
Mrs. Garrett has put a lot of loving effort into this book, and it shows.

She made many visits to Canton during its years of gestation, and the contents fully endorse her claim (Introduction, xiii) that ‘instead of discovering that all had been swept away, I found that much had survived.’ We are also in her debt, for another reason. She has provided a wealth of description from older works obtained during her searches in the second-hand and rare book market, many of them never reprinted, and hence scarce and expensive to buy, if you can find them! One such book is by the American, Osmond Tiffany Jr. (Boston, 1849), which has supplied the two little gems given on pages 79 (on the Parsee merchants of Canton) and 90 (on Chinese shopmen).

The result is a lively, informative, and very readable account of a City, once famous across the Four Seas, which has been long neglected and deserves to be again better known. No matter - as the author has felt obliged to add - that a visit there is “like an audience with a grand old lady who has had too many face-lift”. She is still worth cultivating, for all that!

The long history of Canton is given in outline, but the focus is on its 18th and 19th centuries “heyday,” when the city was the only port on the long Chinese seaboard open to foreign trade: and as promised in the sub-title, here we have ‘merchants and mandarins’ in superabundance, firmly set within the geographical, social, and historical context of their times.

I liked the book’s organization. Its three parts, with fourteen chapters and accompanying notes, together with an Introduction, cover the subject very neatly, whilst each chapter is long enough to impart adequate information, but not to the point when it becomes too much to handle.

I also like the illustrations, especially the three sections in colour, all very well reproduced and including some that (I predict) many
readers will not have seen before. They number forty-three among the over 140 provided to illustrate the book.

All the chapters are of interest, but I most enjoyed No. 10. This is entitled ‘Across the River: Honam and Fati,’ dealing with the area opposite the City and the Foreign Factories, and separated from them by the main stream of the Pearl River. We read about the warehouses at Honam, occupied by the merchants after the Thirteen Factories were burned in 1856 (and which some among their number continued to occupy for many years after land in the new commercial settlement at Shamien was put up for sale in 1861). Also, about the villas and gardens of the two Chinese merchants foremost in the foreign trade, and the famous ‘Sea Banner Monastery’ nearby, now restored, which, like the gardens, had been one of the places members of the foreign community were permitted to visit under the ‘Regulations’ governing residence at the Factories. Included, too, are some glimpses of the temple and the merchant-mandarin residences, and their occupants taken from contemporary accounts of the Macartney and Amherst embassies to China, which had been housed on Honam during brief stays in Canton in 1793 and 1817.

Besides the wonderful quotations from writers of the past, we have Mrs. Garrett’s splendidly evocative account of her first visit to Canton in the 1970s (Introduction, xii), and her brief description of the garden at Abu Wangus’s tomb (p. 8), making this reviewer wish she had included more of the same at other points of the narrative.

Although the book is more of a “coffee-table” production than a guide-book, its contents seem to me to require one or more large maps. With the exception at page 178 (Fig.14.6), the maps included among the illustrations are at best half-page, and most of them date from the past. A specially drawn full-page or even folding one, to complement the text, would assist the reader, especially since, in present-day Canton, besides the changes of street names mentioned by Mrs. Garrett, all street names are now rendered in pinyin romanization, which is vastly different from romanizations of the local Cantonese speech. Such a map would give visual indication of the precise whereabouts of the many interesting sites or buildings described by the author, and could have been substituted for the historical - and disappointingly unclear - historical map of the Canton River which is reproduced on the end
papers and only uses part of the available space.

There is the matter of romanization itself. Authors of books of this sort in the English language find themselves having to use a mix of Cantonese names, comprising old renderings of both Cantonese and Mandarin, the frequently encountered various misspellings by Western writers, and now with pinyin street and place names into the bargain. Like many more of us, Mrs. Garrett has also had to mix her romanizations here and there. Having myself been hauled over the coals for perpetuating just such a “mish-mash” in one of my books, by my former boss and mentor, the late K.M.A. Barnett (Journal, Vol 24, 1984, pp.329-330), I can greatly sympathize with a dilemma not of her making.

The disadvantages for author and reader alike come out particularly in Chapter 6, devoted to the local temples, where we encounter the confusions inseparable from using different systems of romanization within paragraphs devoted to the same institution - and compounded where a street named after the temple in question is (and has to be) rendered in pinyin (as at pages 64-65 on the Kwong Hau/Guangxiao Buddhist Temple). Mrs. Garrett has done her best to reduce problems of identification with her useful ‘English/Pinyin and Cantonese/Pinyin Glossary’ at pp.184 - 6, but this in itself cannot remove all the puzzles inherent in the mix.

In a book which is so full of facts, the attempt to write a review tests the reviewer’s knowledge as much as the author’s, and in truth often beyond it. However, “history” itself can sometimes be uncertain, as in the case of Macau’s origins. It is widely believed that the Portuguese were permitted to settle there because of their help with the suppression of pirates (pp.10, 73), but this is still not certain. Also, Macau was not “granted” (p.73) to the Portuguese, in the sense of bestowing possession or legal right, their occupation being made subject to various payments, that included customs dues and taxes and (later) payment of an annual ground rent, whilst Chinese were excluded from their jurisdiction, being placed under their own official. (For a useful, fairly recent, compendium, see R.D. Cremer (editor), *Macau, City of Commerce and Culture, 2nd Edition: Continuity and Change* (Hong Kong, API Press, Ltd., 1991).
Made more by way of observation, there is the matter of the restrictions imposed, in their turn, upon the foreign traders at the Thirteen Factories in Canton (see p.97 and the Addendum). Mrs. Garrett has explained how they were increasingly ignored by them, in her chapter 9 ( "Disobedience and Destruction: The China Wars"). Here, it seems appropriate to note that the laws of China, designed to support the security of the government and the happiness of the people through enforcing the moral ideas and usages which had characterized the nation over two millennia, were (like the 'Regulations' for the foreign merchants) precisely and minutely detailed, so as to be readily available to the authorities as and when required.

Non-compliance with the laws was not confined to outsiders! One notable deviation was noted by Sir George Thomas Staunton (a resident at the Factories 1798-1816) in his part translation of Qing Statute Law, published in London in 1810: that is, how certain 'religious' activities, prohibited in the penal code, were 'openly practised in every part of the empire,' leading him to surmise that these clauses were 'retained for the purpose of enabling the magistrates to control and keep within bounds these popular superstitions.' when required. (p.175n of the Taiwan reprint by Ch’eng-Wen Publishing Co., Taipei, 1966; with another such on theatrical representations at p.418n). I mention these points in passing, as being relevant for the times.

Returning to Mrs. Garrett’s book, the standard of production is high, and typos are few. But (e.g) since he has been mentioned, Osmond Tiffany, Jr. appears variously in several places, including the index, as ‘Oswald’ or ‘Osmand’: Isabella L. Bird (Mrs. Bishop)’s book, The Golden Chersonese ... has been mispelt: and the Cantonese romanization for the Eighteenth Ward is Shap Pat Po, not ‘Shap Pak Pu.’ (pp.144-5).

But this is to cavil. All in all, this is a very competent and attractive recreation of a bygone world, linked to surviving buildings and other relics from the time, and heartily recommended to the reader - for all of which reasons, the kind of specially-drawn map I have suggested should form part of any further edition of this book.

JAMES HAYES