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Troublemaker in Canton: How Captain McClary fought the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War in China, and lost.

LIU Yong

Foreign businessmen are once again turning their eyes to the big Chinese market. Ever since Chairman Deng Xiaoping decided at the end of the 1970s to gradually open up the isolated plan economy of the People's Republic of China to the world market, an increasing number of foreign companies is competing with each other for a piece of the desirable Chinese 'cake'. Different kinds of *guanxi* (the Chinese version of 'networking') in terms of economic interests among foreign and Chinese entrepreneurs have taken shape. Nowadays, creating *guanxi* is an essential practice that each foreign company willy-nilly has to be familiar with and practice in China. Often, good terms with the local 'mandarins' help a foreign company to make a deal with the Chinese partners and to beat the competition. Dutch business seems to be quite successful in playing the rules of this game: witness the recent successes of companies such as Royal Philips Electronics and Royal Dutch Shell who are among the most successful foreign investors in China.¹

Whether the Dutch have benefited from experience, I don't know, but judging from their performance under the restricted regime of the European trade at Canton in the eighteenth century, it is sure that at the time of the European 'China Craze' or *Chinoiserie*,² the Dutch were also quite successful. Early in the eighteenth century the European East India Companies – the French, the English, the Dutch, the Swedish, and so on - established direct trade relations with China to purchase silk, porcelain and tea, in exchange for silver from America, textiles from India, and spices and later opium from Asian establishments. From 1757 to 1840, European (later also American) traders were only allowed to do their business at the port of Canton in South China. The trade in Canton was organized in a particular

¹ As for Royal Philips Electronics and Royal Dutch Shell's success in China of today, refer to the news 'Philips CEO visits China and strengthens cooperation with China' (25 September 2003) at website www.china.philips.com/informationCenter, and the summary 'Our business overview' at website www.shell.com/home/Framework?siteId=china-cn.

² C.R. Boxer, *Jan Compagnie in War and Peace 1602 – 1799* (Hong Kong 1979) 56.

manner and strictly controlled by Chinese officialdom. Each foreign Company should engage one or two Hong merchants, who were designated by the Chinese authorities to trade with European traders as security. The Hong merchants acted as guarantor for the payment of customs by the Europeans, but were also held responsible for their behavior by the Chinese authorities. In order to monopolize the conduct of business with the Western merchants, the Hong merchants established a guild, the so-called Co-hong, in 1720. It was re-established in 1760 and further refined in 1782. The guild continued to exist until 1842, when at long last trade restrictions were lifted and as an outcome of the Opium War Hong Kong was established as an English crown colony.³

If not in name, European trade with China was, on account of these measures, in practice quite different from the traditional tribute trade of the Middle Kingdom.⁴ During its heyday the Co-hong functioned as a 'combination which the Chinese were forming to set their own prices on the goods they sold Europeans, thereby to have their proportions of the real profit on the said goods, whoever appeared to be the seller'.⁵ All these measures were put into practice on orders of the mandarins in Canton: the *Tsongtu* (Zongdu, 总督)⁶, the *Fooyuern* (Fuyuan, 巡抚)⁷ and the *Hoppo* (Hubu,

³ For the European China trade and the Co-hong system in Canton during the eighteenth century, see for example: H.B. Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* (London 1910); Idem, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834* (Oxford 1926); Idem, *The Guilds of China: With an Account of the Guild Merchant or Co-hong of Canton* (London 1909); C.J.A. Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (Nijhoff 1982).

⁴ In the traditional tributary trade to China there were many strict regulations concerning the trading seasons, the number of tributary ships and personnel, the amount and sort of trading goods, the anchor port and the land route from there to Beijing, the activities of the tributary delegates in China, and the conferment of trading certificate, see J. Li and D. Liao *The Chinese Ancient Overseas Trade* (Nanning 1995) 217-231.

⁵ Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, 5. Usually, the Hoppo appointed one or two Hong merchants as security for each European ship. The security merchant 'gave such a price as he was able, or willing, to give, based on his interest and expenses' (Ibidem, 75.)

⁶ Styled Viceroy (Governor-General), the highest civil official over the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi.

⁷ Called 'Governor' or 'Inspector', the subordinate colleague of the Viceroy in matters relating to the Guangdong province.

粤海关监督)⁸. Usually, all the relations of the European traders with officialdom would be mediated by the Hong merchants and linguists, since China's Confucian administrative elite showed great disdain for merchants, and in particular so for foreign (barbarian) merchants.



'European factories, Canton (1785)'. Drawn, engraved and published by W. Daniell, 1805. 'From l. the following flags of the factories can be distinguished – Danish, next two are uncertain, probably American and Spanish, then Swedish, British in front of the East India Compagny's Factory shewing the wide verandah on first floor, then last at r. , the Dutch.' Bron: Orange, *The Chater Collection*, 224, 247.

Under the so-called Co-hong system, there was fierce competition among the Western merchants on the trading market in Canton.⁹ In daily life though, the servants of the various East India Companies, who all had

⁸ The Imperial Commissioner of the Guangdong Customs, with headquarters in Canton.

⁹ Initially, trade was dominated by the Dutch and English East India Companies. By 1730, however, the Canton trade was dominated by the English, while the Dutch occupied second place and other Companies could only share the remainder (Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600 – 1800* (University of Minnesota 1976) chapter 3 & 4). It is difficult to show the exact proportions of the China trade for all the Western traders, yet if we take the export of Chinese tea in 1785 – 1833 as an example: on average the English held a share of 74%, the continental Europeans 12%, and the Americans 13% (X. Yao, *China's Foreign Trade in the Modern Period I* (Beijing 1962) 258).

to live together on a small plot of land during the trading season, got along quite well with each other. This situation came to an end in the second half of the eighteenth century with the entry of the private free traders, who came to claim their share of the profitable China trade. The so-called English Country traders obtained their license to trade in their own vessels between India and Canton from the English Company (EIC), but it soon turned out that they refused to give in to the authority of the Company's delegates in Canton, the so-called supercargoes, because of their strong position in the Sino-British trade.¹⁰ This obstreperous behavior foreshadowed the English supercargoes' difficult dilemma in the case discussed below.

The better relations, or *guanxi*, foreign traders had with the Co-hong and the lower mandarins with whom they met, the more able they were to obtain victories over their competitors. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) supercargoes in Canton were well aware of this principle. During the 'Golden Years' of the VOC's China trade – from the establishment of the China Committee¹¹ (1757) to the beginning of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784) – the Dutch in Canton succeeded in keeping satisfactory contacts with the Hong merchants, and stayed on particular good terms with the mandarins. Whenever affairs headed towards a conflict or crisis, they were able to outdo their competitors in Canton, particularly their main rival, the English, who kept very shaky relations with the Chinese authorities, to say the least.¹² It is difficult to ascertain how exactly the various parties interacted with each other in those days, but we may find

¹⁰ In the last half of the eighteenth century, the Country trade became very important to the EIC. The Country traders brought a large amount of cotton (and latter opium) from the Indian subcontinent into Canton, where they exchanged the earned silver for London (or Bengal) letters of credit with the supercargoes. This made up the Company's deficits in its China trade and even created surpluses. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, the Country trade made up more than half of all exports by the English to Canton, and thus the Company depended on the Country traders in its China trade. (Li and. Liao, *The Chinese Ancient Overseas Trade*, 500-506.)

¹¹ In order to manage the China trade more flexibly and efficiently, the China Committee, an independent organization was set up by the Gentlemen Seventeen in 1756 and was authorized to make direct decisions on the China trade.

¹² This is shown well in both English and Dutch factory records which I am working on.

some clues if we take a closer look at the Companies' records preserved in London and Den Haag.

The *Goede Hoop* incident of 1781 that involved the Dutch, the English and the Chinese in Canton may serve as a fine example to illustrate the vagaries of business life and the role of *guanxi* in Canton. On 17 August 1781, captain John McClary of the English Country ship *Dadology*, coming from Bengal, captured a Dutch private ship, the *Goede Hoop*, coming from Surat at the roadstead of Canton. Subsequently, the mandarins of Canton, who were immediately informed by the Dutch supercargoes of this seizure, sent troops to surround the English ship, forcing captain McClary to restore his prize. At the same time, they dispatched officials to the English supercargoes in Macao and asked them to make the captain obey their orders. Eventually, the mandarins succeeded by force to compel captain McClary to give up the Dutch private ship, and pressed the English supercargoes to force McClary to return all the remaining goods. From the *Goede Hoop* case we can get a better understanding of conflicts between the VOC and the EIC, the two main rivals, and their respective relationships with the mandarins in Canton.

Process of the *Goede Hoop* case

On 17 August 1781, it was reported to the English supercargoes in Macao¹³ that captain John McClary of the English Country ship the *Dadology* had that day captured the private ship the *Goede Hoop* under Dutch colors at Whampoa. Captain McClary excused his action by pointing out that Britain had declared war against the Dutch Republic in December 1780.

The Dutch supercargoes in Macao reacted promptly to this act of aggression. They first demanded from other European supercargoes a co-signed statement pressing the English supercargoes to condemn captain McClary for his act, but their colleagues refused to do so. Then, on the security merchants' advice, they requested the mandarins of Canton on 21 August to intervene. Canton was a neutral port where the ships of foreign nations – even if they were at war with each other – should never break the local peace, and more acts of violence might probably follow if they did not

¹³ During the so-called off-season (when there was no trade) the foreigners were not allowed to stay in their offices in Canton but had to withdraw to Macao, the tiny Portuguese concession at the mouth of the Pearl River.

take action.¹⁴ On the same day, the Dutch chief supercargo C. Heyligendorp sent a letter to the English supercargoes, strongly protesting that:

Justifying this act on account of the rupture between the two nations, we cannot but think it proper to address ourselves to you in this empire the representations of your sovereign and the company in order to represent to you the injustice of such a procedure, as you cannot but be sensible that the ships of the belligerent powers anchored in a neutral port are always considered in safety from the attacks of each other; [such a act] may have consequence that will be very prejudicial to both companies, [... and] will be exposed to similar enterprises as well as those of private persons. We require your assistance, in order that the Dutch ship with her crew and cargo is restored immediately. But in case this cannot be effected we shall find ourselves under necessity of protesting in the strongest manner against this action and make the author of it answerable for all the consequences it might have.¹⁵

This letter was originally written in Dutch and then was changed to French (not to English, as required by the English, who said no person in their factory understood Dutch). The English arrogantly replied in English, for they said that some of the Dutch understood English well enough. In their reply, the English mentioned that they agreed to respect the neutrality of ports in the sovereignties which were at peace, but that they had no control over the captains of the Country ships. The only thing they could do, they said, was to try to promote the strictest observation of this neutrality by the ships of the English Company, not those of the private traders.¹⁶ The Dutch, of course, were not satisfied with such an answer. Suffering, as the weaker party,¹⁷ from an obviously disadvantageous

¹⁴ Nationaal Archief, Archief van de Factorij Canton (AFC), 1.04.20/44, 21 August and 15 October 1781.

¹⁵ Letter of the Dutch supercargoes to the English supercargoes, see AFC/1.04.20/292, 21 August 1781, or British Library, India Office Records (IOR) – G/12/72-3, 22 August 1781.

¹⁶ Letter of the English supercargoes to the Dutch supercargoes, see IOR – G/12/72-3, 23 August 1781.

¹⁷ The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War proved to be a disaster for the Dutch. In the month of January 1781 alone the British navy and privateers captured no fewer than 200 Dutch vessels, completely paralysing what remained of Dutch shipping (see Schulte Nordholt, *Dutch Republic and American Independence* (Chapel Hill 1979)

position in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War they could do nothing but appeal to the Chinese authorities.

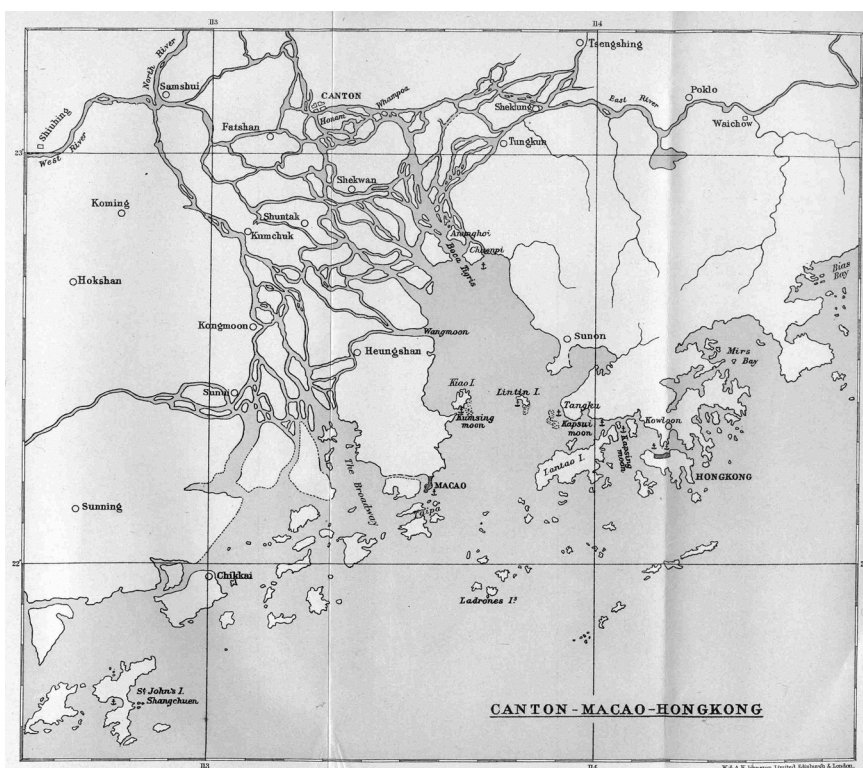
After receiving complaints from the Dutch supercargoes about this act of violence, the mandarins of Canton instantly demanded restitution of the Dutch ship. Captain McClary did not want to return his prize at all, but tried to negotiate the cargo to be sold to the Chinese merchants as if she belonged to the Dutch. This would mean that the Hoppo would not lose his duties, if the other mandarins did not interfere. He stated that he would take his prize out of the river and carry her away, should he be hindered in any way by the Chinese authorities. The mandarins were infuriated and continued to insist that McClary should restore the ship, whereupon he started to re-rig her, and descended with the tide towards the fort Boca Tigris. Every man in the Chinese customs office was by now greatly alarmed. All the troops that could be gathered, about 2000 soldiers, were ordered to a rendezvous point at Tiger Island¹⁸ and every preparation was made to block captain McClary's passage.

The mandarins still preferred to solve the problem in a peaceful manner, and officials were dispatched to the English supercargoes in Macao, who now found themselves in a very disagreeable situation. On 24 August, a mandarin came to Macao and addressed the English supercargoes, not through a merchant or linguist as usual, but through the Portuguese procurator of the city. He complained much of the outrages and insults to the imperial government caused by their English countrymen, and told that he would hold the English supercargoes accountable for McClary's behavior, if they did not oblige him to restore forthwith everything he had taken. The supercargoes replied that they had heard of what had happened at Whampoa only by common report, as such affairs were not part of their responsibilities. They said they had no control over Mr. McClary, the captain of a Country ship, and therefore could not compel him to do anything. But they assured the mandarin that they considered the act illegal and violent, and also desired to prevent captain McClary from persevering in his evil way; they would exhort him to make ample restitution to the satisfaction of the mandarins. Their offer was accepted, and the mandarin

150-156). Further, the British captured all the West African forts belonging to the Dutch West India Company, except Elmina; the Dutch also lost the west Guyana colonies, several bases in southern India and Ceylon. The VOC was to go bankrupt just a few years after the war.

¹⁸ The place that commands the entrance of the river.

himself delivered the supercargoes' letter to captain McClary in which the supercargoes, however, only wrote to captain McClary that his noncompliance might endanger the existence of the Company's trade into this port. The next day a second mandarin came to the supercargoes and



'Canton-Macao-Hongkong'. Bron: H.B. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company trading to China 1635-1834* Volume I (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1926).

was brushed off in the same way. The day after that, another one showed up, who delivered the message that the attendance of the English chief and other supercargoes was required at Boca Tigris, in order to compel captain McClary to comply with the demands of the *Tsongtu*. The chief supercargo J. Bradshaw complained that no Hong merchant was sent to inform him of the particularities of this business, which he knew only from vague rumor or from what the mandarins had told him. He stated that the supercargoes had

already done everything in their power and that he, as the chief supercargo, would neither put himself into a so humiliating and disagreeable situation, nor subject himself to be sent to Boca Tigris. With this unsatisfying answer, the mandarin went away. Afterwards, other mandarins continued to come to Macao almost every day, using threats that the trade of the English Company, as well as that of the private persons, would be adversely affected by the conduct of captain McClary. They did not care for the argument that the supercargoes had no control over other ships than those of the Company. The more the mandarins of Canton realized their lack of power over the real offender, the more they appeared determined to implicate the English supercargoes. Fortunately, for the English supercargoes a way out of this tricky situation was created.

While pressurizing the English supercargoes in Macao, the Chinese authorities were at the same time still continuing direct negotiations with captain McClary on the Pearl River. As the ships *Dadoloy* and *Goede Hoop* were moving down with the tide, the principal magistrates of Canton and the merchants were all encircling them with boats. They kept constant contact with captain McClary, sometimes they attempted to intimidate him, at other times they tried to sooth him, but the English captain was not impressed by any of these shouting opponents. Yet it was clear to him he would never be able to leave the river unscathed. In the end, the Hong merchant Puan Khequa, the principal security merchant of the EIC, contrived the following scheme. It was agreed that when McClary approached the fort Boca Tigris with his Dutch prize, he would order his men off the *Goede Hoop*. This was done and immediately the ship was boarded in a triumphant manner by the shouting Chinese.

The mandarin went to see the English supercargoes again on 29 August, for the *Fooyuern* had been informed by the aggrieved Dutch party, that part of the cargo of the *Goede Hoop* was still missing. He maintained that the English supercargoes should press captain McClary into returning everything. The English complained this time that the mandarin in Canton had contacted them in a very extraordinary and unusual manner, for on every former occasion the mandarins had made use of the Hong merchants and linguists to convey their messages.

Captain McClary's conduct gave the English supercargoes a lot of trouble in Macao. By order of the mandarins of Canton, the local magistrates had sent ships to prevent McClary escaping with his prize. It was rumored in Canton that the *Fooyuern* was preparing to do whatever he could to compel captain McClary to make an ample restitution. The English



'The Foyuern of Canton'.

The Fooyuern, governor of the province, seated behind a table. Painted by William Alexander, member of the British embassy (1792-1794) to the Qing court. By permission of the British Library. Wd. 961 F.67.194.

were even informed on 3 September, that a mandarin from Canton had asked the Portuguese governor of Macao to seize some persons of the English factory and have them delivered to him, but the latter had refused this. On 8 September, the Dutch supercargoes wrote a letter to the mandarins once again informing that captain McClary still refused to return all the remaining items in accordance with the mandarins' order. The *Dadoloj* was therefore surrounded with Chinese boats, positioned to prevent any communication with the English supercargoes.

On 23 September, the English supercargoes came back to Canton and spoke with Puan Khequa at once over captain McClary's actions. Puan Khequa informed them that the *Fooyuern* was extremely dissatisfied with captain McClary's behavior and wanted to punish him as a pirate; he was moreover much displeased with the English supercargoes, because they had procrastinated in complying with his orders. Nothing could have prevented

the *Fooyuern* using violence against the English, but Puan Khequa made up a story in which he explained that the English Company resided in the ‘north’ [England] while the individual traders came from the ‘south’ [India], and that the English were at war with these ‘southern’ people, even in their own country, so it was no wonder that these people would not accept the English supercargoes orders in Canton. By such means, the *Fooyuern* seemed to calm down a little. Then on 28 September the English supercargoes, together with the other European supercargoes, received a general chop¹⁹ under the name of the *Tsongtu*, *Fooyuern* and *Hoppo*, saying that:²⁰

As it is the first time a thing of this nature has happened, and as the offender pleaded ignorance of the laws and customs of this country, we have forgiven him and have moreover excused him the payment of port charges, and ordered all the assistance that may be necessary for the repairing of his ship and preparing her for the voyage. This is to give notice to the supercargoes of the different nations in order that they may inform their countrymen that the emperor will not suffer them to bring war into his dominions, and that whoever does so in future shall be treated as an enemy.

After reading the chop, the English supercargoes became fully aware of the extent to which the mandarins were inclined to consider them responsible for all the irregularities or outrages that were committed by the commanders of the Country ships. They therefore thought it a proper precaution to address a letter to the mandarins, expressing their outrage over captain McClary’s unjustifiable conduct, but disclaiming any kind of power over ships not belonging to the English Company. They further explained that they had not gone to Boca Tigris because of illness, and complained of the ill treatment they had received from the low ranking mandarins. Finally, they denied there was a difference between Englishmen from the ‘north’ and the ‘south’, insisting that this was due to a mistranslation by the security merchant. They, however, found that the answer of the *Fooyuern* of 2 October was full of ‘boasting, insult and threat, as was never before used to Europeans, even in this scene of their humiliation’²¹, because he wrote that:

¹⁹ A ‘chop’ is an official letter.

²⁰ Chop of the *Tsongtu*, *Fooyuern* and *Hoppo*, see IOR – G/12/72-3, 9 September 1781.

²¹ IOR – G/12/72-73, 17 August 1781.

You English are a lying and injurious people, for other nations that come to Canton are peaceful and do not hurt anyone, but you English are always making trouble. But a little time ago one McClary took a ship and her cargo and second supercargoes are sent here by your king to superintend the business of the company, and private persons are permitted to trade here by the same power. Why did you therefore say that you had no power to prevent the misdeeds of those people, and refused to obey when I ordered you to come to Boca Tigris to oblige this McClary to restore what he had taken? (...) If your sickness was not feigned why do you excuse yourselves for not coming to the Boca Tigris by telling me you have no control over private persons? From such equivocations I see the whole is falsehood, and it is not clear to me but this attempt to take away the ship was done by your order (...). Let me inform you that if hereafter you do not attend to my orders the English ships shall not be permitted to trade here, and I will send my soldiers to expel you from the country. What will you then do? (...) To my tribunal your representations seem insolent and impertinent. (...) If any of you English in future shall do wrong, whether supercargoes or individuals, he shall be punished to the full measure of his crime.²²

The reply of the mandarins deepened the English supercargoes' awareness of their awkward situation: every mandarin in Canton exerted his authority over them to his own humor and was hostile to them. They felt that they could not rely on the justice of the mandarins for their affairs. The only solution was to patiently bear this treatment as if with a timid character, although they were not willing to subdue themselves at all.

In fact, the English envied the good relations of the Dutch with the mandarins in Canton extremely. One striking example is the case of a Dutch seaman who was murdered by one of his own countrymen months before. The Dutch supercargoes were not forced to deliver the murderer to the mandarins but executed him themselves on board of one of their ships in sight of the Chinese. Privileges of this kind were not granted to other Europeans. In October 1780 a French sailor killed a Portuguese sailor in Canton and thus the Portuguese chief supercargo petitioned that the culprit should be handed over to him, so that the murderer could be tried in

²² Edict of the Fooyuern to the English supercargoes, see IOR – G/12/72-3, 2 October 1781.

Portugal. The Fooyuern, however, did not accept this petition but put the murderer on trial. These two examples showed the divergent nature of the proceedings of the Chinese tribunal, while dealing with different Europeans. The English supercargoes judged therefore that if a murder would occur involving the English, there was little probability that they could try the culprit themselves, but that the mandarins would try, condemn and execute the murderer.²³

It could be assumed that the poor position of the English supercargoes in Canton and Macao was caused by their nonintervention in captain McClary's business, but it was actually of their own making. Apparently, the English had learned the wrong lesson from the 'Chinese debts' trouble in 1779, in which Sir Edward Vernon (Admiral and Commander in chief of the squadron and fleet of the EIC in India) dispatched captain John A. Panton to the mandarins of Canton, requesting the liquidation of the Chinese merchants' debts to the British creditors in Madras as well as in England. The English supercargoes had been forced at that occasion to negotiate, on behalf of the British creditors, with the mandarins of Canton. After failed negotiations, the mandarins reported this to Beijing. As a result, the Chinese merchants who were involved in the debts were punished severely, and not only did the British creditors receive a very unreasonable liquidation for their lent money, but the Company's business also suffered from this trouble.²⁴ Now, in captain McClary's case, the English supercargoes probably felt it unwise to get involved in the trouble caused not by them, but by their countrymen, yet both the Dutch and the Chinese, from beginning to end, felt that the English supercargoes should exercise control over captain McClary in the case of the crime he had committed. It is therefore easy to understand that the Dutch chief supercargo headed directly for the English supercargoes when some cargo and a chest belonging to the *Goede Hoop* were still not returned. On 28 October, the Dutch chief who arrived at Canton from Macao delivered the English chief a statement, containing a detailed account of sundry stores, as well as a chest of gold and pearls still held by captain McClary.²⁵ Confronted

²³ This judgment is expressed strongly by the English supercargoes in their diary. See IOR – G/12/72-3, 14 February 1781.

²⁴ For the liquidation of the 'Chinese debts', see Kuo-tung Ch'en, *The insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants, 1760-1843* (Taipeh 1990).

²⁵ The detailed account of sundry stores and a chest of gold and pearls is appended to the statement, see IOR – G/12/72-3, 28 October 1781.

with this evidence, the English supercargoes at once protested to McClary and demanded him to return all the remaining goods forthwith.

On 4 November, the *Goede Hoop* was advertised for sale by auction at Whampoa, but was not sold until one year later in October 1782 when it became British property. On 16 December 1781, captain McClary, the troublemaker, fitted out his ship in a warlike manner and left the Pearl River for Bengal loudly declaring that he intended to take many Dutch prizes on the sea on his trip back to India. This was no empty talk, because a few months later, he plundered, without hesitation, a Chinese junk bound for Batavia in the straits of Banka, his excuse being that the property on board the junk belonged to the Dutch.²⁶

Understandings of the *Goede Hoop* case

The *Goede Hoop* matter came to a happy end since the Dutch received a full restitution. As far as their role in the matter was concerned, the English supercargoes made a rather unwise choice. Inept attempts to keep their hands clean severely weakened their position, and from the 1780s onwards business in Canton became more difficult to conduct. On the contrary, the Dutch had thoroughly outmaneuvered the English by involving the Chinese authorities in this affair. During the whole process the Dutch behaved in a very shrewd manner. They did not directly take up arms against the troublemaking captain McClary, but lodged protests with the English supercargoes; at the same time, they begged the mandarins to intervene, and availed themselves of the opportunities that the Hong merchants offered as well. The mandarins could have let matters slide, if they had given the excuse that it was inappropriate for them to interfere in this kind of trouble between the two European nations at war. Yet, they chose to deal actively with the trouble by confronting the English side, because they felt offended by the English behavior and had lost face. Not only did they surround captain McClary's ship, but they also threatened the English supercargoes that they might stop the EIC's trade into Canton. Their intervention was, in

²⁶ For the seizure of the Chinese junk, see IOR – G/12/76, 25 April 1782. After captain McClary returned to Bengal in July 1782, the Governor-General and Supreme Court of Bengal charged him with murdering several Malays in the straits of Malacca. Finally, captain McClary was released due to lack of proof for a criminal indictment against him.

the eyes of the Chinese at least, fully justified because captain McClary was flaunting Chinese rules, and because of the wire pulling of the English supercargoes and their attitude of non-cooperation. Normally, the mandarins themselves would never have considered addressing the Western traders directly, but only through the security merchants or linguists, yet in this case they sent several officials, one after another. They did so because of their good relations with the Dutch, in order to save face, to show their jurisdiction, and most of all: to maintain sovereignty.

As soon as they started to trade into Canton, the Dutch tried to make a favorable impression on the mandarins by portraying themselves as 'honest men'. They did their business with the Hong merchants on basis of paying respects to the Chinese authorities, as they were fully aware of the role of the Chinese authorities in this trade. They pursued a similar policy with the Japanese bureaucracy when they traded in Nagasaki.²⁷ Sure enough, the Dutch supercargoes just imitated the differential attitude of the Chinese sea merchants towards the Dutch authorities in Batavia, 'a prosperous country, famous among the maritime countries', where, the Chinese thought right up to the early nineteenth century, the Dutch came from.²⁸ The good relations between the Batavian government and the Chinese merchants made the latter stand out on the Batavia market. In return, the lenient attitude of the Batavian government towards the Chinese merchants most likely also favored the attitude of the Cantonese administration towards the Dutch supercargoes.

The English could only blame themselves for having bad relations with the mandarins, yet they were not in an easy position. On the one hand, the English supercargoes, when doing their business, always challenged the Cantonese authorities in the interest of the EIC. They grumbled that the English Company's business suffered a lot from the irrationality of the Chinese mandarins who showed great disdain for foreign merchants, despite the fact that these enriched the treasury in Canton. In practice, the Hoppo became their prime target, as he was directly in charge of the

²⁷ J.L. Blussé, 'Divesting a Myth: Seventeenth Century Dutch-Portuguese Rivalry in the Far East', in: A. Disney, *Vasco Da Gama and the Linking of Europe and Asia* (Oxford 2000) 387.

²⁸ For Chinese attitudes towards the Dutch colonial government, see J.L. Blussé, 'The Vicissitudes of Maritime Trade: Letters from the Ocean Hang Merchants, Li Kunhe, to the Dutch Authorities in Batavia (1803 – 09)', in: A. Reid ed., *Sojourners and Settlers* (Sydney 1996) 160.

customs administration that supervised the Canton trade and he was the only relatively high official that foreign traders might ever get in touch with. On the other hand, the English Country ships continuously broke the trade policy of Canton, by evading the port duties or smuggling forbidden merchandize. By confronting the mandarins' jurisdiction as in this case, the Country traders eventually brought the EIC into trouble. The English supercargoes originally had no means of disciplining the Country traders because they were private free traders, not servants of the English Company. This differed from the much smaller private trade supervised by the Dutch supercargoes in Canton. Nonetheless, after more and more complaints reached London in 1783, 1784 and 1785, when an increasing number of the Country ships sailed from the Indian subcontinent to China the English supercargoes started to exercise strict control over the Country traders.²⁹ On account of all their offences, the English in Canton earned notoriety as 'the worst of bad people'³⁰ from the mandarins. Along with the development of the English trade with China, the misunderstandings and tensions between the English and the mandarins in Canton did not decrease, but increase. This formed one of the backgrounds to the Opium War (1839-1841).

²⁹ Earl H. Pritchard, *The Crucial Years of Early Anglo-Chinese relations, 1750-1800* (London 2000) 222-224.

³⁰ IOR – G/12/72-3, 24 November 1781.