FBL, Minn. Colin Campbell to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 10 February 1740, CIC/1740/31a.



Swedish case. It equally demonstrates that Cadiz merchant houses served many big clients in the China trade, and the official Company trade was only one leg of their business, since a similarly large amount of silver was also purchased by private traders.

### *Company recruitments and passenger traffic to China*

In 1731, Campbell also made some additional recruitment of personnel on the spot. For instance, the officers were ordered to look out for a decent cabin cook who would prepare the meals for the supercargoes and officers who all enjoyed dining rights at the top table. Amongst the English ships in the bay, they found an Italian cook whom they hired on the spot. There existed a strict hierarchy on board regarding the access to wine and fresh food. Dining rights at the captain's table were a matter of rank *and* negotiation like the size of the *pacotille* that officers could ship freight free. James Rose, for instance, one of Charles Irvine's nephews, was promised the position of second mate on a SEIC ship in 1743. Yet, James Rose hoped to negotiate privileges above his rank through the influence of his uncle, reporting that 'he had but a few words with [Colin Campbell] on the Street, I expect the wages & privileges of a Chief mate as also the Table which by your mediation may be made save'.<sup>348</sup> Two English carpenters joined the venture in Cadiz, replacing the ne'er-do-wells that had been hired in Stockholm by the captain, but who proved to be a disappointment. While the ship lay at Cadiz, the carpenters were busy making smaller repairs to the vessel and building from scratch the round house and cabins for

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<sup>348</sup> James Rose (Gothenburg) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 22 September 1743, CIC/1743/14a.

the supercargoes and leading officers.<sup>349</sup> Campbell also hired a midshipman, a young Scot by the name of James Maule, who had assisted Campbell in providing ‘sundry necessities for the ship, which would not have been so easy for us to do for want of the Language & Knowledge of the place’.<sup>350</sup> This young man, who had been to India once, was recommended to Campbell, and so were the two other Jacobites in exile he hired as writers.

Cadiz appears to have been a particularly convenient place for those seeking appointments on board of East India ships, and who wanted to circumvent the great competition between different candidates in the Company headquarters. In the case of the Swedish venture of 1731, we get the impression that Colin Campbell was actively creating opportunities for friends and relatives of fellow Jacobites by hiring them *en route* without prior consultation with his peers in Gothenburg. In his diary, he made no secret of privileging experienced British subjects over Swedes who had never set foot in Asia.

Yet, individual experience alone does not explain the pattern of recruitment. Instead, Campbell’s patronage was also given to a number of young and inexperienced men, who were recommended to him by the Company’s ‘friends in England’, meaning his own associates. The recruitment of relations and acquaintances by individual Company directors was a ubiquitous feature of the East Indies trade, indeed it was known in all trading Companies – big and small. As contemporaries rightly suspected, such informal ties between the managing directors and individual servants in the East might be the ‘reason that induces the company not

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<sup>349</sup> Hallberg and Koninckx (eds), *A Passage to China*, 12 April 1731, p. 22.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

to be very rigorous in examining their [servants] accompts (id est: accounts). It is even said, that the directors screen them because they share in the profits.’<sup>351</sup>

If Cadiz became a site for the recruitment of salaried members of staff, it was also a place where free merchants were looking for opportunities to go on board. There is intriguing evidence of a regular passenger traffic from Cadiz to China during the first half of the eighteenth century. We know that English EIC commanders were allowed to generate additional income by taking passengers on board who paid for a berth (or even for a cabin on their own, depending on personal circumstances) and the victuals consumed during the voyage.<sup>352</sup> The amount paid was a matter of negotiation between the commander and either the individual passenger or a third party, who had commissioned the passage. This way, a great many women, children (legitimate and illegitimate), servants, and slaves moved from one continent to the other. For instance, in December 1732, the EIC supercargo Nathaniel Torriano paid the sum of £22 to ‘Capt. Grantham for the passage of my black maid & other charges for her’. In July of the same year, Torriano received a commission fee from a Mrs Hennela Arabin Champais for having arranged the passage ‘for the little black girl [Captain Saunders] brought over [for the amount of] 5“07“06.’<sup>353</sup> At least in theory, all passengers had to get travel permission before the crossing, and a license if they intended to conduct trade in Asia. However, we know of such a large number of private entrepreneurs who operated within Asia without official recognition or Company affiliation that it is safe to say that there was a

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<sup>351</sup> Speaking of the VOC in this regard, see Geronimo de Uztariz, *The Theory and Practice of Commerce*, p. 188.

<sup>352</sup> Bowen, ‘Privilege and Profit’, p. 48.

<sup>353</sup> The National Archives, C/112/24, *Account book of Nathaniel Torriano (1716-36)*, *Compte d’argent*, 3 December 1732/33, p. 45 and 13 June 1733, p. 46.

regular and significant movement of people back and forth, which was subject to informal arrangements rather than Company decision-making.<sup>354</sup>

Specialised studies about the activities of ‘illegal traders’ in Canton, Madras and Bombay exist, yet the circumstances of their crossings from Europe to Asia and back are hardly known.<sup>355</sup> The smaller East India Companies, and in this context especially the Swedish venture, facilitated the movement of private entrepreneurs (in addition to the women and children on board the ships of whom we have evidence, too), who travelled with an independent fortune, and with plans to engage in the country trade between China and India on their own terms and risk. However, among the private entrepreneurs who boarded the Swedish ships at Cadiz between 1731 and 1746 (the end of the first charter) there were no Swedes. Rather, the small companies were used as a gateway to the East by British, Dutch and French interlopers (such as Edmund Roche) who had contacts with different Company employees here and there, but no official affiliation to any of the trading Companies in Asia themselves.<sup>356</sup> Free agents, as we have come to call them, made appropriate use of the neutral status of places like Cadiz, which were far away from the individual Company headquarters, but at the same time lay at a crossroad for pan-European trade activities with Asia.

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<sup>354</sup> For the latter half of the eighteenth century, we even have some figures. The number of (British?) non-Company residents in the Bengal presidency alone, rose from 232 heads of household in 1766, to just under 1,000 in 1800. See, P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1976), p. 23-4.

<sup>355</sup> One rather vivid description of the circumstances of illegal residency and the difficulties that the English Company faced in returning a disagreeable subject from Canton is given in Jessica Hanser, *Mr Smith Goes to China: British Private Traders and the Interlinking of the British Empire with China, 1757-1792* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2012), esp. pp. 57-64; new material on illegitimate traders is also presented by Timothy Davies, *British Private Trade Networks in the Arabian Sea, c.1680-c.1760* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2012).

<sup>356</sup> Samuel Greenhough, Quentin de la Metterie and Samuel Harrison operated out of Madras and Patrick and Robert Garden were moving between Macao and Batavia. They were all part of Irvine’s intra-Asian supply network, but none of them was ever employed by one of the Companies.

### *Cadiz as a financial centre*

Supercargoes and officers who took the great risk to travel to China did so in the hope and expectation that just a few of such trips would suffice to generate a considerable fortune for them. In order to engage in business on a grand scale, however, China traders needed to raise large sums in Europe that would not only augment their working capital in coin and kind, but which would also spread the risks onto many shoulders outside their immediate family. The capital needed for a single voyage was usually 'well beyond the means of most who served as officers', or even for those who were appointed as supercargoes.<sup>357</sup> An outward investment worth £10,000 to £20,000 was not uncommon amongst the supercargoes who traded under the Swedish flag. Only the bold commanders of the English EIC matched such grandiose investments at the time, while they found myriad ways to keep the actual value of their outward cargoes to themselves. For the second half of the eighteenth century, H. V. Bowen has done us a great service by uncovering in a number of cases the discrepancies between what was officially declared by EIC commanders as private trade (being somewhere between £2,000 and £2,500) and the *actual* costs of their purchases for voyages to China and India, which far exceeded the official valuation.<sup>358</sup> For the period of the present study, only very little research has been done on such vital questions so far.

One telling example for a captain who grossly disregarded the official regulations of the English Company is the case of Captain Francis Nelly, commander of the English East Indiamen *Hartford* and an acquaintance of Colin Campbell, Thomas Hall and Charles Pike, who died in Canton shortly before the English ship

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<sup>357</sup> Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit', p. 46.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., esp. pp. 58-63, and Table 2: 'The Private Trade of William Hambly, 1780', p. 62.

could embark on its return journey in 1731/32.<sup>359</sup> Nelly's *pacotille* was subsequently auctioned off at the autumn sales at London's India House for the benefit of his creditors and heirs.<sup>360</sup> The chance survival of an EIC auction catalogue of 1732, which was found among the Chancery papers in The National Archives at Kew, provides us with the opportunity to look at his investments more closely.<sup>361</sup>

In fact, this document is one of the very few surviving examples of an EIC sales catalogue from the eighteenth century, since a great part of the EIC's commercial records were destroyed around the mid-nineteenth century. The annotated auction catalogue includes the price estimates of the textiles that were put up for sale on behalf of Francis Nelly. Although the booklet only includes textiles and no other commodities, it still provides us with a good idea of the scale of Nelly's private trade. In total 158 lots of textiles were sold on his account, and the total of the reserve prices was in the region of £10,000.<sup>362</sup> Yet, wrought silks made up only one part of Nelly's investment. Table 3.2 shows the types and amount of China goods Nelly had registered as 'privilege trade' in 1731 with the Canton supercargoes who had noted the details in their 'diary & transaction book'.<sup>363</sup> It becomes clear that the 158 lots of textiles which appear in this list as '30 chests of silks' were complemented by a range of other goods, including 10 chests of lacquered wares and a large amount of tea and chinaware. The Company *Cash and Commerce Journals*

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<sup>359</sup> In 1730, 'the commander's homeward bound privilege had been more or less fixed at 13 tons', an assigned space that Nelly at least doubled to bring his merchandise home. For an overview regarding the changing allocation of privilege space on East Indiamen, see Earl H. Pritchard, 'Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (1680-1833)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1:1 (1757), pp. 108-37, p. 118.

<sup>360</sup> Nelly drew up his last will before heading to Canton on 26 November 1739, appointing EIC Captain Richard Pinnell, Samuel Skinner (a Canton supercargo), and his wife as executors of his will. Nelly bequeathed his house in Poplar, as well as the proceeds of his estate, his chinaware, furniture, pictures, wearing apparel etc. to his wife (Kathell?) Nelly and ordered that Government securities, shares, etc. should be employed to invest his fortune, heritable by his wife and their two sons Francis and Richard Nelly. Nelly's two sisters inherited £500 each. PROB 11/653/19 Will of Francis Nelly of Poplar.

<sup>361</sup> The National Archives, Kew, Chancery Master's Exhibits: C103/192 Moreton vs. Newnam.

<sup>362</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>363</sup> British Library, IOR/G/12/31 p. 224.

include useful data on the sales value of private goods for various individuals from 1699 through to 1784, including those of Captain Francis Nelly for 1732. Pritchard, who extracted this bit of information, writes that Nelly's charges payable to the Company alone amounted to the staggering sum of £13,436 whereas the sales value of his private trade goods lay at £29,979.<sup>364</sup>

**Table 3.3**  
**Captain Francis Nelly's Private Trade on the *Hartford* (1730/32)**

Chinaware	125 Chests and Boxes
Chinaware	1095 Bundles
Tea	58 Small Chests
Tea	118 Tubs
Silks	30 Chests
Coarse Cloth	1225 Bundles
Lacquered Ware	10 Chests
Arrack	15 Butts
Fans	2 Boxes

Source: British Library, IOR/G/12/31, p. 224.

Captain Nelly might have been prompted to make this unusually large commitment to silks following the enthusiastic assessment of the European market by the Directors of the EIC. The Directors had given instructions to their supercargoes in 1730 to buy some 15,600 pieces of wrought silk on Company account, at an estimated cost of 1,365,000 Chinese tael representing 22% of the total investment of the Company across its four China ships that year.<sup>365</sup> The English Directors wrote that:

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<sup>364</sup> Earl H. Pritchard, Appendix XII: Private trade of captains and others on various ships, 1699-1784, p. 252.

<sup>365</sup> These sums were computed on the basis of: 'A Compilation of the China Investment to be made at Canton, for the Cargos to be laden on board our ships Hartford, Macclesfield, Cesar and Harrison,

[w]e are encouraged to demand so large Quantity of Silks, by the Prices they are now at in Foreign parts, and we make no doubt of their turning to good account if you are careful to procure such as are perfectly well manufactured, agreeable to the following Directions with respect to the Colours, and at or about the usual Process (id est: prices) as specified in the Computation.<sup>366</sup>

More likely, however, is that Nelly had bought at least part of the silks on commission for a wholesale merchant or perhaps a group of shopkeepers. Upon gaining a post for a journey, supercargoes usually informed the members of their networks and asked if they could be of any service – thereby indicating that they were open to receiving orders. There was nothing unusual about the practice of accepting commissions for ready money. In fact, special commissions (as we will see in more detail in Chapter Five) formed an important part of the enterprise of all China traders as they promised safe profits in an unusually risky branch of trade. As the above example of Nelly illustrates, the composition of the private cargo that individual traders assembled for the European market could at times be pieced together by using both Company records and private notes or ledgers. It is more difficult, however, to reconstruct the elaborate financial arrangements that enabled China traders to procure a *pacotille* of the size of Francis Nelly's. In the following, we will attempt to shed light on this question by focusing on the special role of Cadiz as a market for credit in the first half of the eighteenth century.

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with Orders & Directions relating there to' 4th of December 1730, IOR/E/3/105 1730-31, p. 24. The directors anticipated a total investment in merchandise other than gold of 4,796,500 Chinese tael (or £1,598,837). 3 tael equal 1 pound sterling. See, Chris Nierstrasz, *Rivalry for Trade in Tea and Textiles*, 'Measurements'.

<sup>366</sup> 'Orders and Instructions to James Naish, Nathaniel Torriano, Philip Middleton, Abraham Wessels, Richard Moreton and Thomas Fytche, Council for China 4 Dec. 1730'. British Library, IOR/E/3/105, p. 25.



By analysing the accounts and insurance records of one conspicuously successful trader, the SEIC supercargo Charles Irvine, we can identify the key financial mechanisms in place at Cadiz – and the extent to which the financing of Europe’s private trade to China was organised transnationally. Even though most of the material presented in this chapter concerns the British-born servants of the Swedish East India Company, their practices were, however, certainly not unique. A future analysis of the nationality and residence of investors who stood behind individual supercargoes and captains in the ‘old companies’ (particularly the French and English, but also the Danish) would certainly uncover a similar patchwork of transnational financial entanglements.

Experts on the country trade have long argued that commercial collaboration and cross-company friendships between European private traders of different nationalities were the rule rather than the exception in Asia.<sup>367</sup> The reasons given differ from P. J. Marshall’s foregrounding of the pursuit of profit as the main driving force for cross-company collusions, to Andrew MacKillop’s take on the reconfiguration of regional and national identities at the colonial frontier in India, where Europeans felt more familiar with one another than back home.<sup>368</sup> Yet, the intensity of cross-Company activities in Europe, and more specifically at Cadiz, has been overlooked so far. Here, Holden Furber presents a welcome exception, for he also focused on the ‘international’ (European) composition of the shareholders of the different *kamers* of the VOC and English EIC, showing that the percentage of

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<sup>367</sup> Such transnational collaborations are best explored in relation to the private remittance trade from India to Europe. See, for instance, P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes*, esp. pp. 251-56; Holden Furber, *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1948).

<sup>368</sup> Andrew MacKillop, ‘Europeans, Britons, and Scots: Scottish Sojourning Networks and Identities in Asia, 1700-1815’, in Angela McCarthy (ed.), *A Global Clan. Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities Since the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York, 2006), pp. 19-47.

foreign shares in both trading Companies was substantial from the beginnings and did not become 'nationalised' over the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>369</sup>

There are three groups of actors that are important in this context. First, the China traders who touched at Cadiz on their way to the East and who sought to collect their treasure from one of the local merchant bankers, or who sought to contract for additional loans in town. Second, city merchants and private lenders (among whom were many women) who looked to invest their spare capital in a venture that promised interest rates of thirty to thirty seven per cent. This was the usual rate of return for money lent for the duration of a round trip to China during the first decades of the eighteenth century. Wartime rates were even higher. Third, the relatively small group of foreign merchant houses in Cadiz, which brought far-flung investors and individual Company servants together by offering a range of financial services to both parties. They processed insurance contracts, remitted money and cashed bills of exchange in return for a commission and additional charges subsumed under the term brokerage. I argue that these merchant houses were absolutely crucial in making Cadiz *the* place for cross-company money-lending/financing in Europe in this period by drawing on their personal networks to Company servants of different trading companies.

In addition, Cadiz merchant houses also helped investors who lacked any formal connection to the East India Companies to make investments in the East Indies trade. Through the mediation of Cadiz bankers, investors were enabled to lend money to supercargoes such as Charles Irvine whom they had never met in person. Cadiz thus became more than a convenient place for the uploading of victuals and contraband. It also became an important node for processing all kinds of *indirect*

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<sup>369</sup> Idem, 'East India Companies', reprinted from *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, in Paul H. Kratoska (ed.) *South East Asia. Colonial History: Imperialism before 1800* (London and New York, 2001), pp. 273; 276.

investments in the China trade. If the individual trajectories of many China traders appear as a series of border-crossings, the financial structure behind the private trade was equally diffuse and transnational in scope.

The focus on Cadiz helps to disentangle some of these more complex transactions in the early China trade and to expose a pattern of investments that was efficient, widespread, and apparently routine. In the following, we will look at different kinds of credit arrangements that answered to the needs of, on the one hand, Company servants who were desperate to increase their working capital and financial security, and distant investors on the other, who chose to insure cargoes and lent money in return for the payment of high premiums. These arrangements included bottomry (or *respondentia*) bonds and investments in the treasure of the Swedish company.

### *Bottomry loans and the cross-Company money market*

One of the most pervasive credit instruments available to China traders in the first decades of the eighteenth century was the sea loan. Depending on the language in which the contract was written, the terms *bottomry*, *respondentia*, and *à la grosse aventure* were often used interchangeably.<sup>370</sup> Contemporaries used these different terms to describe a type of contract that combined elements of maritime insurance

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<sup>370</sup> D. Diderot and J. d'Alembert (eds), *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751-65); (University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project, 2013), R. Morrissey (ed.), at <http://encyclopédie.uchicago.edu/article> 'Bomerie'. Vol. 2, (1751), p. 317 (last accessed: 11 September 2015), 'BOMERIE, s. f. terme de commerce de mer, c'est une espece de contrat, ou de prêt à la grosse aventure, assigné sur la quille du vaisseau, différent de l'assurance, en ce qu'il n'est rien dû en vertu de ce contrat, en cas de naufrage, mais seulement quand le navire arrive à bon port. On a donné ce nom à l'intérêt des sommes prêtées entre marchands sur la quille du vaisseau, ou sur les marchandises qui y sont chargées, moyennant quoi le prêteur se soumet aux risques de la mer & de la guerre; & comme la quille d'un vaisseau s'appelle bodem en Hollandois, on a nommé ce prêt bodemerie ou bodmerie, dont nous avons fait celui de bomerie.'

with a straightforward loan.<sup>371</sup> The exact parameters of the agreement were subject to individual negotiation, but the text of the contracts were sufficiently similar to suggest a great deal of routine in their usage. Thereby, an agreed sum of money was borrowed against the security of a ship's cargo or 'bottom', drawn at a stipulated interest rate (prime/premium) and repayable after an agreed amount of time – usually the duration of the voyage plus a few extra months during which time the cargo was sold. Yet, the advanced capital plus interest only had to be repaid when the ship reached its destination intact.

The insurance part of the contract stipulated (in the wording of the bottomry contract between Charles Irvine (borrower) and Claude Luis de Grand & Comp from 1736) that 'all risks of the sea, fire, enemys, men of war, or other casualties' were to be covered by the lender.<sup>372</sup> This was a standard formulation that appears in most contracts of the time. Contracts were usually handwritten by the borrower and then signed by the lender or a person who had the latter's power of attorney. Merchant bankers such as Jean Pierre Henssens in Antwerp also sent out printed templates to Cadiz, to which only the agreed sums and signatures had to be added (see fig. 3.4).

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<sup>371</sup> The secondary literature on maritime law and history distinguishes more firmly between bottomry and respondentia contracts, but contemporaries were less precise in their usage of the terms.

<sup>372</sup> Bottomry contract dated Cadiz, 22 March 1736. Irvine papers, Shipping records (36-8d).

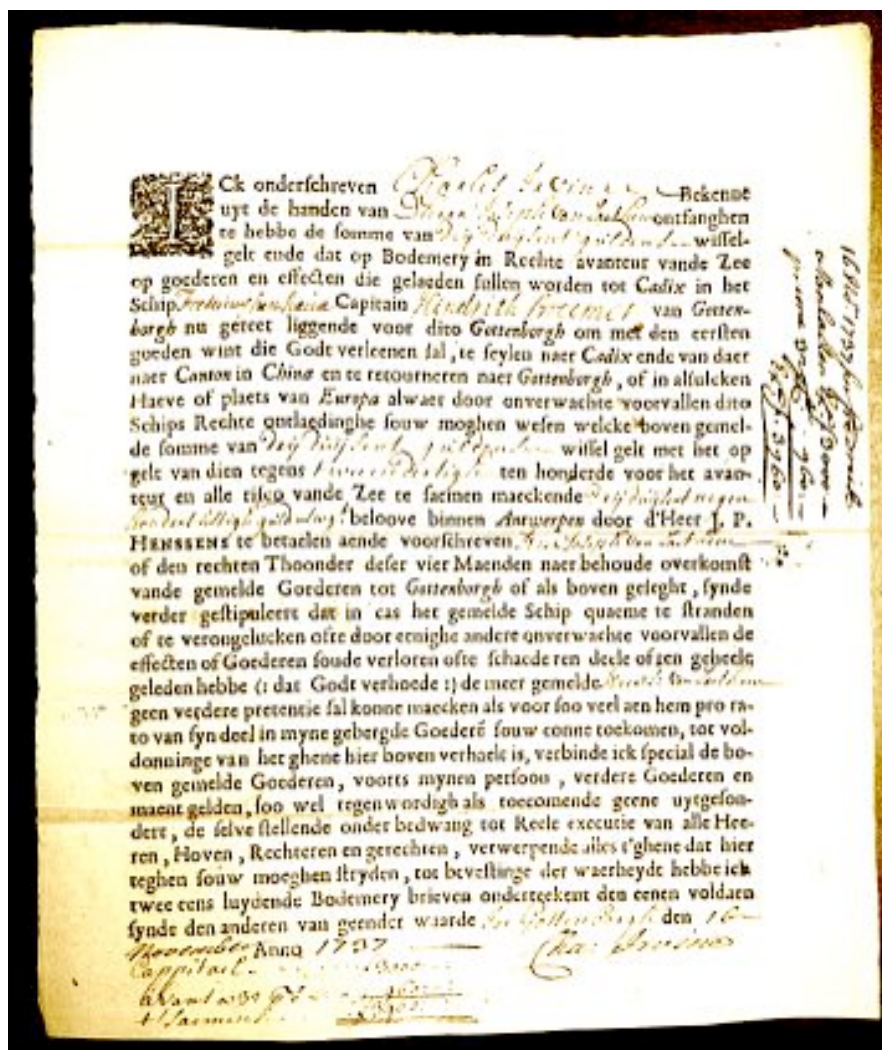


Fig. 3.4 Printed template for a bottomry contract sent out by H.P. Henssens. Filled in and signed by Charles Irvine and Joseph van Laethum, 16 November 1737. Source: FBL, Minn. Charles Irvine papers. Shipping records, box number 11. One item dated, 16 November 1743.

Even though interest rates were generally high (by today's standards at least) – and especially at times of war – sea loans were nonetheless cherished by long-distance traders. The reason is that sea loans increased their commercial flexibility and enabled them to act upon unusual opportunities in the market place despite a shortage of personal funds. John Searle, for instance, a supercargo employed in the EIC, explained his decision to take up £100 from a Mr Thomas Copper at bottomry in this light, but he also cautioned his wife (who looked after his business during his absence from London) that it would be advisable for her to pay back the borrowed sum immediately, in case she heard that Searle lost his passage or died abroad. The

reasoning behind this was that every delay in payment after the agreed lifespan of the contract would cut too much into their profits.<sup>373</sup>

Normally, China traders signed bonds for the duration of a round trip, for instance from Cadiz to Canton, including numerous stopovers along the way, and back to Gothenburg (or any other destination in Europe). These long-term loans were part of the structural financing of East India voyages – since China traders usually covered large parts of their planned investment in the East with bottomry contracts in Europe. As such, bottomry bonds provided a lucrative and reliable opportunity for lenders to invest in the China trade of particular Company employees without entertaining direct connections to the Company under whose flag the latter were sailing. The private nature of the contract also encouraged its use as a channel for cross-company investments, as we will see later on.

The foreign merchant community at Cadiz played a key role in facilitating this kind of loan business, especially for traders who stopped there on their way round the Cape of Good Hope. The reasons why Cadiz proved to be an ideal place as a money market for the China trade were threefold. First, silver was cheaper and more readily available than in the rest of Europe, thanks to the burgeoning black market in town, which absorbed about 50% of the bullion that arrived from the Americas in the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>374</sup> Second, the arrival of East India ships from different nations on their outbound and homebound journey created a natural meeting point for Company employees encouraging cross-company activities. Third, the large presence of foreign merchant houses in Cadiz linked the city effectively to the various centres of commerce in Northern and Western Europe – making the remittance of profits from bottomry loans an expedient and often

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<sup>373</sup> *The National Archives*, C107/154 Ledger of John Searle, China supercargo in 1755/56.

<sup>374</sup> Pilar Nogués-Marco, *Bullionism, Specie-Point Mechanism and Bullion Flows in the Early 18th-century Europe* (unpublished PhD thesis, Institut d'Etudes politiques de Paris, 2010), p. 35.

lucrative venture. Lucrative, because favourable exchange rates were taken into account by lenders and borrowers in deciding where the proceeds of the loans should be cashed.<sup>375</sup>

Bottomry contracts provide an unrivalled glimpse into the multilateral payment system that was in place in Europe, since contracts usually provide full details about the place the silver was supplied (and the contract signed). They also give information on those people who were involved as lenders, borrowers, brokers and witnesses, often including their place of residence. Moreover, the backs of the contracts carried information about the merchant bankers who received and remitted the proceeds after payment was due. (Fig. 3.6: Payment details of a bottomry loan, dated 28 December 1741) The movement of cash in kind or as bills of exchange is made visible by the various merchants' signatures on the back of the contract, who thus acknowledged the receipt and further remittance of the specified sum.

A good example for what was happening on a regular basis is the bottomry contract dated, Canton, 28 December 1741 between Charles Irvine & Arthur Abercromby (borrower) and Don Francisco Namptata Stamma (lender) – who was represented by the French supercargo Francis Roth in Canton. Roth deposited the sum of 1,500 Mexico dollars with Irvine and Abercromby on the *Stockholm*, which was ready to sail back to Europe. The money that was supplied in Canton on behalf of a Spanish merchant first went through the accounts of merchants in Marseille and St Malo, before it was cashed in Cadiz. The involvement of merchant houses across Europe in a single transaction of this kind is significant, as it seconds the argument made by K. N. Chaudhuri that the East India trade 'was becoming multilateral in

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<sup>375</sup> Correspondents regularly discussed the right time to remit money from Cadiz to other places in Europe 'pour profiter du Change'. See, for instance, Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Jean Cossart & fils et Bouwer (Amsterdam), 1 December 1742, FBL, Charles Irvine papers, letter book 1742-43.

character' in the period between 1660 and 1760.<sup>376</sup> The special role of Cadiz in the silver circuits, which underpinned both private and Company trade to the East, is remarkable and speaks to its close integration into pan-European and crucially cross-Company networks of finance and shipping at the time.

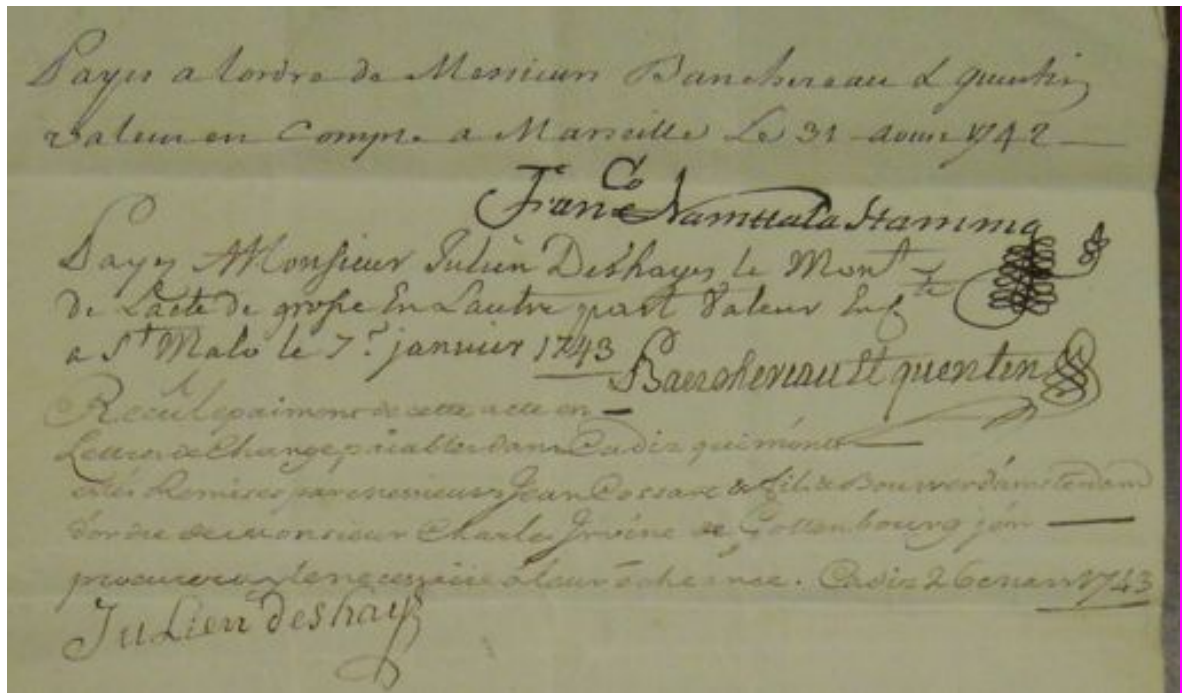


Fig. 3.5 Payment details of a bottomry loan, dated 28 December 1741. Source: Bottomry contract dated, Canton, 28 December 1741, between Charles Irvine & Arthur Abercromby and Don Francisco Namptata Stamma. FBL, Minn., Irvine Papers, Box 11, shipping records.

Cadiz was of course not the only marketplace for sea loans. Supplementary bonds could also be arranged on an *ad hoc* basis in Asia, answering to the unpredictable nature of the trade for the individuals involved. In China, bottomry loans were sometimes taken up by supercargoes, who saw the opportunity to corner the market for a specific Chinese product in Europe. In 1746, for instance, Irvine saw this happening. He spread the news among the wholesale community of Amsterdam and London that the Danish supercargoes had 'taken up from Europeans & Chinese at least 30 Thousand Tales' at bottomry in order to increase their stake in wrought

<sup>376</sup> K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia*, p. 173.



silks dramatically.<sup>377</sup> Although Irvine added in a private note to Colin Campbell that the Danish ‘being bold Traders have gone deeper than I would have venture[d] to do in their case’, he appreciated their understanding of the situation. That was because the competition for silks was greatly diminished that year, since none of the Swedish ships would return to Europe, and only two English vessels were ready to leave Canton in the season of 1746. In total, nine European ships were expected, of which only the Dutch had bought wrought silks in any significant numbers. In order to justify the payment of an interest of 40 per cent on their bottomry bonds, Irvine added, the Danish silks ‘must sell very high to bring them profit.’<sup>378</sup>

While this takes us briefly away from Cadiz, it should be noted in this context that bottomry loans were also popular in the intra-Asian trade.<sup>379</sup> In fact, numerous bonds between Company servants and Chinese merchants have been found in the Nordic Museum Archive (Stockholm) and the Danish Company archives at Copenhagen, which suggest that they were also used by supercargoes to finance trading voyages from Canton to Batavia and elsewhere in Asia.<sup>380</sup> Sometimes it was also convenient for supercargoes and captains to borrow additional sums of money in Canton from fellow Europeans, which were then insured only for the last leg of the voyage – back to Europe.

European merchants involved in the long-distance trade with Asia soon discovered that these loans were extremely useful to transfer funds in both directions. In 1724, John Harrison and Alexander Hume jointly lent £6000 at bottomry to Thomas Hall, who was going to China in the employ of the Ostend Company on

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<sup>377</sup> See letters to Cossart & Bouwer (Amsterdam), John Anderson (London) and Benjamin Hall (London), all dated 16 January 1746, letter book 1746-47.

<sup>378</sup> Charles Irvine (Canton) to Colin Campbell (Gothenburg), 16 January 1746, letter book 1746-47.

<sup>379</sup> See, for instance, the examples given by Ghulam Nadri, *Eighteenth-Century Gujarat: the Dynamics of Its Political Economy, 1750-1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 71-73.

<sup>380</sup> Some are printed in: Paul A. Van Dyke, ‘The Yan Family. Merchants of Canton 1734-1780’, *Revista de Cultura* 9: Macao and the Pearl River Delta (2004), p. 39; pp. 56-57.

board the *Marquis de Prié* – whereas Hume and Harrison were sent to India instead to establish a series of trading factories. Hume and Harrison probably used this method to remit their money safely and profitably to Asia.<sup>381</sup> Gedalia Yogev found that diamond merchants in London attended to this method from the 1750s onwards to purchase diamonds in India.<sup>382</sup> Before that time, diamond merchants had always commissioned commanders or supercargoes to sell coral, silver, and precious stones on their behalf, the proceeds of which were reinvested in Indian diamonds which were then brought back to London, incurring a great deal of commission fees and freight for the merchant.<sup>383</sup> In addition, diamond traders faced the risk that the coral would be badly received in India.<sup>384</sup>

By contrast, bottomry bonds promised to bring a handsome interest to the diamond merchant, as long as the ship reached its destination. By distributing loans to individuals who travelled on different ships, it was even possible for the diamond traders to spread the risks of their annual investment. Even for those investors who did not have similar engagements in the commodity trade to and within Asia, sea loans seemed to have offered a welcome investment strategy. Similar to the investment opportunities offered by agency houses in India in the late eighteenth century that Anthony Webster has analysed, the bottomry loan business attracted investors who did not have any formal role in the East India Companies.<sup>385</sup> The bottomry contract that was signed by Irvine and Abercromby in 1741 mentioned

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<sup>381</sup> Thomas Hall's 'Ostend Journal', 21 September 1724, p. 14, *The National Archives*, C111/95 Hall vs. Hallet.

<sup>382</sup> Gedalia Yogev, *Diamonds and Coral*, pp. 126-28.

<sup>383</sup> On EIC ships, the commander 'received 1.4 per cent' of the value of the diamonds in his charge 'for his trouble'. In addition there would have been a commission fee for the outbound journey and the 2.5 per cent that the Company charged for freight. Yogev, *Diamonds and Coral*, p. 133.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>385</sup> Anthony Webster, *The Richest East India Merchant: The Life and Business of John Palmer of Calcutta, 1767-1736* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 45f.

above is one of few surviving documents that show that Spanish notables also made indirect investments in the private trade of Company officials.

Judging by the surviving contracts in the Irvine papers, it is clear that bottomry/respondentia loans were used before 1750 to remit money from Asia to Europe. In 1741, for instance, Quentin de la Metterie, a French free merchant at Madras, ordered the Franco-Irish supercargo at Canton, Jacques Louis Friell, to sign two bottomry bonds on his behalf with members of the Swedish factory.<sup>386</sup> (Jacques Louis Friell was, like the Rothe brothers, an Irish Jacobite refugee – his full name being O’Friell – who had settled in France and enjoyed a long and successful career in the Compagnie des Indes. O’Friell was at times Company treasurer at Pondicherry and supercargo at Canton.) The loaned sum plus interest (amounting to 3,900 Mexican Dollars) were to be repaid to de la Metterie’s business partner at St Malo, four months after the ships’ arrival in Gothenburg.<sup>387</sup> The ‘Swedish’ supercargoes involved in this cross-Company transaction were Charles Irvine (a good friend of de la Metterie, with whom he regularly exchanged gifts as well as personal news), Hans Turleon, Gerard Barry and Arthur Abercromby.

De la Metterie was not the only French trader who discovered the advantages of cross-company money lending.<sup>388</sup> Francois Rothe and Duvelaer de la Barre, supercargoes of the French East India Company at Canton, equally loaned money to their Swedish colleagues at bottomry to transfer their gains to Europe yielding a net

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<sup>386</sup> Both the families Roche and Friell were ennobled for their service to French commerce. See, Patrick Clarke de Dromantin, *Les réfugiés jacobites dans la France du XVIIIe siècle: L’exode de toute une noblesse pour cause de religion* (Pessac, 2005), pp. 93f.; 443-47; 472.

<sup>387</sup> Bottomry contract dated Canton, 28 December 1741 between Charles Irvine/Arthur Abercromby (borrower) and Quentin de la Metterie in Madras (lender) – who is represented here by Jacques Louis Friell in Canton – for the sum of 2,600 Mexico Dollars (principal plus interest at 30 per cent) on the SEIC ships *Riddarhus* and *Stockholm*. Irvine shipping records.

<sup>388</sup> In 1734, ‘Mr de la Mettré’ [sic] was described by the EIC supercargoes in Macao who sought his advice on trading conditions at Amoy as ‘a Free Merchant who had lived hereabouts some years’. Cited in Morse, *Chronicles*, vol. 1, p. 231.

profit of 30 to 35 per cent.<sup>389</sup> Despite the lure of profit, another obvious advantage of this method of transfer was that such dealings went unnoticed by the Company bookkeepers in Lorient. The money was usually transferred to the foreign merchant houses of Cadiz, which handled such matters discretely. Thanks to the distinct composition of Cadiz's foreign merchant community, the city remained a key site for the unwinding of transnational dealings among the private traders active in Asia. Duvelaer de la Barre used the French merchant bankers Casaubon & Behic at Cadiz for his transactions with the Swedes. Francois Rothe, instead, appointed James Gough (a fellow Irishman and Jacobite) to receive the proceeds of his bottomry contracts with Irvine.

The central place of Cadiz for the arrangement of bottomry loans for the outbound China trade is perhaps best understood if we look at the contracts of one merchant in more detail. The secondary literature on bottomry loans, thin as it is, rarely mentions the name, nationality, and place of residence of the brokers and investors involved – details that are always given in such contracts.<sup>390</sup> This neglect by historians is particularly curious since few merchant documents of the early modern period are as standardised as bottomry bonds, and could be used so fruitfully to make plain the networked nature of long-distance trade. For the new interpretation of the European context of the China trade with which this study is concerned, bottomry loans provide invaluable evidence of the transnational flow of investments that sustained the private trade to Asia. Because the set of documents used here mostly relate to the borrowing practices of one particular trader (and surely an

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<sup>389</sup> Bottomry contract dated Canton, 29 December 1741 between Charles Irvine/Archibald Duff (borrower) and Duvelaer de la Barre (lender) for the sum of 3640 Mexico Dollars on the *Riddarhus* and *Stockholm*; ditto dated 28 December 1741 between Arthur Abercromby/Charles Irvine (borrower) and Francois Rothe (lender) for the sum of 650 Mexico Dollars.

<sup>390</sup> One notable exception is B. R. Tomlinson, 'From Campsie to Kedgerie: Scottish Enterprise, Asian Trade and the Company Raj', *Modern Asian Studies* 36:4, (2002), pp. 769–791, esp. appendix 1: 'John Lennox's bonds and respondentia for voyage of Southampton, 1781–85', pp. 189–90.

important one), they ought to represent a unique constellation of lenders and brokers.

With this word of caution about their representativeness in mind, I still claim that the places that feature prominently in our set of sources also played a crucial role for the financing of private trade more generally.

**Table 3.4: Irvine's bottomry loans (1736-41): list of lenders and brokers**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Name of Lender</b>	<b>Place of residence</b>	<b>Name of Broker</b>	<b>Place of residence</b>	<b>Amount borrowed in florins</b>	<b>Ditto in £s</b>	<b>Premium</b>
1736/37	Jean Pierre Henssens	Antwerp	Etienne and Joseph Galart & Comp.	Cadiz	2040		37
	Paul Charlé	Antwerp	Dessinhuyzen, de Vos, et Comp.	Amsterdam	6265.17		37
	Pierre Proli	Amsterdam	Nicolas Langton	Cadiz	4719.2		35
	Claude Luis Gand & Comp	Cadiz	Claude Luis Gand & Comp.	Cadiz	1298.18		
	Urbano Arnold and Cesar Sardi	Amsterdam	Nicholas Langton	Cadiz	2359.11		35
	Jean Pierre Henssens	Antwerp	Etienne and Joseph Galart & Comp.	Cadiz	8160		37
	Hermannus Scheppers	Amsterdam	Etienne and Joseph Galart & Comp.	Cadiz	8160		37
	Urbano Arnold	Amsterdam	Nicholas Langton	Cadiz	3525.11		35
	Jean Pierre Henssens	Antwerp	Joseph van Laethum	Göteborg	3000		32
	Monsieur Estelmans	Antwerp	Jean Pierre Henssens	Antwerp	6000		32
	Madame Joffronive Prüggemans	Antwerp	Jean Pierre Henssens, Urbano Arnold	Antwerp	3000		32
	Mademoiselle Joffronive van Havre	Antwerp	Jean Pierre Henssens	Antwerp	3000		32
	Franila Roisier Bois	Antwerp	Jean Pierre Henssens	Antwerp	5000		32
	Henry Geelhand de Merxem	Antwerp	Jean Pierre Henssens	Antwerp	5000		32
<b>Totals 1736/37</b>					<b>61526.77</b>		

Year	Name of Lender	Place of residence	Name of Broker	Place of residence	Amount borrowed in florins	Ditto in £s	Premium
1738/39	John Walsh	Cadiz	None	Signed at Cadiz		1000	30
	Jean Baptiste Coget	Amsterdam	Urbano Arnold	Signed at Cadiz	3000		32
	Pietro Proli	Antwerp	Urbano Arnold	Signed at Cadiz	17000		32
	Urbano Arnold	Antwerp	Nicholas Langton & Comp.	Cadiz	6000		31
<b>Totals 1738/39</b>					<b>26000</b>	<b>1000</b>	
1740/41	Giacinto Mellerie	Antwerp	J.J. Proli	Cadiz	3102		30
	Urbano Arnold	Antwerp	None	Signed at Cadiz	6000		30
	Urbano Arnold	Antwerp	None	Signed at Cadiz	1000		30
	Urbano Arnold	Antwerp	None	Signed at Cadiz	2000		30
	Urbano Arnold c/o Cesare Sardi	Amsterdam	None	Signed at Cadiz	4000		30
	Urbano Arnold	Antwerp	None	Signed at Cadiz	3000		30
	Urbano Arnold c/o Cesare Sardi	Amsterdam	None	Signed at Cadiz	10000		30
	Etienne & Joseph Galart	Cadiz	None	Signed in Cadiz	2828		30
<b>Totals 1740/41</b>					<b>31930</b>		

Source: Charles Irvine's bottomry bonds in FBL, Minn., Irvine Papers, Box 11 Shipping records.

Table 3.4 summarises the information of twenty-five bottomry contracts that were signed by Charles Irvine between 1736 and 1741. For the sake of clarity, I have picked out only those contracts in which Charles Irvine borrowed money from investors single-handedly. There are also a few contracts in which Irvine only held a small share or provided security for one of his colleagues, lending his good name in order to help traders lacking credentials to get a lower interest rate.<sup>391</sup> Thus by excluding joint bonds and those contracts in which Irvine appears as a lender himself (from 1741 onwards), we are still left with a fairly conclusive picture of the capital Irvine generated by this method during three of his six trips to Asia on behalf of the Swedish East India Company. The reason why no bottomry bonds have been preserved for his first journey to India on behalf of the SEIC in 1733 might be explained by the fact that the law suit following the capture of the *Ulrica Eleonora* at Porto Novo meant that a great deal of evidence documenting the personal losses would have been left by Irvine with those who negotiated the reconciliation between Britain and Sweden.

For Irvine's penultimate and final voyages in 1743 and 1745, his need for borrowed capital had dramatically decreased, a fact that is reflected by the absence of loans that were issued on behalf of Irvine as a borrower after 1741. Although it is, of course, possible that it is merely that those particular bonds have not been preserved, it is an unlikely scenario considering that there are quite a few bottomry bonds for

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<sup>391</sup> Bottomry contract dated Canton, 27 December 1741 between Hans Turleon (borrower) and Quentin de la Metterie (lender) – who was represented by O'Friell in Canton – for the sum of 1,300 Mexico Dollars (principal plus 30 per cent interest). Because Turleon died on the home journey, it was Irvine who paid off the bond, for which he was later reimbursed by the executors of Turleon in Gothenburg. See the rear page of the contract; Bottomry contract dated Cadiz, 22 March 1736 between Alexander Cumming/ Charles Irvine (borrower) and Robert Crew (lender) – using Thomas Main & co as brokers – for the sum of 3,730 Dutch Guilders (principal plus 26 per cent interest) which were to be repaid in Cadiz. Irvine had a share of twenty per cent in the loan and risk.



the period after 1741 which either concern the loans of Irvine's kinsmen and colleagues or were signed by Irvine himself – albeit as an investor. From the surviving correspondence we know that Irvine gave directions to his London agent in 1743 to insure his private trade goods and provisions worth £11,677 on board the *Calmar* in 'one of the Publick offices' in London, for which he seem to have raised no loan.<sup>392</sup>

The data presented in Table 3.4 thus tells us something about the development of Irvine's personal fortune in addition to the significant questions it raises about the location of lenders and brokers involved in financing the private trade to China. Irvine successfully made the transition from being a major borrower, even in 1736/37, to becoming a substantial investor in other traders' enterprises.<sup>393</sup> This gradual transition from being a borrower to becoming a lender was also typical for British private traders operating in India. Profits on lending were often higher than the traffic in goods. In 1741 alone, Irvine lent a total of 19,000 florins at bottomry to two SEIC captains, Martin Kalling and Israel Ekman, at an interest rate of 30 per cent. Within the scope of eight years, Irvine's prospects and standing as a merchant had thus been entirely transformed, despite the great disappointments that had accompanied his trading ventures as an interloper.<sup>394</sup>

When he started his career in the SEIC, his friend and mentor Colin Campbell still saw the necessity of informing Irvine about how to go about raising additional sums of money for a voyage. Campbell recommended making friends with some of the merchants in Stockholm such as Erick Nissen, 'a good man & rich & who can be of service in lending money when you go another voyage, Mr. Langeloh our

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<sup>392</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to George Ouchterlony (London, 26 November 1743, FBL, letter book 1743-44 and Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), to George Ouchterlony (London), 10 December 1743.

<sup>393</sup> See, Timothy Davies, *British Private Trade*, pp. 147-53.

<sup>394</sup> Charles Irvine (Canton) to Samuel Greenhaugh (Madras), 8 January 1747. FBL, Charles Irvine, letter book of 1746-47.

Bookkeeper can make you acquainted there.’<sup>395</sup> Compared to some of Irvine’s British colleagues, who had come to the Swedish venture via Ostend, he did not at this stage entertain personal contacts with any of the key financiers in the Southern Netherlands.<sup>396</sup>

For his first voyage with the SEIC, instead, Irvine seems to have relied mostly on resources advanced by his extended family and friends in London, including George Ouchterlony and Patrick Garden. Garden, who was operating for some time as a free merchant in Macao and Batavia, provided long-term loans at a favourable rate of interest to his cousin. The debts Irvine had incurred to make a start as a supercargo in the SEIC were only settled after ten years of trading. In 1743, after four voyages in the SEIC, Irvine wrote to his cousin in London that he ‘long[ed] for nothing so much as to know the net produce of my Labour for these as years Last past.’<sup>397</sup> Every new voyage brought with it new debts and an uncertainty about how much (if any) profit would be made after settling the bonds. The Porto Novo affair had taken many years to settle, years in which Irvine was deprived of the funds he had put into this unhappy journey to India. Ultimately, reparation was paid by the EIC, yet it was not sufficient to cover Irvine’s investment in money and goods and the considerable interest that had accrued. To settle his debts for good, Irvine asked Garden in 1743 to ‘make a particular account...of all these unlucky transactions’ and ‘how they have been payd with interest...so as to bury in oblivion if possible’ this whole affair.<sup>398</sup>

The traumatic events of the Porto Novo affair certainly caused much personal grievance. Yet, it did not affect Irvine’s creditworthiness. With the initial help of

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<sup>395</sup> Colin Campbell (aboard the *Frederick*) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 23 February 1735, CIC/1735/1a.

<sup>396</sup> At least there is no evidence of him having any direct correspondence with them before 1738.

<sup>397</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Patrick Garden (London), copy letter, dated 8 January 1743, FBL, Minn., CIC/1743/2a.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

Cadiz merchant bankers such as Galart & Comp. and James Gough, Irvine's name was soon being promoted, thereby attracting considerable sums and an advance of trust from a long list of independent investors from the 'merchant republics' of Antwerp and Amsterdam from 1736 onwards.<sup>399</sup> It is significant in this context that Irvine's early bottomry bonds were always signed by one of the Company directors in Gothenburg, Colin or Hugh Campbell. They confirmed the considerable privileges of Irvine as supercargo. They also reveal Irvine's entitlement to a certain percentage of the profits that were made by the Company on the ships he was serving in (called commission), which provided additional security to his lenders. With the status of 'first supercargo' came the SEIC privilege to receive a commission of 1.5 to 2.5 per cent 'of the net proceeds of the public sale of the return cargo'.<sup>400</sup> Such commissions were thus exceedingly high in the SEIC.<sup>401</sup> For his voyage on the *Riddarhus* in 1740-42, Charles Irvine's share of the Company's net profits lay at 1.5 per cent. This amounted to the staggering sum of 33,750 Mexican dollars – a handsome monetary recognition of his service to the company. The second supercargo on this voyage, Arthur Abercromby still received a commission of 13,500 Mexican dollars, a sum that did not even include the proceeds of his *pacotille* or the interest generated by his investment in the stock.<sup>402</sup>

Considering the expected and considerable income of China supercargoes, bottomry loans were thus a relatively safe investment for independent lenders. Once Irvine's reputation as a 'good debtor' was established, he was no longer in need for

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<sup>399</sup> I borrow this term from Mary Lindemann who sought to integrate places like Hamburg, Antwerp and Amsterdam in the same framework. Idem., *Merchant Republics* (Cambridge, 2014).

<sup>400</sup> Koninckx, *The First and Second Charters*, p. 341.

<sup>401</sup> Here, some comparison can be offered for the EIC, since a certain 'Mr Jonathan Scarth Dec<sup>d</sup> Fourth Supracargo' received '£3000 and Mr John Forbes Fifth [...] £2000 on account of their commission and interest in the cargos of the ships *Stafford* and *York* arrived from China in 1745. IOR/B/69 (labelled 62) 1746 – 1748, pp. 130f.

<sup>402</sup> Koninckx, *The First and Second Charters*, p. 342. The archival source on which he based these figures are in LAG. ÖST. A 152 55 ff. 19 & 178.

the Company to stand security for his private loans. Irvine's connections and eminent status in the China trade were such that in 1751, when the SEIC was embarrassed for funds in Canton and in no condition to purchase a Europe cargo for their return voyage, it was Irvine who acted as a broker collecting subscriptions for a massive bottomry loan of £215,000 which secured the continuity of the Swedish trade in Canton that year.<sup>403</sup>

The Swedish Company, however, did act as security for other traders as well. In fact, bottomry loans were taken up by a great number of Company servants in the SEIC (and during the Company's second charter). Christian Koninckx found a document in the Swedish Maritime Museum (*Sjöhistoriska Museet*) that lists the bottomry loans taken up by Company servants on the *Finland* and *Stockholms Slot*, which sailed to China in 1763.<sup>404</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, the list included loans taken up by 'quartermasters, ships' carpenters, ships' smiths and even seamen and "boys", all of whom had borrowed sums of money to conduct private trade and pledged their expected salaries of the journey in case they were unable to repay the loan. For those who had little chance to raise money outside their immediate families, their official role as Company servants helped them to participate in the professional market for credit, as their employment offered at least some security to professional lenders. From this archival discovery, we learn that Cadiz remained a key market for credit also after the period of this study. Koninckx mentions just a few cases, such as a loan of 1,250 Dutch guilders issued by James and Edward Gough to Jacob Poies, who was third mate on the Swedish China ship *Stockholm Slott* in 1764/65 for the risk of Madame Hélène Gough Eustace.<sup>405</sup> However, Koninckx leaves no doubt that the

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<sup>403</sup> Koninckx, *The First and Second Charters*, p. 296.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., pp. 294f. This contract was found in the Göteborg *Landsarkivet* ÖST. A 152 51-2 fait à Cadiz, 2 April 1764.

practice was common enough to persuade the SEIC to make it an obligation for their servants to give notice of their private loans after 1746.<sup>406</sup>

Intriguingly, there is also evidence in the *Court books* that the EIC in London meddled in the market for sea loans themselves, by providing money at bottomry to the commanders of their ships. It is unclear how widespread this was as a practice. In 1734, a request of Captain Charles Raymond was granted to be paid in advance ‘£2,000 on Bottomree on the same terms as other captains’. Only a few years earlier, the Committee of Treasury had been willing to furnish ‘Capt Robert Mead [with] £3,000 of the Company on Bottomree on the usual conditions’.<sup>407</sup> Further entries have been found that confirm that the EIC granted loans at least until 1747.<sup>408</sup> Cleverly, by doing so the EIC could claim a substantial share of the profits generated by the private trade of commanders, a source of income that was independent of the freight and other charges they extracted from Company employees in any case. There is no evidence that supercargoes also borrowed money from the EIC, so perhaps this was an arrangement between the Company directors in London and the commanders alone, who were not formally their servants as they chartered the ships from a close-knit group of ship’s husbands.

The SEIC, it seems, did not have designated funds to act as a lender. In fact, until 1753, the Company did not even have a permanent capital stock, but rather raised money and paid out the dividends for each voyage separately. In practical terms, this meant that ‘the Company was dissolved again and again after the redistribution of capital plus dividends from an expedition, then re-established for the

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> East India Company, *Court Book*. IOR/B/62 (labelled 55) 5 April 1732 – 2 April 1734, 21 February 1732, p. 270; Ibid., IOR/B/63 (labelled 56) 3 April 1734 – 31 March 1736, 22 January 1734, p. 245.

<sup>408</sup> See also the petition of Elizabeth Steward, widow of Captain Gabriel Steward, who upon his death still owed money to the Company, which was given out as a respondentia loan. IOR/B/69 (labelled 62) 1746 – 1748, 11 March 1747, p. 243.

next venture’, although many of the investors ‘allowed their shares to be carried over to the next expedition’, according to Koninckx.<sup>409</sup> In contrast to the EIC, which used its fixed capital to act as a lender when they signed bottomry/respondentia contracts with individual commanders, the SEIC instead encouraged their servants (which included the directors *themselves* as we have seen) to borrow money from third-party investors for their purchases in China, which were then sold through the Company auctions. Privately arranged bottomry loans thus contributed indirectly to the Company’s economic performance. By outsourcing significant parts of its money-raising activities to the servants, the SEIC’s trade waxed and waned with the private money invested in it year by year. Traditionally, private trade is thought of as an annex to the Company trade, which expanded and contracted according to Company tonnage and the restrictions laid upon it. For the smaller interloping companies, however, the opposite is true. As Hanna Hodacs has rightly insisted, ‘[t]he history of the smaller Scandinavian companies almost ceases to make sense without taking into account private trade’.<sup>410</sup>

*Entangled cities of the China trade: Cadiz, Antwerp and Amsterdam*

We will now return to the scrutiny of Irvine’s bottomry loans in Table 3.4, by focusing on the question of who was involved in the transactions. The names of the lenders and brokers as well as their place of residence should help us to see more clearly the close links between the interloping communities of Europe that were

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>410</sup> Berg et al., ‘Private Trade and Monopoly Structures’, p. 137.

involved in the China trade, and the special place of Cadiz within the transnational system of payments. Table 3.4 clearly shows that the bulk of loans, which Charles Irvine took up during the 1736/37, was arranged by the foreign merchant houses in Cadiz – as brokers – on behalf of Irish, Dutch, but mostly of Flemish investors. It is the interplay between Cadiz and places like Antwerp and Amsterdam that is particularly relevant here.

Some, but not all, of Irvine's distant investors entertained more intimate connections with the smaller trading companies as shareholders, directors or independent financiers – including Urbano Arnold, Jean-Pierre Henssens, Paul Charlé and Pierre Proli. Pierre Proli and Paul Charlé at Antwerp, who appear prominently in this list of Irvine's investors, both played a formative role in the Ostend Company. Pierre Proli was one of the original directors of the Ostend Company. The Proli family, originally from the duchy of Milan, remained active in the East Indies trade as financiers and directors over the entire course of the eighteenth century. Count Charles Proli, the son of Pierre (or Pietro) Proli, went spectacularly bankrupt in 1785 after an unsuccessful venture in the East Indies trade with the Triest Company, which he had founded together with the notorious projector William Bolts. Charles committed suicide that same year. The bankruptcy of the Pietro Proli banking house caused a financial earthquake of unprecedented scale in Antwerp and affected creditors all over Europe.<sup>411</sup> Earlier in the eighteenth century, the Proli family had been also important backers of the Swedish East India Company, investing in both private and official trade. The widow of Pierre Proli, for instance, contributed 75,841 silver dollars to the Company stock of the *Drottning of Sverige* (1742-44). The Company profits of this particular voyage were higher than

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<sup>411</sup> See, Mary Lindemann, *Merchant Republics*, pp. 287-89.

usual, and lay at 105 %.<sup>412</sup> De Proli received 155,474 silver dollars for her initial investment, a handsome profit.<sup>413</sup>

The Antwerp merchant, Jean-Pierre Henssens, too, had already been involved in the Ostend venture as an investor. He lent rather large sums to Swedish Company servants at bottomry, and was later, in the 1750s, of vital importance for the financial backing of the Prussian East India Company – the last interloping venture in the ‘Ostend cycle’, as Dermigny has put it. In 1736/37, he lent 13,000 florins to Charles Irvine at an interest rate of 37 per cent, while acting as a broker for several other investors in Antwerp, including three women investors: Madame Joffronive Prüggemans, Mademoiselle Joffronive van Havre and Franila Roisier Bois. He thereby raised the additional sum of 22,000 florins in cash to be used by Charles Irvine for his private investments in Canton.

Another man, who is perhaps less known in the context of the interloping ventures of the Flemish *haute bourgeoisie*, is Urbano Arnold. Arnold hailed from Antwerp and became a key partner for British subjects in the SEIC, amongst whom we find Irvine, Captain Kitchin and Colin Campbell. As a merchant-banker, Arnold was not only involved in the private bottomry business, but was also chiefly concerned with financing the SEIC’s silver cargoes, sometimes in partnership with the Proli family. The bottomry bonds that have survived in the Irvine records make it clear that Arnold operated as a broker as well as a lender. Between 1737 and 1740, Arnold seems to have stayed in Cadiz for some time to look after his business there. Irvine must have met him in person on his way to China in 1737 and once again in 1740, when he borrowed in total 32,000 florins from Arnold. The latter also arranged

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., p. 299.



loans for another 20,000 florins to be paid to Irvine for the account of Pierre Proli and Jean Baptiste Coget, merchants of Antwerp and Amsterdam respectively.

Urbano Arnold was a merchant with an extremely wide portfolio. In addition to his involvement in the silver and loan business, he operated also as a wholesale merchant for Chinese and colonial goods.<sup>414</sup> The financial connection between Arnold and Irvine soon developed into a more complex agency relationship. On 24 December 1743, for instance, Irvine sent him an invoice for sixty-six cases of fine teas that had been landed at Ostend, which Irvine hoped Arnold would sell at Antwerp on behalf of Colin Campbell and himself.<sup>415</sup> Parts of the cargo were intended to be smuggled to Scotland by Irvine's nephew James Rose. Rose, who was helped by Irvine to a position as an officer in the SEIC, was regularly accompanying shipments of contraband tea to the north of Scotland. Rose undertook this dangerous work of selling contraband teas for a number of Scottish-Swedish interlopers from 1743 onwards.<sup>416</sup> On 22 April 1743, he reported that he had arrived at Montrose 'after a very good passage and ... sold the goods I carried and shall dispose of what came by Mr. Elphinstone'.<sup>417</sup> Arnold was expected to sell the remaining teas by public auction or straight from his warehouse when the market permitted it, a service for which he charged a commission.<sup>418</sup>

Arnold's name also features among the buyers at the half-yearly auctions of the SEIC at Gothenburg. The Low Countries certainly absorbed a share of his purchases there, but tea was also sold on to smugglers, who frequented the sea route

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<sup>414</sup> In 1750, Urbano Arnold and Comp. was established in Antwerp. By 1757, the firm dealt on a large scale in refined sugar and the firm also run five sugar refineries in Fiume (today's Rijeka in Croatia), employing about 1000 workers there. See the document 'Urbano Arnoldt und Compagnie' in German at the auction house *Historisches Wertpapier Haus AG* lot nr. 126, dated Vienna 20 April 1757. See, [http://www.hwph.de/actions-obligations/losnr-auktnr-pa22-126\\_fr.html](http://www.hwph.de/actions-obligations/losnr-auktnr-pa22-126_fr.html) (last accessed, 6 December 2015).

<sup>415</sup> Copy letter, Charles Irvine to Urbano Arnold, 24 December 1743. Irvine letter book, 1742-43.

<sup>416</sup> From the surviving correspondence we know that Rose sold teas for Colin Campbell, Captain George Kitching, Arthur Abercromby, Archibald Duff, George Elphinstone as well as Charles Irvine.

<sup>417</sup> James Rose (Aberdeen) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 22 April 1743, FBL, Minn., CIC/1743/6a.

<sup>418</sup> Irvine to Arnold, 24 December 1743, Irvine letter book, 1742-43.

between Ostend and the Channel Islands or little patrolled parts of the English coast. Arnold's chief contact in Cadiz was Nicholas Langton, who had been born in Cadiz to an Irishman from Kilkenny and his wife, a member of another old Irish family in Cadiz, Francisca Carew. The case of Arnold presents a good example of how interconnected the worlds of high finance and wholesaling were in the China trade. Arnold's varied activities also reveal the close entanglements between different sites of interloping activities *within* Europe. Private trade geographies were made up not by one, but rather by many corridors and gateways. Yet, when seen from some distance, the pattern for the SEIC (and its British free agents) shows distinct clusters in Cadiz, Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Gothenburg. For the French traders, other places must be added to the list, but Cadiz remained a crucial site for all China traders at the time. Cadiz was *the* place where different interloping networks met and partly overlapped.

## Chapter IV

### From China with love: the special commission trade

Merchant mariners were an integral part of eighteenth-century commercial life. Commanders, supercargoes and other high-ranking members of the maritime elite operated in port cities and financial centres around the globe and effectively linked land-based production centres and local trading networks to far-flung markets. In this context, they can be regarded as the expansionist element of the Eurasian trade.<sup>419</sup> Despite the crucial and manifold roles that merchant mariners played in the long-distance trade to China, we still know very little about their business practices and commercial networks in Europe. Indeed, the question to what extent Canton supercargoes and commanders were part of a mercantile community of wholesalers and retailers specialising in the making of markets for Chinese export wares in Europe has not yet been answered – or even properly asked. The evidence presented in the present (and the interrelated following) chapter will show that British commanders and supercargoes – and this crucially includes British interlopers in continental companies – functioned as essential linchpins in pan-European ordering networks for Chinese wares. The same actors also took an active part in the making and shaping of markets across Europe. As such, British commanders and supercargoes are regarded as European merchants in their own right and not simply as importers or representatives of any of the East India Companies.

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<sup>419</sup> On captains in the Asian country trade see Emily Erikson and Peter Bearman, 'Malfeasance and the Foundations for Global Trade: the Structure of English Trade in the East Indies, 1601-1833', *American Journal of Sociology*, 112:1 (2006), pp. 195-230; B. R. Tomlinson, 'From Capsie to Kedgerie: Scottish Enterprise, Asian Trade and the Company Raj', *Modern Asian Studies*, 36:4 (2002), pp. 769-791.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, transnational informal networks decisively shaped all financial aspects of the China trade, from the organization and insuring of provisions, to the money-lending and remittance of profits. We will now see that the private trade in Chinese consumer goods, too, rarely ran alongside national-political boundaries. Depending on their personal networks and social aspirations, merchant mariners managed to built-up a client base in Britain and on the continent, which encompassed members of the aristocracy, but also wholesalers and specialised dealers in Chinese goods, in addition to the members of their extended business and kin networks. Canton traders were necessarily engaged in a dialogue with all these groups, in order to be able to respond quickly to changes in demand.

To explore a central dimension of the trading activities of Canton supercargoes and commanders, this chapter will focus on one specific aspect of their private trade, namely the commission business. It is the aim of this and the following chapter to uncover the links between the arrival of Eastern goods in European ports and their subsequent distribution to markets across Europe, with a special focus on the roles that British merchant mariners played therein. The existing literature has remained largely silent about the mechanisms in place that surrounded the private commission trade in Chinese export wares. By focusing on the entrepreneurial activities of Canton traders, I contend that we will thus be able to challenge the supposed marginality of private commissions, and private trade more generally, in our understanding of the East India trade.

There has been some recent interest among Company historians in the role played by commanders and supercargoes in developing niche markets in China and India, but not in Europe. Roger Smith, for instance, considered the private trade of English supercargoes and commanders in clocks and mechanical toys for the Chinese

market, and has also discussed in some detail the ways in which mariners teamed up with London-based clockmakers and merchants to create suitable goods for export to Canton.<sup>420</sup> H. V. Bowen, instead, has explored the entrepreneurial activities of commanders of English East Indiamen in the export of European goods to India in the decades after the Battle of Plassey.<sup>421</sup> A typical case is that of Captain Hambly, commander of the *Lord North* in 1780 who was supplying the small but demanding community of Anglo-Indians stationed in Benkulen with familiar things from home. Among the large variety of goods that made up Hambly's outward cargo were a chariot, mathematical instruments, stationary, books and playing cards but also window glass and cider.<sup>422</sup> In making his commercial choices, Hambly could rely on first hand experience to know what kind of products were most in demand among the English in Asia and thus likely to yield a good profit.

Parts of his cargo certainly consisted of private commissions. As Margot Finn has shown, Company servants were surprisingly outspoken about their material desires in their letters to their families back in Europe. For transporting commissions from A to B, a mediator was needed who had privileged access to cargo space on board of an East India ship. Commanders and supercargoes, who were sailing back and forth between Europe and the different European settlements, claimed the largest share of private tonnage and were thus commonly put in charge of countless commissions for individual Company servants and their extended families.<sup>423</sup> Indeed, a significant part of Euro-Asian private trade in both directions was used for special commissions, yet it is impossible to quantify this claim systematically, as many commissions were never registered as such. Private commissions were used for the

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<sup>420</sup> Roger Smith, 'The Sing-Song Trade: Exporting Clocks to China in the Eighteenth Century', *Antiquarian Horology*, 30 (2008), pp. 629–658.

<sup>421</sup> H. V. Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit'.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>423</sup> Margot C. Finn, 'Colonial Gifts: Family Politics and the Exchange of Goods in British India, c. 1780–1820', *Modern Asian Studies*, 40:1 (2006), pp. 203–31, esp. p. 224.

‘emotionally-charged exchange’ of presents or favours between kin, neighbours and friends.<sup>424</sup> However, they could also be purely market-oriented. Yet crucially, commissions always involved some kind of personal dialogue between the commissioner and the importer who was sometimes represented by an intermediary. Special commissions thus differed from the speculative purchases China traders made, as their future owner was confirmed from the outset of the venture.

In order to better understand the import, circulation and selling of Chinese consumer goods in Britain and Europe (and the role played by merchant mariners therein), we have to understand the very processes through which such orders could be placed. This chapter is, therefore, dedicated to the definition and explanation of different types of commissions of the private trade in Chinese consumer goods during the first half of the eighteenth century. For the sake of clarity, it seems useful to first set up a typology that reflects the different people involved in both small-scale and large-scale commissions. The chapter will then move on to explore the ways in which commanders and supercargoes managed their commission business. The aim here is to sketch a portrait of merchant mariners as distributors and consumers of Chinese export wares.

Then, in the connected and final Chapter V, I will focus exclusively on large-scale commissions. In that chapter, I will make the claim that European wholesale merchants exercised direct influence on imports from China by setting up regular private commissions with supercargoes and commanders of different East India Companies. In order to prove this point, I will discuss in detail the crucial relationship between wholesale dealers in places like London, Amsterdam, Cadiz and Stockholm on the one hand, and a group of British mariners who were working under the aegis of different East India Companies on the other. By analysing large-

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

scale orders for Chinese silks and tea, we can gain a clear picture of the profits and uncertainties that were involved in the commission trade. Chapter V will then move on to discuss the role that speculation and the prediction of markets for Chinese wares played for merchants and mariners in the period under consideration. Here, the art of speculating about futures markets is analysed as a form of ongoing ‘dialogue’ and, at the same time, as a potential source of conflict between wholesale merchants and company servants: merchants and mariners were mutually dependent upon each others’ contacts, timely information and experience in order to profit from intra-European trade in Chinese products. Trust played a major role in this relationship, but so did competition and a sense of authority in matters of taste.

### *Merchants and the commission business*

Before we turn to the typology of commissions, it seems useful to first address the more basic question what eighteenth-century merchants meant by the term ‘commission business’, and what kind of rules and issues of trust were attached to the ordering of goods over vast distances. To provide an adequate answer, it is best to consult contemporary sources. The growth of international shipping in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fostered the production of a wide range of didactic literature dedicated to the world of commerce. Merchant manuals such as *The Compleat Tradesman* or *The Accurate Accomptant* provided advice and concrete instructions on different systems of accounting, commercial letter writing, and legal

conventions.<sup>425</sup> Dictionaries and glossaries of commercial terms became essential tools for merchants active in the intra-European and the international trade. The publication of this wide range of *ars mercatoria* in Europe allows us to recover some of the forgotten meanings of commercial terms used in the eighteenth century. A more intimate acquaintance with these works will prove vital for understanding the now forgotten complexities of private business in the Euro-Asian trade in this period. In the 1757 edition of Malachy Postlethwayt 's *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*, the merchant aptly describes the ways in which (domestic) trade was conducted through, and greatly facilitated by, the use of 'factors', 'agents' and 'supercargoes' abroad.<sup>426</sup> In the eighteenth century, a London-based merchant did not have to travel far in order to obtain goods from Amsterdam, Cadiz or Madras. Connected through a dense epistolary network, merchants were able to place orders with their peers in most parts of the European trading world. Alternatively, they gave orders to a master of a ship or supercargo who went out to procure the goods on their behalf. Such overseas agents charged a commission fee for their services (sometimes called 'factorage' or 'brokerage') that varied depending on the 'custom of the place'.<sup>427</sup> For instance, 'at Jamaica, Barbadoes, Virginia, and most of the Western parts of the World, the commission runs at 8 per cent' at the time Postlethwayt gathered his information. By contrast, commission fees within Europe lay only

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<sup>425</sup> See Natasha Glaisyer's discussion of *ars mercatoria* in her book, *The Culture of Commerce in England, 1660-1720* (Woodbridge, 2006), esp. chapter III, 'The compleat comptinghouse': manuals for merchants, pp. 100-142.

<sup>426</sup> Malachy Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce, translated from the French of the celebrated Monsieur Savary ... with large additions and improvements, incorporated throughout the whole work; which more particularly accommodate the same to the trade and navigation of these kingdoms, and the laws, customs, and usages, to which all traders are subject*, 2nd edition, vol. 1 of 2 (London, 1757). On Postlethwayt, see Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York, 2007), esp. Chapter Two.

<sup>427</sup> In her careful analysis of the correspondence between Philadelphia merchants, Toby Ditz has shown that agents often tried to negotiate better terms (that is, higher commission fees) with their principals. The latter, however, often argued against such attempts that disregard 'the custom of the place'. See, Toby L. Ditz, 'Formative ventures: eighteenth-century commercial letters and the articulation of experience', in Rebecca Earle (ed.) *Epistolary Selves: letters and letter-writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 59-78.



between 1 ½ and 2 ½ per cent of the sales price of a cargo. And as the records of Charles Irvine suggest, in the 1730s and 1740s, there existed a comparatively high percentage of up to 10 per cent for commissions from China.<sup>428</sup> Having these rates in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that it was ‘the universal custom of merchants of the highest credit, throughout Europe, to act mutually in the capacity of factors for each other: the business so executed is called commission business.’<sup>429</sup>

According to Postlethwayt, a *supercargo* is a merchant employed by other merchants (or indeed companies) to go back and forth on ‘a voyage over sea, and dispose of their goods to the best advantage’.<sup>430</sup> By contrast, ‘A factor is a merchant’s agent, [permanently] residing abroad.’<sup>431</sup> The physical mobility of an agent thus determines whether he is regarded as a factor or a supercargo. At the same time, both groups shared a number of similarities. Like factors, supercargoes charged commission fees. What is more, their services did not significantly differ from their land-based counterparts. Some commercial functions, however, could only be fulfilled by resident merchants, which depended on legal regulations and on the time that a supercargo or commander could actually spend in a city. Resident merchants (factors) were often crucial with regard to the supply of goods from local producers, insurance matters, and the storage of goods.<sup>432</sup>

The precise role of supercargoes, factors and other overseas agents was, according to our eighteenth-century source, usually ‘constituted by letter of attorney’. This was a written arrangement, stating that a merchant may be empowered to act on behalf of somebody else, thus taking full responsibility (in a

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<sup>428</sup> FBL, Minn., Charles Irvine Correspondence. Box 12, Accounts and Invoices, 1730-74.

<sup>429</sup> Malachy Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*, p. 761.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 760.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>432</sup> See, for instance, Xavier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and their Overseas Networks* (Woodbridge, 2010), esp. chapter two on: ‘Basque Ship Captains and Seamen’, p. 62.

legal sense) to obtain or dispose of goods at best possible terms.<sup>433</sup> The usage of ‘agents’ in overseas trade goes back a long way. Its institutional foundations have received a great deal of renewed interest following Avner Greif’s recent study of the commercial practices and legal underpinnings of agency relations within the Jewish trading community in the Muslim Mediterranean.<sup>434</sup> The role reversal of merchants we have just described, however, is strangely absent from Greif’s account of medieval overseas trade. Curiously enough, business relations look much more hierarchical in Greif’s study than in much of the literature about early modern commerce. In his interpretation, overseas agents usually remained agents or became partners – not principals – by *contributing* capital to a specific transaction. These are also the two basic options in an agency relationship covered by medieval *commenda* contracts, according to the analysis of John H. Pryor:

1. A sedentary investor, generally known as a *commendator* delivered capital into the possession of a travelling associate, generally known as a *tractator*. 2. The *tractator* might or might not add capital of his own to that of the *commendator*. If he did not, the contract is referred to by modern historians as a unilateral *commenda* since the capital was supplied by one party only. If he did invest some additional capital, it was usually a half of that contributed by the *commendator* and modern historians refer to the contract as a bilateral *commenda* since both parties supplied capital.<sup>435</sup>

There are two possible conclusions to be drawn from this: either, Greif

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<sup>433</sup> Malachy Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*, p. 760.

<sup>434</sup> Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge, 2006). The most critical response to Greif’s body of work on Jewish traders, whom he sees to have formed a well-defined collective averse to using business contacts outside the ‘Magribi’ community was published by Jeremy Edwards and Sheilagh Ogilvie, ‘Contract enforcement, institutions, and social capital: the Maghribi traders reappraised’ *Economic History Review*: 65:2 (2012), pp. 421-444.

<sup>435</sup> John H. Pryor, ‘The Origins of the Commenda Contract’, *Speculum*, 52:1 (1977), pp. 5-37, p. 6.

greatly simplified the commercial reality by disregarding the fact that the travelling agent of a sedentary merchant could also become the former's principal in another transaction, making this a truly reciprocal relationship. Or, the characteristics of the agency system have significantly changed in the early modern period, a period in which agents became also principals as soon as they had the necessary working capital to do so. It is worth repeating that even the most prosperous overseas traders fulfilled basic and sometimes trifling (economically speaking) agency services for members of their respective networks, such as the temporary storage of goods, finding underwriters for the insurance of a cargo, the forwarding of letters, and the supply of books and personal apparel (such as stockings) for distant correspondents.

Fig. 4.1 Example of a current account (1735) between Charles Irvine and Alexander Cumming, Canton traders in the SEIC. FBL, Minn, Accounts and Invoices, 1730-74.

The fact that every merchant was potentially the agent of somebody else greatly complicates the endeavour to analyse the private trade in Chinese consumer goods during the first half of the eighteenth century. For instance, private trade registers of the EIC have to be treated with special caution since they rarely mention the name of the consignee to whom the private trade goods of a supercargo or officer actually belonged. Surviving personal records of China traders, however, clearly reflect not only their personal ventures, but also those conducted in the name of one or sometimes a whole syndicate of investors. In order to track commissions from the initial order to the actual delivery, one has to follow the individual merchant's art of bookkeeping (see fig. 4.1). As Postlethwayt acutely remarked in his dictionary on the rubric of 'supercargoes', 'this class of traders, of established reputation, have current, as well as commission accounts, constantly between them, and draw on, and remit to, and send commissions to each other, only by the intercourse of letters, which, among men of honour and worth, are as obligatory and authoritative, as all the bonds and ties of law.'<sup>436</sup>

In order to explain the different ways in which private commissions could be organised in the China trade, and also for determining what kind of actors were actually involved in the process, a typology that reflects both small-scale and large-scale commissions is needed.

### *Typologies of commissions in the China trade*

The literature on the decorative arts in Europe and most curatorial studies of Chinese export wares such as porcelain, wrought silks, watercolour paintings, and lacquer ware acknowledge the decisive role that private trade played in providing a gateway

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid., p. 761.

through which fine quality wares, souvenirs, and customized pieces could enter markets in Europe. The most substantial and sophisticated literature on private trade goods exists for Chinese export porcelain, and a small number of these studies focus exclusively on commissioned wares – the so-called *chine de commande*.<sup>437</sup> The object-based research of art historians has led to the identification of a chronology of styles and techniques in pottery and painting that were in use during the period of this study. Due to these works on particularly rich collections of export porcelain in Europe and the United States, it is sometimes possible to link some of the objects in museums and private collections to the ‘social life’ of these objects as commission goods, gifts and memorabilia.<sup>438</sup> Merchants connected to the East Indies trade were often collectors themselves, and their personal acquisitions feature prominently in museums across Europe.<sup>439</sup> When merchants acted as collectors, it is evidently difficult to distinguish between the designation of certain items as ‘stock’, and others as strictly ‘personal’ items. The tracing of an object’s ‘biography’ is therefore not unproblematic, but possible in some cases. Generally, merchants seemed to have sold personal things when needed, hoarded some of them in order to increase their value or to build up their own personal reputation, and also gifted judiciously for the sake of fostering patronage ties.

The study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century shipwrecks of East Indiamen has provided much evidence that can help us to better distinguish the

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<sup>437</sup> See, for instance, David S. Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader: The Private Market in Chinese Export Porcelain illustrated from the Hodroff Collection* (London, 1994); Rose Kerr and Luisa E. Mengoni, *Chinese Export Ceramics* (London, 2011); Christiaan J.A. Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade, 1729-1794* (Leiden, 1982); Geoffrey A. Godden, *Oriental Export Market Porcelain and its influence on European Wares* (London, 1979).

<sup>438</sup> Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>439</sup> See, for instance, the exquisite pieces of Japanese lacquer and Chinese porcelain that Jan Albert Sichterman (1692-1764), the former Governor of Bengal for the VOC, commissioned in China also via Charles Irvine and other friends engaged in the Canton trade. The Groninger Museum has a large proportion of Sichterman’s armorial porcelain. According Christiaan J. A. Jörg, Sichterman needed two ships to bring back his possessions to Europe; see idem, ‘Jan Albert Sichterman. A Groninger Nabob and Art-collector’, *Itinerario*, 9 (1985), pp. 178-195.

official company trade in porcelain from that carried out on private accounts. According to the surviving sources, the English East India Company ordered predominantly coarse and middling qualities of blue & white and polychrome tableware. By contrast, merchant seamen in the company's service obtained a highly diverse range of fine quality pieces for individual consumers, merchants, patrons and friends in Europe.<sup>440</sup> The evidence for a single trading year can serve to illustrate this fact. For instance, in 1774, as the art historian David S. Howard has shown, 'only two specified design patterns [were] ordered by the Hon. East India Company for over a thousand pieces of enamelled ware, and four specified designs among an even larger quantity of blue & white.' By contrast, it is clear that 'apart from armorial ware – which averaged about fifty annually – there were probably hundreds of other individual pieces or designs chosen from Canton shops by servants of the East India Company.'<sup>441</sup>

Chinese and Japanese lacquerware in the form of panels, folding screens, cabinets, tea tables and other costly items of household furniture seem to have been purchased exclusively on private account.<sup>442</sup> This was equally true for other fancy goods such as mother-of-pearl snuffboxes, fans, wallpaper, painted glass and *blanc de chine* figures.<sup>443</sup> The choice of the private trader is, by contrast, less obvious in the trade in Chinese silks, cotton fabrics (nankeens) and tea. Crucially, supercargoes and captains often purchased a wide range of qualities of these commodities, including

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<sup>440</sup> Geoffrey Godden, *Oriental Export Market Porcelain and its Influence on European Wares* (London, 1979), p. 15.

<sup>441</sup> David S. Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader: the Private Market in Chinese Export Porcelain illustrated from the Hodroff Collection* (London, 1994), p. 11.

<sup>442</sup> In the first decade of the eighteenth century, there is some evidence pointing to the short-term Company trade in lacquered fans, but this enterprise seems to have been given up quickly. The Court of Directors reminded their outgoing supercargoes that 'It is found by experience that they (Chinese artisans) Lacker or Japann better at Chusan than at Canton therefore be very curious in getting all the Lacquer'd or Japann'd fans don well and by the best Workmen'. Quoted from, IOR/E/3/96 ff. 289-291, v 'List of Goods to be provided at Chusan by the Supra Cargo's of the Rochester. Instructions to Supra Cargos are dated 6 Jan 1710 (1709)'.

<sup>443</sup> See Rose Kerr and John Ayers, *Blanc de Chine: Porcelain from Dehua* (London, 2002).

cheap *Bohea* (a strongly fermented black leaf tea of inferior quality). It is thus one of my central findings that the general assumption that private traders only provided for the top-end of the market, whereas the Companies targeted mass consumers of cheap but fashionable wares, does not always hold true. As a consequence, a straightforward distinction between private trade and Company goods is not always possible, or even particularly useful, to make. The fact that private traders imported cheaper wares next to extravagant luxuries can give us a clear hint to what extent the nature of private commissions could vary. What I thus seek to show in this chapter is that the business ventures of captains and supercargoes ranged from small-scale commissions (sometimes only a single item) to wholesale enterprises and speculative purchases on a single voyage – a kaleidoscope of activities that calls for a structured analysis with regard to the different types of buyers involved.

I propose to differentiate between *four* different types of commissions executed through the initiative of merchant mariners engaged in the China trade. In doing so, it is crucial to account for change over time, since access to Chinese wares greatly increased in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, not least due to the increased shipping of the different chartered companies.<sup>444</sup> Around 1720, which marks the beginning of the period of my study, special commissions were mainly undertaken by, and for, East India Company personnel, associated ship owners, shareholders and their families. These small-scale orders form the first group of my analysis. An important characteristic of such commissions was that they were part and parcel of the dense patronage networks that evolved around the East India trade. Gifts, favours and mutual obligations were partly played out through the distribution of precious goods from China.

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<sup>444</sup> In the 1750's the English East India Company alone send about 20 ships to the East in one sailing season. In the late eighteenth-century this number more than doubled to 50 ships per year. See, H. V. Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit', pp. 43f.

In order to analyse this branch of small-scale commissions, we can rely on somewhat patchy but in many cases conclusive evidence in the form of mercantile correspondence, account books, probate inventories, wills, sales catalogues and private trade registers. In addition to lists and other written documents, there exists particularly rich evidence of material culture. This is partly to be explained by the fact that customized goods are often easier to relate to a particular buyer. What is more, since many of these objects were displayed rather than used on a daily basis, there are myriad pieces that have survived in museums and private collections up to the present day.

The second type of private commission became more frequent from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, and encompassed orders from the upper middle-classes, the lower gentry and aristocratic circles. Special commissions from China became fashionable among these elite groups of society partly through the influence of East India Company servants. The class of merchant mariners who plied the seas from the West Indies to China and Sri Lanka were part of a new mercantile elite that became ever more powerful in the urban centres of commerce, in politics and, lastly, in the polite circles of Europe. The fact that these newly rich ‘seamen’ gradually mixed and mingled with the lower gentry (and sometimes even with the high aristocracy, as well as artists and artisans) and had tangible effects on patterns of consumption in Britain, and also on the continent.<sup>445</sup>

To acknowledge these shifting epicentres for the commission business from the urban environment (with connections to the East India trade) towards the provinces and country houses, we need a different category. In the middle decades of

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<sup>445</sup> The many surviving pieces of Chinese armorial porcelain in Britain and on the continent best reveal the personal connections between EIC servants and the landed elite in Europe. For examples, see Rose Kerr and Luisa E. Mengoni, *Chinese Export Ceramics* (London, 2011), esp. pp. 39-57.



the eighteenth century, private commissions became desirable and accessible to a much wider range of consumers, namely also for those without personal ties to company supercargoes and commanders. This shift towards a more anonymous 'market for special commissions' is neatly summarised by an announcement made in 1763 in the *London Chronicle, or Universal Evening Post*. Here we can read:

On New Year's day was launch[ed] from Messrs Wells's deck in Deptford, a fine ship for the service of the Hon. East India Company called the *British King* to be commanded by Captain Peter Pigou. After the launch the Captain gave at the Crown and Anchor in the Strand an elegant entertainment and a ball to a brilliant assembly of near two hundred ladies and gentlemen of distinction.<sup>446</sup>

These kind of large entertainments in a famous London coffeehouse were perfect venues for attracting private commissions from 'ladies and gentlemen of distinction' that would otherwise have to buy ready-made wares from the shops that specialised in merchandise from China. The ball mentioned above took place shortly after Peter Pigou (1732-1783) had become appointed master of this new ship. Pigou himself came from a very wealthy Company family, with two of his brother being active supercargoes in China and his father Frederick Pigou (1711-1792) serving as a powerful director of the East India Company in London. Before Pigou senior got appointed to the Court of Directors, a position that he held almost uninterrupted between 1758 and 1777, Frederick Pigou had been chief supercargo on several voyages to China himself. His personal instructions on how to distinguish the

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<sup>446</sup> *The London chronicle, or, Universal evening post*, vol. 13. From Thursday, 30 December, to Saturday, 1 January 1763. Italics, my emphasis.

different qualities of Chinese silks were presented to many supercargoes that went out to Canton under his patronage, and reflect an intimate knowledge of the demands for China goods in Europe, an asset that could be passed down the family line to a new generation of China traders, such as to Peter Pigou.<sup>447</sup> As the episode with the London ball clearly demonstrates, the latter was well acquainted with the established – but also with newly emerging – conventions and ‘tricks’ of China supercargoes who were eager to attract ever-greater circles of buyers for special commission goods. However, Pigou, might have taken on too many commissions, for he was dismissed in 1765, when the Court of Directors discovered that on his return journey from China, ‘Capt. Pigou of the British King’ and three of his officers had disposed ‘of large quantities of their private trade at Lisbon, where the said ship touched to have the main mast repaired’.<sup>448</sup>

We can perceive a further widening of the market for special commissions when corporations, secret societies and companies discovered the potential of having their group identity not only put on paper and rhetorically expressed in vows, but rather materialised in the form of, for instance, elegant drinking vessels from China. The third type of commissions thus came from institutions rather than from individuals. Since this development falls in a slightly later period than looked at in the present study, mainly towards the late eighteenth century, I will only mention this phenomenon rather than discuss it in any detail. Because of the great number of pieces ordered by such institutions at once, some fine examples survive in museums today. David S. Howard writes that ‘[b]y the end of the century supercargoes, captains and officers of the English East India Company alone had purchased special

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<sup>447</sup> Frederick Pigou was also the co-owner of gunpowder mills at Dartford, Kent. See E. D. Cook, ‘Andrews, Miles Peter (1742–1814)’, rev. Rebecca Mills, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/528>, accessed 25 June 2012].

<sup>448</sup> C. S. Srinivasachari (ed.), *Indian Records Series (Fort William India House Correspondence)*, vol. IV, 1764-1766. Published for the National Archives of India (Delhi, 1962), p. 105.

commissions in Canton’ for roughly ‘thirty livery companies, at least twenty societies and two regiments.’ In addition, via these maritime merchants, also a number of ‘mugs, punchbowls or plates for two inns, a breeches maker, a post office, a hat-maker, a boat-builder, a “man-midwife” and “George Harding, China Warehouse, No. 189 Minories” in London’ were bought in China and shipped to their European consumers.<sup>449</sup>

The last of the four different types of private commissions outlined here is probably the one that has been the most inconspicuous of all of them in contemporary scholarship. Nevertheless, as I would argue, it was in many respects the most influential with regard to market developments. From the early eighteenth century onwards, wholesalers and retailers (such as mercers) sought to get hold of the best wares from China, commodities in which they dealt in bulk in Europe. Soon, they understood that access to the *pacotille* (that is the ‘privilege’ cargo of private traders on board of East Indiamen) of merchant mariners was the best way to get new products, new patterns and better qualities. The analysis of large-scale commissions that were organised in partnership between wholesalers and mariners deserves, as this work makes clear, much more attention by scholars of the East India trade, as much as it calls for a closer examination from historians of retail and consumption.

However, before we get to the functioning of large-scale commissions, we need first to dwell on the first type of commission introduced above. The reason is that it provides us with the right background knowledge necessary to branch out to larger market phenomena.

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<sup>449</sup> David S. Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader*, p. 26.

The first type of commission was ordered by staff and families associated with the East India Companies. As Howard finds in his important study of private trade in porcelain, '[i]n England a comparatively small circle of families, related by blood or background, succeeded both in directing what became the largest company in the world and at the same time in acquiring much of the porcelain that survives today.'<sup>450</sup> In fact, the first armorial wares in England (imported *ca.* 1710) were all commissioned by affluent EIC servants, managing owners of East Indiamen, shareholders, directors, captains and supercargoes.<sup>451</sup> In France, the situation is comparable. In the first two decades of the eighteenth century, most 'orders came from the court, senior civil servants and managerial staff of the Compagnie des Indes.'<sup>452</sup> However, soon 'families of standing in the provinces, especially Brittany' started to order family china, too. According to Louis Mézin, their 'proximity to Lorient', where the company auctions took place, 'and connections with families associated with the Compagnie des Indes fostered the growth of the trade in private export china.'<sup>453</sup>

Dutch merchants might well have started the fashion for armorial wares as items of regular trade, since most of the very early examples were made for Dutch families. Here, the overall trend is similar to what happened in Britain and France: we are faced with an extraordinary high proportion of commissions from VOC servants and financiers.<sup>454</sup> Clearly, armorial wares helped this new mercantile elite in

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>451</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>452</sup> Louis Mézin, Jill Corner, Eileen Meillon, Nadia Hammadi, David M. Stewart, *Cargoes from China: porcelain from the Compagnie des Indes in the Musée de Lorient* (Île Sainte-Hélène, 2004), chapter on 'Family china', pp. 153-181.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>454</sup> See Christiaan J. A. Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (The Hague, 1982).

northwestern Europe to render visible their access to powerful ordering networks of what was in the beginning of the eighteenth century still a fairly exclusive luxury trade. In his excellent study on the influences of Chinese porcelain on South-East Asia, Japan, the Middle East and Europe, Robert Finlay described the slow beginning of the porcelain trade through Portuguese and Spanish merchants, who initially supplied only the few royal dignitaries on the continent with porcelain. This royal monopoly on Asian luxuries was only broken with the entrance of the Dutch into seaborne trade in Asia.<sup>455</sup> Large dinner sets comprised up to 400 pieces of customized porcelain. These sets included sweetmeat dishes fruit baskets, tureens, punchbowls and knife handles, which were an impressive statement of wealth and family identity. Armorial wares seemed to have offered the rare combination of being modern consumer goods while clearly playing with notions of exclusivity, family legacy and heritage. Such material attributes must have been particularly popular among families that had only obtained recently their fortunes.

In order to commission a set of 'family china', painted wallpapers, or matching silks for curtains and bed hangings, it was vital to approach supercargoes and commanders of East Indiamen directly. This is mainly due to the fact that private commissions often involved the exchange of written instructions, miniature models, patterns of fabric, portraits, drawings or sketches of the design. A coloured drawing (or engraved book plate) featuring the armorial bearings, crest and Latin motto of the family, would be provided as a model for the production of customized porcelain.<sup>456</sup> The fact that these coloured drawings were indeed the main, and often sole, basis for the production of armorial ware by Chinese manufacturers is reflected in the following telling anecdote. David S. Howard documents the unfortunate commission

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<sup>455</sup> See idem, *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (Berkeley, 2010), esp. pp. 254-261.

<sup>456</sup> See Geoffrey A. Godden, *Oriental Export Market Porcelain*, p. 16.

of the London merchant Calverley Bewicke, who ordered a porcelain service with his armorials around 1740. His commission was executed with great precision. By mistake, however, his written instructions were reproduced as well. Thus, ‘[e]ach piece of the service was duly painted in China with “Our coats of arms” in untidy script written beneath the armorials.’<sup>457</sup> Such mistakes might have happened with some regularity, and reflect the sometimes unforeseen complications of such large-distance and trans-cultural commission businesses that directly linked self-conscious European consumers to anonymous porcelain painters in Canton. Given their evident uselessness as respectable objects of display and self-fashioning, it is not surprising that very few of such curious pieces survive in museums and collections.



Fig. 4.2 Chinese lacquered hall chair with the Child coat of arms, at Osterley Park. Furniture made for Sir Francis Child, the Younger in the 1720s. ©National Trust

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

Despite this particular failure, the instance of the merchant Bewicke's ordering of his family service clearly shows how this trans-cultural commission business of Chinese export wares actually worked for the European consumer. The exchange of drawings and models suggests that buyers were directly involved in the process that led to the production of customized goods in China. In this context, small-scale commissions reflect the *active* pursuit of consumers and merchant seamen for novelties in an otherwise increasingly standardized trade.<sup>458</sup> The value of analysing special commissions therefore lies partly in the possibility of uncovering the numerous, but forgotten, acts of innovation in eighteenth-century consumption.

An act of innovation was, for instance, the way in which design motifs travelled from one material to another for achieving a pleasing unity in interior decoration.<sup>459</sup> In fact, drawings of armorial bearings, flower bouquets and allegorical figures were sometimes given not only to one, but to different artisans and shopkeepers in order to get an assembly of customised goods of the same style in one go. Crucially, coats of arms were not only placed on porcelain. Sir Francis Child the Younger, an appointed director of the English East India Company between 1721 to 1732, furnished his mansion in Osterley Park, nearby Richmond, with an impressive range of lacquered furniture.<sup>460</sup> These included several cabinets (featuring myriad little lockers for storage), a richly decorated writing desk, trunks and clothing chests, an enormous lacquer screen and 12 identical hall chairs – all worked with his coats

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<sup>458</sup> For a theoretical appreciation of the importance of novelty in consumer behaviour, see Marina Bianchi, 'Taste for Novelty and Novel Tastes: the Role of Human Agency in Consumption' in *idem.* (ed.), *The Active Consumer: Novelty and Surprise in Consumer Choice* (London, 1998), pp. 64-88.

<sup>459</sup> See, for instance, Mimi Hellman's contribution 'The Joy of Sets: The Uses of Seriality in the French Interior' in the essay collection of Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg (eds), *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century. What Furniture can tell us about the European and American Past* (London, 2006), pp. 129-154.

<sup>460</sup> Eveline Cruickshanks, 'Sir Francis Child' (c.1684-1740), banker and goldsmith, was an elected director of the EIC in 1718-19, 1721-5, 1726-30, 1731-5. See, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/child-francis-1684-1740> (last accessed: 23 June 2012).

of arms (Fig. 4.2).<sup>461</sup> By analysing the potential private traders who had furnished these items to Sir Francis Child, we can gain a better understanding of the role that patronage and power relations played for the commission trade. Certainly, Child's special orders were delivered shortly after their arrival in England and were never brought to a public auction. This privileged access to lacquer of exceptionally high quality and quantity was reserved for those far up in the Company hierarchy.<sup>462</sup>

Between the early 1720s and 1732, hence the period in which all of Sir Francis Child's items were purchased, there were only very few company servants who imported lacquerware in such a great quantity. A certain Captain Robert Hudson appears to be the most likely candidate for such a large and prestigious commission. He was experienced in the Canton trade and could thus provide the necessary contacts to *hong* merchants and shopkeepers. Moreover, he was part of a well-connected family of ship-owners and company servants. Good relations within the company's Court of Directors were essential for the career of any merchant seamen, since all appointments to East Indiamen, and all allocations to voyages, had to be ultimately approved by the Court.<sup>463</sup> Hudson seemed to have been indeed well positioned within these powerful circles, since in 1726-28, he was able to secure the position of the first officer for his brother Charles on the *Prince Augustus* (his brother would later become a commander himself).<sup>464</sup> The directors of the Company usually acted as patrons for certain supercargoes and ships' officers. In return, they were able to use these personal ties to commission objects that were clearly different

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<sup>461</sup> For a full case study regarding Osterley Park's Asian legacy, see Yuthika Sharma and Pauline Davies, "A jaghire without a crime" East India Company and the Indian Ocean Material World at Osterley 1700-1800', *East India company at Home* (July 2013), pp. 1-42, <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/files/2013/02/Osterley-Park-PDF-Final-19.08.14.pdf>

<sup>462</sup> Carolyn Sargentson, in her study of the *merchants merciers* of Paris, notes the difficulty that French mercers often had in the period considered here for finding lacquer of exceptional quality on the continent. See *idem, Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchants Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London, 1996), p. 63f.

<sup>463</sup> See H. V. Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit', p. 45.

<sup>464</sup> IOR/G/12/26, p. 39 *British Library*, London. On board of the same ship was Robert Hudson's colleague Richard Harrison, first supercargo on the *Macclesfield* and his brother Woodward.



in both quality and originality from pieces that would be sold at the EIC auctions (Fig. 4.3).<sup>465</sup>



Fig. 4.3 Model in ivory of a Chinese pleasure barge, mid-eighteenth-century, at Osterley Park.  
©National Trust.

The commercial ledgers of the English Company contain details about the private trade of high-ranking crewmembers on many voyages to China. Through these sources, we learn that Robert Hudson went out in 1724-25 to navigate the *Macclesfield* to Canton. According to the EIC records, he brought back the conspicuously large cargo of ‘2 Japan Escrutores, 2 Japan Screens’, 1 box with ‘Dressing Boxes’ (nécessaires), 10 cases ‘lacquered trunks’, 2 cases ‘lacquered chests’, and an additional 2 cases with ‘lacquered screens’.<sup>466</sup> This amount of lacquerware on account of a single merchant is not only unusual in comparison to

<sup>465</sup> There is no evidence that the English East India Company ever sold furniture at their public sales, although other private trade goods such as textiles, tea, spices, fans and sugar candy were consistently sold this way. See, for instance, ‘Richard Moreton’s claim in the East India Warehouse’ (c.1732) listing all his private trade goods on four different ships awaiting the public auction, quoted in the Chancery Master’s Records, C103/192 Moreton vs Newman, The National Archives, Kew.

<sup>466</sup> British Library, IOR/G/12/25, p. 9.

most of his peers, who often brought home a single box of lacquered ware. Rather, if we look at the private cargo of Hudson's next voyage as commander of the *Macclesfield* in 1727-29, we see that this time he contented himself with the investment of a single box of Japanware and two lacquered writing desks. This might reasonably be seen as an indicator that he had taken on a large commission for lacquered furniture on his previous journey and that he not usually specialised in speculative purchases in fine furniture.<sup>467</sup>

However, without the matching correspondence or delivery receipts that mention Child as the actual owner of Hudson's goods, it is evidently difficult to argue that he was. The commission might well have spread over a few colleagues who went out in the same season. Richard Nicholson, a supercargo who also took passage on the *Macclesfield* in 1724-26 – and thus shared every single meal with Robert Hudson over two periods of travel each lasting nine months – might well have taken some of the commissioned goods of Sir Francis Child on his account. As these examples can demonstrate, personal acquaintances and the individual position of a servant within the Company's hierarchy were vital for the successful realisation of the high value commission trade.

Although commanders and supercargoes of the China trade all belonged to the European maritime elite and were bound together by a strong group identity often strengthened by family ties, key differences in upbringing, education, and social comportment still have to be taken into account when we look at them as commission agents. Not every commander was likely to be trusted with a commission of the calibre of Sir Francis Child's lacquered furniture. On the contrary, contemporaries often commented on those representatives of the maritime elite whom nobody would have liked to have at their own ball or tea party – and hence

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<sup>467</sup> See IOR/G/12/27, p. 123.

would probably not have trusted for choosing the right silk fabrics, vases or furniture for their elegant homes. Some merchant mariners were indeed ill-mannered, others dangerously short-tempered, and quite a few were known drunkards. Eliza Fay, who wrote an important travel journal later in the century, rightly commented what many passengers must have thought who witnessed the rough manners exhibited by some company commanders. Captain John Lewis, a EIC commander in the 1770s and 1780s, ‘appears to be an excellent seaman, but the roughest being surely that nature ever formed, in language and manners. The oaths he swears by are most horrible and he prides himself in inventing new ones’.<sup>468</sup> Colin Campbell confirmed that ‘many Captains of ships ... huff & strut & bounce & curse & swear upon Decks’, so as to increase their authority upon the rest of the crew.<sup>469</sup>

Similarly, Robert John Harrison, a supercargo of the EIC in the 1750s, bitterly complained about the ill treatment he had received by one Captain Jodrell, who had him kicked out from the round house during the evening meal upon hearing that Harrison said that Jodrell as an Englishmen would ‘not understand English’.<sup>470</sup> As Harrison recalled, the Captain ‘immediately flying into a passion, Swearing, and the same time laying hold of me by one arm, and pulling me from the Table, [said] that I should ... never set foot into that Room again’.<sup>471</sup> The claustrophobic situation on board of East Indiamen and the confinement of traders in Canton to a small strip of land formed the social context in which both life-long friendships and intense hatred among individual merchant mariners arose. Alcohol and gambling played no small roles in determining who got along with whom.

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<sup>468</sup> Eliza Fay, *Original Letters from India* (1779-1815) (Calcutta, 1817; reprint, London, 1925). Cited in H. V. Bowen, ‘Privilege and Profit’, p. 44.

<sup>469</sup> Hallberg and Koninckx, *A Passage to China*, p. 67 (80).

<sup>470</sup> British Library, IOR R/10/3, Diary and Consultation Books, letter by Robert John Harrison to Mess.rs Palmer and Kinnersley, 18 October 1755.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

Friendships between commanders, supercargoes and lower ranking officers cut across national boundaries and the established vertical hierarchies on board. Yet, social rank and individual comportment were key elements for the formation of friendships and had, in the end, also considerable impact on who was participating in joint transactions and who was not. For Charles Irvine, sobriety, piety and honour were key markers of an individual's character. Like him, there were many supercargoes and some commanders too who behaved like Gentlemen and who made no secret out of their disgust of the rough tone and atmosphere on board East India ships. In Europe, they mingled in circles of learned men and the landed elite and as such they were more likely to receive prestigious orders for armorial porcelain, custom-made wallpaper and other personalised items of display. Thus, the social connections and their place within polite society in Europe of supercargoes and navigating officers played a paramount role for their success in the special commission business, which was by definition a very personal matter.

Unfortunately, very few China traders kept separate records for private commissions which would allow us to clearly distinguish between the goods brought by them for sale at the regular auctions, objects that were brought home as a trial, as presents, for their own consumption, or indeed as special commissions. Instead, private orders were noted randomly in small note books, on loose sheets of paper, on the back and bottom of contracts or delivery receipts and in commercial ledgers. Of course, commissions are also mentioned in the surviving correspondence of China traders. Their scattered and unsystematic recording makes it exceedingly difficult to establish patterns for individual traders and to show who received rather more commissions from shopkeepers or manufacturers, and who was put in charge of royal commissions or orders from the aristocracy.

*Southern with Texian*  
 C<sup>7</sup> 141 to 155, 15 Chests weighing 60 lbs each at 65 Cattle per Chest  
 Cattle 975. at 15 Cattle Tare  
 Tare 225.  
 Net 750 Cattle at 29 to 30 Paul. To 217.5 - - - - 217.5 - - -  
 More 80 lbs from Hongqua - - - - 3021.5 0 0 - -  
 391.8 - - -  
 3413.3 0 0 0  
 1 League Arrack, perhaps put in other small C<sup>7</sup>s  
 1 Tea Sett directed Palpetski, 'tis my Lady bespoke it.  
 1 Box China Ink Gov<sup>t</sup>. Amarcrona  
 1 Box H.C. cont. 7 Canisters Southern 24 Gov<sup>t</sup>. M. H. Conyble  
 1 Box D. cont. 24 Mustess fine Teas for My Lady C. Conyble  
 1 Box D.B. cont. Sundrys by M<sup>r</sup>. Dubois & Co. Barro

Fig. 4.4 Special commissions taken on by Charles Irvine in 1745 on board the *Calmar*; source: FBL, Minn., Charles Irvine shipping documents, 1742-45, 'Invoice of Pacotil[le] on the Calmar', dated January 1745.

Fig. 4.4 is symptomatic for the ways in which private commission were noted down in merchant's private records. The package often carried the initials of its owner, indicating that these goods were already taken. Intriguingly, the extract from the invoice of Irvine's *pacotille* is the only piece of evidence that there is about Irvine's own love life. From Canton, he brought '1 Tea Sett directed Palpetski' with the remark added 'tis my Lady [who] bespoke it'.<sup>472</sup> Strangely enough, none of Irvine's letters ever mentioned this woman companion. The China ink for governor Ancarcrona, by contrast, was a routine commission, since the governor asked for ink every time Irvine went out to China. And so was the tea purchased on behalf of the two SEIC directors Hugh and Colin Campbell.

Private commissions form a sub-category of private trade goods, which were kept distinct from speculative purchases, which were intended to be sold at public auction. Arjun Appadurai has pointed to the fact that luxury goods, which were

<sup>472</sup> FBL, Minn., Charles Irvine shipping documents, 1742-45, 'Invoice of Pacotil[le] on the Calmar', dated January 1745.

usually reserved to a small group of elite consumers, could be made accessible to the non-elite strata of society via meandering routes.<sup>473</sup> Marshall Sahlins, on whose work Appadurai's assessment is based, thought primarily of theft, plunder in wartime, piracy, smuggling, and other – often violent – intrusions into the trading cycle. Yet, the 'pragmatics of trade' (how Sahlins called such diversions) could also be of a more mundane nature.<sup>474</sup> Indeed, private commissions were often diverted from 'the preordained path' that most China trade goods took, simply by categorizing them differently. By means of a semantic shift, Canton traders managed to provide members of their personal networks with items that would have otherwise been reserved to the very rich. The terms private 'commission', 'present' or 'gift', were often used interchangeably to denote the emotional value of a specific imported object. Supercargoes and other private traders were indeed careful to stress the personal nature of parts of their cargo in order to signal that these goods were not intended to be sold to the highest bidder. Thus, rhetorically, special commissions were taken out of the cadre of mere commodities. Instead, they were declared to be tokens of friendship for their families, patrons and friends. Special commissions became a loophole for the distribution of customized goods, but also a gateway to secure more ordinary goods of especially fine quality for specific individuals, such as the '24 Musters fine Tea for Mistress C. Campbell'. The special privilege of Canton traders lay not only in being able to access goods in China directly, but by directing them to specific consumers 'from China with love'.

In many instances, however, it is very difficult to tell which private trade goods were commissions, and which others were not. In a journal kept between 1724 and 1726, Thomas Hall noted down some particulars about the owners and prices of

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<sup>473</sup> Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, editor's introduction, p. 26.

<sup>474</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

the goods that he had privately imported from China. Individuals of the Belgian nobility had asked him to purchase smaller items. The Duchess of d'Arenberg (an Italian princess by birth) spent over £300 for eleven pieces of Chinese silk fabrics, and the Marquis of Campo, a Spanish nobleman of Flemish descent, purchased wrought silks and the most expensive type of black tea for his Spanish wife. The difference in size between the purchases of individual consumers such as Christian F. de Steiner, who bought a snuffbox, sword case and some embroidered Satin, and large-scale purchases done by shopkeepers or wholesale merchants to which the widow of J. van Colthen probably belonged is rather clear.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> The National Archives, Kew. Chancery Masters' Exhibits, C 111/95 Hall vs. Hallett, 'Journall Book of affairs of Thomas Hall. Beginning in Ostend August 10<sup>th</sup> 1724'.

**Table 4.1: Purchasers of Thomas Hall's *pacotille* in August and September 1724**

<b>Name of buyer</b>	<b>Articles</b>	<b>Price in £s</b>	<b>Arranged by</b>
Madame Duchess d'Arenberg	7ps. Pequins	175,00	Mr. J. Worth
	3 ps. Gorgorons	120,00	Mr. J. Worth
	1 ps Damask	46,00	Mr. J. Worth
Marquis de Campo for his wife	3 ps. Damask	138,00	Mr. J. Worth
Josefa Arcadia Rodríguez	1 chest Hyson tea	292,00	Louis Baernert
Christian F. de Steiner	Snuffbox & sword case	39,00	
	Embroidered Satin	108,00	
Widow of J. Van Colthen	Chinaware	4160,10	
Anon.	6 lots Damasks à 10 ps		John Butler
Anon.	Colour/gold plates	2418,11	John Butler
Captain Peter Jackson	Charts	304,90	
Jacobus Maelcamp	Saffron	4,13	
<b>Total</b>		<b>7805,24</b>	

Source: The National Archives, Kew. Chancery Masters' Exhibits, C 111/95 Hall vs. Hallett, 'Journall Book of affairs of Thomas Hall. Beginning in Ostend August 10<sup>th</sup> 1724'.

While we need more research on the precise mechanisms of the special commission trade conducted through commanders and supercargoes, we also know next to nothing about the patterns of consumption among merchant mariners in the East India trade and especially with regard to China. Only the conspicuous consumption of East India merchants has been described with regard to returning 'Nabobs' from India.<sup>476</sup> Clearly, mariners sought to display their wealth and their connection to the Asian trade as much as their land-based counterparts in the military or civil service in India. The private commissions demanded by former supercargoes and commanders can thus give us a glimpse of the objects sought after for personal

<sup>476</sup> Tilman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2010). Also the manifold research results of 'The East India Company at Home (1757-1857)'-project need to be considered, which significantly enrich our understanding of the influence that the East India Company had on Britain's material past.



use in the period that marked the height of fashion in Europe for all things Chinese.<sup>477</sup>

*Commanders and supercargoes as consumers, suppliers and entrepreneurs*

Soon after official appointments were made for a journey to the East, the correspondence of British supercargoes and commanders regularly shows a sudden rise of letters containing informal ‘wish lists’ – which were usually given by a number of relatives, business associates and former colleagues. For instance, on 17 March 1740, Hugh Campbell, a major shareholder and former supercargo of the Swedish East India Company and close friend of Charles Irvine, gave his last-minute orders when Irvine was about to embark on the *Ridderhuys* to China. In exchange for Campbell’s £40, 17s, in gold that Irvine would still need to turn into silver at Cadiz at a favourable exchange, he was asked to bring for ‘Mrs Campbell a [piece] of Embroidery upon the finest dark coloured Satin olive or brown of a fine large running pattern with worsted Silk’.<sup>478</sup> For his daughter he ordered ‘a piece of Embroidery on whatever yellow Satin’ with a ‘handsome ... but not a very large Pattern’.<sup>479</sup> Probably intended to be used as presents were the ‘50 cattis best Souchong’ (catties), ‘20 ditto best Peckoe’, and ‘20 ditto best Hoysan: putt up in handsome pott’ that Campbell ordered from his friend.<sup>480</sup> By contrast, ‘A complete tea service with Coffee pott, slop basin of enamelled copper’ as well as ‘A barber’s

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<sup>477</sup> See Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior. Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, 1996).

<sup>478</sup> For an estimate how much this sum would be worth today, see [www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk](http://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk), which calculates the purchasing power of British Pounds from 1245 to Present. In 2010, £40 17s 0d from 1740 is worth £4,620.00 using the retail price index and £72,300.00 using average earnings.

<sup>479</sup> Hugh Campbell (Gothenburg) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 17 March 1740, CIC/1740/44a, *James Ford Bell Library*, Minneapolis.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid. Such porcelain jars (‘potts’) for tea and spices were used for display and were regular gifts among merchants.

basin and bottle of ditto' might well have been commissioned for the usage in his own household. (A slop basin was part of a tea or coffee service. It functioned as a litter for tea and coffee waste.) Unfortunately, we do not know whether Campbell had a specific design in mind for his coffee set, or whether he relied upon the taste of Charles Irvine in such matters. In any case, he gave clear instructions for the '2 pairs of painted looking glass of the model herewith send you'.<sup>481</sup>

This last order is especially interesting and tells us much about the fact that wealthy mariners were among the first who owned new fancies from China. Reverse mirror paintings from China became highly fashionable in the second half of the eighteenth century. Elaborate gilded frames in rococo taste then usually replaced the original wooden frames. The mirror depicted in fig. 4.5 shows one of the earliest examples of such a 'painted looking glass' in European design (at least of what survives to the present day). Unfortunately, we have no trace of the two pieces that Hugh Campbell commissioned in 1740, which is very early indeed and suggests that merchants associated with the East Indies trade could act as trendsetters for new luxuries from China.

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<sup>481</sup> Hugh Campbell (Gothenburg) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 17 March 1740, CIC/1740/44a.



Fig. 4.5 A Chinese export reverse mirror painting, circa 1750 in original hardwood and gilded Chinese frame. Height (with frame) 72.5 cm. Width 59.7cm. Decorated with leaves, butterflies, and two squirrels eating grapes or nuts. © Jeremy LTD

Such an analysis of small-scale commissions among the members of the maritime elite reveals the consumer tastes of merchant mariners. The complexity of commissions and their subsequent distribution is particularly well illustrated by the example of Hugh Campbell's brother, Colin, one of the directors of the Swedish East India Company from its first charter in 1731 until his death in 1757. Leaving the active trade to younger peers, Colin Campbell still sought to maintain his amicable contacts with the most prosperous *hong* merchants of the time – through gifts and special commissions. Charles Irvine's voyage to Canton in 1740 was thus a welcome opportunity for Colin Campbell to nurture the friendship through the commission of presents to some of the Chinese merchants with whom he had previously dealt directly as supercargo. He thus instructed Irvine to

Try if you can get at Cadiz a few of the small Essence bottles that come from Italy, & buy for my account a dozen of them (or two dozen if not too dear) to be distributed between Suqua, Tan Chinqua & Manuel as presents from me, also if you can get 3 small pots of Portuguese snuff of which one also to each of them.<sup>482</sup>

This exchange of gifts was attended by the closure of accounts between Suqua and Campbell. His instructions to Irvine show that private commissions did not only flow from Europe to China, but apparently also the other way around. Hence, we learn that Irvine was asked to bring Suqua the sales revenue of 4599,00,, in Mexico dollars ‘of the Silks & Chinaware I brought & sold here for him’. In addition, he was asked to bring ‘my inclosed letter, letting him know at [the] same time that I do not charge him commission or any other charge for my trouble, but have served him for nothing as I promised him.’<sup>483</sup> This instance, then, reveals not only that personal relations between Western merchants and Chinese wholesalers at Canton were much more intimate than the traditional historiography of the Canton trade tends to suggest.<sup>484</sup> It also reminds us that supercargoes and commanders acted as mediators for a profitable trade in both directions, and that wealthy merchants from China clearly saw the potential of European markets for their products. Small-scale

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<sup>482</sup> ‘Private Memorandum’ from Colin Campbell (Gothenburg) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 10 February 1740, CIC/1740/31a.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> More recent work on the relation between European merchants with their Chinese counterparts has done much to revise the obsession of earlier studies on the supposed rigidity and arbitrariness of the Canton trade. See, for instance Paul A. Van Dyke, ‘Weaver Suckin and the Canton Silk Trade 1750-1781’, *Review of Culture* (International Edition), 29 (2009), pp. 105-19; idem., *Merchants of Canton and Macau: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Trade* (Hong Kong, 2011).

commissions lay very much at the heart of that trade, especially because they brought together more closely the buyers and suppliers of goods over such vast distances.

The correspondence between maritime merchants reveals unique details about the nature of private commissions, the people involved, and the practicalities of ordering customized goods. Through the survival of merchant letters, we learn among other things that special commissions sometimes required the repeated exchange of materials, drawings and instructions before an object could actually be made in China. For instance, Colin Campbell wrote to his friend Charles Irvine that he had sent on board the *Ridderhuys* ‘a red lacquered teak for Chairs in order to have 12 Rosewood Chairs made for the teak’ in Canton.<sup>485</sup> (When merchants refer to ‘rosewood’, they often mean a range of different strong and durable timbers from South-East Asia and Tropical America of an elegant and richly hued red or brown. Teak was similar in price to ‘genuine rosewood’ and was – and is – a very popular timber for furniture.) For the execution of his order, Campbell suggested: ‘As Compradore Atay made the Seats he may also make the Chairs the best & newest fashion you can get, but not too heavy and clumsy.’ In addition to the chairs Campbell asked for ‘a good rosewood hand Scritore but smaller than the ordinary Sort & lighter, & to be well fastened together.’ Thus, his lacquered teak panels must have travelled the long way from China to Europe and back when Campbell decided what he would like to have made from it.

We know that Colin Campbell had, in fact, a substantial collection of Chinese export wares. His last will and testament (annotated and published in 1960) gives us a taste of the objects that he acquired both personally and through private commissions. He bequeathed a number of items to the young wife of Niklas

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<sup>485</sup> ‘Private Memorandum’ by Colin Campbell (Gothenburg) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 10 February 1740, CIK/1740/31a.

Sahlgren, who was not only a close friend of Colin Campbell, but acted also as director of the Swedish East India Company. On his generous gifts, Campbell wrote that, 'Out of Friendship and real Esteem that I have always had for Mrs. Catharina Christina Sahlgren, alias Grupp (second wife), I desire her to accept of my large Lacquered Chest, or Chest of Drawers, with all my China, Pictures on Glass, and my Emerald Ring that Her Majesty the present Queen of Sweden did me the Honour to present me.'<sup>486</sup> This not only shows how esteemed the British interloper Colin Campbell had become through his services to the SEIC, but also that these interlopers could possess very valuable items for their private spaces, despite the exceedingly mobile career of these free agents, who often moved houses in search for ever new commercial opportunities.

Another telling incident is recorded in the commission book of Captain Patrick Lawson, commander of the *Lord Holland* East Indiamen in 1778, with regard to the placement of special commission orders by private consumers from Europe.<sup>487</sup> Prior to his departure to Canton, Mrs Lawson (alias Bridget Hennessy) collected special orders from six female customers (which seem to have been her acquaintances) and a number of shopkeepers, too. She wrote down in marvellous details the particularities of these different commissions. For her 'own particular wear', by contrast, she first wanted to be furnished with patterns and an estimate of the price before giving orders for it to be made. She thus informed her seafaring husband that

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<sup>486</sup> Quoted in Alexander A. Cormack, *Colin Campbell 1686-1757, Merchant, Gothenburg, Sweden. His Will – Annotated: A Scoto-Swedish Study* (Aberdeen, 1960).

<sup>487</sup> Patrick Lawson, was born in Banff (Scotland), which was then one of the main smuggling centres on the North coast of Scotland, and he was related to the Duff clan (Earls of Fife). Several members of the Duff family previously worked for the Swedish East India Company and were greatly involved in the contraband trade to Britain via Scotland.

I send twenty yards of Muslin with a drawing of a Barley Iheaf [sic!], I should wish the fag [remnant] cut off and it worked, one blade in silver the middle of a shining kind and the rest Silver thread. [T]he other blade that crosses it, green silk ... worked in the fag and sent to me as patterns with the price of doing the 20 yards.<sup>488</sup>

Among various other commission for herself, including '1 Sett large Jarrs', teaboxes, sugar dishes in filigree style, 'some slight taffetas', '3 pieces winter silk', another black and two grey silks, 'some pelongs', she also promised to 'send a shoe a size larger I should wish them as they shrink.' She furthermore added that 'the same size of the pattern shoe will also do for Mrs MacLellan but I beg she may not get the Europe[an] heels.'<sup>489</sup> Mrs Lawson did not only provide written instructions on how she wished things to be made. She also referred to a range of numbered drawings (which unfortunately have been lost) for the many different sets of porcelain and furniture damasks that her customers expected her to procure, noting already the initials with which the chests should be marked.

From the detailed descriptions of the commissions, we understand just how much influence a consumer could have in seeking a unique token from China. Of course, some consumers were less discriminatory, and so Mrs Lawson wrote to her husband that all 'things very pretty and very cheap would be acceptable to Mrs. Mae.'<sup>490</sup> This direct involvement of women in the collection, preparation and arrangements of payments for special commissions is only surprising at first sight. In fact, many of the supercargoes and commanders worked in close collaboration with

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<sup>488</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. hist. c.331, account book of Captain Patrick Lawson (19 pages, dated 1778), p. 1.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

their wives and female relatives. In mercantile correspondence, women often feature as consumers of Chinese luxuries. By looking at receipts and account books, however, we understand that they were key *distributors* as well.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to expand our understanding of the role of Europe's maritime elite in the trade with China. Supercargoes, captain and commanders, either employed in the older and bigger East India Companies, or working as interlopers for the smaller Companies on the continent, were presented here as European merchants in their own right. To understand the role of the merchant mariners as significant facilitators of cross-cultural commerce in the realm of the commission trade, a typology of four different types of commissions have been identified. When their functioning and reach are taken together, these types make clear that in order to fully understand the roles of supercargoes and captains for Europe's trade with China during the first half of the eighteenth century, it is important to acknowledge them as fully fledged commercial entrepreneurs. That is, the commercial ingenuity of supercargoes and captains led them to skilfully use their privileged appointments to eastern voyages to build up their own contacts and networks of potential consumers for the goods they promised to bring back, and thus helped to diversify and enlarge the group of European consumers for novel and often customised goods from the east.



## Chapter V

### Big business: the wholesale trade in Chinese export wares

This chapter proposes a change of perspective for studying European private trade with China in the first half of the eighteenth century by focusing on an extended network of Scottish merchants and mariners active in the import, wholesale and re-export of Chinese export wares. I am primarily concerned with the mercantile links between a group of East India commanders and supercargoes that regularly travelled to Canton on behalf of the Swedish Company and their private contacts with dealers in north-western Europe, who were key players in the trade in Chinese commodities in this period. For the proposed analysis, we need to bring together two historiographies that usually operate quite separately from one another: the fields of maritime history, and what is traditionally called business history. In that pursuit, I am following in the footsteps of two doyens of East India Company research, Jaap R. Bruijn and Huw Bowen. Both historians have recently published studies on aspects of the lives of commanders of East India ships, both at sea and ashore.<sup>491</sup> For the first time, we are able to compare the social status, professional privileges and career trajectories of VOC and EIC commanders in a systematic manner.<sup>492</sup> It is Bowen's achievement to have compiled a comprehensive account of the various sources of income that commanders in the English merchant marine developed as soon as they

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<sup>491</sup> H. V. Bowen, 'Privilege and Profit'; Jaap R. Bruijn, *Commanders of Dutch East India Ships in the Eighteenth-Century* (Woodbridge, 2011).

<sup>492</sup> Bowen laid more emphasis on the trading activities of commanders, especially with regard to their role in supplying the European settlements in India with British manufactures. Bruijn's prosopographical study, in turn, placed considerably more emphasis on exploring the place of VOC commanders in Netherlandish society and less so on their private trade.

reached that prominent position.<sup>493</sup> Neither of the two authors, however, have explored the vital role played by commanders, and other members of the merchant marine, for distributing East India goods within Europe.

In what follows, I argue that the analysis of East India Company *mariners as merchants* can help to fill some of the glaring gaps in the literature on private trade and the distribution of Chinese export wares in Europe as a whole. In a nutshell, this chapter seeks to establish ways in which we can think more generally about the integration of the Companies' 'maritime elite' into histories of European wholesale and retail trade.<sup>494</sup> As will become clear, the selection of British-born mariners does not make this only a 'British story'. On the contrary, the partnerships between city merchants and Company servants deliberately transgressed the boundaries of the different 'monopoly Companies'. Most of the actors presented here were traders who worked for more than one East India Company during their career, in changing positions as officers (mates), supercargoes, or commanders. The potential of studying individual mercantile careers lies partly in the opportunity to avoid some of the dangers of traditional East India Company literature – with its focus on national success stories and chronologies of failure. Partly, it is the shift towards merchant networks as opposed to Company hierarchies that helps us to rethink some of the historiographical boundaries that still persist out of convenience rather than necessity. By using the exceptionally rich yet understudied primary material that is available for China traders active in the first half of the eighteenth century, it is thus possible to extrapolate from individual case studies to describe larger mechanisms

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<sup>493</sup> Important insights on the careers of commanders in the mercantile marine were also made by Jean Sutton in her recent book, *The East India Company's Maritime Service 1746-1834. Masters of the Eastern Sea* (Woodbridge, 2010).

<sup>494</sup> Bowen's 'maritime elite' refers to commanders of the EIC alone, but we can usefully incorporate supercargoes and high-ranking officers of all Companies into this illustrious group. They belonged to the same networks, shared the unpleasant experiences of a life at sea and often socialised and intermarried ashore.

and structures that connected the world of mariners with that of European sedentary merchants, traditionally the protagonists of business histories.

For matters of clarity the chapter is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on private trade and its crucial role within the pan-European trading arena and for the success of individual Companies. It is argued that the scope of private trade has been underestimated because historians have so far neglected the complex networks that private traders developed within wholesale networks in Europe. However, China traders are best understood within a dual framework; as members of the close-knit community of merchant seamen and as ‘gatekeepers’ of the European wholesale market for Chinese export wares.

In the second part, the discussion moves on to show the interdependence of Company servants and wholesale merchants for the supply and distribution of Chinese export wares in Europe. A number of key questions are explored, such as: what commercial practices were in place that helped generate partnerships between sedentary merchants and Company men? How did the collaboration between those two groups shape the market for Chinese export wares in Europe? And perhaps more basic, but nevertheless crucial: how did the China commission trade work out in practice and what impact did private agreements have on the methods for selling merchandise at Company auctions? And what kind of conflicts could arise between sedentary merchants and merchant mariners because of the multi-tasking that China traders had to attend to; namely, to mind their own business *and* that of various principals including the Company, under which protection they were travelling.

The third and final part will consider the specific role played by British interlopers and members of their informal networks in linking different national markets in Europe and in participating in the contraband trade to Britain. It is argued that if we wish to understand ‘English’ commercial success in the China trade in the

first half of the eighteenth century, we have to look to the European continent where British merchant houses and interloping China traders closely collaborated to secure access to different European markets. More than that, British merchants and mariners were also key figures in the illegal trade of Chinese tea to Britain. The subversion of the British monopoly on the import of tea yielded large profits for those involved. A network perspective shows that the Scandinavian tea cargoes were chiefly shipped to British shores on account of Britons abroad.

*Mariners as merchants: revisiting the Sino-European private trade*

The size and scope of private trade in Chinese export wares has been greatly underestimated for the first half of the eighteenth century. One crucial reason for that is the very limited selection of archival material that is generally used to measure the flow of private goods on Company ships. Historians of the Canton trade have mostly relied on official records, Company by-laws, privilege trade regulations and registers for calculating the volume on board of individual ships, and for establishing long-term trends.<sup>495</sup> To be sure, this focus on official documentation (fragmentary as it is) can give us a clearer picture of the rules prevailing in different Companies and at certain points in time. However, it rarely tells us what was brought back in reality.

Opportunities for engrossing a mariner's private trade privileges were numerous in all Companies. To name just a few: the early death or absence of a colleague on board usually led to the increase of privilege space for the remaining

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<sup>495</sup> Earl H. Pritchard, 'Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (1680-1833)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1:1 (1957), pp. 108-37. H. B. Morse, *Chronicles of the East India Company in China*, Vol. V. Christian Koninckx made estimates for *The First and Second Charters of the Swedish East India Company (1733-1766). A Contribution to the Maritime, Economic and Social History of North-Western Europe in its Relationships with the Far East* (Kortrijk, 1980), p. 267.

travellers. Individual negotiations with ship-owners and directors could increase the cargo space as well, and so did the declaration of ‘presents’ or objects of ‘personal use’.<sup>496</sup> Hence, only the comparison between official records *and* the private correspondence and account books of China traders can reveal the significant gaps between formal ‘rule’ and economic reality, and thus provide us with a better understanding of the functions and importance of private trade activities for the China trade. However, we are still a long way from studying the mismatch between private and official records in any systematic manner.<sup>497</sup> There have simply not been enough case studies carried out to date, and a great deal of source material lies still untouched. The work of Bowen for the second half of the eighteenth century must be considered as a model for future studies. By focusing mostly on the outward cargoes that EIC commanders brought to Asia, he compared private records with those of the Company and successfully revealed just how many more goods were shipped undeclared. His work on the mechanics of private trade with India is absolutely crucial.

One example may suffice to illustrate this point. In 1738/39, Charles Irvine acted as chief supercargo of the Swedish East India Company in Canton. Irvine was one of fifty-five identifiable Britons who joined the Swedish Company during the first two decades of its existence, the majority of whom were Scottish-born like he himself.<sup>498</sup> Irvine’s mercantile career brought him first to Rouen, where he was

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<sup>496</sup> It is, for instance, at best doubtful that the 12 chests of porcelain that Thomas Lyell (supercargo) declared to be presents ‘for Margaret’ in 1736 were really what they seemed; rather they are more likely to have been a parcel of commissions from his various clients. See, IOR/G/12/39, p. 37. For a good example of an ‘unhappy’ supercargo who managed to increase his privilege cargo by negotiation, see C. Koninckx, ‘Andreas Jacobus Flanderin. Een achttiende eeuwse middelgrote koopman’, *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis*, 56 (1973), pp. 243-90, esp. 249-50.

<sup>497</sup> See, *idem*, ‘Privilege and profit’, esp. pp. 59-62.

<sup>498</sup> Irvine’s private papers feature a list of British-born supercargoes, writers, surgeons and officers employed by the SEIC during its first charter. There were 19 supercargoes and writers, 15 officers and midshipmen, in addition to 2 ‘chirurgiens’, 3 ‘charpentiers’ and 5 ‘matelots et garçons’. This document does not mention the Scottish directors, warehouse men and financiers that were closely

apprenticed to the Scottish wine merchant and Jacobite activist Robert Arbuthnot, from thence to Ostend, from where he sailed to the East for the first time and further to Gothenburg.<sup>499</sup>

Irvine's correspondence network bears the trace of his wanderings on the continent, as well as his Scottish roots and sympathies. In 1736/37, Irvine was permitted to bring back to Europe 20 chests or '2 ½ last' of merchandise (i.e. private goods) freight-free, a privilege that reflected his elevated rank on board.<sup>500</sup> The same volume was granted to him two years later. Cargo space was allocated according to rank. During the period Irvine was active in the SEIC, supercargoes enjoyed the largest share of private trade, followed by commanders and officers on board. Next to his privilege trade Irvine was given 2 per cent commission on the sales value of the Company goods that were sold at public auction.<sup>501</sup>

Since Irvine's private papers contain an unusually rich set of shipping records for several of his voyages, it is possible to reconstruct his private investments over several years. In 1738/39, Charles Irvine assembled a private cargo in China consisting of 273 chests and 48 tubs of different sorts of fine teas, 1424 pieces of Indian cotton textiles (that he had ordered from Madras), 223 pieces of Chinese wrought silks and 70 bales of raw silk.<sup>502</sup> A long list of 'speciality goods' (including drugs and customized souvenirs) complemented his investment.<sup>503</sup> His cargo was shipped back to Europe on board the *Fredericus Rex Suecia* and *Stockholm* in 1739.

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involved in the venture. See, letter books and account books, legal documents and unclassified papers, Charles Irvine Papers, FBL.

<sup>499</sup> On Irvine's connection to Jacobite circles see, for instance, Douglas Catterall, 'At Home Abroad: Ethnicity and Enclave in the World of Scots Traders in Northern Europe, c. 1600-1800', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 8:3-4 (2004), pp. 319-57.

<sup>500</sup> See, 'Instructions etc. for the voyage of ship Three Crowns, 1736-37' (36-1h), Letterbooks and Account books, 1736-48, Irvine Papers, FBL.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> Calculated from 'Invoice of Goods for my own Acc[oun]t', Canton, 14 January 1739, Shipping Documents, 1733-1738, Irvine Papers.

<sup>503</sup> Irvine's notes mention 24 painted mirrors in lacquered and rosewood frames, '4 China knives', '12 Nankin Fans', 'Sundry enamelled copper', '13 chests rhubarb & pepper' and many more items of trade.

Even if we consider the unlikely case that Irvine may have bought up the entire ‘privilege’ cargo space of his colleagues to transport his goods to Europe, he still would have exceeded the space that was allocated to the entire crew according to the Company ‘instructions’. The latter was a document that had been signed before the departure by two Company directors, Henry König and Colin Campbell.<sup>504</sup> One might reasonably ask, then, why did the Company not dismiss Charles Irvine, but instead sent him to Canton for two more voyages, which were, as Irvine put it himself, ‘more for my Interest then for their Service’?<sup>505</sup>

In order to explain this incident, we must consider the possibility that Irvine’s private trade was thought to be beneficial to Company concerns, rather than ‘malfeasant’ – as is usually assumed.<sup>506</sup> There are a few important points to be made here that help to put into perspective Irvine’s seemingly rude infringement of private trade restrictions. On a purely economic level, exceeding one’s private trade yielded considerable income to the Company. The SEIC settled a ‘fine’ of 1000 silver dollars for every excess *last* (which is, according to Koninckx’ estimate, equivalent to 2,448 kg) of privilege trade.<sup>507</sup> Thus, instead of preventing the growth of private trade, the SEIC simply charged those employees who had the capital to invest in additional goods.<sup>508</sup>

On top of the freight-free cargo, China traders were usually permitted to import more goods if there was space left in the hold or their own cabin. Apparently, Irvine was not the only person exceeding the limit for freight-free shipping. The total

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<sup>504</sup> ‘Instructions etc. for the voyage of ship Three Crowns, 1736-37’ (36-1h), letter books and account books, 1736-48, Charles Irvine papers, James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota.

<sup>505</sup> Charles Irvine (Canton) to Samuel Greenhaugh (Madras) 31 January 1746, Charles Irvine letter book, 1746-47.

<sup>506</sup> See, for instance, Emily Erikson and Peter Bearman, ‘Malfeasance and the Foundations for Global Trade: The Structure of English Trade in the East Indies, 1601-1833’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 112:1 (2006), pp. 195-230.

<sup>507</sup> See, Koninckx, *The First and Second Charter*, pp. 155-56.

<sup>508</sup> See, instruction No 15, ‘Instructions ... *Three Crowns*, 1736-37’, letter books and account books, Irvine papers.

volume of private trade on board the *Three Crowns* (as noted by Irvine as chief supercargo) comprised of at least 836 boxes and chests (large and small), 139 bundles and tubs as well as a number of jars and bulky items.<sup>509</sup> The payment of ‘indulgence’ fees for excess goods was worth the investment for many private traders and must be regarded as a matter of astute calculation rather than moral decay.<sup>510</sup>

The Company also derived income from every private trade good that passed its public sales because warehouse fees, handling charges and commission had to be paid by the importer. The obligatory costs for private traders included a 3 per cent commission on the sales value of their goods sold at auction, plus warehouse fees, et cetera, payable to the SEIC.<sup>511</sup> In short, the Company profited directly from the trading activities of its servants through the introduction of duties and charges.

In addition, Charles Irvine’s private trade – whose case is exemplary – was important to the commercial success of the SEIC in a number of other, perhaps more subtle, ways. Instead of thinking of private and Company trade as two antagonistic systems, there is strong evidence to believe that private trade actually contributed a great deal to the competitiveness of the SEIC. This particularly concerned the need to attract foreign buyers, upon whose purchasing power the Swedish venture essentially depended, since the home market was too weak to generate a seller’s market. A network perspective is key to understanding the individual contributions of supercargoes, commanders and officers to the success of the SEIC, especially during the critical phase of its first charter (1731–46). After all, this was a period in which

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<sup>509</sup> Calculated from, ‘Copy of letters Ship Three Crowns 1736 a 1737’, 5 February 1736 to 6 January 1747, letter books and account books, 1736–48, Charles Irvine Papers, FBL, Minn.

<sup>510</sup> A useful overview of EIC private trade duties and charges that were payable to the Government and the Company is given by Earl H. Pritchard, ‘Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (1680–1833)’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1:1 (1957), pp. 108–137, p. 118.

<sup>511</sup> As was the rule for Company goods, private traders had to give their buyers a discount for ‘prompt payment’ of 2 per cent on the auction price. See, ‘Calculations of Wrought Silks in Private Trade from China to Gothenburg & thence to Holland’, 1745, Price lists and exchange rates, Box 10, Charles Irvine papers.



the Company was steered predominantly by foreign manpower, capital and expertise.<sup>512</sup> The multi-national composition of its staff did not only secure valuable overseas experience – as is often stressed in the literature – but also widespread contacts to buyers and foreign markets.<sup>513</sup> The reason was that the majority of the leading personnel of the SEIC had made previous experiences in the East India trade as servants of the Compagnie des Indes, the EIC, the VOC or, most significantly, the Ostend Company.

As we have seen, the employment of foreign subjects with previous experience in the East India trade was a frequent point of contention between the different Companies throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The official instructions for EIC supercargoes and commanders repeatedly reminded servants stationed in China and India to look out and, when possible, to detain any British subject who navigated through Eastern waters under the command of a rival Company or without a licence from London.<sup>514</sup> Since Canton was a place where all Europeans were allowed to trade in the eighteenth century and where nobody could claim an exclusive right to do so, it was therefore a delicate mission for Company officers to attack or detain any national subject who was employed by another Company. Further complicating the matter, the Chinese officials strongly resented any attempts to solve disputes of this kind on land. After the demise of the Ostend Company in 1729, trading vessels from thence continued to visit China while

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<sup>512</sup> Koninckx, *The First and Second Charter*, pp. 335-341; Leos Müller, 'Scottish and Irish Entrepreneurs in Eighteenth-Century Sweden', in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Gent, 2007) pp. 147-174; Andrew MacKillop, 'Accessing Empire: Scotland, Europe, Britain, and the Asia Trade, 1695-c.1750', *Itinerario*, 29:3 (2005), pp. 7-30.

<sup>513</sup> See, Conrad Gill, 'The Affair of Porto Novo: An Incident in Anglo-Swedish Relations', *The English Historical Review*, 73:286 (1958), pp. 47-65.

<sup>514</sup> In 1730, for instance, EIC commanders received special orders to seize a man by the name of Richard Dyer who was trading for some years between India and China without permission. IOR/G/12/ 30 1730, *China Diary, Transactions and Consultations* of James Naish, Edmund Godfrey, Richard Nicholson jun., George Arbuthnot, Richard Lewes, William Lane and John Raper, p. 37.

hoisting neutral flags.<sup>515</sup> British and French supercargoes were alarmed when the ‘Prussian’ ship *Apollo* arrived in 1730 at Whampoa (the place of mooring for East Indiamen). After some initial enquiries were made, the true nature of the adventure was revealed. The supercargoes of the English factory subsequently reported that ‘there is no Prussian subject on board, but 26 Englishmen, 8-9 French Subjects and some Dutch as well as an Irish Priest of Roman Catholic belief.’<sup>516</sup> James Naish, one of the EIC supercargoes in charge, probably recognised some of his former colleagues since he had himself served for several years in the Ostend Company alternately as either commander or supercargo.<sup>517</sup>

Despite Franco-British plans to boycott the post-Ostend interlopers, nothing seems to have happened in China. The *Apollo* returned to Europe earlier than the other vessels. Part of its cargo was put on the *Mary* in Cadiz, and both ships then sailed on to Hamburg where the cargo was supposed to be sold. Under great diplomatic pressure, however, the Hamburg Senate prohibited its sale, yet proprietors were allowed to remove the cargo clandestinely for sale elsewhere.<sup>518</sup> Parts of the cargo were seized in the Netherlands in 1733, but the bulk of goods seem to have been absorbed by buyers in Europe. The affair over the ‘Prussian’ ship serves to show that the figure of the merchant mariner (and his national loyalty) stood at the centre of inter-Company jealousies. But while it was important to the individual merchant to serve under the ‘right flag’, the freedom of commercial association was never called into question, thus opening wide opportunities for private trade schemes for merchant mariners. And while the EIC warned their servants about investing in other Companies (that is to buy shares, invest in their silver cargo, et cetera), there

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<sup>515</sup> Jan Parmentier, *Tea Time in Flanders: the Maritime Trade between the Southern Netherlands and China in the 18th century* (Ghent, 1996).

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>517</sup> Gill, *Merchants and Mariners*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>518</sup> Statements of the Senate of Hamburg, printed in *The London Gazette*, Tuesday March 5 to Saturday March 9 1733.

was never an enquiry into conflicting interests caused by the clients and investors that every single merchant mariner represented.

Charles Irvine continued to rely on his connections to ‘old Ostenders’, such as his long-standing agents in the Low Countries – including George Clifford & Sons, Thomas Wilkieson, Jean Cossart et fils & Bouwer and Urbano Arnold –, once he had joined the SEIC. At Company sales in Gothenburg, Irvine bought tea and textiles on their behalf, but he also used them as agents to dispose of his own goods on the continent.<sup>519</sup> The leading merchant houses that had dominated the public sales of the Ostend Company still featured in the correspondence of these British China traders even when the latter had moved on to Gothenburg, Copenhagen or London to seek new opportunities.<sup>520</sup> In many ways, the annual auctions in Gothenburg were more predictable than one might expect, since returning China traders quickly informed their associates and intended buyers about the different cargoes that were assembled in Canton, pointing out what goods could be of special interest to each of them.

Local demand for specific goods differed from year to year. Commercial intelligence thus started to be exchanged whilst supercargoes were still on board their homebound China ships. In 1747, on board the *Freden*, Irvine wrote to the Amsterdam merchant house of George Clifford & Co about the particulars of the SEIC cargo in view of acting as their agent at the upcoming sales. Irvine expected his correspondent to be primarily interested in wrought silks. Yet, what qualities, colours and designs were suitable for their clients in the Netherlands and further afield? Irvine himself did not know this, but offered to use his position and connections with

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<sup>519</sup> For instance, in 1742, Urbano Arnold was commissioned by Colin Campbell, Charles Irvine and Captain Dens to sell 66 chests of fine teas on their behalf as well as to assist James Rose (Irvine’s cousin) with the organisation of a smuggling voyage from Ostend. Charles Irvine (Göteborg) to Urbano Arnold (Rotterdam), undated, letterbook and account books 1742-43, Irvine Papers.

<sup>520</sup> See the important but now largely forgotten work by Conrad Gill, *Merchant and Mariners of the 18th Century* (London, 1961).

the Company directors to make sure Clifford & Co were able to purchase parcels of goods at the auction which were tailored to their particular requirements. ‘Doe your buyers love Paddesoys with larger or smaller wale [i.e. ridge]’.<sup>521</sup> Irvine knew that ‘[t]here is sometimes demand for particular Collours of Silks; if any such thing pray let me know it & how your buyers would have 100ps sorted, perhaps I may have some influence that way’.<sup>522</sup> In turn, the merchant-seamen asked to be informed as precisely as possible about price developments for goods they were interested in buying on their own account.<sup>523</sup> The personal networks of private traders to petty smugglers and major wholesale dealers such as Clifford & Co in the Netherlands, Britain, Spain, Northern Germany, and France were crucial to the Swedish venture as a whole, as these networks generated a strong base of customers, whose individual needs were known and attended to by individual employees.

We will return later to the mechanisms by which these links were forged. First, however, it is necessary to explain the other ways in which private trade contributed, indirectly, to the mercantile success of the SEIC. We still lack a comprehensive account of the role of innovation in the Canton trade, a phenomenon that is so far best explored by art historians who focus on the dialogue between Chinese and Western techniques, designs and ideas in the production of Chinese export art for Western markets.<sup>524</sup> The process of artistic innovation was accompanied and made possible by a flow of patterns, instructions and models that influenced what was ordered and produced in Canton, Jingdezhen, and other

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<sup>521</sup> Leanna Lee-Whitman, an expert on Chinese export silks, writes that Paduasoyes are ‘a silk woven in a variation of the satin weave, with bindings arranged to create fine cross-ridges across the fabric’. See idem, ‘The Silk Trade: Chinese Silks and the British East India Company’, *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17:1 (1982), pp. 21-41, p. 30.

<sup>522</sup> Charles Irvine (on board the *Freden*) to George Clifford (Amsterdam), 24 August 1747, letter book 1746-47, Irvine Papers.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

<sup>524</sup> On the role of innovation in private trade, see, for instance, David S. Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader: the Private Market in Chinese Export Porcelain illustrated from the Hodroff Collection* (London, 1994).

manufacturing centres. What we know less about, however, are the commercial mechanisms by which this exchange of novel designs and ideas actually took place. Both merchant-mariners and sedentary dealers played a crucial, though as yet insufficiently explored, role in this interaction. Part of the reason why private trade is still marginalized in our histories of the early Canton trade is that the creative cooperation between sedentary dealers in Europe and seafarers like Irvine has rarely been analysed and remains insufficiently understood.

Curatorial research on Chinese porcelain, fans, wrought silks and other export wares revealed that private traders bought rather more expensive pieces, ready-made objects and novelties of all sorts in comparison with Company imports.<sup>525</sup> The introduction of novelties via private trade is an important subject that has not yet been studied systematically, but we know of many goods that were imported exclusively through private trade channels, such as Chinese paper, soy sauce, rosewood furniture, mirror paintings, armorial porcelain and the most expensive types of black and green tea. Private trade imports thus greatly diversified the range of goods and qualities sold at Company auctions (Fig. 5.1: Picture of SEIC sales catalogue with *pacotille* goods). The impressive trading portfolio of Charles Irvine clearly supports this assumption for the Swedish case. China traders – of all European East India Companies – did not normally specialise in any particular good, but traded in everything from golden snuffboxes and hand-painted wallpaper to rhubarb and gunpowder.

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<sup>525</sup> Fine overviews concerning the main export arts in Canton for the Western market are provided by Margaret Jourdain and R. Soame Jenys, *Chinese export art in the eighteenth century* (London, 1950); Carl Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade: Paintings, Furnishings and Exotic Curiosities* (Woodbridge, 1991); and Craig Clunas (ed.), *Chinese Export Art and Design* (London, 1987).

Loß	Nro	DIVERSE WAHREN		
2197	1	10 Quadrille Laden	<i>Th: Coppinger</i>	10
2198	2	10 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	9. 24
2199	3	10 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	9. 24
2200	4	10 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	9. 24
2201	5	10 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	9. 24
2202	6	30 Chin. Mahlereyen	<i>J. Barry</i>	1
2203	7	1 lacquirter Schirm von 6 Leutern	<i>P. Coppinger</i>	101
2204	8	1 Quadrille-Lade mit Wapen	<i>J. P. Kew</i>	12
2205	9	1 Lade mit Chin. Bilder	<i>Ditto</i>	21
2206	10	1 groß. gemahlr. Spiegel mit Rahm roth u. Gold	<i>Ditto</i>	105
2207	11	1 dito kleiner	<i>Ditto</i>	86
2208	12	1 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	76
2209	13	3 dito kleine mit Rosenholz Rah- men u. verguld.	<i>Ditto</i>	40
2210	14	3 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	40
2211	15	3 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	49
2212	16	3 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	51
2213	17	3 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	35
2214	18	8 Chin. Mahlereyen, Papier auf Lei- nen gekleistert	<i>Ditto</i>	8
2215	19	7 Japan. lacquirte kleine Lädchen	<i>Ditto per Lsg</i>	63
2216	20	80 St. gezeichnete bein. Fächer	<i>H. König</i>	1. 11 1/2
2217	21	80 dito	<i>Ditto</i>	1. 13 1/2
2218	22	74 dito, m. o. w.	<i>Ditto</i>	1. 14 1/2
2219	23	2 Théc-Flaschen von email. Kupfer	<i>Ditto</i>	35

Fig. 5.1: Detail of SEIC sales catalogue (1743)

That said, individual supercargoes or commanders still prided themselves on possessing a particular expertise on certain goods, as the written exchanges between wholesalers and China traders make clear. Special competencies of individuals in judging the quality of silk, tea and drugs were recognised and exploited by the Companies. To take just two examples, Charles Pike, active supercargo in the Ostend Company, was asked to provide detailed instructions for the first voyages of the newly formed SEIC not only on what was needed to set up a factory in Canton, but also how to judge tea qualities.<sup>526</sup> Manning Lethieulier, supercargo of the EIC in 1720s and 1730s brought a special expertise to the China trade, as members of his family were wholesalers in porcelain.<sup>527</sup>

The SEIC and most other Companies focused on a much narrower range of imports and qualities, a trend that became even more pronounced in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>528</sup> It was no secret to informed contemporaries that private traders in the EIC also dealt in a stunning variety of Chinese export wares ‘by which the company either cannot gain at all by, or are not so gainful as others they prefer to engage in’.<sup>529</sup> In other words, private and Company trade effectively complemented each other, to attract a greater mix of buyers who could supply all strata of society and target dispersed markets across Europe with goods matching local demands.

Alongside the argument about variety, there is also some consensus among curators and historians that private trade was the more dynamic and experimental

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<sup>526</sup> Charles Pike (Gothenburg) to Charles Irvine (Cadiz), 29 January 1733, Charles Irvine Correspondence, FBL, Minn., CIC/1733/8a; Charles Pike (Gothenburg?) to Charles Barrington and Charles Irvine (Cadiz), 11 February 1733, CIC/1733/10a.

<sup>527</sup> See, David S. Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader: The Private Market in Chinese Export Porcelain illustrated from the Hodroff Collection* (London, 1994), p. 33.

<sup>528</sup> The English East India Company, for instance, had stopped trading in Chinese porcelain and silks altogether by the end of the eighteenth century. See Anthony Farrington, *Trading Places: the East India Company and Asia, 1600- 1834* (London, 2002), p. 87.

<sup>529</sup> Malachy Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*, p. 683.

trade.<sup>530</sup> This is not to say, however, that the SEIC or any other chartered Company was reluctant to change its orders, or blind to the wheel of fashion.<sup>531</sup> Rather, the supercargoes were regularly reminded by the directors to seek out novel patterns and colour combinations for all merchandise for which fashion was a concern. Yet, the Companies often picked up ideas only *after* they were ‘tested’ in private trade and promised safe returns. This is true for the introduction of high quality teas into European markets such as Souchon (black) and Hysan (green), but also for many other items of trade including fans, lacquered furniture, painted Canton enamels and rhubarb.

Close attention to chronology is crucial, as lacquered boxes, cabinets and screens loomed large in private trade already in the mid-seventeenth century and were continuously traded over the course of the eighteenth century. The SEIC never seems to have developed a sustained interest in these wares, but the EIC made trials every so often between 1683 and 1710, regularly complaining to their supercargoes of the bad quality of the shipments they received on Company accounts.<sup>532</sup> The last time that the English East India Company made an attempt to develop a role in this market was an order of 9000 lacquered tea tables and 300 boards (lacquered on both sides to be used as veneers by European cabinet-makers) for the *Rochester* East Indiamen in 1710.<sup>533</sup> This probably marked the last shipment of lacquer wares on behalf of the Company. Private commissions of such wares continued to flourish and

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<sup>530</sup> A good and concise discussion of the buying strategies of EIC supercargoes and captains is given by David S. Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader*, esp. pp. 18-34.

<sup>531</sup> IOR/G/12/33, p. 37. ‘Diary and Consultation Book of George Arbuthnot, Whichcott Turner, John Starke, Edward Pratt, Manning Lethieulier, Henry Plant and Thomas Liell a standing Council for the management of affairs in China anno 1732.’

<sup>532</sup> EIC instructions for the supercargoes of the *Trumball* bound for Amoy in 1697 and those for the supercargoes of the *Fleet* bound for Canton in 1701. Cited in Margaret Jourdain and R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Export Art*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>533</sup> IOR/E/96 letter book 1706-10. ‘List of Goods to be provided at Chusan by the Supra Cargo’s of the *Rochester*’, pp. 289-29.



some family collections feature a large number of pieces with armorial decoration and customized designs.

The commission trade that linked individual commanders or supercargoes to specific clients – who might be collectors, wholesalers, or shopkeepers – was a rich source of innovation and enabled the exchange of patterns, models and instructions that created a continuum of novelties that travelled between Canton and Europe. Since private traders in Canton quickly learned from each other, novelties soon became staples that were available in more than one auction room. Jean Cossart & Bouwer (an Amsterdam-based merchant house) knew that their profits very much depended upon the ‘novelty’ of their designs for Chinese silks when they reminded their commission agents, Charles Irvine (SEIC) and Duvelaer de la Barre (Compagnie des Indes) of not showing their musters to anybody else in Canton other than to the Chinese painters.<sup>534</sup>

Much of the literature that considers the commission trade is about special orders of customized furniture, tableware, and textiles, all of which satisfied the demand of a small elite who was ready to pay for unique works of art. Yet, the bulk of commissions that supercargoes and commanders fulfilled were part of the inconspicuous wave of consumer goods that could be purchased by a much broader group of consumers. By analysing the European trading activities of Company supercargoes and captains, we gain a more nuanced picture of the relationship between Company and private trade, and the hitherto largely ignored mechanisms of re-distribution. Such an analysis helps to explain what actually happened with the Company and private trade goods that were publicly sold at Company auctions in Europe once the fleets had returned to the Company headquarters after roughly two years of voyage.

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<sup>534</sup> Jean Cossart & Bouwer (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Cadiz), 18 February 1740, CIC/1740/35a.

### *Public sales, private agreements*

This section touches on the often-overlooked fact that wholesalers exercised direct influence on what was to be supplied from China by placing orders with those supercargoes and commanders on East Indiamen who managed to get an appointment on one of the lucrative voyages to Canton.<sup>535</sup> Through this form of collaboration, private trade became the loophole through which individual sedentary merchants could respond to and further spur changing consumer demands. Agreements between members of the maritime elite and one or more merchant houses in Europe usually grew out of an already close business relationship between both parties, and need to be seen in the context of the frequent exchange of mutual favours and commitments. As Tijl Vanneste has rightly suggested, the idea of reciprocity was central to the functioning of commercial networks and represented ‘a basic cohesive element in long-lasting and stable commercial relationships’.<sup>536</sup> In order to attend to this principle, ‘merchants assumed different roles in order to guarantee reciprocal interest’.<sup>537</sup> Hence, depending on the circumstances, a figure like Charles Irvine could act as an agent for the great merchant house of George Clifford & Co, as a partner, or indeed as a principal by asking them to sell his teas in Amsterdam (Fig. 5.2).

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<sup>535</sup> Once such appointments were made, news spread quickly within the trans-national community of merchant seamen and dealers, see CIC/1737/8a.

<sup>536</sup> Tijl Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks: Eighteenth-Century Diamond Merchants* (London, 2011), pp. 81-94, p. 82.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.



Fig. 5.2 George Clifford III (1685-1760), merchant banker in Amsterdam. Informant of the EIC in London; investor in the Ostend Company, SEIC and VOC. Business contact of Charles Irvine. Famous plant collector and patron of Carl Linnaeus. Source: <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/scientific-resources/collections/botanical-collections/clifford-herbarium/about-clifford/index.html>.

Captains and supercargoes were extremely well positioned to become substantial traders in their own right in Europe, profiting from a mix of personal experience, cross-Company intelligence and extensive private trade privileges. It is less well-known among Company scholars that China traders were often able to keep their privilege cargo by paying the Company sales commission themselves.<sup>538</sup> The question of keeping or selling one's private trade goods at Company auction depended on strategic considerations.<sup>539</sup> In December 1742, Charles Irvine informed his agent Thomas Wilkieson that he was concerned about the news that 'all fine teas, in which most of my pacotille consists bears but a poor price [in Amsterdam], therefore if any tolerable price is offered at our Sales I am resolved to let mine go'.<sup>540</sup>

<sup>538</sup> See, David S. Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader*, p. 29.

<sup>539</sup> The freedom to choose between different options was certainly also linked to the individual's financial situation, as all traders were bound up in complex credit relations. For a good discussion of this, see Bowen, *Privilege and Profit*, esp. pp. 45-50, 55-57.

<sup>540</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), 1 December 1742, letterbook 1742-43.

Letters written months after the December sales, however, reveal that Irvine had changed his mind and instead kept large parts of his private cargo.<sup>541</sup> Irvine hoped that the market prices would improve if he waited long enough, until those merchants desperate to sell had disposed of their goods for meagre profits. It was a dangerous game. He had to sell before news of fresh supplies from Canton reached Europe, which usually brought down the price, leaving Irvine and his agents with a timeframe of roughly seven months to sell his entire *pacotille*. In May 1743, Irvine asked Wilkieson to wait still a little longer with the sale of his fine teas until profits were safe for ‘I love short accounts as well as other people, but I’ve brought them too far to let them goe at any great disadvantage, since I thank God, can wait a twelf [sic] months.’<sup>542</sup> Depending on market conditions, merchant seamen usually tried to sell at least parts of their private cargo to the highest bidder, whilst also investing in typical ‘Company goods’ such as Bohea tea and tutenague, thus expanding their portfolio considerably.<sup>543</sup>

What China traders needed, however, was the market specific intelligence that only sedentary merchants could offer. Wholesalers provided insider knowledge on potential markets, price developments and local taste – expertise that very few merchant seamen had because of their greater mobility. In 1743, Charles Irvine tried to sell some fine Chinese silks in Stockholm via the merchant house of Koschell & Conradi, but apparently misjudged the local market. As they informed him, the price of the fabrics was simply too high for their buyers, with the result that none had been sold when Irvine started to prepare his next voyage to Canton.<sup>544</sup> This time he asked

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<sup>541</sup> See, for instance, Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to George Ouchterlony (London), 30 July 1743, letterbook, 1742-43.

<sup>542</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), 4 May 1743, letterbook.

<sup>543</sup> For Irvine’s involvement in the Bohea trade see his regular correspondence with Charles Metcalfe in Hamburg and Pye & Cruikshank in Amsterdam, CIC/1759/1a-35a.

<sup>544</sup> There were several ways in which East India goods were sold by wholesalers and specialist dealers in Europe. Either goods were sold by public sale or they were shown to interested parties in private.

for advice from Stockholm: 'Je vous serais fort obligé de me marquer les Etoffes que vous croyez être demandé dans ce pays icy & les assortiment de Couleurs pour ma gouvernement en Chine.'<sup>545</sup> These market insights were often transmitted in written form, sometimes accompanied by samples.

There were several ways in which East India goods were sold by wholesalers and specialist dealers in Europe. Commodities such as drugs, tea and porcelain were often sold by public sale. Irvine oftentimes preferred that his goods were shown to interested parties in private. Especially if market prices were low, Irvine was wary to sell his goods openly. He regularly reminded his agents:

not [to] expose them to publick Sales because when goods doe not sell they are afterwards blown upon; & I am the more induced to come to this resolution, that I am convinced that my goods by being kept in a proper warehouse will improve in quality to the taste of your buyers, I do not for all this limit you but only tell you my opinion, show them by all means when a buyer comes.<sup>546</sup>

Public sales, however, could be advantageous at moments of temporary scarcity, great demand, or at certain times of the year, such as before Christmas.<sup>547</sup> Although the strategies for selling private trade goods in Europe were recurring topics of discussion between merchant mariners and sedentary merchants, it is telling

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Irvine often kept samples and pieces of fabric (although the bulk of merchandise was in the hands of his agents).

<sup>545</sup> Charles Irvine (London) to Messrs. Koschell & König (Stockholm), 23 November 1743, letterbook, 1743-44.

<sup>546</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), 4 May 1743, LBI/1742-43.

<sup>547</sup> Irvine apparently had some hope that his silks would find a buyer during the festive period when people were on the lookout for presents. He thus wrote to Koschell & Conradi: 'J'apprend que mes Marchandises d'Etoffes de Soye ne vendent point parce que ils sont trop chères, J'en conviens mais que faire sachie – voila les fêtes de Noel & le Jour de l'an qui approchent il me semble qu'il serait bon de faire une vente publique (ne) pense vous? Ibid.

that Irvine usually accepted the advice of his more experienced agents in Amsterdam, London, Hamburg and Stockholm.

In turn, China traders offered first-hand knowledge of and direct access to Asian markets. They also provided timely information about incoming cargoes for their correspondents – sometimes even before the Company directors would know about them – and had the ability to point out particular lots of exceptional quality well in advance of the public auctions.<sup>548</sup> Insider knowledge of this kind allowed some merchants to ‘cherry pick’ goods at Company sales, when they operated in partnership with individual China traders. Specialised dealers often preferred to commission the goods they wanted prior to the beginning of the voyage and then waited for the private trader to organise the delivery.<sup>549</sup> Cossart & Bouwer, for instance, used several supercargoes who acted in accord with the formers’ interests to purchase the silks needed by the Amsterdam merchant house. Charles Irvine (SEIC) and Duvelaer de la Barre (Chief supercargo of the French East India Company in the early 1740s) were friends and regular partners in business. For many years, they lived in close proximity in China, where de la Barre was to stay for many years as resident supercargo. He had a brother, who supervised the Company warehouses at Lorient – a position that probably facilitated the private ventures of the China supercargo. Duvelaer de la Barre was a respected trader who was regularly mentioned in the EIC Canton diaries for sporting innovations such as transporting raw silk in rattaned bales with wax cloths (as opposed to putting them in chests) for

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<sup>548</sup> A series of letters mentioning the particulars of what different Companies and private traders had bought in the season of 1746/47 were sent out by Irvine from Canton. Interestingly, he always altered the content of his cargo description slightly according to the trading interests of his correspondents in Europe. See the letters to Benjamin Hall, John Anderson, Cossart et fils & Bouwer and Colin Campbell, 16 January 1747, letterbook, 1746-47.

<sup>549</sup> This is particularly the case with silk merchants and porcelain dealers; see, for instance, the correspondence between Charles Irvine and Koschell & Conradi (Stockholm), and Irvine with Jean Cossart & Bouwer in the Netherlands.

better preserving their colour. According to Philippe Haudrère, he was also among the wealthiest French private traders of the time.<sup>550</sup>

In this particular constellation, mariners played the role of commission agents, who charged a service fee or claimed a share in the sale of the goods. There are also instances when merchant seamen fulfilled orders without charge, hoping to be granted other favours in turn. Usually, however, China traders accepted commissions because it generated additional income and safe profits. In 1765, the London drug merchant Richard Gammon addressed John Searle, an English supercargo (whose account books are preserved amongst the Chancery papers in Kew) before the latter embarked on his journey to Canton, asking him and his friend Mr [Thomas] Bevan the favour ‘to help Captain Ross in the sales of the amber in lump & seed pearls that he has on board’.<sup>551</sup> Gammon was shipping pearls, ‘cash’, coral and amber to Canton via a number of different Company servants, on behalf of his associate Challoner’s and at his own risk. In order to clarify that he did not merely ask for a favour he added: ‘I got you put in the commission of a Box of Coral sent by Mr Challoner on the Company’s register GCN°5 & Capt. Ross invoiced at £ 3666,11 and I shall hope it will sell at a good price as it’s by much the finest parcel I ever saw together’.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> Philippe Haudrère, ‘The French Company of the Indies in the 17th and 18th centuries: success or failure’, in Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau (eds.), *Merchants, Companies and Trade* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 202-211.

<sup>551</sup> Thomas Bevan was one out of a small group of writers/supercargoes who were supported by the EIC directors in their efforts to learn Chinese according to H. B. Morse, *Chronicles of the East India Company in China*, Vol. V, p. 27. The Bevans were a wealthy Quaker family, originally from Swansea. Silvanus Bevan (1661-1725) grew rich from the copper refinement industry. Subsequent generations settled in London as apothecaries (Timothy Bevan was the owner of the Plough Court pharmacy in Lombard Street), export merchants to North America and the West Indies, bankers (connected to the Barclays family) and East India servants. For more information, see Jacob M. Price, ‘The Great Quaker Business Families of Eighteenth-Century London: The Rise and Fall of a Sectarian Patriciate’, in idem., *Overseas Trade and Traders: Essays on Some Commercial, Financial, and Political Challenges Facing British Atlantic Merchants, 1660-1775* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 363-399.

<sup>552</sup> Richard Gammon (London) to John Seale (London), 22 January 1765. The National Archives, Kew, C107/154, FLINT v HOLLOWAY: John Searle, of Lambourne and Norton Mandeville, Essex, supercargo of the East India Company in the China trade: will, account-books and papers (1750-86).

Being 'put in commission' by wholesale dealers like Gammon & Challoner generated additional income for China traders, especially when the sums were substantial since the brokerage could greatly exceed the 1.5 or 2 per cent of the sales value that were common in the intra-European trade. Company servants could hope for 5 per cent at least for offering their services to metropolitan merchants like Gammon & Challoner. To prevent smuggling, the Company introduced the rule for diamond merchants that they had to pay the captain of a ship 1.4 per cent of the value of their registered diamonds on board of East Indiamen, even if the captain was not concerned with the purchase of the stones themselves. Being stored in his cabin, the captain thus had a sensible interest in defending the legal trade in diamonds, chiefly because it generated personal income that would otherwise escape him.<sup>553</sup>

In view of the great price fluctuations that characterised the trade in East India goods, the commission system became a crucial 'safety mechanism' for individual private traders. Thus, part of the latter's *pacotille* consisted of parcels destined for specific European city merchants who had sometimes put considerable effort and funds into producing good musters, novel designs, and specific colour palettes for the goods that were to be produced in China.<sup>554</sup> Clearly, wholesalers and specialist dealers would not have made such investments if they were afraid to lose these parcels at the Company auctions against a competitor. A key point of discussion should therefore consider the means by which collaborations between wholesalers and Company servants worked out in practice. What mechanisms were in place to help circumvent the formal structures of Company sales that were based on competitive ascending-bid auctions? Paucity of sources on auction proceedings

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<sup>553</sup> Gedalia Yogev, *Diamonds and Coral*, p. 133.

<sup>554</sup> Jean Cossart et fils & Bouwer knew that their profits very much depended upon the 'novelty' of their designs for Chinese silks when they reminded their commission agents, Charles Irvine (SEIC) and Duvelaer de la Barre (VOC) not to show their musters to anybody else in Canton than to the Chinese painters. Jean Cossart et fils & Bouwer (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Cadiz), 18 February 1740, CIC/1740/35a.



(and their circumvention) has led historians to believe that Company auctions indeed simply functioned as described in Company by-laws and ‘at the front of the printed sale catalogues’.<sup>555</sup> The latter provided some vital information for buyers, including directions on commodities that had to be exported (because of their being banned in the importing country), customs duties and discounts, reserve prices for each lot, duration of the sales and so forth. Yet, much of the actual workings of these auctions remain obscure.<sup>556</sup>

In theory, at least, samples of all goods that were imported by the Companies or by private trade had to be ‘fairly Exposed to the View of the Buyers at least Ten days before the Sale’.<sup>557</sup> This regulation was intended to give every merchant the possibility to examine the quality of goods (mostly samples) they were interested in buying prior to the start of the auction. In practice, however, this was far from being always the case. While this chapter cannot treat the subject of auction manipulation exhaustively, it can at least mention some of the most common practices that helped to guarantee that those customers and befriended merchants actually got the goods, which they had ordered via private trade channels. Needless to say that some goods never made it to the Company warehouses, but were smuggled ashore before the ships arrived in the home port.<sup>558</sup> All Companies took action to prevent smuggling as it meant the loss of income and control over supplies. Yet, as long as private goods were properly registered and sold via the official auctions, the Companies seem to

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<sup>555</sup> Koninckx, *The First and Second Charter*, p. 275.

<sup>556</sup> A few scholars who have tried to compare formal auction rules and actual practices are Gedalia Yogeve, *Diamonds and Coral*, pp. 216-23; and Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader*, pp. 29-34.

<sup>557</sup> See, report on the discussions between ‘The Commissioners of his Ma[jes]ties Customs’ and ‘Mr Liell and Sir Matthew Decker two of the Directors of the United East India Company on Friday last relating to the Method of Selling Goods in private Trade’, 11 January 1722, British Library, IOR/E/1/14 pp. 38-40.

<sup>558</sup> Irvine successfully smuggled large quantities of gold ashore on his return trip from Canton. See, Charles Irvine to George Ouchterlony (London), 24 August 1747; Charles Irvine (off Dover on board the *Freden*) to Mr Fecton (Dover), 1 September 1747.

have turned a blind eye to the special arrangements between their servants and individual buyers.

First, it happened that private traders managed to prevent their goods being shown prior to the auction, so nobody except the intended buyer knew about their precise contents. We know that this occurred, because a German merchant who attended the EIC sales in London in 1722 complained in writing to the ‘Commissioners of his Ma[jes]ties Customs’ ‘that several parcels of Goods in private Trade had not been fairly Sold and that Some of them had not been Exposed to the View of the Buyers’.<sup>559</sup> Since the goods were *not* present in the auction room, and merchants only bid on what they had previously seen in the warehouses, this method effectively excluded all other buyers from seeing the goods beforehand and thus to be able to make a sensible bid for it. The same source reveals another practice that prevented the ‘wrong person’ from buying a particular lot. In response to the complaint of David Elers, the Customs officials suggested the introduction of new rule:

[t]hat the Candleman or any Officer of the Company be not permitted to declare to whom the Goods belong thereby to hinder any person from bidding ... and in case the Candleman shall declare the Goods to be bought by any person to hastily and it shall be objected by the officers of the Customs attending the Sale that Such Goods were not fairly Sold that the Chairman and Directors then present shall cause the Same to be immediately put up to sale again.

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<sup>559</sup> See, IOR/E/1/14, pp. 38-40.

As we further learn from the same document, the bribing of those who conducted the sales was another straightforward opportunity for securing certain parcels. Tellingly, the two Directors of the EIC who handled this case, Thomas Liell and Sir Matthew Decker – both notorious private traders themselves – rejected the above request by their colleagues from the Customs office. They replied, stating that they ‘did not mean that the Officers of the Customs should be the Judges whether a lott be fairly Sold or not’.<sup>560</sup> Overall, there are surprisingly few formal complaints in the East India records that directly relate to methods of selling private trade goods. What is clear from the cases we have, however, is that Company directors proved reluctant to closely regulate the mechanisms of sale. In this context, it is important to note that Company directors were anything but disinterested administrators. By contrast, they were usually as involved in private trade as their employees.

The Swedish Company directors Colin and Hugh Campbell and Niklas Sahlgren represent memorable examples as they were for many years among the largest buyers at the annual Company sales in Gothenburg.<sup>561</sup> In 1733 and 1734, for instance, Hugh Campbell attended three sales in total, and bought goods worth 51,029 guilders (October 1733 and March 1734 combined) while spending another 17,407 guilders on merchandise at the October sales in 1734. These are staggering sums indeed. Although it is not unproblematic to convert historical currencies into contemporary worth, a tentative estimate is nevertheless useful. 51,029 Dutch guilders in 1733 are roughly equivalent to 169.3 yearly wages of an unskilled worker at the time.<sup>562</sup> In today’s terms, Hugh Campbell would have spent almost three million pounds at the first two sales alone. To be sure, Campbell bought on behalf of

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> Exceptional sources for reconstructing the composition of buyers at SEIC auctions are the annotated sales catalogues that survived in significant numbers in Swedish archives. I thank Hanna Hodacs for pointing me to this material.

<sup>562</sup> Source of calculation: <http://dutchancestrycoach.com/historic-calculator.php>, accessed March 2013.

distant clients and investors as well as for his own account. To give another striking example, in 1748 the *Calmar* returned to Gothenburg with a rich cargo from Canton. Colin Campbell purchased – besides innumerable other things – 105 lots (that is 356 chests) of Bohea tea at the SEIC sales. The *Calmar* carried in total 1584 chests of Bohea tea that season, which means that Campbell purchased 22.5 per cent of the ship's Bohea cargo.

For the small army of bookkeepers and writers that were based at Gothenburg, it was exceedingly difficult to separate the private dealings of Company servants such as Hugh Campbell from Company concerns, as both were often closely intertwined. We get a good glimpse of the challenges that Company clerks faced by looking at a series of annotated balance sheets ('account currents') that have survived among Charles Irvine's business papers. Here we learn that it often took years to settle a dispute or reveal errors in the chain of transaction surrounding a particular voyage, since bookkeepers had to wait until all actors in question were actually physically present at Gothenburg in order to discuss, defend, and cross-check the accounts for specific voyages. A clerk who took over from the previous head bookkeeper lamented: 'Having now followed Mr Langloh with all possible attention through the innumerable turnings and windings of these accounts, we are amazed to see the transactions of one plain voyage so Surprisingly blended and misrepresented.'<sup>563</sup> The state of accounts between the Company and individual servants, and commitments between different servants, were 'so variously represented by Messrs. Hugh Campbell, Langeloh, Beyer and Barclay; that of six or eight Sketches of it now before us, not any two agree, nor is there any one right.'<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Charles Irvine Correspondence, letter books, legal documents and account books, first item, FBL, Minn.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

On an altogether larger scale was the customary practice among Company servants to organise pre-sales.<sup>565</sup> A rare document from 1790, written by the London merchant Eleazar Levy Isaac, provides some detail about this method for acquiring privilege goods:

it is usual for the merchants who trade and deal in such East India goods, immediately on the arrival of the East India ships to contract with the officers of such ships for the purchase of their merchandize at a price certain ... and when the same goods and merchandizes are afterwards sold at the sales of the East India Company, the contractor buys them in and pays for them to the original owners according to the price before contracted, without any regard being had to the price bid for the same at such public sale.<sup>566</sup>

In other words, a binding contract was formed between a Company servant and a city merchant that set the price of a parcel of goods. This enabled the merchant to outbid all competitors during the auction with the confidence that they would have to pay only the price that was agreed beforehand. There was even some quick profit to be made by the sedentary merchant, in the event that the bid-up prices went well beyond the agreed sum. Then, the merchant could restrain from giving the highest bid, leave the goods to another merchant – who would most likely not be aware of the secret arrangement – and divide the profits with the Company servant. This profit comprised ‘the difference between the price fixed in the contract and the price actually paid at the public sale’.<sup>567</sup> There is sufficient evidence in the scattered private correspondence of China traders and in the Court of Chancery records to

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<sup>565</sup> Contemporaries called them ‘fore-sales’; Yogevev, *Diamonds and Coral*, pp. 223-25.

<sup>566</sup> Cited in, Yogevev, p. 216, emphasis mine.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid, p. 218.

suggest that this was indeed a common practice throughout the eighteenth century. The Company bookkeepers may have been aware of these dealings, yet no mention of it is to be found in Company records. Only when one side of the contract (buyer or seller) did not keep their promise, and the matter was taken to court, do we find a convenient accumulation of receipts that allows us to reconstruct the tactics used by importers and buyers respectively.<sup>568</sup>

It should, however, not be assumed that the circumvention of rules of selling imported goods by public auction, was narrowly based on malfeasant behaviour on the side of the original proprietors and buyers involved. In fact, there is ample evidence to suggest that various types of goods were never intended for public sale in the first place. The sale of Indian pearls via the East India Company auction was ‘nothing but a farce’.<sup>569</sup> Only in 1803 were changes to the well-established system of a merely nominal sale of pearls made through an Act of Parliament, which led to the prompt protest of several merchants involved in the importation of pearls. Their letters explained and defended the previous mechanisms by which ‘the sales at the India House, having been heretofore merely nominal, and the value (of the pearls was) ascertained by the register sent to the India Company from India’.<sup>570</sup> Thus, based on the invoice price, the pearls were put up for sale, and then ‘bought in by the agent of the Company for account of the proprietors.’<sup>571</sup>

With regards to the sale of pearls and diamonds from India, the East India Company thus played an active part in protecting the privileges of a small group of respectable dealers, who bought annual licenses to ship out coral, glass beads, silver and amber in return for diamonds and pearls. Anglo-Dutch Jews dominated the

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<sup>568</sup> See, for instance, the case of Richard Moreton. C103/192 Moreton vs. Newnam, Chancery masters’ records, The National Archives, Kew.

<sup>569</sup> Yogev, p. 134.

<sup>570</sup> Yogev, citing from Mocatta and Goldsmid Letter Book, letters No. 15, 16 (15 Aug. 1803, October 1803), p. 298.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

licence trade in precious and semi-precious stones and also had a big share in the drug trade in which the Company did not have a great interest in. The trade in those low volume/high value goods was very vulnerable to changes in demand and, as Yogev recounts, many diamond traders were strong opponents of selling stones by public auction, for the damage it could do to the market as a whole, but also for fear of price-rigging between buyers or as contemporaries called it a ‘chance of combination among the purchasers’.<sup>572</sup>

There were thus a number of commercial instruments (and the list is certainly not complete) by which merchants and mariners managed to undermine the structure of competitive bidding at Company auctions. Hence, despite the existence of a regulatory framework for East India auctions, merchants and mariners managed to influence the re-distribution of goods to a considerable degree. At their core, these methods speak to the extent to which city merchants and mariners were able to use informal networks to advance their own position in the European wholesale trade. Such private agreements between merchants and mariners helped to reduce uncertainties for both parties, but they also led to the accumulation of power in the hands of fewer dealers – who at times managed to dominate the wholesale market for certain products.<sup>573</sup> By using their connections to merchant seamen across the different companies, wholesalers could ‘quietly’ pick up large quantities of goods without alarming their competitors, or they could try to chase up prices at the auctions – knowing that they would pay only previously agreed sums. Commanders, officers and supercargoes of the China trade thus appear in a new light if we take their involvement in the inter-European trade seriously. Despite recent efforts to illuminate various aspects of their social lives ashore, mariners in the East India

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<sup>572</sup> Yogev, p. 299.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

Companies – and the mercantile marine in general – are mostly depicted as ‘rough-hewn men of the sea’, who lacked the economic strength and social recognition of city merchants that dominate historical narratives of long-distance trade and Europe’s commercial revolution.<sup>574</sup> Yet, this chapter argues that merchant seamen were decidedly more than the travelling agents who acted on behalf of Companies and individual investors. Rather, their ambition as merchants shaped the integration of markets for Chinese export wares in Europe and the success of the Company ventures abroad.

### *The re-export trade*

The previous sections have established some of the key mechanisms by which China supercargoes and commanders could profit from their privileged access to Asian goods in the European marketplace. Now, we will return to the specific role played by British free agents/interlopers in Europe. We will look in particular at the ways in which they used their displacement on the continent to develop a strong position in the lucrative re-export trade of Chinese consumer goods. By following the activities of Britons abroad, we see the extent to which they acted as connectors between different national markets. Their reliance on extended kinship networks and regional ties is particularly significant in this context, as it shaped their private trade activities to a significant degree. A network perspective is useful to reveal trading patterns and commercial geographies which would – as in the case of Cadiz – remain otherwise hidden.

British interlopers such as Charles Irvine spent little time in Sweden, and a lot of time at sea. Still, they managed to sell their private goods, attend some of the

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<sup>574</sup> H. V. Bowen, ‘Privilege and Profit’, p. 44.



Company auctions, and take on commissions along the way. At the same time they had to organise provisions and an appropriate outward cargo for their next journey to China. In the most extreme cases they had merely three months to achieve all this. Arthur Abercromby is not the only supercargo who complained about the fact that there was always too little time to get everything in order before leaving for Canton: 'You can't imagine what a hurry I am in having everything to provide aboard & ashore as the Company gives nothing to speak of.'<sup>575</sup> Irvine repeatedly apologised to the Campbell brothers whom he bestowed with powers of attorney for leaving his private papers in a disordered manner. Since they were working on a very tight schedule, we can appreciate why supercargoes and commanders had to delegate much of their business to trusted correspondents.

It was, of course, impossible for supercargoes and commanders to anticipate all problems or misunderstandings that could arise in their absence regarding outstanding payments. However, Irvine, Abercromby and others like them usually left very detailed instructions and additional funds in the hands of different merchant bankers to 'acquit all demands' which were made in their absence.<sup>576</sup> Considering the special conditions under which supercargoes and other merchant seamen operated, it becomes clear that only a close-knit network of sedentary merchants could ensure that Canton traders could be more than commercial agents.

Charles Irvine, for instance, used a small but efficient network of merchants and kinsmen to deal with his wholesale activities in Europe – and well beyond the continent. Many of them were Scotsmen. Table 5.1 presents a selection of agents on whom Irvine relied for selling his Chinese consumer goods in different European markets and in Britain. The merchants that are mentioned in the list were not the only

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<sup>575</sup> Arthur Abercromby (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 4 November 1758, CIC/1758/42a1.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

agents active for him, but those with whom he had routine correspondence and repeated transactions for prolonged periods of time. Sometimes, Irvine used also other people such as Robert Main in Cadiz or John Forbes of Alford in Rotterdam, but was soon disappointed with their service.

At its height of activity in the late 1740s and early 1750s, Charles Irvine's wholesale networks spanned seven cities in Europe: Amsterdam, London, Antwerp, Stockholm, Cadiz, Hamburg and Aberdeen. The centre of network activity was not Gothenburg or London, as one might think, but Amsterdam. The reason was that Amsterdam, not London was the prime entrepôt for Chinese export wares in Europe – and this includes Britain, if we consider the massive illegal trade to British shores in which Anglo-Dutch merchant houses played an important role. Although the literature of Anglo-Dutch commerce uniformly attests to the relative decline of Amsterdam as the European re-distribution centre for colonial goods in the eighteenth century,<sup>577</sup> yet its position as a marketplace for Chinese export wares and as a hub for commercial intelligence and finance surrounding the East India trade remained unchallenged during the period of this study. It is therefore hardly surprising that Irvine had several close contacts in that town.

Irvine's key contacts in Amsterdam were all houses of wider reputation and significance. Although most of these merchant houses have been introduced at different points throughout this work, some further remarks about their trading interests and relationship to the China trade and British interlopers such as Charles Irvine are useful. Taken together, these merchant houses formed a key but elusive group of intermediaries who were only informally connected to the different East

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<sup>577</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade*; the gradual rise of London as Europe's main entrepôt for colonial goods is charted by David Ormrod, *The Rise of Commercial Empires* and Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies*.

India Companies. Through their cooperation with individual Company servants, however, they managed to play a crucial role for the functioning of the trade.

**Table 5.1 Irvine's wholesale network**

<b>Period of collaboration</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Place of residence</b>	<b>Nationality</b>
1720s-1743	Thomas Wilkieson	Amsterdam	Scottish
1720s-1764	George Ouchterlony	London	Scottish
1730s-1760s	James Gough & Co	Cadiz	Irish
1730s-1740s	Urbano Arnold	Antwerp	Flemish
1730s-1740s	Jean Cossart & Bouwer	Amsterdam	Flemish
1743-1750s	George Clifford & Co	Amsterdam	Anglo-Dutch
1743-1770	Pye & Cruikshank	Amsterdam	Scottish
1740s-1750s	Koschell & Conradi	Stockhom	German/Swedish
1740s-1750s	James Rose	Aberdeen	Scottish
1749-1763	Charles Metcalfe	Hamburg	Scottish
1750s	Jennings & Findlay	Stockholm	Irish?/Scottish

Thomas Wilkieson, born in Edinburgh, was perhaps the most important trading partner of Charles Irvine in the Netherlands in the 1730s and early 1740s. Wilkieson conducted his trading ventures from Amsterdam, but remained strongly connected to Britain. His trading interests literally spanned the globe. He was involved in Anglo-Dutch commerce, the trade to Spain and France, was engaged in the Atlantic trade, and was also dealing in East India goods.<sup>578</sup> We know that Wilkieson acted as the principal agent at Amsterdam for the British Royal African Company, for which he regularly purchased cowries from the Maldives and Indian textiles destined for the African slave trade.<sup>579</sup>

<sup>578</sup> Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 2 January 1740, CIC/1740/1a. For Wilkieson's expertise regarding the trade with Spain and its American colonies, see Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 23 January 1740, CIC/1740/19a.

<sup>579</sup> Jan Hogendorn and Marion Johnson, *Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 94-97.

Wilkieson also sold tea, textiles and rhubarb on Irvine's behalf, and supplied him with textiles (for export to China), wine and numerous provisions. In doing so, he was in regular contact with George Ouchterlony, Irvine's agent in London. Especially at times of war, they were jointly weighing the risk for sending Irvine's goods to Cadiz or Gothenburg for fear they might be confiscated at high sea.<sup>580</sup> The frenetic exchange of letters between them in 1739 with proposals on how to get a large consignment of English textiles which were stored in Wilkieson's warehouse to Irvine before his departure to China demonstrates the amount of responsibility that an agent like Wilkieson had. Questions such as which route was the safest, whose name should be on the bill of lading, what exactly should be insured, and what flag should be hoisted in case of confrontation, were hotly debated by members of Irvine's support network.

The tone between Wilkieson and Irvine in their routine correspondence was more personal and outspoken than Irvine usually had with his many other correspondents. This, however, did not prevent the two to have regular disagreements on the quality of goods, and the best way and timing to sell them – discussions that make clear how difficult it was to predict the market for Chinese imports. One example, which is spelt out by Wilkieson in a letter to Irvine in 1740, also shows just how many professional groups were involved in the market for specific Chinese goods which were brought to Amsterdam by servants of the different Companies. Irvine, the importer of ten large chests of Chinese rhubarb in 1739, relied on the information given by the Chinese hong merchants for choosing the right quality for the European market. Given his first-hand knowledge of the rhubarb available there, he felt rather certain that his parcel would fetch a good

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<sup>580</sup> Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 30 January 1740, CIC/1740/22a.

price.<sup>581</sup> It was Wilkieson, his agent, who subsequently had the unpleasant task to inform Irvine that the quality of his rhubarb was really not that good, and that the expected wholesale buyers in Amsterdam – the druggists – were to be trusted in their critical judgement.

[A]ll the surgeons & apothecarys together with the whole College of Physicians through all Europe are not so good Judges of the quality of it [Rhubarb], as some of the Druggists & these are the persons we have to deal with, & it signifies little or nothing in being conceiled [sic!] in one's opinion, when one has to do with persons who are the greatest Connoisseurs.<sup>582</sup>

For Wilkieson, both 'raw silk and rhubarb are very capricious articles', not least because they were likely to suffer from the long and humid journey back to Europe by ship. He thus wrote to Charles Irvine that 'I am told that to pack Rhubarb in Rice will preserve it from the worm'.<sup>583</sup> Wilkieson gave meticulous advice on a wide range of subjects and commodities, and always looked out for ways in which to facilitate Irvine's mobile business. For instance, he arranged for patterns to be made out of Irvine's textiles so the latter could take some of them with him to China for comparison with his new purchases.<sup>584</sup> It was also intended that Irvine would also show these samples to potential buyers in Sweden before his scheduled departure, thus hopefully securing the interest of his future clients.

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<sup>581</sup> Irvine Papers; shipping records items 39-3d and 39-4d. Bills of lading, 4 January 1739. Signed by Thomas Neilson (commander of the *Fredericus Rex Suecia*), FBL, Minn.

<sup>582</sup> Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 16 January 1740, CIC/1740/14a.

<sup>583</sup> Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 19 February 1740, CIC/1740/36a.

<sup>584</sup> Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 27 February 1740, CIC/1740/41a; Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 27 February 1740, CIC/1740/42a.

Irvine's collaboration with Wilkieson also affected the very logistics behind his trading. His efficient dealings with Wilkieson and his other agents become evident when we consider how and where Irvine forwarded his Asian goods to once he arrived in Europe from China. Irvine usually did not rent rooms to store his own goods. What was more, the SEIC warehouse provided only a temporary storage space. Following the Company sales, Irvine thus always distributed his *pacotille* and auction purchases among his sales agents in Amsterdam, Stockholm and Hamburg, and so forth, who stored them until their re-sale.

Yet, wholesale agents like Wilkieson offered more than practical expertise and help in the logistics of trade. Since they also participated in other trades and had contacts to myriad other correspondents unknown to Irvine and others like him, they effectively increased the reach for Company servants to a larger and more varied customer base. Irvine put a lot of trust in the commercial abilities and integrity of his agents, and in Wilkieson in particular. When Wilkieson broke the news of his pending retirement from business in 1743, Irvine thus wrote him a personal letter that clearly reflected the personal and commercial appreciation he had for his correspondent:

[I] do with the greatest sincerity & Joy ... congratulate you on your resolution of Setting limits to your ambition & and retiring from business tho' I assure you it gives me at the same time no small concern to think that I am loosing a friend in whom I could & would, on occasion, put trust sans reserve.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Thomas Wilkieson (Amsterdam), undated, FBL, Minn. Charles Irvine letter book, 1743-44.

Wilkieson's business was subsequently taken over by his former junior partners, two young British merchants in Amsterdam, who had formed an independent firm called Pye & Cruikshank. Charles Pye was English, George Cruikshank originally from Aberdeen. They continued to sell tea for Irvine until the late 1760s. It was during the same decade that Pye & Cruikshank developed a strong interest in the Anglo-Indian remittance business. Together with Clifford & Sons, Hope & Co, and a few other Anglo-Dutch firms, they made a successful transition from import/export merchants into large banking houses. Yet, their wealth, connections and knowledge of the East Indies trade derived from their extensive shipping concerns as tea dealers and factors for merchant seamen like Charles Irvine, George Kitchen and George Elliott. Little is known about Pye & Cruikshank's trading activities outside the East Indies trade, but when they started issuing government loans and became active in war finance around the mid-eighteenth century, this is when their financial weight became apparent.<sup>586</sup>

Amsterdam's prominent role within Irvine's own private trade network – and the Company trading system more generally – is perhaps best exemplified by the Anglo-Dutch merchant house of George Clifford & sons. The Clifford family came to the Netherlands from the north of England in the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>587</sup> George Clifford III (1685-1760) was a wealthy merchant banker with close connections to the Gentlemen Seventeen and the EIC directors in London. He acted as the official correspondent/informant of the EIC in the Netherlands, and provided regular information on prices, the departure and arrival of East Indiamen, the timing of different auctions, and so forth. After the death of George Clifford senior, his sons

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<sup>586</sup> The involvement of Pye & Cruikshank in the East Indies remittance trade is discussed in Holden Furber, *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Mass, 1948).

<sup>587</sup> Tijl Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks*, p. 70.

continued the agency service.<sup>588</sup> The larger East India Companies all used a system of agents for gaining reliable information about their trade and the competition. Of course, the Companies' entire staff consisted, in a sense, of commercial agents and potential informants. However, another category of agents were those who supplied the Companies with commercial information on a regular basis from different port cities in Europe. Agents did not receive a fixed salary, but were paid irregular gratuities and compensations for all costs that they incurred on the Company's behalf, such as the postage of letters, the feeding and housing of stranded sailors, the supply with provisions, and other things.<sup>589</sup>

In the English East India Company records, transcriptions of the letters received by Clifford & sons have partly survived, together with newspaper cuttings which announced the sale and cargo details of many different ships and across the different East India Companies. The Amsterdam house received these announcements from their informal contacts within the Companies, and then took it upon them to forward the information in a timely manner to the Court of Directors in London. In a letter from 1768, Clifford remarked on the expected sale of two SEIC ships, among them the *Lovisa Ulrica*, which had just returned to Gothenburg. Clifford wrote that

We received these [announcements] this evening from Sweden, and thought it our Duty to forward them to you immediately for the inspection of the Gentlemen Directors, which, we hope, they will be pleased to take in good party. As the two above mentioned ships have brought a very considerable

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<sup>588</sup> See the extensive correspondence between George Clifford & Sons and Peter Mitchell Esq at East India House, London. British Library, IOR/E/1/51, pp. 1-233.

<sup>589</sup> James H. Thomas 'East India Company Agency Work in the British Isles, 1700-1800', in H. V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln and Nigel Rigby (eds), *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 33-48.



quantity of Tea, and there being besides Seventeen more Ships expected this year in Europe from China, viz. 8 English, 4 Dutch, 3 French, & 2 Danish, it is very probable, that Teas will in general go very cheap.<sup>590</sup>

Geographically speaking, Amsterdam sat – similar to Cadiz – at a cross-road for the cross-Company exchange of information about incoming and outgoing vessels, their expected cargoes and any irregularities regarding their passage. These irregularities could include unusual routes taken, delays, numbers of death, sickness on board, shipwreck or the need for repairs, et cetera. The annual cycle of the China trade followed the rhythm dictated by the monsoon winds. The concerted departure and arrival of ships to and from China – by which already minor delays were bad for business – naturally impacted on the flow and availability of information. Merchants who were active participants in the wholesale trade were keen to collect as much information and as early as possible from their private correspondents in order to plan ahead and be able to judge the market. This meant that merchants had to decide, for instance, whether there was an urgent need to sell their remaining stocks quickly before their competitors had gathered this type of information.

Sometimes, well-connected merchants received rather sensitive information about the expected cargo of a China ship even before the Company directors concerned were informed by their employees. Knowing this, Irvine apologised in advance to George Clifford for not giving any particulars yet about the cargo on board the SEIC ship *Freden* in 1747, claiming that '[o]ur Gentlemen Directors have justly been displeased when notes of cargoes have been sent before they had them

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<sup>590</sup> George Clifford & Sons (Amsterdam) to Peter Mitchell Esq. at the East India House in London, dated Amsterdam 1 July 1768. *British Library*, IOR/ E/1/51, p. 2. The newspaper announcement is dated 18 June 1768.

themselves henceforth you'll excuse my not sending it you herewith.'<sup>591</sup> At the same time, however, Irvine hoped to be furnished with timely price information by Clifford to decide what to buy at the upcoming auction in Gothenburg. He thus informed Clifford: 'Please ... mention the prices of Sundry Teas, wrought Silks and Tutenague: not that I have any concern directly or indirectly in either, being only passenger; but may possibly be a buyer of these be an appearance of getting a Penny.'<sup>592</sup> The gathering of information was of prime importance for all participants in the wholesale trade, including the Company supercargoes in their role as *private traders*.

Clifford & sons were investors and shareholders in many different East India Companies during the period of this study.<sup>593</sup> They were involved with the Ostend venture and remained in close contact with supercargoes and captains of various rival Companies. Later, they also invested in SEIC ventures. George Clifford regularly sold tea and silks in Amsterdam for Charles Irvine, Arthur Abercromby, Colin Campbell, and other British free agents. Yet, they also figured as buyers of Company goods.<sup>594</sup> The Clifford family entered the city-government of Amsterdam in the mid-eighteenth century, which perhaps shows best their integration into Dutch society. In the 1760s and 1770s, Clifford & sons were also key players in the Anglo-Indian remittance business, through which EIC servants channelled their fortunes back to Europe. It is through these financial services (and the speculation that accompanied

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<sup>591</sup> Charles Irvine (on board the *Freden*) to George Clifford & Sons, 24 August 1747, letter book 1746-47.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> The name of the merchant house George Clifford & co repeatedly changed over the course of the eighteenth century.

<sup>594</sup> On their involvement in the re-export trade of Indian diamonds see Tijn Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks*, pp. 70 and 153.

the trade in bills of exchange) that their company eventually went bankrupt in 1773, and took with them a great many others into the financial abyss.<sup>595</sup>

Given the multiplicity of alliances to the big and small East India Companies and George Clifford's involvement with British interlopers, his official role in the EIC is rather surprising. The (in our eyes at least) peculiar trust that was put in the merchant house of Clifford & Sons by subsequent generations of EIC directors is partly to be explained by the close links that they maintained within the broader Anglo-Dutch commerce. There was close cooperation between London and Amsterdam, and Clifford & Sons played an important role in this bi-national trade – which meant that their loyalty was never questioned. One could undertake a certainly revealing study of the kinds of information that George Clifford actually had from his many trading partners across Europe on the one hand, and the arguably much more limited kind of information he was willing to pass on to the Companies.

For private traders such as Charles Irvine, in turn, it was a distinct advantage to count such eminent merchant houses amongst their friends, since vital information especially about price developments were useful to them as well. To give an example, George Clifford was the first to know in 1744 that the EIC planned to legally purchase certain types of tea at continental auctions, since in that year the Company could not fulfil the market obligation: that is, the demand. Such information was crucial as it kept the prices up for quite some time. And the individual decision-making of private traders was certainly influenced when such an opportunity for legal selling occurred. It was only when prices really went down that private traders were willing to sell their goods on to smugglers.

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<sup>595</sup> Femme S. Gaastra, 'War, Competition and Collaboration: Relations between the English and Dutch East India Company in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in H. V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln and Nigel Rigby (eds), *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 49-68, esp. p. 61f.

Amsterdam was the place where most of Irvine's tea went in the 1730s and 1740s, a part of which was certainly sold on to smugglers who would have brought it to the Channel Islands – the preferred gateway of contraband tea to England. Yet, Amsterdam also supplied the German lands and wider Central Europe with Chinese tea and other consumer goods. The names of the purchasers listed by Pye & Cruikshank in their regular correspondence following every sale they made on Irvine's behalf supports the assumption that much of Irvine's fine tea was actually bought by German merchants and captains who visited Amsterdam for that purpose.<sup>596</sup> This concentration of tea in one place had its disadvantages, of course. The outbreak of military conflicts, any sign of political instability, and also the temporary overstocking of that market could all be disastrous for the importer, since profit margins on the legal sale of tea were becoming very slim anyways.<sup>597</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Charles Irvine actively sought to develop alternative outlets for his goods.

Irvine continued to supply tea to his agents in Amsterdam throughout the 1750s. At the same time, however, he also looked elsewhere to sell his SEIC auction purchases (especially of black tea) – auction purchases that increased dramatically after he gave up his active career as supercargo.<sup>598</sup> The first outlet that was developed by Irvine and many of the other Scottish-born interlopers was their own home country. Smuggling voyages to the Isle of Man were also organized occasionally. This was the case, for instance, in 1743 when Irvine reported to George

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<sup>596</sup> Pye & Cruikshank (Amsterdam) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), letters dated 17 February, 9 March, 23 March 1748, CIC/1748/18a, 24a, and 28a.

<sup>597</sup> Diederick Smith (Amsterdam) to John Hallet Esq. (London), 14 March 1755, The National Archives, Kew, C111/95 Hall vs Hallett.

<sup>598</sup> See the twenty-one annotated auction catalogues of the SEIC between 1747 and 1758 from the Swedish National Archive, which were made available online via the Warwick University Library <http://contentdm.warwick.ac.uk/cdm/landingpage/collection/swedish> (last accessed: 10 January 2016). Irvine was among the top five buyers of tea at the SEIC sale of the *Prins Carl* in 1756 according to the calculation of Hanna Hodacs and Leos Müller, 'Chests, Tubs, and Lots of Tea – the European Market for Chinese Tea and the Swedish East India Company, 1730-1760', in Maxine Berg (et al.) (eds), *Goods from the East, 1600-1800 Trading Eurasia* (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 286.

Ouchterlony – his partner in many such smuggling ventures – that his kinsman ‘T.O.’ [Thomas Ouchterlony] was ‘ready to sail [as] passenger for the Isle of Mann with a large Pacotille.’<sup>599</sup>

Yet, after 1743, a group of interlopers and their intimates who came together through their joint interest to sell tea clandestinely in Britain organised a more regular tramping trade between Gothenburg and the North-East of Scotland, where most of them originally came from.<sup>600</sup> This group included Adam and Archibald Duff, Captain Urquart, Arthur Abercromby, Colin Campbell, Captain Kitchin, James Moir, George Elphinstone, George and Thomas Ouchterlony, Charles and John Irvine and James Rose – the latter was actually bringing the goods ashore.<sup>601</sup> The existence of extended regional, and in particular kinship, networks seem to have been an important support structure for this risky but profitable illicit trade to the North.

Irvine also extended his access to the German market by appointing an agent in Hamburg who marketed his goods directly.<sup>602</sup> Charles Metcalfe, a Scottish resident merchant in Hamburg, started to sell tea for Irvine and Captain Kitchin from 1749 onwards, thereby reporting meticulously on every price fluctuation and the general atmosphere among the tea brokers in Hamburg, or, as he called them, ‘our speculative chaps’.<sup>603</sup> The market for tea had certainly developed for some time in this place. German demand for Chinese consumer goods seem to have picked up during the time in which Irvine entered the market. Metcalfe repeatedly reported on the growing number of specialised traders in town. Charles Irvine visited Germany twice as his application for royal passports document, he first went to Stralsund and

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<sup>599</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to George Ouchterlony (London), 30 July 1743, letter book, 1743-44. FBL, Minn.

<sup>600</sup> For an excellent discussion of the inland support networks of smugglers and the role of tea dealers in Scotland at the time, see Andrew MacKillop, ‘A North Europe World of Tea: Scotland and the Tea Trade, c.1690-c.1790’, in Maxine Berg (et al.) (eds), *Goods from the East*, pp. 294-308.

<sup>601</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to George Ouchterlony (London), 14 May 1743, letter book 1742-43.

<sup>602</sup> For some time he also used one Jacob de Vlieger, but soon relied entirely on Metcalfe.

<sup>603</sup> Charles Metcalfe (Hamburg) to Charles Irvine (Gothenburg), 13 June 1755, CIC/55/23a.

later to Hamburg, in 1752 and 1758 respectively.<sup>604</sup> Hamburg was also the place where one notorious Ostend interloper lived, Peter Spendelow, who had been chief supercargo of the *Apollo* which showed up unexpectedly in Canton in 1730, carrying the Prussian flag.<sup>605</sup>

German merchants regularly attended the SEIC sales, yet they also received merchandise from Amsterdam, Copenhagen and London.<sup>606</sup> Every sales catalogue of the SEIC mentions German names. Some merchants appear frequently, including the merchants Keller, Schull, Schutz, and Jacobsen. The brothers Jacobsen were prolific buyers at the Swedish auctions for many years. Interestingly, Theodor and Jacob Jacobsen never bought any tea in Gothenburg. Instead, they focused on buying wrought silks and porcelain. The Jacobsen family were naturalised British subjects and among the largest investors in Bank of England shares in the early eighteenth century.<sup>607</sup> The fact that they did not take an interest in tea – despite the great price difference to the London market – is indicative and suggests that they had reasons not to get involved in the contraband trade to Britain.

Koschell & Conradi, a firm associated with one of the SEIC Company directors, the German merchant Hendrik König, also acted as sales agents for Irvine. The firm was based in Stockholm, and Irvine repeatedly sent his *pacotille* silks to them to be sold in the Swedish market. They specialised in selling and producing decorative wares. They dealt primarily in wrought silks, porcelain and enamelled tableware from Canton. Sweden, as Hanna Hodacs rightly insists, did not have a

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<sup>604</sup> FBL, Minn. Charles Irvine Papers, shipping records, passports for Stralsund and Hamburg, item numbers, 52-1i and 59-2i.

<sup>605</sup> Abraham Hume to Captain John Hallet (executor of Hall's will), Goldings, 19 July 1750. The National Archives, Kew, C111/31.

<sup>606</sup> 'Försäljningsbok af de med skeppen Calmare och Cron-Printzen Adolph Friedrich', Gothenburg University Library. Accessible online:

<http://www.ub.gu.se/fasta/lab/erez/handskrift/ostindiepdf/168/168.pdf>.

<sup>607</sup> See Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, *Deutsche Kaufleute in London: Welthandel und Einbürgerung (1660-1818)*, (München, 2007), esp. p. 116 and p. 136.

large domestic market for East India goods, but rather supplied as a ‘peripheral emporium’ other parts of Europe with fine manufactured goods as well as tea from Canton.<sup>608</sup> British interlopers in the Swedish East India Company still tried to sell in this small market, but were generally more successful in the special commission trade, by which the Swedish aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie sourced their armorial tea sets and ready-made wallpaper.

In a detailed memorandum designed to instruct the young Gilbert Elliott, who was going to China as first-time supercargo in 1743, Irvine noted that the buyers in Sweden should not be misjudged, because ‘I have observed that people here will pay for a good thing’, he exclaimed.<sup>609</sup> Especially Chinese silks were sought after in Sweden, and they were cheaper than those which were coming in from France or Italy. Whether a parcel of silks would find customers in Sweden, or had to be re-exported to other places, depended on different factors – as Irvine continued to explain to Gilbert. It is ‘very hard to judge what may do best, black Padesoys to be sure answered incredibly this last voyage for which reason I fear it will be dangerous now to meddle [sic!] with them.’<sup>610</sup> The success of former sales thus did not guarantee steady demand. The Swedish market was quickly saturated, and demand ‘varies pretty much not only as fashions [go] but according to quantities imported & therefore ought to have been particularly inquired in to here & at Stockholm’.<sup>611</sup>

In the end, private traders had a distinct advantage in spreading their network of agents across Europe. Not only were they better informed about price developments elsewhere, but private traders slowly but surely also got a better idea of what was preferred in different markets. This, as Irvine painfully realised, meant

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<sup>608</sup> Hanna Hodacs, *Tea and Silks in the North*.

<sup>609</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Gilbert Elliott (Gothenburg?), 10 April 1743, letter book, 1742-43, FBL, Minn.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

for instance that what he perceived to be good quality tea was rejected in Amsterdam for being ‘overtasted’. In an unusually sharp reply to Wikieson’s account of his problems in selling Irvine’s tea in Amsterdam, Irvine replied that ‘we [the supercargoes] chose the Teas for the same reasons that your buyers find fault with them.’<sup>612</sup> In offering an explanation of the obvious diversion of tastes, he wrote: ‘I think your tastes are framed from your own [VOC] teas, which from China directly are the worst any Europeans bring, & that from Batavia wretched Stuff.’ If they could not be sold in Amsterdam at a profit, Irvine could still send the teas elsewhere. Complaining about market conditions did not help, as Irvine knew perfectly well. After all, ‘[t]here is no disputing of tastes and we ought to conform ourselves to the humour of the place where we propose to sell.’<sup>613</sup>

The integration of Canton traders into European wholesale and re-export markets has been established for the first time in this chapter. This has been achieved principally by tracing the mutually supportive and sometimes conflicting relationship between sedentary merchants and Company supercargoes. British interlopers in the smaller Companies, in particular, were successful in developing extensive contacts on the European continent and in Britain for selling Chinese consumer goods on a wholesale level. The case of Charles Irvine was taken as an exemplification of a larger group of expatriate traders who developed a stake in the re-export trade, in which, as we have seen, Britain was fully integrated. Geographically, the sales networks of British interlopers extended from the highly developed consumer societies of the Netherlands and England to rather remote places such as Montrose, Aberdeen, or Stockholm (not to speak of puny Stralsund).

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<sup>612</sup> Charles Irvine (Gothenburg) to Thomas Wikieson (Amsterdam), 21 May 1743, letter book, 1742-43.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid.



The integration of different national markets was perhaps a result of the patchwork of chartered Companies, which all faced certain import restrictions in domestic markets that made re-export to other parts of Europe a key feature of the trading system on the whole. Yet, also the existence of cross-Company collaboration and mobility, and the informal networks which grew out of some border-crossing activities, shaped the distinct ways in which markets were connected to each other. British interlopers were free agents par excellence, as they managed to use their precarious legal position to gain access to Chinese goods in the first place and then to sell them on advantageous terms wherever they established informal links to wholesalers and petty smugglers.

## Conclusion

This thesis has made an attempt to approach the China trade during the first decades of the eighteenth century from a different angle altogether. By focusing on the transnational European context inhabited by British merchants and mariners who sought out temporary employment in the smaller interloping East India Companies on the continent, the work has revealed a world of cross-Company activities and private enterprise hitherto unknown. By tracing the mobile careers and extended networks of British interlopers in Europe, the work has presented a new way of thinking about the China trade on the whole.

We have seen how China traders cannibalised different Company networks to pursue their own goals, and how a culture of cross-Company collaboration and collusion lurked behind the system of seemingly separate national ‘monopoly’ Companies throughout the period of this study. The suspicion that national monopoly rights were variously undercut by self-interested Company servants and free merchants, who used the Company infrastructures in Asia for the advancement of their own business, has since long been a feature of the rich literature on the Anglo-Indian empire and comparative Company studies more generally.<sup>614</sup> Yet, this study went further in exposing the transnational foundation of these trading bodies in Europe, and has looked at the close relation of British-born traders with both the continent and places they had once called home.

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<sup>614</sup> Recent works still largely built on the insights of Holden Furber, P. J. Marshall and Louis Dermigny, whose seminal works have first investigated the levels of corruption and cross-Company activities that developed among Europeans in Asia. Of crucial importance in this context were Furber, *John Company at Work A Study of European Expansion in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Mass, 1948); Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes. The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1976); and Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident a Canton au 18ième siècle, 1719-1833*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1964). Yet, none of these authors or their later followers have looked in any depth at the related private trade activities of Company servants in Europe.

In their description of an approach to the transnational they have called *histoire croisée*, Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann have provided useful reflections on transnational history that also pertain to this work – and to its author.<sup>615</sup> That is, they have rightly stressed that the viewpoint of a scholar is necessarily shaped by his or her personal background, which should be made explicit to the reader as it explains – at least to some extent – the intellectual set-up of the work.<sup>616</sup> As an historian coming from Central Europe and working in England on Britons on the continent, it is perhaps hardly surprising that for me, the divide which the English channel supposedly marks between the British Isles and ‘Europe’ seemed always less deep and definitive than for other scholars. This personal inclination to explore connections rather than ruptures between Britain and the continent undoubtedly informed this thesis from its very beginning.

Yet, archival findings equally shaped the development of the framework for this study, and so did the application of a particular methodology to study the China trade in its European context: network theory.<sup>617</sup> The similar career paths and entanglements between interloping Canton traders that archival research brought to light raised a range of significant questions about the pan-European context of the China trade, and the ways in which resources underpinning this particular branch of overseas commerce were allocated transnationally. To explore the careers of interloping China traders within the European theatre, the work has reconstructed and analysed a rich network of merchants, many of whom can best be understood as

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<sup>615</sup> Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, ‘Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity’, *History and Theory*, 45:1 (2006), pp. 30-50.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>617</sup> Social network analysis has become an effective tool for historians of economic life in general and Atlantic history in particular. There is new work that investigates the local embeddedness/global connectedness of private traders in the East Indies trade. See, Tim Davies, *British Private Trade Networks in the Arabian Sea, c.1680-c.1760* (unpubl. PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2012). Jessica Hanser, *Mr. Smith Goes to China: British Private Traders and the Interlinking of the British Empire with China, 1757-1792* (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2012); Søren Mentz, *The English Gentlemen Merchant at Work: Madras and the City of London, 1660-1740* (Copenhagen, 2005).

‘free agents’ and commercial nomads.<sup>618</sup> By tracing their different ways into the China trade, by studying their sojourning activities and willingness to swap Companies – sometimes multiple times – in the relentless pursuit of greater commercial privileges and profits, and finally by tracing their activities after active service in the East, this work has provided a rich picture of those individuals who helped to shape the very practices, conventions, and opportunities of the China trade during an early and highly dynamic phase of its history.

Enquiries into the economic behaviour of individual actors represent the smallest possible unit for understanding trading practices. Yet, only through the exploration of an individual’s interaction with others are we able to detect conventions, trading patterns and mechanisms of wider significance. The virtue of actor-centred approaches to economic history is that they show more readily than other kinds of enquiries the transnational connections that individuals cultivated. By extending the network perspective to the study of chartered trading Companies, this study had sought to pinpoint their reliance on private informal networks for accessing key resources for commercial gain: expertise, trading goods, capital, information and markets. None of these Company resources were confined to a national arena.<sup>619</sup> The foreign element of the East India Companies has thus played a major role in this study, as the workings of the early China trade have been analysed

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<sup>618</sup> Cátia Antunes, ‘Free Agents and Formal Institutions in the Portuguese Empire: Towards a Framework of Analysis’, *Portuguese Studies*, 28:2 (2012), pp. 173-185. This new concept is a welcome addition to the field of Company studies as it allows us to see China traders first and foremost as private entrepreneurs and not simply as corrupt servants of the chartered Companies. The dominant view in the East India Company literature, by contrast, still represents them as private schemers who necessarily impaired the trade of their employers and fellow countrymen. One notable, recent exception to this normative view of private and Company trade is Emily Erikson’s *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: the English East India Company, 1600-1757* (Princeton, 2015), who instead stresses that both branches of commerce were acting in symbiosis.

<sup>619</sup> This work’s focus on the transnational context of the China trade complicates the narrative of British commercial expansion in Asia and Europe, and presents a corrective to the widespread tendency to study early modern chartered Companies as national ‘containers’. Global history theorists, like Sebastian Conrad, have provided valuable ideas on how to escape the ‘methodological nationalism’ that also persists in Company studies. See idem, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, 2016).

from the viewpoint of those marginalised at home: political, economic and religious refugees, sojourners and fortune-seekers whose loyalty was often limited towards their families and associates, and not bound to any particular flag. British interlopers who worked for one, and often even for several different Companies during their mobile careers, are the key agents of this study, but attempts have been made to show that their opportunistic behaviour and interloping careers was also a pervasive feature among other nationals, a finding which I hope future research will draw out more clearly.

What this thesis has equally demonstrated is that interloping, as a commercial strategy, was not limited to a few reckless people. Rather, it was a relatively widespread phenomenon among merchant mariners in general and British-born traders in particular. By means of a ‘group portrait’, this work has shown that the formation of cross-Company networks and the repeated relocation of British interlopers on the continent were anything but random. On the contrary, the movements of free agents involved in the China trade followed certain patterns. Interloping mobility was channelled and timed by the emergence, demise and reappearance of small ‘shell’ Companies. Even though the Ostend, Scandinavian and Prussian Companies had received a royal charter and operated within the legal framework of their respective host countries, their operations were nonetheless built on foreign expertise and capital, and geared towards multiple national markets.<sup>620</sup> They were risk-sharing ventures, in which private trade played a paramount role.

Another chief aim of this work has been to understand the involvement of the Canton trade elite in the European market place. It could thus be shown that

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<sup>620</sup> This assessment is very much in line with what Leos Müller has argued in relation to one of the smaller East India Companies. See idem, ‘The Swedish East India Company – Strategies and Functions of an Interloper’, in Markus A. Denzel, Jan de Vries, Philipp Robinson Rössner (eds), *Small is beautiful? Interlopers and Smaller Trading Nations in the Pre-industrial Period* (Stuttgart, 2011), pp. 73-93.

Company servants – and especially supercargoes, commanders and navigating officers – were not simply importers, whose goods were auctioned off at the Companies' sales without interference. Rather, supercargoes were presented here as active participants in the European re-export and wholesale trade: as commission agents, brokers, financiers, and moneylenders – and, to some extent, also as arbiters of taste. Their links to sedentary merchant houses in Europe enabled supercargoes to pursue their stake in the wholesale market, even though they were going back and forth between Europe and Asia. As we have seen, private traders assembled goods for a European, not only a domestic market, and their operations have therefore to be analysed within a transnational arena of competition that shaped the China trade during the period of this study. This constellation of actors included a small group of large players – the Companies – that were relatively slow moving in their business decisions, and a larger group of smaller players – the individual private traders – whose salient features were flexibility, opportunism and non-specialisation.

Yet, these characteristics do not fully define the trading identities of British interlopers. While this work has put much emphasis on the opportunistic and unbounded elements of the interloper's existence by framing them as free agents and flexible citizens, it has equally paid attention to the fact that interlopers were deeply rooted in extended kinship networks, regional alliances and close-knit communities of fellow traders.<sup>621</sup> In fact, informal networks informed many of the practices of interlopers on the European continent. Indeed, the nature and reach of their personal networks structured the involvement of China traders in the European market place.

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<sup>621</sup> The discussion of the specific role played by ethnic, kin and communal ties for the constitution and maintenance of trading networks has generated a vast literature in recent years. The identities and networks of Scottish traders in Asia and Europe respectively are most fruitfully discussed in Andrew MacKillop, 'Europeans, Britons and Scots: Scottish Sojourning Identities and Networks in India, c.1700-1815', Angela McCarthy (ed.), *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities since the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 19-47; and Steve Murdoch, *Network North: Scottish Kin, Commercial and Covert Association in Northern Europe, 1603-1746* (Leiden and Boston, 2006).

My focus on Canton traders and their personal networks has also brought to light the names of a number of people and professional groups who were important for the functioning of the China trade, yet who were not formally employed by any of the trading Companies. Wholesalers, commission agents, financiers, smugglers and suppliers supported the work of British interlopers in Europe. And yet, it is the first time that they feature in a history of the China trade.<sup>622</sup> The work has, for instance, explored the crucial role played by the foreign merchant community in Cadiz – a port city where interlopers mingled and cross-Company activities flourished. As became clear, the merchant community in Cadiz was indeed instrumental for the provision trade.

This study has finally contributed to recent debates about the complex relationship between Company and private trade in the first half of the eighteenth century, and about the various links that connected both branches of commerce. In contrast to the established literature on private trade in the English East India Company, this study has not focused on the impact of malfeasant behaviour on the expansion of a ‘British’ trading system in Asia. Yet, this study has demonstrated that British success in the Asian trade cannot be explained within a national framework – that is, without considering the transnational context of competition and collaboration in Europe. British traders successfully infiltrated continental European markets, resources and opportunities through their involvement with the smaller East India Companies.

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<sup>622</sup> Wholesalers, shopkeepers and smugglers in England do feature in the important work by Hoh-cheong Mui and Lorna H. Mui on the British tea trade. However, the authors failed to recognize the role played by British interlopers and the private trade more generally for the organisation of the contraband trade from the continent to Britain. For the period of this study, see idem, ‘Smuggling and the British Tea Trade before 1784’, *American Historical Review*, 74:1 (1968), pp. 44-73.

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- C108/414 Bundle of letters concerning Captain Richard Pinnell commanding the East Indiaman 'Elizabeth' in 1746 with a post mortem inventory of his possessions
- C112/24 Account books of EIC supercargo Nathaniel Torriano.
- C111/95-96  
and  
C103/130-32 Hall vs. Hallet, Correspondence, account books, ledgers, letter book of Thomas Hall, esq.  
Journal and ledger of the Ostend Company ship St. Joseph, Messrs Hall, Pike and Hever Supercargoes to China  
Journal book of affairs of Thomas Hall, beginning at Ostend 1724.

PROB 11/653/19 Will of Francis Nelly of Poplar

PRO 11/981 Will of Sir Abraham Hume Bart of Wormley, Hertford.

**United States**

James Ford Bell Library (FBL), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

**Charles Irvine Papers**

Series 1: Letters to Charles Irvine from various correspondents, (CIC) 1732-1772  
Box numbers: 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8,

Charles Irvine Transactions  
Box number 9a

Price Lists and Exchange Rates, Weights + Measures, 1724-46 (and undated)  
Box number 10  
Contains also 'Cost and Package of my private Trade. Ship Ridderhuys  
Canton, 1741-42

Series 2: Irvine Shipping Documents, 1733-59  
Box number 11

Series 3: Accounts and Invoices, 1730-1770  
Contains all kinds of receipts that were originally attached to the  
correspondence  
Box number 12

Series 5: Irvine letter books and account books, legal documents, unclassified papers  
and transactions  
Box number 14

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