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**William Nelson Lovatt in Late Qing China  
War, Maritime Customs, and Treaty Ports, 1860-1904**

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*William Nelson Lovatt in Late Qing China: War, Maritime Customs, and Treaty Ports, 1860-1904.* By WAYNE PATTERSON. Lanham MA: Lexington Books, 2020. xvii, 239 pp. ISBN: 9781498566469.

China was forced to open its first Treaty Ports in 1842. This was one of the conditions of the Treaty of Nanking (now Nanjing) which ended the First Opium War (1839-1842). The country was forced to make further concessions with the Treaty of Tientsin, which ended the Second Opium War (1856-1860). This saw an ever-increasing number of Treaty Ports appear before the system finally ended in 1943. This second treaty also opened the Yangtze river to foreign trade and missionary activity, allowing Westerners penetrate into the Chinese interior. In the first year of the river's opening, Shanghai's customs revenues tripled<sup>i</sup>, but the duties paid on goods, incoming and outgoing, were handed to Western customs officers, who then forwarded receipts to Peking (now Beijing). This was because during the early stages of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), the British had begun collecting import duties, and because the revenues were so much larger than they had been under the Chinese administration (prone as it was at the time to corruption), the British persuaded the imperial court to allow them supervise the entire Customs service, establishing the Imperial Maritime Customs in 1854.

Treaty Ports were established by war and supported by the Customs service. Wayne Patterson's *William Nelson Lovatt in Late Qing China: War, Maritime Customs, and Treaty Ports, 1860-1904* gives us a series of fascinating glimpses into all three of these elements through the diaries and letters of an Anglo-American soldier turned

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<sup>i</sup> Stella Dong, *Shanghai: The Rise and Fall of a Decadent City*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 23.

Customs official who lived in China in the last decades of the Qing dynasty. William Lovatt was born in England but spent two-thirds of his life in China, first (briefly) as a soldier, then as a Customs official. Lovatt served in nine of China's Treaty Ports, beginning and ending in Hankou (with brief stints in Taiwan and Korea). A Christian and a Freemason (p. 119, endnote 18), he can sometimes sound a little self-satisfied, although he mostly comes across as a likeable pragmatist, unfailingly optimistic in the face of career and financial setbacks. Also, he 'was able to remain coolheaded in the face of potentially serious incidents' (p. 152), thereby exhibiting characteristic British phlegm.

This excellently researched book gathers Lovatt's journals, letters, and photographs to give unique insights into China in the late nineteenth century. Lovatt's descriptions of customs personnel, missionaries, and diplomats, as well as local Chinese of all social classes, are well observed. He clearly enjoyed his job (except the posting to Chongqing) (p. 222). Although 'silent on how he came to be hired' (p. 21), at a time of expansion for the Customs service, a well-educated, Chinese-speaking Englishman would have been snapped up, and because he *could* speak Chinese, and travelled extensively, his insights into 'the fault lines of late Qing China' (p. xiii) are interesting, particularly the antiforeignism that flared up from time to time.

'The Customs was centralized, highly organized, and disciplined, it was nonetheless an institution dominated by foreigners and thus representative of a sort of informal empire' (p. x). At the same time, it operated as an adjunct of 'the Qing government to provide a stable income from maritime trade' (p. 221). For most of his career Lovatt was a Tidesurveyor, basically a harbormaster controlling shipping and cargo (p. 21). This book 'gives us an inside look at the workings of the Chinese Imperial

Maritime Customs Service and its inspector general Robert Hart' (p. 223). Competent and hardworking, never having been disciplined, and having mastered Chinese, Lovatt's longed-for promotion to commissioner eluded him (p. 224). Patterson convincingly explains why by showing how Hart was punishing Lovatt for disloyalty when he resigned (temporarily) in 1883 after a stint in Korea, he then more or less blackmailed Hart for a more generous severance package by threatening to reveal secret plans to annex the Korean customs service (p. 224).

Incidents like this make Patterson's book quite exciting in places, as we wait to find out what is going to happen to this likable man. Yet his story is much more than an expatriate's reminiscences, Lovatt's papers provide 'a rich and original inside look not only at the last half-century of the Qing dynasty but also at the inner workings of Hart and the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, treaty ports, missionaries, diplomats, and Chinese society' (p. xiii). This is backed by research conducted 'on three continents' (p. xiv), which situate the man and his times really well. This book should be of interest to anyone seeking to know more about Treaty Ports, the Customs service, or late nineteenth-century China. The fourteen chapters are illustrated with black-and-white photographs of (and by) Lovatt. All chapters are copiously endnoted, with numerous cross referencing to other sources, and the Conclusion neatly recapitulates all that has gone before. Lovatt died suddenly in 1904 and the Epilogue (Chapter 14) notes that his wife Jennie died seven years later, in 1911, the same year Robert Hart died, and also the year the Qing dynasty was finally overthrown.

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