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La Force du commerce

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Opening American Commerce with Canton: From the *Empress of China* to the *Columbia Rediviva* (1784-1793)

MARCO SIOLI

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Résumés

Français English

L'arrivée de l'*Empress of China* à Canton après une traversée de six mois sur l'océan Atlantique et l'océan Pacifique, commencée à New York le 22 février 1784, marque le début du commerce avec la Chine pour les Américains. La réussite de cette traversée, qui permit de rapporter aux États-Unis du thé, de la porcelaine, de la soie et des épices avec un bénéfice de 25%, et le rôle actif joué par Samuel Shaw, Consul américain à Canton, encouragea l'investissement dans le commerce avec la Chine. L'un des navires qui s'y livra, le *Columbia Rediviva*, commandé par le capitaine Robert Gray, fut le premier vaisseau américain à faire le tour du monde, transportant des fourrures en provenance de la côte nord-ouest des États-Unis vers les marchés cantonnais, où elles furent échangées contre du thé et de la porcelaine. Œuvrant tant à la gloire de leur pays qu'à leur profit personnel, ces deux commandants de navires inaugurèrent le commerce avec la Chine, lequel nourrit la participation de l'Amérique au commerce mondial.

When the *Empress of China* left New York harbor on February 22, 1784, reaching Canton through the Atlantic and Indian Oceans in six months with a cargo of American ginseng, she opened commerce with China for the so called "new people." The success of the voyage, that brought tea, porcelain, silk and spices back to the United States with a 25 percent profit, and the active role of Samuel Shaw as American Consul in Canton, encouraged others to invest in further trading with China, following the Pacific route. One of these ships, the *Columbia Rediviva*, with Captain Robert Gray in command, was the first American vessel to circumnavigate the globe, bringing furs gathered on the American Northwest Coast to the markets in Canton, exchanged again for tea and porcelain. Working both for national glory and their own profit, these two men opened American commerce with China, fueling America's involvement in global trade.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : Chine, commerce américain, Samuel Shaw, capitaine Robert Gray, commerce mondial

Keywords: China, American commerce, Samuel Shaw, Captain Robert Gray, global trade

Texte intégral

- 1 James Fenimore Cooper, the famous American novelist of the American frontier, but a sailor early in his life, showed interest in the history of the American Navy at the end of his career, writing a long essay published in full only in 1853, two years after his death. The reason for this change in outlook after the tremendous success of his *Leatherstocking Tales*, which included *The Last of the Mohicans*, was certainly due to his disappointment over the disappearance of the Indians east of the Mississippi River after Andrew Jackson's Removal Act in 1830 (Dekker 193-4). But it was also due to the growing importance of the American schooners that inaugurated the era of fast commerce, once more interpreting Benjamin Franklin's famous motto penned in his *Advice to a Young Tradesman*: "time is money" (320).
- 2 Fenimore Cooper wrote: "It has been a matter of question what vessel first carried the American flag into the Chinese seas, but there can be no doubt that it was the ship *Empress of China*, with Captain Green, which sailed from New York the 22nd of February 1784, and returned to the same port on the 11th of May 1785" (1: 146). With this important recognition, the voyage of the *Empress of China* entered the history of the American Navy, but also the history of the new nation. While John Green was the captain of the vessel, the founder of the initiative was Robert Morris, a prominent Philadelphia merchant, signer of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and former member of the Continental Congress. More interestingly, Morris had been the superintendent of finance for the United States from 1783, before the appointment of Alexander Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury in 1789. For the historian Thomas Doerflinger, Morris was "a one-man conglomerate" (238), overseeing investments in tobacco shipments, military contracting for George Washington's Continental Army, goods importation, and land speculation.
- 3 Chinese tea and porcelain, and spices and silk, usually obtained from Great Britain by the British East India Company before the American Revolution, could be acquired directly from China and easily paid for not with money, but through trading other goods such as ginseng roots, a highly valued aphrodisiac and herbal remedy in China, that grew in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, and sea otter furs in high demand on Eastern markets. Morris's power of persuasion allowed him to mobilize enough capital and credit to begin this ambitious project: the start of commercial relations with China. The money used to fund the expedition came from the New York firm Daniel Parker & Company, that was very active as ship owners in obtaining wartime military contracts, including one to evacuate British troops from New York City. In July 1783, Parker travelled to Boston in order to build a new ship for this long trip, and to seek additional investors for trade with China. By the end of the summer, Boston shipbuilders were constructing a vessel to be called the *Empress of China* of 360 tons according to the carpenter's measure, and "400 tons, according to Parker and the policy of insurance written on her" (Smith, 25).
- 4 The ship was a replica of the *Bellisarius*, considered the fastest vessel in the British Navy (Smith, 29). Parker also secured the building of six additional ships to form a growing fleet of vessels. By the end of September, Morris and Parker had seven ships almost ready for the China trade. Initially they had planned two simultaneous voyages. One would travel to China along the Northwest Coast to fill up the cargo with sea otter and beaver furs, and the other, carrying Appalachian ginseng, would sail directly to Canton through the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. But after the partners discovered that their profits would be eroded by import duties the Chinese had begun putting on all foreign ships trading in Canton, the logical course was to cut risks and losses. Instead of the western route, around Cape Horn and along the western coast, as suggested by the merchant and explorer John Ledyard, they decided that one ship was enough, using the

longer but safer eastern route around Cape of Good Hope only for the expedition of ginseng (Gray 105).

5 The *Empress of China* was ready to depart with 30 tons of Appalachian ginseng in 1784. The cost of the expedition was impressive, 120,000 dollars, “equivalent of 24 thousand acres of primary farmland” (Gray 106). But when the ship returned to New York one year later loaded with tea, cinnamon, porcelain and silk, the owners of the enterprise had earned 30,000 dollars, or a 25 percent return on their investment (Shaw 218). However, even though the goal of making a profit was achieved, the mission was also a patriotic effort, especially due to the presence of 30 year-old Revolutionary War hero Mayor Samuel Shaw as the supercargo (the manager of the ship’s cargo). He and captain John Green, and five other members of the crew, including his friend Thomas Randall, belonged to the Society of the Cincinnati, the hereditary order of Continental Army officers founded by Henry Knox in the spring of 1783, an organization which supported the growth and independence of the United States (Dolin 18; Schmidt 5).

6 This article will focus in particular on the first trip of the *Empress of China*, and on Major Shaw’s second trip to Canton with the ship *Hope*, that was a little smaller than the *Empress of China*. It will also look at the global commerce of Early America with China in general, originated by the intuition of John Ledyard, who after his experience around the world with Captain James Cook from 1776 to 1780, first proposed the transpacific voyage to Robert Morris. In fact, even though Morris decided to start with the Atlantic route, the original project began upon hearing Ledyard’s idea for reaching China along the Northwest Coast, an enterprise finally completed by captain Robert Gray and his ship *Columbia Rediviva* (“revived” in Latin) between 1787 and 1790.

7 Thus, this study will be divided into three parts. The first part will deal with the story of the *Empress of China*, also known as the *Chinese Queen*, following the journals of Major Samuel Shaw, who after the successful return of the ship, was nominated Consul in China by the Congress, “without being entitled to receive any salary, fees, or emoluments whatsoever” (Shaw 112). Not only do his journals remain the main source of information about the voyage, but he in a certain sense represents the beginning of official American-Chinese relations, as well as “the testing ground for negotiating diplomatic relations and foreign trade” between the eagle and the dragon (Aldridge 100). If commerce with China could be one of the promising markets for American merchants, always looking for more things to sell and buy, Shaw was the key to enter this world.

8 The second part of the essay considers Shaw’s second voyage to China with the ship *Hope* in 1786. During his residence in Canton he took the occasion to visit Macao from January to July 1787, and Calcutta and Madras from February to September 1788, where he remained until January 1789. In these years, he set up successful commercial relations in the Chinese and Indian seas, writing two long reports to John Jay, at that time Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

9 Shaw’s adventures continued with his third trip to Canton with the ship *Massachusetts* in March 1790, after President George Washington renewed his appointment as American Consul in China. We do not have his journals for this trip, nor do we have his reports for the following trip, his fourth and last. We know from the second officer of the vessel, Amasa Delano, who published a narrative of his voyages in 1817, that for this trip to Canton, Shaw and his friend Randall founded a firm: the Shaw & Randall Company (Fichter 43). The *Massachusetts* built specifically for the Company, with her 820 tons of weight, was the largest merchant ship at that time in the United States, and she was meant to transport masts and spars to Canton (Morison 52). The commerce would not prove as profitable as that of ginseng, especially because the pieces of wood were “taken on board directly out of water with ice and mud on them” causing trouble to the ship herself (Delano 23). Nevertheless, using his commercial relations, Shaw was able to sell the cargo in the Canton market, but only for \$15,000, as well as the *Massachusetts* itself, with her wet and almost rotten cargo, for \$65,000 to the Danish East India Company (41). The story in Shaw’s memoirs, published by his descendants, was slightly different: the ship was sold to the Portuguese government upon his arrival at Canton, and Shaw returned to New York with a cargo of merchandise (Shaw 118).

10 The fourth and final trip to Canton was postponed because of his marriage to Hannah Phillips which took place in Boston in August 1792. With “no room for anxiety” (122) he departed again for Canton, but during the stop in Bombay he contracted a “disease of the liver incident to the climate” (123). This time in India was fatal for his health, and in Canton he was forced to stay confined in his house. Finding no relief in this city he sailed on the ship *Washington*, but the disease worsened during the voyage, and led to his death near the Cape of Good Hope on May 30, 1794.

11 The last part of this essay will delve into the story of the ship *Columbia Rediviva*, or simply *Columbia*, the other vessel built in Boston to sail to China by the Northwest Coast following the original idea of John Ledyard to collect furs to trade with Asia. The journey began in the fall of 1787 and took three years leading to only moderate profits, but it established the standard route for a vigorous and profitable Massachusetts-China trade. So promising was the Northwest Coast trade that just a month after its return, the *Columbia* set out once again. The *Columbia* and the other ships involved in the China trade through the Pacific Ocean, started the era of faster merchant vessels. The most important aspect of a schooner was speed; actually, it was built in such a way so as to enhance velocity, thus helping to bring more remuneration to the owners of the cargo transported, and fueling in this way the international trade.

Major Samuel Shaw and his journals

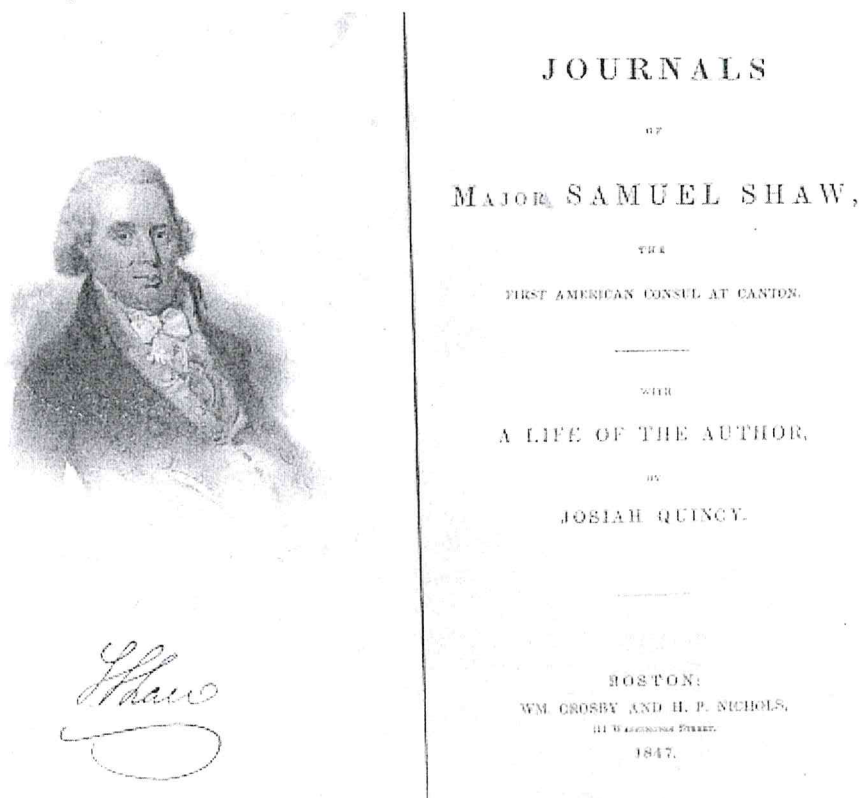
12 Before outlining the story of the *Empress of China*, we have to consider the major primary source of the first part of this work: *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw*, published by Josiah Quincy in Boston in 1847. Originally, the journals came into the possession of his nephew, the famous merchant Robert Gould Shaw, after Major Shaw’s death. How could proper relevance be given to the journals? The nephew chose the former President of Harvard University, Josiah Quincy, an educator and member of the House of Representatives for the Federalist Party from 1805 to 1813. In 1812, he was also a founding member of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, and became Mayor of Boston from 1823 to 1828, and then President of Harvard University from 1829 to 1845. Quincy used the correspondence and the documents gathered by his heirs to give a global view of Samuel Shaw. The first part of the book started with some information about his birth and education. After a long part dedicated to his service in the Continental Army, full of patriotic zeal and stories of the American Revolution, the book moved to the end of the war and finally to Shaw’s engagement in “the first commercial enterprise from the United States to China” (108).

13 This final part, concerning the first and the second trips to Canton, plays a special role in our research, together with the journals published at the end of the book. Quincy gathered many letters, presented in long quotations, up to the final letter from Thomas Randall, a family friend and partner who accompanied Shaw in the enterprise. The letter, dated August 24, 1794, was addressed to Shaw’s wife: “Dear Madam,” Randall wrote, “with a heart deeply distressed I take the pen to inform you of the death of my beloved and esteemed friend, Mr. Samuel Shaw who died on board of the ship *Washington* [...] on the 30th of May last. Every effort was used by the surgeon Mr. Dodge [...] to affect his recovery”. With great historical ability, Quincy was able to continue using the journals of James Dodge, the surgeon of the last ship, to furnish further details on Shaw’s death: he expired after an illness of 8 long months due to a liver failure contracted in Bombay, “during which time he had been afflicted with severe complaint” (124).

14 Lastly, Quincy reproduced the obituary published in the Boston *Columbian Centinel* on August 20, 1794: “His fine natural talents, elegant erudition and social benevolence gained him the esteem of the people [...] In his character of American consul for the port of Canton he was called to act a part which required much discretion and firmness [...] His commercial dealings were regulated by honor, refined by principles of philosophy and religion” (126).

15 Quincy concluded: "Of his official conduct and commercial proceedings in China, while consul of the United States at Canton, his Journals speak sufficiently. It was his fortune and happiness during the residence in that city, by his official influence to give to its inhabitants the first impression of the character and resources of a new nation [...] establishing in that remote country, confidence and respect for the American people" (128).

Fig. 1 : The front cover of the book *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw*, published by Josiah Quincy for Wm. Crosby and H.P. Nichols in 1847. On the right are Samuel Shaw's portrait and signature.



Source: Internet Archive, San Francisco. <<https://archive.org/details/journalsofmajors00shaw/page/n10/mode/2up>>

Sailing to Canton with the *Empress of China*

16 As we have already learned, the *Empress of China* was ready to depart symbolically on February 22, 1784, the day of George Washington's birthday. The 13-gun salute representing the number of the American States, given while passing the Battery in New York harbor, started the trip figuratively, and also highlighted Major Shaw's pride toward the American flag, as the 13 stars and stripes flew on the top of the mainmast. The ship was commanded by John Green, while Peter Hodgkinson was in charge as second captain; both were from Philadelphia. There were 41 persons on board including one surgeon, one gunner, two carpenters, a cooper and other sailors. The journals start with the description of Cape Verde Islands and the visit to the commander of the fort of Praia, the port of Santiago, the largest island of Cape Verde. Anchored in the bay were two Portuguese ships ready to continue to the coast of Africa for a cargo of slaves, and a French brig on her way to Cape François, Haiti, with a cargo of 123 slaves (Shaw 139).

17 "On this ship a number of naked blacks were on deck," Shaw wrote, "poor creatures, going to a state of hopeless slavery." Slavery was described as a "happy immorality," and these men engaged in the slave trade, "with a capacity for enjoying happiness, and suffering misery," trampled upon "the principles of universal benevolence," and became "a fiend to torment his fellow-creatures" (Shaw 139). In these writings Shaw represented the sentiments of the antislavery movement growing force in New England,

where many slaves were being liberated in those years by decision of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, establishing the basis for ending slavery on constitutional grounds, even if no law or amendment to the State Constitution was passed (Zilversmit 114).

18 On the open sea, the ship had an encounter with a whale, and flying fish, sword fish, and barracudas up to her arrival in Batavia on Java first, then in Macao on August 24, where Shaw dined with the French Consul and the Portuguese governor “in a very pleasant” circumstances (163), and finally to Whampoa (contemporary Hong Kong), 14 miles below Canton, on the 28th.

19 At this point the journals refer to the presence of Europeans—Swedish, German, Dutch, Danes, French, and English of course – all having regular establishments and trading companies. The Spanish traded by supercargoes from South America by way of Manila. The Portuguese ran their business from Macao, this way saving on the duties that the other nations were obliged to pay. Every ship that arrived in Whampoa had to have *co-hoang* – a set of merchants interested in the cargo – and a *comprador* – a person who furnished provisions to the ship – plus a *linguist*, absolutely necessary for the transactions with the customs house located in Canton, where no stranger could be admitted except for on the quay and the few surrounding streets occupied by Chinese merchants. *Linguists* also provided *sampans* – the Chinese boats – for unloading and loading the cargo (176). Shaw noted the number of vessels, the name of the ships and their captains: 9 English, 4 French, 5 Dutch, 3 Danish, and 4 Portuguese (182).

20 The first problem for Shaw was to clarify the difference between the English and the Americans, defined by the Chinese as “the New People.” Chinese merchants were described by Shaw as “intelligent, exact accountants, and punctual in their engagements, and with a fair character,” but their government was oppressive. “It may, perhaps, be questioned – wrote Shaw – whether there is a more oppressive one to be found in any civilized nation upon the earth” (183). Even though China was considered a civilized nation in Europe (Pomeranz 155), the idea of the despotic nature of the Chinese government prevailed in Shaw’s mind: all offices in the provinces were “squeezed by the petty mandarins” and they “in their turn, by their superiors, the governors and viceroys.” Sometimes they are accused of “maladministration” by the emperor, “and doomed to the end of their days in banishment in Siberia” (Shaw 184).

The *Lady Hughes* Affair and the New People

21 An incident occurred between the English and the Chinese in November, that required Shaw to make the difference between the Americans and the English clear again to their Chinese counterpart. With the help of the French Consul, Philippe Vieillard, Shaw was able to avoid being involved in the event that he called “the Canton War,” at the time commonly known as the *Lady Hughes* Affair. When the sailors of the English ship *Lady Hughes* fired a salute upon their arrival on October 25, they killed a Chinese official and wounded two other Chinese in a boat nearby. The next day, more than forty Chinese warships lay opposite the factories. “These ships were not very formidable – wrote Shaw – their force consisting of two iron pieces each,” while their soldiers were armed with swords, bow and arrows, and lock muskets (190). The Chinese authorities asked for the guilty gunners, but the British refused because death would certainly be the punishment. At this point the Chinese seized George Smith, the supercargo of the English ship, but all the Western traders stopped doing business and supported the British during the crisis. Shaw assumed the responsibility to speak for the US merchants, trying to keep a clear distinction between the English and the Americans. He asked for the support of the French Consul to clearly state to the Chinese “that we are American, a free, independent, and sovereign nation, not connected with Great Britain” (Shaw 193).

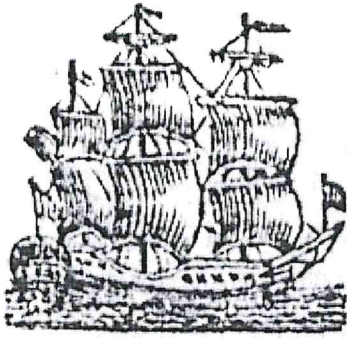
22 The affair went on during the month of November. At a meeting, the head magistrate of Canton declared that the shooter should surrender within three days, promising a

fair trial. The British at this point decided to hand over one of the authors of the shooting, a Filipino sailor, and the supercargo of the ship *Lady Hughes* was released. The gunner was tried, found guilty and hanged. Shaw believed that the death could have been avoided by stronger cooperation between the Western consuls, “but private trading interests were considered more important” (de Goey 66). On December 1st, “peace and commerce were restored” (Shaw 193). The Chinese traders seemed happy to make business with the Americans because they treated them “politely every time.” One of the China traders said to Shaw: “All China-man very much love your country [sic!]” (199).

23 Then, some reflections on Chinese religion followed. Shaw observed the Chinese paying devotion to an image of a fat, laughing old man, usually referred to as the “Fat Buddha.” The worshippers prostrated before this idol, “and knocks his head three times upon the ground” (196). In addition to those in public places, every house had its domestic deity, before whom a piece of sandal-wood was kept burning. “The Chinese observe no Sabbath, but work every day in the week,” continued Shaw, describing the hard working attitude of the people in China (197). The *Empress of China* completed her cargo, including “a set of porcelains” made for the Society of the Cincinnati in late December, and on the 28th of the same month the ship was ready to sail back to the United States (200). The first encounter between the two cultures – the New People and the Old Empire – ended with a salute of nine guns before the departure of the American vessel, which arrived in New York on May 10, 1785.

24 The Congress expressed satisfaction for the first effort “to establish a direct trade with China,” but in the meantime the principal organizer Daniel Parker went bankrupt, and had to flee to Europe. Gouverneur Morris, representing the interests of Parker, realized a profit of 25 per cent. The *Empress of China*, that was part of the inventory, was also put up for sale upon her arrival, as the advertisement appeared in the New York newspapers. Built in Boston, she was “copper-bottomed scarcely two years old [...] she may be fitted for a voyage to India with small expense. The remarkable short passage which she made from China, and the good order in which she delivered her cargo, prove the superior excellency of her sailing” (*New York Independent Journal*, June 11, 1785).

Fig. 2 : The *New York Independent Journal* published this advertisement on June 11, 1785, for the selling of the ship *Empress of China* after her return from Canton. A woodcut of the vessel appeared on the top-left of the advertisement.



The Ship

EMPRESS OF CHINA,

As she arrived from Canton, will be SOLD at the Coffee-House, on Saturday, the second of July. She is copper-bottomed, scarcely two years old, built by the celebrated Peck, of Boston, and so well found, that she may be fitted for a voyage to India with small expence. The remarkable short passage which she made from China, and the good order in which she delivered her cargo, prove the superior excellency of her sailing and construction.

N. B. A reasonable credit will be given on good security. Her inventory to be seen at

CONSTABLE, RUCKER, and Co's.
New-York, June 11, 1785. 60

Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester.

- 25 Many other newspapers celebrated the voyage of the *Empress of China*: on December 29, 1785, the *Philadelphia Pennsylvania Packet*, and *Daily Advertiser* wrote a plea to Congress encouraging American commerce in China as “the profits of this lucrative trade will rest entirely among ourselves.”

Back to Asia with the *Hope*

- 26 Following the success of this first enterprise that enriched Philadelphia’s markets, the New York merchant William Constable was able to buy the *Empress of China* and organize a new trip to China. After the War of Independence, he was convinced of the importance of American commerce with the East Indies to provide local markets with goods, tea in particular. In 1784, only a few weeks after the *Empress of China* left New York, he organized the trip of the schooner *Betsy* to Canton with a cargo of ginseng and furs. She brought home a cargo of teas, textiles, and chinaware sold in New York for \$90,000 with a profit rate of 25 percent (Sturm-Lind 47).
- 27 The supply of furs and ginseng became the source of income for many smaller towns and communities of upstate New York, the western regions of Massachusetts, and the Connecticut River Valley, from where they were brought downriver to the port of New York. In particular ginseng, broadly used in commerce with China, was at the origin of the creation of numerous towns in upstate New York, such as Rochester, Paris, and Utica. Small manufacturing industries developed in these areas for the preparation of

ginseng, and it soon became clear that the proper preparation of ginseng could have an impact on the price in China (Block 63).

28 The correspondence between the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, John Jay, and John Adams, the Ambassador in London in those years, revealed the interest of the American government in commerce with China. In a letter dated February 3, 1786, Jay told Adams that there were three ships ready to depart from New York to Canton: the *Empress of China* with the same captain John Green, the *Hope* with Captain James McGee, and again the schooner *Betsy* with Captain Neal McHenry. A fourth ship, the *Canton*, was ready to depart from Philadelphia. In the same letter, Jay informed Adams that the Congress had appointed Samuel Shaw to be their Consul in China, and his friend Thomas Randall of Philadelphia as Vice-consul. It was clear that the safer route to follow was again the Atlantic one (*The Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States of America* 511).

29 So what happened to Samuel Shaw? As he wrote in his journals, he first “relinquished the idea of pursuing the China business, and accepted the appointment of first secretary to the war-office of the United States, under the patronage of my friend General Knox” (Shaw 218). The death of his father and of his eldest brother forced him to take care of the settlement of his father’s estate in Massachusetts, but the return from Canton of the ship *Pallas* with his friend Thomas Randall, and Robert Morris’s new offer to be involved in a more extensive plan of business with China, brought him back to Philadelphia. Morris’s proposal, however, would have involved Shaw’s staying in Canton several years as an exclusive agent for the Philadelphian merchant, so he declined the offer and moved to New York, where “Isaac Sears and other gentlemen” offered him better conditions (219).

30 We know the name of the major organizer of the expedition in China, the New York merchant William Constable. He was able to organize the sailing of three ships: the *Empress of China*, the *Hope*, and the *Betsy*. Within five years, as his shipping papers revealed, Constable’s business with China brought him enormous success, making him one of America’s most important merchants for the East Indies markets (Sturm-Lind 48). Samuel Shaw was on board of the *Hope*, with Isaac Sears as supercargo, after having received the appointment as Consul of the United States for Canton by Congress on January 27, 1786. One of the reasons for the Consulship was that the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, John Jay, was really impressed by his conduct during the *Lady Hughes* Affair, as well as by his report of the state of things in Canton. Furthermore, he asked Shaw to continue to collect all possible information concerning the trade in Canton, and on China more generally (de Goey 66).

31 The *Hope* left New York on February 4, 1786. Samuel Shaw’s second voyage to Canton followed the same route of the *Empress of China*. The city of Batavia, on the island of Java, was reached on July 4th. This time, Shaw spent 20 days in this place described as “the great emporium of the Dutch,” and a “striking example of the wealth and energy of the Dutch nation” (Shaw 221). At this point, both the captain, James McGee, and the supercargo, Isaac Sears, were confined to their bed with fever. Whampoa was reached on August 15. While Shaw and Randall visited Canton, Sears remained on board, and died on October 28 of fever and dysentery contracted in Batavia. He was buried on one of the small islands close to Canton Harbor with an inscription on his tomb “to give his character in a few words, he was an honest man, an agreeable acquaintance, and a warm friend” (227).

32 Captain John Green of the *Empress of China* drew up a long list of ships and cargoes anchored outside the port of Whampoa port from July 8 to December 10, 1786. The document was published by the *Independent Gazette* of Philadelphia on May 16, 1787. What emerged from this list, unlike Shaw’s reports, was the interest of the Chinese in the opium trade, although forbidden, also in Canton. Two English ships, the *Surprise* and the *Neckar*, both arriving from Bombay, were bringing opium to the Chinese market. Two other American ships, the *Grand Turk* from Salem and the *Experiment* from New York, were on John Green’s list. The first was filled with red-wood, the second with ginseng and tar.

33 After Isaac Sears’s death, Shaw became the supercargo of the ship. In this role he showed his great experience gained during the first voyage with the *Empress of China*.

Nothing was different from the first arrival, except for the increase of British interest in the tea trade. But also “the inhabitants of America must have tea, the consumption of which will necessarily increase with the increasing population of our country,” wrote Shaw in his journals (231). With respect to the demand in China for the ginseng gathered on the Appalachian mountains, and following his old farmer’s soul, he exaggerated the value of this trade, writing that it “might perhaps be rendered as beneficial to her citizens as her mines of silver and gold have been to the rest of mankind, the world has been much mistaken” (232). But following his new merchant’s soul, he also highlighted the possibility to make a profit by bringing merchandise from Batavia to China: “Besides the advantages which America may derive from her ginseng, in the direct commerce with China, others would also accrue from making the voyage circuitous, which could be performed without loss of time.” When the American ships stopped at Batavia, they were well received and there “iron and naval stores, the produce of our country – penned Shaw – found a ready sale; and besides these, we disposed of articles which, though not immediately production of our own, had been received from other countries in exchange for them.” “No doubt, similar advantages – continued Shaw – might result to the Americans, in circuitous voyages to China” (233). The need for the American vessels to make these voyages was clear in Shaw’s mind, as was the need in these countries for the products of the American manufactures.

34 Shaw’s friend and partner Randall chose to go back to New York through Macao with the son of the late Sears and Shaw’s letter for the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, John Jay, dated December 21, 1787. The long report concerned American trade with China, considered “in its infancy.” This commerce was “viewed with no small degree of jealousy by our late mother country,” commented Shaw who preferred to avoid English invitations to their tables or concerts. The Chinese empire was also considered with suspicion by Shaw, who wrote about “great disturbances in many parts of the empire, and considering their empire, and the insurrections in the island of Formosa.” The oppressions exercised by the Chinese here “have reduced the inhabitants of those parts to a state of desperation...” “The law can be good” wrote Shaw to Jay, but Chinese policies were extremely defective and shocked the humanity of foreigners (354). Considering the effect of the despotism of the Chinese empire, Shaw turned “with pleasure to the contemplation of that happiness which an American enjoys, under the government of equal laws and a mild administration” (355). The report closed with the list of the ships that arrived in Whampoa in 1787: 28 English, 5 Dutch, 2 Swedish, 2 Danish, and 3 French, plus two private vessels from Prussia and Tuscany (356).

35 His attempt to go from Macao to Bengal failed due to the absence of direct ships. He was forced to stay for six months in Macao, under Portuguese authority at the time with the help of 150 *sepoys*, the regular troops from Goa. But the Chinese, who were more numerous, kept up a separate and independent government, by their mandarins, and a custom-house of their own, observed Shaw (237). “Opium is with the Chinese absolutely contraband, and cannot legally be admitted into their ports,” wrote Shaw first referring to this commerce in his journals. But this prohibition did not extend to Macao, “as belonging to the Portuguese.” Opium importation from Bengal has increased, along with the prices, due to the control activities of the Chinese government. But English speculators “keep a vessel plying among the neighboring island, where are plenty of safe harbors” (238). Shaw had clear in mind how the opium commerce ran: the Chinese purchasers repair to this vessel, and pay the money before receiving the drug, but in addition “they pay twenty dollars for every chest to the mandarins, who in their boats always keep near enough to watch and receive the bribe” (239). Other traders resided at Macao in this period: Mr. Cox, an English gentleman who deals “in all sort of clockwork and jewelry,” and an Italian, Mr. Pavolini, “dealing in coral, pearl, and other valuable commodities of this sort” (245).

36 The arrival from New York of the brigantine *Columbia* on July 28, with captain Solomon Bunker and supercargo Mr. Hayden and his friend Gorton, allowed Shaw to come back to Canton, where he met with a new problem: “the scarcity of rice, the bread for the Chinese” (248). In order to alleviate the famine, the Canton magistracy distributed rice to the poor daily. But the pressure was so great that, upon opening the

door of the storehouse, 20 poor women were trodden to death on July 30. For Shaw the Chinese magistrates were “certainly culpable in suffering such things” (248).

37 Finally, he was able to depart for Calcutta in January 1788, arriving on March 14. His journals described the complex society in Bengal exhaustively. The same happened at his arrival in Madras in July, showing also great interest in the complexity of the society in India. When he came back to Canton in November, he found three vessels from the United States. The *Asia* and *Canton* from Philadelphia, and the *Jenny* from New York, and two more ships were expected: the *General Washington* from Rhode Island and the *Jay*, formerly the *Hope*, from New York. It was clear that the commerce first opened by the *Empress of China* was soon followed by other ships, attracted by the high percentage of profit. This time the Canton port also hosted a small ship from Boston, fitted out to go around Cape Horn “to the Northwest Coast of America for furs, with which they were to proceed to China, and return by Cape of Good Hope” (295). The name of the ship was not mentioned in Shaw’s journal, but we know it was another *Columbia*, or better the *Columbia Rediviva*.

Sailing to China through the Northwest Coast

38 In those years, the second part of the American investors' project was taking place. Another Boston merchant vessel, the *Columbia Rediviva*, or simply *Columbia*, was on its way to the Northwest Coast around Cape Horn following the original idea of John Ledyard. Ledyard was part of the last expedition of the English explorer James Cook between 1776 and 1779, during which he kept a personal journal that he was able to publish in Hartford in 1783. Although not as successful as Cook’s own published journals, Ledyard’s shipboard writing, with its plain prose, got the attention of the American public soon after the War of Independence, because he considered this history “essentially useful to America in general but particularly to the northern States by opening a most valuable trade across the North Pacific Ocean to China” (Gray 97). Ledyard’s book also provided clear evidence of the potential of the fur trade in the Northwest regions. A single cargo of skins could make a fortune, as “skins which did not cost the purchaser six-pence sterling sold in China for 100 dollars,” wrote the explorer, creating in this way an “astonishing profit” (Ledyard, 70). Under Robert Morris’s patronage, this trade could become “the greatest commercial enterprise ever undertaken in this country,” wrote Ledyard to his cousin Isaac in June 1783 (quoted in Gray 103).

39 We know what happened to Ledyard’s dream. Philadelphia and New York merchants preferred to choose the much easier shipment through the Atlantic and Indian Oceans of another commodity, ginseng. Ledyard sailed to Europe in the summer of 1784 pursuing his other dream: to find the northwest passage through the Russian Empire. His commercial plan to trade furs with China through the Northwest Coast remained appealing among Boston merchants because they had little access for this trade to the ginseng grown in the Appalachian mountains. By the fall of 1787, the Boston ship *Columbia* was preparing to leave for the Northwest Coast, ultimately headed to Canton. The journey would take three years. Unlike the *Empress of China*, her profit was modest, because the furs sold very poorly, but she would inaugurate the standard route to the Pacific and to China (Fichter 54).

40 The first trip of the *Columbia* to the Northwest Coast was organized by Joseph Barrell & Company, a Boston fur-trading firm. She was accompanied by another ship, the *Lady Washington*, under the command of John Kendrick, as reported in the inscription on the commemorative pewter coins made “to be distributed amongst the Natives on the North West Coast of America, and to commemorate the first American adventure to the Pacific Ocean” (Fichter 50). The mission was to barter manufactured goods with the Indians for sea otter pelts and beaver furs, which in turn were to be traded at Canton for tea, silk, spices, and porcelain (Vaughan and Holm 29). The voyage began exactly on September 20, 1787, and ended on August 9, 1790. No journals

survived, but some reports and letters told the story of the two ships reaching Nootka Sound, a narrow ocean channel between two bodies of land on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, where they found the British trading settlement built by “a number of Chinese carpenters.” The Spanish claimed the region and sent a force to retake possession and expel the British. Americans understood that Nootka Sound was Spanish, as Captain Robert Gray of the *Columbia* wrote in a letter to Joseph Barrell on July 13, 1789: “we are now in a good friendship with the Spanish Commodore” (quoted in Fichter 52).

41 After leaving the *Lady Washington* in the Pacific Northwest, the *Columbia* proceeded in advance to China, arriving in Canton in January 1790, where Captain Gray found a rotten market for pelts and furs, because local authorities had banned trading in those items as a consequence of the state of perennial conflict with Russia. When Captain Kendrick arrived in Canton with the *Lady Washington*, Gray urged his colleague to remain in Macao and sell the cargo. In a letter dated February 4, he wrote: “You will not receive one third of the value for your skins” in Canton (quoted in Fichter 54). While the *Columbia* returned to Boston through the Indian and the Atlantic Oceans, obtaining the distinction of being the first American ship to circumnavigate the globe, the *Lady Washington* remained in Hong Kong where Captain Kendrick worked for himself, trying to build his own fur trading business, while promising to give the ship back to Randall. “He did neither” (Fichter 54)

42 Again under the command of Captain Robert Gray, the *Columbia* left Boston on October 1, 1790, arriving at Vancouver Island on June 3, 1791, and wintering there. Resuming his pursuit of Indian trade in the spring, on May 11, 1792, Gray took the *Columbia* over the bar into the estuary of a large river. The entry in his log was terse: “we found this to be a large river of fresh water, up which we steered. Vast numbers of natives came alongside” (Gray 435). Those natives, reported first mate John Boit, “appear’d very civil (not even offering to steal).” In fact, they were open for business. “During our short stay,” Boit added on May 15, we collected “150 Otter, 300 Beaver, and twice the number of other land furs” (Boit 398).

Fig. 3 : China porcelain platter, c. 1793. This dish was purchased in China by Captain Robert Gray with furs from the Northwest Coast and used on his ship *Columbia Rediviva*. Oregon Historical Society, Gift of Miss Amelia Peabody.



Source: Thomas Vaughan and Bill Holm, *Soft Gold: The Fur Trade and Cultural Exchange on the Northwest Coast of America*, Portland, Oregon Historical Society, 1990, 13.

43 For nine days they explored some thirteen miles upstream, and anchored in the bay that still bears Gray’s name – the same place where Lewis and Clark, calling it “Shallow Bay,” were pinned down for two miserable days by rough seas, high tides and relentless winds. Gray and his crew returned to Boston on July 26, 1793, leaving behind only

some samples of the commerce with China and a name, Columbia River, that reappeared in the diaries of Lewis and Clark, the two explorers sent up the Missouri River by Jefferson after the Louisiana purchase. But Gray never published his discovery. It remained for the British captain, George Vancouver, who crossed the Columbia River at the end of May, to announce it in his journals, *Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean*, published in 1798.

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44 The *Empress of China*, from one side, and the *Columbia Rediviva*, from the other, not only developed a national investment community in the new Republic, but also moved American trade from the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean to the Pacific and Indian Oceans. There was also a change in the construction of ships. While before these two vessels international commerce preferred larger and elegant ships, now the Bostonians, after the failure of the enterprise of the *Massachusetts*, built their ships for speed. In other words, these ships engaged in trade with China started the era of schooners, finally realizing how important fast delivery was, and still is today, to give more power to the force of commerce.

45 When Alexander Hamilton, as the Secretary of the Treasury of the new Republic, wrote his "Report on Manufactures" in December 1791, among the many articles that required protection from the American government, he chose to include "Ships [...] Cables, sail-cloth, Cordage, twine and packthread." In Hamilton's words, especially "Sail cloth; one intimately connected with navigation and defense; and of which a flourishing manufactory is established at Boston and very promising ones at several other places," needed to be supported in its fabrication at home. For George Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, American raw materials, combined with individual enterprise, would also offer farmers and hunters an opportunity to attain a better standard of living in a free world market.

46 With the successful enterprises of the *Empress of China* and the *Columbia Rediviva*, the "New People" expected to expand their economic horizons not only in the Caribbean and European markets, but also in the Far East, to be reached both from the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. In other words, the new social order provided by the American government would allow for expanding the economy beyond the borders of British mercantilism, to participate, including through this new commerce with China, in the new spirit of expectant capitalism within the ranks of Jeffersonian America. As the Republican Congressman Edward Livingston stated in a toast in 1798: "The Colossus of American freedom: may it bestride the commerce of the world" (quoted in Appleby 88).

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Table des illustrations

Titre	Fig. 1 : The front cover of the book <i>The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw</i> , published by Josiah Quincy for Wm. Crosby and H.P. Nichols in 1847. On the right are Samuel Shaw's portrait and signature.
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Légende Source: Internet Archive, San Francisco. <<https://archive.org/details/journalsofmajors00shaw/page/n10/mode/2up>>

URL <http://journals.openedition.org/1718/docannexe/image/5747/img-1.jpg>

Fichier image/jpeg, 2,5M



Titre Fig. 2 : The New York *Independent Journal* published this advertisement on June 11, 1785, for the selling of the ship *Empress of China* after her return from Canton. A woodcut of the vessel appeared on the top-left of the advertisement.

Crédits Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester.

URL <http://journals.openedition.org/1718/docannexe/image/5747/img-2.jpg>

Fichier image/jpeg, 1,6M

Titre Fig. 3 : China porcelain platter, c. 1793. This dish was purchased in China by Captain Robert Gray with furs from the Northwest Coast and used on his ship *Columbia Rediviva*. Oregon Historical Society, Gift of Miss Amelia Peabody.



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Auteur

Marco Sioli

Marco Sioli is Associate Professor at the University of Milan where he teaches American History and Politics. He published widely on Early American History and the role of the Founding Fathers. His last book concern the actuality of Alexander Hamilton's thought, and his role in the development of American manufactures and commerce. He was a residential fellow of the Library Company, Philadelphia, the Newberry Library, Chicago, and the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester. He recently organized the exhibition entitled "The Era of Sails: Clippers and Schooners between J. Fenimore Cooper and H. Melville."

Droits d'auteur



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