

## Research Article

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# The Mirror Image of Sino-Western in America's First Work on Travel to China

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**Abstract:** American travel writing on China, *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the First American Consul at Canton With a Life of the Author*, not only reflects the image of China in the mid-Qing dynasty from a Western perspective, but also presents the self-conception and identity construction of early Americans. Shaw's understanding of China prior to his arrival in China was influenced by public opinion, his community, and his reading experiences, leading him to approach his observations of China through a complex filter of romantic imagination and grandiose expectations, and commercial incentives, as well as malicious misinterpretations. While in China, his idealized vision of the Chinese market was tempered by his critical stance toward the Qing government and legal culture, which were closely linked to American interests. Shaw's journals deconstructed the image of China as a utopia and marked an important turning point in the history of American perception of China. This study explores the trajectory of this transition and reflects on the discursive construction of American national identity in the process, tracing Samuel Shaw's evolving perceptions of China and his influence on American politicians, businessmen, and the general public.

**Keywords:** Samuel Shaw, travel writing, mirror image of Sino-Western

## Introduction

After the *Treaty of Paris* was signed with Great Britain in 1783, the United States gained independence and began to break through the economic sanctions and commercial monopoly that the British East India Company had imposed on its colonies and the Far East. A group of wealthy merchants from New York and Philadelphia, led by one of America's founding fathers Robert Morris, joined forces with Daniel Parker & Company to finance the purchase and refurbishment of *Empress of China* (Latourette 13). The ship sailed from New York in February 1784 for Canton and returned in May of the following year (Paullin 160–161), completed the first voyage between China and the United States, and “opened one of the most romantic and glamorized chapters in American maritime history, celebrated to this day in moving pictures, storybooks, and history primers” (Isaacs 67). Its supercargo, Samuel Shaw (1754–1794), served as an army officer during the War of Independence, received a commendation from President Washington for his meritorious service, and was the first American consul to China and an important pioneer of early trade between China and the United States. He witnessed the first exchanges and collisions between the Eastern and Western maritime civilizations and was one of the most important authors of American travel writing in China.

Through his meticulous observations, Samuel Shaw gained a preliminary understanding of Chinese institutions and culture in the mid-Qing period and left behind many valuable manuscripts. Based on these, Josiah Quincy, Jr., a member of the United States House of Representatives, mayor of Boston, and president of Harvard University, edited and published a biography titled *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the First*

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*American Consul at Canton With a Life of the Author* in 1847. It consists of the journals and letters of Shaw written during his visits to China from 1784 to 1788, describing his involvement in American trade with China and his appointment by Congress as the first American consul in Canton in 1786, and his impressions of China during this period.

The image of China within the American imagination has undergone significant changes over time, with scholars debating when and how these shifts occurred. Scholars such as Harold Isaacs and Kenneth Latourette regard the mid-nineteenth century as a turning point in America's perception of China, arguing that the First Opium War undermined American respect for Chinese civilization (Isaacs 71; Latourette 124). Miller emerges as the pioneering scholar to contest this assertion, positing that from the inception of Sino-United States interactions, American merchants maintained a comparatively unfavorable viewpoint toward China (375–395). While Alfred Owen Aldridge probes deeper, locating the origins of the degradation of China's reputation at the very commencement of Sino-American relations. He posits that Samuel Shaw was one of the pioneer Americans to challenge the prevailing Western perception of China, which was predominantly positive. Subsequently, a palpable sense of skepticism towards the Chinese steadily solidified, becoming a primary sentiment in the United States' interactions with China (Aldridge 130). Miller and Aldridge's perspectives are partially concurred with in the article, and a comprehensive analysis of Samuel Shaw's journals reveals that America's respect for China has gradually diminished since his time; when it comes to Chinese governmental administration, judicial systems, military strength, and artistic standards, his stance is predominantly critical. His process of understanding China aligns with the gradual debunking of utopian ideals. Nonetheless, it is essential to avoid reducing Shaw's viewpoint on China to a mere skeptical and negative stance. His anticipation of China's commercial potential and his admiration for Cohong merchants are well recognized. Furthermore, it is undeniable that Shaw played a significant role in directing the attention of statesmen and the general public toward Sino-American commerce and the US's expansionist goals.

Informed by existing research in this domain, this study explores the evolution of Shaw's understanding of China. Consequently, by contextualizing Shaw's journals within the larger framework of antecedent discourses on America's perception of China, this article illuminates the nascent American viewpoint on China during the mid-Qing dynasty, as manifested in Shaw's travel accounts. Moreover, it offers a historical examination of the discursive formation of American national identity and its interrelation with Shaw's observations and standpoint on China. The article endeavors to uncover the genesis of Shaw's preconceptions about China before his arrival, the representation of China he devised in his journals, and his strategy for addressing the national identity conundrum while molding early American national character under the scrutiny of the Other. In doing so, this research contributes to the academic literature on travel writing and its significance in shaping cultural perceptions and identity construction. Additionally, the article scrutinizes the impact of Shaw's expedition to China and the ensuing publication of his manuscripts on the American society's impressions of China and American diplomatic policies toward China. This analysis, therefore, offers valuable insights into clarifying the origins of the entire discourse system concerning China from the source in the United States.

## Methodology

This article adopts the theoretical frameworks of Imagology and Hermeneutics with a focus on the notions of “mirror image” and “national identity,” to scrutinize the representation of China as depicted by Samuel Shaw and to delve into the development of American identity within the global society during the nascent stages of the nation. Imagology, a subfield of comparative literature that investigates the portrayal of foreign cultures and peoples in literary discourses, is centered not only on the analysis of the creation and dissemination of national and cultural stereotypes, images, and identities but also on the dynamic interplay between “self-images” and “hetero-images” (Leerssen 27–28). Hermeneutics, a scholarly domain of interpretation that places particular emphasis on the historical and cultural dimensions of the interpreters' understanding as well as their “fore-conceptions” (Heidegger 191) and “fusion of horizons”

(Gadamer 415), is especially relevant to textual analysis. China constitutes a text interpreted by Samuel Shaw whose “fore-conceptions” of the country are influenced by his preexisting assumptions, expectations, and biases. Shaw’s experiences in China give rise to a “fusion of horizons” by confirming, contesting, or redefining his prior viewpoints, thereby enriching his comprehension of Chinese culture. Combining these dual theoretical lenses allows for a more holistic understanding of the factors and processes involved in the construction of China’s image within Shaw’s journals.

The concept of “mirror image,” stemming from Said’s seminal work *Orientalism*, examines the subjective and idealized portrayal of one culture as crafted by authors originating from a different culture. This analytical approach entails heterogeneous cultures, landscapes, and traditions, consequently unveiling the creators’ cultural contexts, predispositions, and expectations. Historically, American representations of China have been generated by attributing idealized qualities, traits, and customs of their own culture onto the Chinese. As such, Americans have perceived China as if reflecting themselves through a metaphorical mirror (Jespersen xviii–xix). Shaw’s portrayal of Chinese culture offers insights into the formation of America’s national identity, encompassing ideological disparities, cultural distinctions, and interactive processes. With respect to “national identity,” Anderson’s idea of “imagined communities” provides a persuasive framework for exploring how Shaw constructs American national identity by contrasting it with the image of China. Through his travelogues, Shaw narrates his experiences and observations in China, highlighting the dissimilarities in the political systems and ideological principles of the two countries. This comparison serves to underscore America’s uniqueness, subsequently nurturing a heightened sense of belonging and identity. These concepts contribute to the analysis of the dynamics of Sino-Western relations during the early American republic and their role in shaping both the image of China and American national identity.

## “Fore-Conceptions” Before the Arrival in China

In accordance with Heidegger’s assertion that “whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception” (Heidegger, 191), it becomes imperative to examine the formation of Samuel Shaw’s preconceptions prior to his arrival in China. The impact of Shaw’s experiential encounters through reading and perceiving China constituted a significant component of his comprehensive historical consciousness, subsequently influencing his observations and interpretations of Chinese society and culture upon arrival.

Eighteenth-century Americans were exposed to depictions of China through diverse sources such as newspapers, magazines, elaborate Chinese ceramics, and traveler accounts, which led to the swift development of an idealized Chinese image as a prominent imaginative geography, infused with mythical, romantic, and exotic elements (Turner 57). The image engendered a collective social imagination that was captivated by the allure of the orient, significantly influencing Shaw’s perspective on China. During the eighteenth century, the European cultural landscape was characterized by a fascination with “Chinoiserie” and the widespread prevalence of Sino-mania. Despite the limitations on direct trade with China imposed by British mercantilist policies during the colonial era, Americans were able to access Chinese goods through the intermediary of the British East India Company and “Quantities of porcelain and other goods were smuggled in from St. Eustatius in the Dutch West Indies and elsewhere” (Goldstein, *America Views China* 45). These items encompassed exquisite porcelain and silk, aromatic tea, elaborate lacquer work, radiant silver, visually appealing wallpaper, and intricately carved ivory and jade fans and sculptures. These artifacts were esteemed as status symbols for the upper echelons of society, while more utilitarian items catered to mass consumption. The influence of “esthetic colonialism” (O’Connor 38) was felt across varying degrees within different American social strata, as they sought the exoticism of Chinese culture. This consumer inclination significantly impacted early American artisans. Although they may not have fully grasped the philosophical concepts and aesthetic interests embodied in these artworks, they were eager to appreciate and adopt the enigmatic visual arts of the Orient. American artisans frequently emulated Chinese design motifs or incorporated printed imagery inspired by Chinese themes, thereby constructing romantic representations of harmony and beauty that resonated with both American merchants and consumers.

Samuel Shaw was undoubtedly influenced by the social communities to which he belonged. Early American intellectuals and political leaders, including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson, held Chinese Confucian philosophy, economic theory, the imperial examination system, and literary works in high regard. They also recognized the superiority of China's agricultural development. The American Philosophical Society, the first academic society in the United States, was founded during this period. In the preface to the first volume of its journal, the editors drew parallels between China and the United States in terms of "latitude," "climate," "soil and natural produce," and emphasized that "could we be so fortunate as to introduce the industry of the Chinese, their arts of living and improvements in husbandry, as well as their native plants, America might in time become as populous as China" (Anon 3). This demonstrates that American scholars sought valuable insights from Chinese civilization. Many board members of the American Philosophical Society later became affiliated with the Society of the Cincinnati, an organization composed of Continental military officers. An informal collegiality was maintained between the two associations over the long term. Generally, a writer's perception of a foreign reality is inextricably linked to the collective imagination of the group or society they belong to (Meng 7). As the secretary of the Society of the Cincinnati, Samuel Shaw's foresight in observing China was inevitably influenced by his peers. In 1738, Franklin enthusiastically announced the discovery of ginseng in Pennsylvania, a plant previously believed to only exist in China (262). The American Philosophical Society also stated that ginseng was found only within the same degrees of latitude in America as in China (Anon 5). Though this judgment is now considered inaccurate, the academic authority symbolized by the American Philosophical Society and the emphasis it accorded to ginseng aligned with Shaw's anticipation of the plant's prospective significance in the initial stages of United States–China commerce.

A more profound and direct influence on Shaw's perception of China can be traced to the British bestseller of the time, *A Voyage Round the World, In the Years 1740–1744*. This book, chronicling the legendary journey of British Commodore George Anson (1697–1762) filled with treachery, bloodshed, shipwreck, disease, adventure, and glory, was so popular that it appeared on the book lists of elite women in colonial Philadelphia (Fatherly 229). Anson was ordered to plunder the Spanish fleet in the Pacific during the War of Jenkins' Ear, and the account of his voyage achieved immense commercial success upon its publication in 1748. Anson's accomplishments during the expedition bolstered his reputation, propelling his rapid ascent in the navy and eventually leading to his appointment as First Lord of the Admiralty (Williams 299). The widespread circulation of the book in both Europe and the United States was further facilitated by Anson's social standing. As a result, it continued to be considered a suitable teaching resource in geography classes well into the early twentieth century (G.E.L.C. 168).

It was also this far-reaching travelogue that initiated "the first full-scale attack on the rosy image of China that the French Jesuits were trying to convey" (Mackerras 39). Encountering obstacles in China while seeking refits and supplies for *Centurion* during his homeward voyage, Anson depicted Canton as a defenseless port within an inert China as an authoritarian empire and Chinese officials and merchants as cowardly, hypocritical, greedy, and contemptible villains, while Anson's arrogance and use of force were glorified as necessities to secure diplomatic victories. According to the Chinese historical document *A Brief History of Macao*, Governor Yin Guangren of Dongguan discovered starving Spanish prisoners of war on Anson's ship, begging for help. Yin had to repeatedly enlighten Anson about the principles of righteousness. Eventually, Yin negotiated a deal wherein the Chinese government would provide food and sail repairs in exchange for the release of 299 prisoners (Yin and Zhang 129). Both sides defended their positions, and their views of each other tended to be negative. In Western academia, Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire questioned Anson's authority to judge the morals, beliefs, and industries of China, considering his limited interactions with the ancient and civilized nation (Voltaire 276). Senior East India Company supercargoes James Naish and Edward Page sought to rectify the "ungenerous" and "sweeping indictments" (Williams 199). American East Asia researcher Robert Markley argued that "Anson's behavior threatened the complex trade relations that depended on the symbolic exchange of gifts in eighteenth-century Canton... in order to construct an Anglocentric history" (Markley 216). Numerous scholars and historical participants expressed sympathy toward China's situation at the time. However,

misunderstandings were difficult to dispel, and as Chinoiserie began to wane with the rise of Europe in the late-eighteenth century, Western public opinion grew increasingly derogatory toward China.

As an avid reader of *A Voyage Round the World*, Shaw directly quotes the book twice in his journal, illustrating the continuity and intertextuality of the image of China as constructed by the British author and reimagined by an American reader. One quotation describes the delicate power relations between the Portuguese governor and the Chinese government upon Shaw's arrival in Macao, stating that the governor had to "behave with great circumspection" and "avoid every circumstance that may give offense to the Chinese" (Shaw, *Journals* 162; Anson 469). Indeed, when Anson visited China in 1743, the Qing dynasty was consolidating its control over Macao, and Portugal sought to avert conflict. King João V of Portugal demanded that the Portuguese in Macao submit to Chinese authority, even instructing that in the event of a clash between Portugal and China in Macao, there would be "no rescue" and the blockade of Macao would be left to the Chinese (Fei 104). In 1786, following Samuel's second visit to China and a 6-month stay in Macao, he generally concurred with the claim and wrote in his journal that "With respect to situation and government, it does not differ essentially from the account given in the preceding pages, taken from Anson's Voyage" (Shaw, *Journals* 237). Although Shaw's predisposition toward established authorities seems to be corroborated by factual inquiry, this hasty conclusion is at odds with his subsequent descriptions. According to Shaw's journal, Macao is under Portuguese control, guarded by forts, batteries, and sepoys, with "the inhabitants more immediately subject to the Portuguese authority," while the governor frequently engages in opium smuggling, and the Portuguese authorities act arbitrarily, demanding exclusive possession of Typa Island and repeatedly violating the housing rights of other European residents (Shaw, *Journals* 237–259). This reversal of power relations between China and Portugal is evident and closely tied to the "Providências Régias" (Castro 345–357) issued by Queen Maria I of Portugal in 1783. These measures expanded the authority of the Governor of Macao, equipped him with military arms, established customs, set up missions and ecclesiastical schools, and confirmed administrative jurisdiction over Macao. Shaw, on the other hand, perpetuates outdated knowledge in new contexts, and his inconsistent narrative reveals a significant blindness in his preconceptions of China.

Moreover, Shaw's views on Chinese politics, military, and arts are indirectly colored by *A Voyage Round the World*. First, Anson challenged the Jesuits' idealized portrayal of benevolent rule under enlightened sovereigns (Anson 543), and Shaw continued this skeptical tone by asserting that "the accounts given in the writings of the missionaries are enveloped in much mystery, and, in many instances, border not a little upon the marvellous" (Shaw, *Journals* 168), implying dishonesty and exaggeration in their depictions of China. Second, regarding military matters, Anson stated that the Qing army was "extremely defective in all military skills" and "*Centurion* alone was an overmatch for all the navy power of that Empire" (Anson 387; 414). Similarly, Shaw remarked that "three European long-boats, properly equipped, might have forced their way through them, had they been five times as numerous" (Shaw, *Journals* 191), revealing the Qing government's lack of naval defense awareness and the significant gap between Europe and China in modern military strategies, warship construction, and army training. Third, both authors adopted a derogatory attitude toward Chinese art. In *A Voyage Round the World*, Chinese craftsmen were labeled as "servile imitators" and even Chinese painters "in great esteem" were criticized as "more defective" due to their struggles with human figures and larger compositions (Anson 411–412). Likewise, when Shaw anticipated that Guangzhou painters would merge the goddess engraving and the soldier statue into a single image but failed to receive the ideal artwork, he lamented, "it is a general remark, that the Chinese, though they can imitate most of the fine arts, do not possess any large portion of original genius" (Shaw, *Journals* 199). However, it is evidently unfair for him to judge a Chinese artist lacking a Western cultural background by a standard that requires a perfect fusion of an ancient Roman mythological figure and a modern military exemplar. These parallels suggest that Shaw was significantly participating in a tradition and that his understanding of China partially reproduced Commodore Anson's statements of historical experience, which implies that Shaw was prone to inherited prejudices and lacked "a critical yet magnanimous spirit" (Brunel 117).

Despite Shaw lacking firsthand experience with China before his arrival, he was shaped by the collective imagination of Americans, key figures of the Society of the Cincinnati, and his own reading



experiences. As a result, his understanding of China was guided and constrained by various preconceptions, leading him to perceive the country through a diverse set of lenses, encompassing romantic imaginings, grand expectations, commercial enticements, and unfavorable misinterpretations.

## **“Fusions of Horizons” During the Time in China**

Upon the successful completion of *Empress of China*’s inaugural voyage, Samuel Shaw managed to obtain genuine exposure to this ancient civilization, thereby establishing “fusions of horizons” (Gadamer 415) grounded in empirical observations. It is crucial to highlight that when scrutinizing the portrayal of China crafted by Samuel Shaw, consideration must be given not only to the prevailing conditions in China during the Qing dynasty but also to the reflective depiction of America and the development of national identity, “because images of China have largely come from Americans’ assumptions about themselves” (Jespersen xv).

### **Exploration of the Chinese Market and Sino-American Foreign Trade Routes**

Following the culmination of the War of Independence, the United States was subjected to an economic boycott by the British, which resulted in the cessation of trade with the West Indies. This, in turn, had a deleterious impact on the maritime industry, necessitating an economic readjustment. Further compounding the issue was the absence of a robust central government under the federal system, which rendered the period between the Revolution’s conclusion and the ratification of the Federal Constitution as the “critical period” (Fiske v–viii). To mitigate the dire economic circumstances, the United States was compelled to explore new avenues for international trade, leading to a strong impetus to cultivate commercial ties with China.

In recent scholarly discourse, the nature of the Chinese market has been the subject of considerable debate, with some questioning whether it is more myth than reality. American scholar Paul A. Varg contends that “the great China market proved to be a myth” (Varg 4), while Fairbank astutely observes that American commercial interests in China are entwined with significant amounts of imagination and aspiration (Fairbank, *The United States and China* 258). Indeed, the intricacies of the Chinese market, characterized by the discord between the myth of boundless market potential and the reality of China’s self-sufficiency, as well as the intense competition among international businesspeople, complicate the identification of commodities that can consistently satisfy the Chinese market while yielding substantial profits. As such, this situation poses both opportunities and challenges for American entrepreneurs engaged in this complex market landscape.

Samuel Shaw rapidly comprehended the underlying principles and fundamental operations of the Guangzhou System through his examination of Sino-European commercial exchanges. He perceived that conducting business in this environment appeared less convoluted than anticipated, perhaps even as straightforward as any other location within the known world (Shaw, *Journals* 168). Concurrently, Shaw cultivated amicable professional relationships with Chinese merchants, who, in turn, extended considerable courtesy toward him (Shaw, *Journals* 233). Notwithstanding, Shaw encountered instances of dishonesty among some Chinese traders, such as tea merchants who engaged in deceptive practices. Upon recognizing the escalating demand for high-quality tea, these merchants unscrupulously adulterated premium tea with inferior varieties, thereby compensating for the losses incurred due to an overabundance of tea and the shift in trading methods (Shaw, *Journals* 298). Nevertheless, Shaw regarded the Cohong merchants responsible for managing Sino-Western trade as astute and adept individuals, possessing commendable attributes such as proficiency in accounting, punctuality, trustworthiness, and adherence to elevated business ethics (Shaw, *Journals* 183).

In comparison to their European counterparts, early Americans exhibited a more heightened degree of respect for the Qing government's laws and trade policies, motivated by the pursuit of trading opportunities and an elevated status in China. As an American merchant in China once articulated in *The Canton Register*,

The American Government requires of us, to submit peaceably to the laws of the country we may visit, hence we consider ourselves bound to obey the laws of China – other foreigners may take a different view of their obligations, and their Governments may uphold their resistance – we do not question the propriety of their conduct – we all know the terms on which we are admitted to trade – and know the dangerous footing on which we stand here. (83)

The Viceroy of Liangguang, Jiang, also praised the Americans as “the most respectful,” (45) which in turn led the Chinese to place Americans in a special position among all foreign merchants. The friendly relationship often translated into capital benefits, as the Cohong merchants would extend significant credit to Americans for surplus goods (Dennett 52–53), and Shaw himself borrowed from Chinese merchants to expand his investments (*Journals* 252).

Such observations fostered a sanguine outlook on prospective United States–China trade, with Shaw asserting that every American ought to feel gratified by the equitable and favorable business dealings between the two nations (*Journals* 233). In particular, he identified American ginseng as a valuable commodity with the potential to secure a strong position within the competitive Chinese market. Given that American ginseng is exclusively found in the United States, it possesses not only the economic characteristics of a tradable good but also the emblematic attributes of a nation. Contrary to Europeans, who were required to purchase ginseng using cash, Americans could simply exchange their “useless produce of mountains and forests” (Shaw, *Journals* 231) for Chinese goods. Shaw optimistically anticipated that the benefits America would accrue from ginseng trade could be on par with those enjoyed by Spain (Shaw, *Journals* 134). He even conjectured that Americans might experience an equal or superior advantage compared to Europeans in future commerce with China (Shaw, *Journals* 337–341). As an ardent advocate and publicist for trade with China, Shaw's nationalistic fervor may have obscured his impartial assessment of the intricacies inherent in international trade. He strategically overstated the boundless demand for ginseng in the Chinese market, presupposing that this demand would ensure an inexhaustible supply of tea for the United States.

In actuality, prior to Shaw's arrival in China, ginseng was the only commodity of American origin imported into China by the British East India Company. In the widely acclaimed publication *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation*, American historian Yokota observed that even after the War of Independence, the United States continued to supply sizeable quantities of American ginseng to British merchants (148). The British expended considerable effort and resources in selecting, handling, and controlling the quality of the ginseng they purchased, thereby earning a superior reputation within the Chinese market (Randall 135). John Swift, who served as the chief of affairs for *Express of China*, exhibited a more astute anticipation concerning the untenable nature of American ginseng investments when compared to Samuel Shaw. He found that despite its uniqueness, American ginseng was not irreplaceable, and European traders were likely to maintain dominance within the ginseng market (qtd. in Woodhouse 29). Oversupply would inevitably diminish profits. Indeed, when *Experiment* arrived in Canton in 1786 with a cargo of ginseng, Captain Stewart Dean was promptly disheartened to discover that the price of ginseng was no longer worthwhile. In 1789, *Washington* managed to sell ginseng for merely 65 dollars per quintal, and by 1790, the price had plummeted to 32 cents per pound (Shaw 304–305; Fontenoy 5). The enormous United States shipments eradicated the rarity of ginseng, leading the Chinese ginseng market into a cyclical downward spiral from boom to saturation, and ultimately, collapse. Nevertheless, Shaw remained unwavering in his faith in ginseng. In 1790, he announced in American newspapers that in spite of the increased quantity, the sales have not been materially affected and there is probably always a high demand (in China) for this commodity so that it remains of great value (Shaw, “Remarks on the Commerce of America with China” 127). Evidently, the allure of the Chinese market, which stemmed from Shaw's “own projections of dreams and desires” (Brunel 114), proved irresistible, consequently causing him to make irrational judgments in his strategic analysis of United States–China trade.

What precisely constitute Samuel Shaw's “dreams and desires”? Transitioning from a revolutionary officer to consul in China, it is evident that his exploratory business ventures were imbued with a robust

patriotic fervor, as well as considerations of personal gain, envisioning China as a land of business potential and weaving a grandiose vision of wealth and self-actualization. During the Revolutionary War, Samuel Shaw held positions as a second lieutenant, lieutenant, captain, and major in the artillery, as well as serving as an aide-de-camp to Secretary of War Henry Knox. He emphasized “the infinite obligations we are under to our country, ourselves, and posterity, for the faithful discharge of our duty” (Shaw, *Journals* 15). For his sense of mission and responsibility, he was lauded by Washington as a sagacious, proactive, and courageous officer, and received the Medal of Commendation on the occasion of the victory in the War of Liberation (Shaw, *Journals* 110). Although his military career garnered him a respectable reputation, he and the soldiers remained unpaid for nearly 3 years due to government corruption, resulting in financial destitution and even debt. Consequently, he viewed his work in China as an opportunity to ameliorate his financial situation and that of his family, and, in 1786, he accepted an appointment as the first consul in China from John Jay, then Secretary of Foreign Affairs (Shaw, *Journals* v; 98; 111–112). Consul as a position, however, possessed neither real power nor salary and merely symbolized the nation’s “confidence and esteem” (qtd. in Christman 64). Nevertheless, Samuel Shaw expressed gratitude to the American Congress for the honor and committed himself to live up to it (Shaw, *Journals* 114). On the eve of his third visit to China, he proactively requested Washington to extend his consulship and apply for the extension of the title to all countries east of the Cape of Good Hope, which did not materialize (qtd. in Christman 67), but demonstrated his ambition to partake in the global competition within the Asia-Pacific region. Simultaneously, due to the high capital cost of trade between China and the United States, he hoped that the United States could, to some extent, emulate the European model and construct a monopolistic mechanism of collaboration between government and business through state-owned companies’ cooperation with large merchant ships (Shaw, *Journals* 305). Shaw aimed to secure a dominant position in the initial stage of United States trade with China, leveraging his close relationship with the government. In 1787, he borrowed funds from the Chinese and authorized a shipyard in Quincy to construct a merchant ship called *Massachusetts*, inspired by the British East India Company ship that had impressed him at Canton. The 800- to 900-ton ship, the largest in American shipbuilding history, garnered significant attention and was described as the pinnacle of craftsmanship at the time (Shaw, *Journals* 117). However, it was soon discontinued and sold to the Danish Asiatic Company due to inferior workmanship and equipment quality. Then Shaw and his close friend and vice consul in China, Thomas Randall, established a company in Guangzhou under their names, “Shaw & Randall.” However, the company dissolved shortly after Samuel Shaw’s death, before it could expand (Dennett 71).

In the initial stages of attempting to emulate European trade routes, Samuel Shaw’s endeavors could be perceived as unsuccessful; however, this did not deter him from seeking alternative business models tailored to the unique context of the United States. Shaw identified that not only could the United States profit from direct trade exemplified by ginseng, but it could also benefit from re-export trade facilitated through circuitous routes. American-made iron products and munitions could find potential markets in the Dutch colony of Batavia, while goods transported from Batavia to Canton occasionally fetched favorable prices. Consequently, Shaw posited that utilizing China as a pivotal point to connect the United States with diverse trade routes could be advantageous, stating if the Americans take the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, and the Straits of Malacca, a circuitous voyage to China could yield similar benefits (Shaw, *Journals* 233). This insight laid the groundwork for the United States to later employ its geopolitical strengths in conducting multifaceted trade, ultimately connecting the North Pacific and the Indian Ocean through a transoceanic trade network. Moreover, it established the basis for the transition of United States trade exports to China in the early nineteenth century, predominantly adopting an entrepot form of trade.

In 1788, Samuel Shaw journeyed to the British colony of Bengal, a prominent source of opium, and acquired a more profound comprehension of Chinese trade within the larger geo-economic context. He progressed beyond his initial “ginseng-for-tea” strategy to scrutinize how opium had emerged as a potent commodity in Sino-British trade. Shaw endeavored to incorporate the United States into the commercial landscape established by European powers across Asia, devising a plan to coordinate the development of a package of commodities within this network (Johnson, *The New Middle Kingdom* 36–37). Regarding opium, Shaw did not perceive it as a contentious commodity. While traversing the Straits of Sunda, he observed



that the locals were so fond of opium that they would consume 12 or 14 pills at once, seemingly without adverse effects (Shaw, *Journals* 154). Although Shaw acknowledged the stringent prohibition of opium under Chinese law, he refrained from critiquing its potential negative social consequences. Instead, he aimed to replicate the British trade system that had evolved around opium. During Randall's time in China, he maintained correspondence with Stephen Girard, an opium merchant who would later gain notoriety in the United States (Shaw, *Journals* 138). These correspondences indicate that the intent of American involvement in the opium trade was already evident in Samuel Shaw's era.

### The Collision between American National Ideals and the Realities of China's Institutional System

Under the Qing government, strict regulations constrained the extent of foreigners' activities. In 1759, the "Regulations for the Prevention of Foreigners" were promulgated, mandating that foreigners in Guangdong were to reside and conduct business as merchants, while being subject to control and inspection (*The Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty* 19). Consequently, Samuel Shaw's movements were confined to a limited area of less than a quarter of a square mile on the outskirts of Guangzhou. He perceived the dock officials as highly vigilant and considered every servant in the 13 houses to be a spy (Shaw, *Journals* 185). However, Shaw also recognized that his preconceptions prior to arriving in China were inadequate for informing future strategic analyses of the country's economy, prompting him to seek accurate information on China's constitution and customs (Shaw, *Journals* 167). Despite the apparent constraints of Shaw's "contact zone" (Pratt 8), his meticulous observations enabled him to glean insights into the government and legal practices of China at that time and form his own judgments.

First, Samuel Shaw presents a vehement critique of the Qing government's longstanding global reputation for administrative governance, posing the question, "whether there is a more oppressive one to be found in any civilized nation upon earth" (Shaw, *Journals* 183). In Shaw's perspective, the Qing government exhibited a lax approach to administration and a pervasive desperation in the population's livelihood, leading to daily suffering that he deemed shocking. What further incensed foreigners was that the number of impoverished individuals was not particularly significant, and the local government seemingly possessed the capability to provide adequate support (Shaw, *Journals* 354). However, the government awarded official positions to those who exploited the populace at every level, resulting in dire circumstances, and, ultimately, these officials could be dispatched to Siberia by the emperor for mismanagement and meet a grim fate (Shaw, *Journals* 183; 355). Shaw cited several examples to demonstrate the autocratic and corrupt nature of the Qing government, which he argued was detrimental to the people. First, he claimed that Chinese customs taxation relied on bribery, rendering the law ineffective. Customs inspectors from the Household Ministry openly solicited bribes from foreigners, who were exempted from taxes if they presented gifts amounting to half the tax value (Shaw, *Journals* 348–349). Opium traders could continue their illicit operations by tipping officials \$20 per box (Shaw, *Journals* 239). Additionally, Shaw mentioned the case of an official from the Ministry of Revenue who, after Cohong merchant Shi Qiongguan expressed dissatisfaction with his inebriation, coerced Shi into giving a 30,000-tael gift (Shaw, *Journals* 184). Due to widespread corruption, a foreign buyer feigned being a procurer to evade customs extortion but was swiftly apprehended and imprisoned for a week (Shaw, *Journals* 185). Second, Shaw argued that the government's capacity to alleviate famine and maintain security was inadequate. In 1786, Guangdong faced severe drought and food shortages; however, local warehouses' effectiveness in suppressing food prices was limited, and the high price of rice persisted, resulting in widespread famine and starvation (Shaw, *Journals* 248–249). Contrastingly, Shaw extolled the virtues of America, stating, "From this painful view of the effects of despotism, I turn with pleasure to the contemplation of that happiness which an American enjoys, under the government of equal laws and a mild administration" (Shaw, *Journals* 355). Here, Shaw reconstructs an American national image, underscored by universal values such as equality and democracy, by criticizing China's "antagonistic and semi-pathological collective social imaginary" (Ricoeur 55).

Second, Samuel Shaw expressed criticism toward the legal system of the Qing Dynasty, contending that the "life for life" principle constituted a breach of human rights. On November 24, 1784, Shaw observed the

incident involving *Lady Hughes*, a British merchant vessel that discharged a salute in Guangzhou, resulting in the death of two Chinese individuals and the injury of another. Nonetheless, the Chinese authorities maintained an unwavering stance, asserting the sanctity of the Empire's laws. Ultimately, the British surrendered a crew member who faced execution shortly thereafter.

The "Lady Hughes Affair" leads to a dispute that, according to Jonathan Spence, constitutes one of "the two cases that made the greatest impact on Western thinking and forced a serious reconsideration of how to deal with the Qing at the international diplomatic level" (Spence 126). The handling of this case by an administrative office responsible for foreign trade demonstrates a certain conflation of the administrative and judicial powers within the Qing establishment. Moreover, when the British gunner involved in the incident escaped, the Guangdong Customs arrested the supercargo, impacting the legitimate rights of other nations, and proposed that the British side send a representative to assume responsibility without requiring the actual culprit (Shaw, *Journals* 189). This prioritization of substantive justice at the expense of procedural justice also potentially contributes to the discourse surrounding the barbaric image of traditional Chinese judicial arbitrariness.

Samuel Shaw's journals have been considered as an early argument for examining "Legal Orientalism." Ruskola identified this concept as a unique form of Orientalism that emphasizes the process through which "the Orient" and "the West" have been constructed via legal discourse and argued that the self-referential focus on Western representations of Chinese law perpetuates biases and misconceptions, limits understanding of alternative legal systems, and exacerbates power imbalances between cultures (193–198). The traditional Chinese notion of retributive justice, epitomized in the "life for life" principle, signifies an intersection of ideas pertaining to retribution, circumspection in the administration of punishment, and the employment of penal sanctions for deterrence purposes, while Shaw posited that vessels of foreign origin ought not to be subjected to the purview of the uncivilized Chinese legal system. He further argued that the actions of the British artilleryman, resulting in an unintended fatality, were devoid of malicious intent and, as such, should not necessitate the imposition of capital punishment as prescribed by Chinese law (Shaw, *Journals* 186–188).

Additionally, he found "such an outrage upon personal liberty spread a general alarm" (Shaw, *Journals* 339), leading him to rally other European merchants to send armed ships in solidarity with Britain. This stance exemplified two perspectives: First, the use of force was regarded as the most effective approach when dealing with the Chinese since Anson's arrival in the country (Williams 451); second, Shaw maintained that human rights issues were intrinsically connected to commercial activities.

In the realm of Sino-United States relations, the question of human rights remains a contentious subject, and Samuel Shaw emerges as a pioneer among Americans in addressing the disparate conceptualizations of human rights within China and the United States. The impetus behind Shaw's persistence in confronting the British government warrants examination. On the one hand, Shaw's focus on human rights can be attributed to his personal conviction in innate human rights and his commitment to the principles of the Society of the Cincinnati. The preliminary establishment of modern American democratic consciousness and institutions was achieved through the crucible of the Revolutionary War for independence, as *Declaration of Independence* underscores the notion of "unalienable rights," asserting that governments derive their legitimate authority from the acquiescence of those whom they govern. Subsequent to the war, Shaw played an instrumental role in the composition of the Society of the Cincinnati's foundational manuscript, suggesting that vigilance is required to shield from encroachment of those esteemed rights and liberties of humanity for which they have battled and shed their blood, without which the elevated status of a rational being would transmute into a curse rather than a blessing (qtd. in Lossing 695). Consequently, both in this instance and throughout his global journeys, Shaw consistently displayed concern for the capacity of governing authorities to preserve the human rights of their constituents.

On the other hand, Samuel Shaw's emphasis on human rights consistently served as a reflection of American national interests. As Fairbank posits, "the right of extraterritoriality that the British and the rest of us claimed in China in the age of imperialism was a concrete expression of what we now call human rights" (*China Watch* 2). Should British merchants be granted extraterritorial rights in China, allowing them to engage in trade activities while being exempt from the constraints and restrictions of Chinese law, it

becomes necessary to consider the implications of the United States' Far East policy. This policy demands for "United States citizens treatment no less favorable than that enjoyed by any other government" (Howland 5). Consequently, in light of these circumstances, Americans may utilize this policy as grounds to request that the Chinese authorities accord equal rights to American merchants. In his journals, Shaw expresses a tinge of remorse, stating that if European nations had been steadfast in their commitment to human rights and had sacrificed some self-interest for collective rights, the outcome would have been more favorable, possibly yielding additional privileges (*Journals* 195). Evidently, Shaw's defense of human rights is, to a degree, a pursuit of privileges, with his ultimate aim being the promotion of the United States' commercial interests and national prestige. In the "Lady Hughes Affair," Shaw did not respect China's jurisdiction as an independent sovereign state and even hindered China's judicial process by threatening violence within its territory. Shaw's words and actions reveal a United States-centric view of "colonial sovereignty," which bolsters its national and transnational identity and subjectivity and offers ideological cohesion and moral support for defying Chinese law and justice (Chen 445). Moreover, the United States warships remained resolute even as other European nations withdrew their threats of force. Shaw proudly declared, "we were the last who sent off our boat, which was not disgraced with a Chinese flag" (*Journals* 340). In essence, Shaw utilized the "Lady Hughes Affair" to underscore the United States' national character, employing concepts of "freedom," "justice," and "glory" to distinguish his ship as the last of its kind. He invoked these ideas to establish his ideological superiority as a member of a republican state, earning the gratitude and respect of European country representatives. In reference to his role in the "War of Canton," the "Columbia Centinel" asserted, "Mr. Shaw represented American interest in such a manner as to throw a lustre on his commission, and give him great credit among the European merchants and other eminent characters. At his return his conduct met the approbation of the representatives of the United States in Congress" (qtd. in Shaw, *Journals* 127). This indicates that the underlying purpose of Samuel Shaw's image as a human rights champion is to secure international recognition for the United States and accruing political capital for himself.

### The Construction of American National Identity

During the formative years of the United States, considerable economic and political uncertainties prevailed, and the American populace exhibited significant heterogeneity. Individuals hailed from diverse nationalities; practiced various religions; and adhered to distinct customs, rituals, and habits. As President Dwight noted, "There was no interest felt on the part of the inhabitants to defend each other. The mere fact that they are under one government may not prove to be a sufficient bond of union" (73). Fostering a collective sense of national identity, characterized by shared emotions, symbols, and social interpretations, was undoubtedly challenging yet essential. In light of this, Samuel Shaw sought to overcome the conundrum of American national identity by cultivating an "imagined community" of the United States as a nation-state and engendering self-identification with the American national character. Central to his strategy was the gaze and acknowledgment of the Other. Consequently, China emerged not only as a "space of the other" and a diplomatic stage for American self-projection, but also as an integral factor in the construction of America's national identity in the arena of international conflict and competition.

Although he criticized the devaluation of the United States currency during the war, which led to the decline of public morality and the rise of extravagance and extortion, Samuel Shaw's conception of an ideal self-imagined American identity encompassed "benevolence," "justice," and "temperance" (Shaw, *Journals* 54; 61). He also aimed to construct a positive national image through his own example in Chinese business practices to garner recognition and respect from the international community, thereby reaffirming the legitimacy of the United States as an independent sovereign and enhancing its national identity. In his perspective, "America is now become an empire and the eyes of the world are fastened upon her. Let, then, humanity, a love of justice, and a universal spirit of moderation be its distinguishing traits" (Shaw, *Journals* 105). It is worth noting, however, that Shaw uses the term "empire" in his characterization of America's self-image. This rhetorical device, which positioned America as an empire, had become the prevailing ideology

among the Revolutionary generals. They sought to erect their esteemed American empire upon the ruins of the British Empire and rise like a phoenix from the ashes of the mother country (Gates 514). Although Shaw's use of the term "empire" may have been an unconscious expression of his aspirations for the United States, it also hints at the nation's underlying ambition for overseas expansion. In this context, Shaw perceived China as one of the strategic platforms for the ascent of the United States.

Indeed, the very fact that the American-built *Empress of China* was able to carry an American crew and cargo to China signified America's independence as a sovereign nation, marking the opportunity for the emerging economy to compete aggressively with Great Britain in Far Eastern trade on equal footing. Robert Morris, the founder of *Empress of China*, wrote to Foreign Secretary John Jay, "I am sending some ships to China, in order to encourage others in the adventurous pursuits of commerce, and I wish to see a foundation laid for an American navy" (Morris 97). Daniel Parker, one of the owners of the ship, also urged Captain John Green before his departure, "You will probably be the first who shall display the American flag in those distant regions. You will consult your own Honor and that of the Country whose Commission you bear" (Parker 66). These statements confirm that the voyage had official support, and its political significance outweighed the economic benefits.

Green thus arrived in China carrying a copy of *Declaration of Independence*, treaties between the United States and European nations, and sea-letters to be displayed on any occasion that might require it. The sea-letters, granted by Congress, was intended to greet "Most Serene, Serene, most puissant, puissant, high, illustrious, noble, honorable, venerable, wise and prudent Emperors, Kings, Republicks, Princes, Dukes, Earls, Barons, Lords, Burgomasters, Councillors, as also Judges, Officers, Justiciaries & Regents of all the good Cities and places" and declared that the ship belonged to the citizens of the United States of America, as a united commonwealth, to engage in lawful business practices, hoping to receive necessary assistance (Smith 66–70). The excessively prepared and grandiose language reflects the uncertainty of the new United States administration regarding the conduct of international trade and foreign affairs, as more experienced Europeans would likely refrain from sending such letters to foreign ports. The letters' absurd form, intended to demonstrate the United States' place in the diplomatic arena, could quite possibly convey the opposite impression to the Chinese (Haddad 8).

The Chinese initially struggled to distinguish these American adventurers from their more experienced British counterparts. After Samuel Shaw and his party provided a brief introduction to the United States' geography and demographics, the Chinese referred to the Americans as a "new nation" and were excited about the prospects of a promising market (Shaw, *Journals* 183; 338). At that time, American merchants interacted with Chinese officials from the Ministry of Revenue, Cohong merchants, and itinerant businessmen. The officials did not initially recognize the United States as a political entity separate from Great Britain. As every country trading with China was required to pay tribute to the emperor, merchant Pan Qiguan attempted to exempt the Americans from this fee by mistakenly identifying Samuel Shaw as British and registering *Empress of China* as "Country Ship." However, this registration prevented Shaw from obtaining a ship's license for his return voyage due to tensions between China and Britain. Consequently, Shaw sought assistance from French consul M. Vieillard to formally declare the United States' independent sovereignty to the Chinese; thereby, the American national identity was stripped of its British attributes through defense. In contrast, Chinese lower-level, itinerant businessmen distinguished between British and American merchants by observing their differing attitudes. Accustomed to bargaining, these merchants frequently tested foreign merchants' patience with low offers. While British merchants often responded harshly and arrogantly, Samuel Shaw politely refused each time. This led one Chinese peddler to express goodwill to Shaw, saying, "I see very well you no hap Englishman. All China-man very much love your country" (Shaw, *Journals* 199). Shaw was pleased to receive such praise, as he had repeatedly referred to the British as "savages" or "barbarians" (Shaw, *Journals* 11–12; 62; 73) in his correspondences during the War of Independence. However, he also expressed resistance and sarcasm toward Chinese bargaining culture, remarking, "All men come first time China very good gentlemen, all same you. I think two three time more you come Canton, you make all same Englishman too" (*Journals* 200). National character is often most clearly defined when compared to other countries, and Shaw, as an outsider, sought to assert the United States' superiority over Britain and China psychologically. Interactions with Chinese individuals from

various walks of life led Shaw to confidently believe that although the Chinese impression of the new nation was somewhat vague, the United States had succeeded in attracting attention and earning respect from this ancient Eastern nation after a few exchanges (Shaw, *Journals* 337). The affirmation from China appeared to bolster the young nation's national pride positively, and it could be argued that "The reception our citizens have met' in China helped to transform the nascent nation from an awkward, impotent confederation of republics into a confident economic power" (Morrison 30). China not only provided a domain for the United States to engage in international conflicts and competition, but also functioned as an other for self-projection and as a diplomatic platform. Simultaneously, the image of China inadvertently played a significant role in shaping America's national identity.

Rather than focusing on the reactions of the Chinese upon their first encounter with the Americans, Shaw devoted more attention to recording the perceptions of European expatriates. He argued that Americans needed to establish their national character among the powers, as their initial attitude would determine the perception of America (Shaw, *Journals* 125). En route to China, Shaw and his party visited governors at various ports, providing an overview of the United States, promoting the country's achievements, and even reaching preliminary diplomatic agreements. In addition, they received hospitality from Captain D'Ordelin of the French ship *Poseidon*. Furthermore, their French allies not only assisted in navigating the voyage and guiding the berth, but also introduced the American merchants to the expatriate community in China, paving the way for their successful entry into the Chinese market. Upon arriving in Guangzhou, Shaw exchanged greetings with representatives from Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and other countries. He was pleased with the feedback from Europeans, who demonstrated consistent attention and respect toward the Americans, treating them as citizens of a free and independent country (Shaw, *Journals* 180–181; 338). Initially, even British businessmen welcomed the Americans, suggesting that Britain and America could unite and challenge the world (Shaw, *Journals* 154–164). Notably, Shaw's performance in the "Lady Hughes Affair" earned the gratitude and respect of Britain and the previously unequal colonial relations and hostilities between Britain and the United States were somewhat dissolved. When Shaw first left China, he received considerable courtesy from European leaders, emphasizing that England was no exception (Shaw, *Journals* 181). Thus, American scholar Samuel W. Woodhouse contends that in Canton at the time interstate rivalries were temporarily set aside in order to reach a formal united front of mutual comity and alliance against the Chinese (Woodhouse 27). It is evident that although old China provided new America with a vast trade market and an international stage, Shaw still identified himself as a member of the "Fanquois" (Shaw, *Journals* 195), a colloquial expression referring to Westerners in Cantonese. He preferred to define the legitimacy and acceptance of the United States within the international community according to Western standards and sought to form a community of mutual assistance with European merchants.

However, by the time of Shaw's second visit to China, the British East India Company had banned any form of assistance or encouragement to American commerce. Shaw highlighted the ban in his journals and criticized the British for their narrow-mindedness in extending undignified receptions to economic sanctions (Shaw, *Journals* 234). Moreover, the Dutch colony of Batavia also prohibited American merchants from engaging in trade activities, prompting Shaw to report the situation to President Washington (Shaw, *Journals* 118). Evidently, the United States was not universally recognized in the international community, particularly among European countries, resulting in a precarious position among the major powers and causing Shaw to experience constant anxiety regarding his American citizenship.

In summary, as a soldier and consul with a strong sense of mission and patriotic zeal, Samuel Shaw's travels were not purely commercial in nature. Instead, they were driven by the diplomatic needs and imperialist national ambitions of the nascent empire, aiming to expand America's overseas markets and seek international recognition. Despite his optimistic perspective on the Chinese market, Shaw's overall assessment of China was predominantly negative. He not only rejected the political and legal culture of the Qing Dynasty but also transformed the once-revered model of benevolent government held by the American Founding Fathers into an authoritarian, corrupt, and uneducable barbarian state. Such an assessment was partly based on a perspective of progressive historiography and a realistic analysis of Qing society, considering the differences between China and the United States in terms of political and legal systems and



ideologies. It was also partly related to the American interests represented by Shaw, who sought legitimacy for the United States government in the diplomatic arena by asserting sovereignty to break away from political relations with Britain. Additionally, he interfered in China's judicial process on the grounds of human rights issues to gain privileges in China and win the approval of European powers. This confirms that Shaw's China was a far cry from a country whose people value etiquette highly, and his writings on China marked an important turning point in the history of America's perception of China.

## Reverberations Following the Return to America

### Reactions in the Media, Cultural, and Business Spheres

The return trip of *Empress of China* brought back a large quantity of Chinese goods, such as tea, porcelain, silk, and spices, achieving a substantial return of 25–30% (Smith 23). The triumphant return of Samuel Shaw and the national celebration of the United States entering the global trade arena not only exposed Americans to novel goods but also contributed to the country's economic recovery to a certain extent. The United States media created a frenzy on the occasion of the ship's return to New York's East River, with major newspapers publishing editorials in response to this historic event. *New York News Dispatch* was particularly responsive, writing the day after the ship's arrival, "it presages a future happy period in our being able to dispense with that burdensome and unnecessary traffick, which hitherto we have carried on with Europe – to the great prejudice of our rising empire, and future happy prospects of solid greatness" (qtd. in Smith 224–225). It is evident that trade with China not only generated considerable profits but also bolstered American national pride and self-confidence in the country's future destiny. *The Massachusetts Centinel* even dubbed the voyage "one of the greatest nautical prodigies we ever recollect hearing" (qtd. in Kitts 3). Later, *Loudon's New York Packet*, *The Pennsylvania Packet*, *The Pennsylvania Journal*, *The Connecticut Courant*, *The New York Packet*, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, and *The Providence Gazette* were among the media outlets that ran extensive stories or reprinted them. These reports established the importance of Chinese trade to the United States economy in the minds of the American public through powerful penetration, echoing the rising national sentiment of the time. For many Americans, the successful voyage of *Empress of China* was perceived as a sign that the young nation was coming of age. It was a great honor to participate in Chinese trade on an equal footing with other world powers, boosting American national pride, morale, and confidence.

The American national poet Philip Freneau also composed the poem "On the First American Ship that Explored the Route to China, the East Indies, after the Revolution, 1784." In this poem, the mysterious East is depicted as "golden regions" with "porcelain ware, enchased in gold" and "fragrant tea," a place "where George forbade to sail before" and also the "Chinesian shores" that the United States eagerly sought to explore (Freneau 181). For Freneau, *Empress of China's* trip to Canton symbolized the practical implementation of American independence and self-government, as the United States transformed from a former colonial vassal state into a global economic player.

"News reports and popular literature function as reflective surfaces for their recipients" (Brunel 116), showcasing Americans' aspirations for their nation to assume a position on the global stage as an independent entity. Simultaneously, shared interests prompt them to perceive themselves as part of a new identity – "American." It is crucial to recognize, however, that the media and poets have underscored the significance of the successful development of United States–China trade for the United States more than for China itself. Much of the information received by ordinary Americans is inaccurate and misleading. According to Samuel's journals, *Empress of China* was briefly anchored at North Island, Sumatra, Krakatoa, Table Bay, Cape of Good Hope, St. Bartholomew, St. Bartholomew, and St. Martin without stopping to load Indian cargoes (Shaw, *Journals* 201–210), yet some advertisements labeled the cargo as "Indian goods" as a marketing ploy to attract customers (Smith 228). This implies that "India" was regarded in America at the time as synonymous with the entire East, as historian Tyler Dennett articulated, "Americans viewed Asia as a whole and called it the East India. The trade so described included all the commerce the destination or

origin of which lay in either the Indian or western Pacific oceans" (3). It is apparent that even American businessmen directly engaged in Sino-American trade maintained a nebulous and confused impression of China. This includes Captain Green's diary entry for the trip to China, which reads, "A Journal of an Intended Voyage on Board the Ship Express of China from New York to Canton in India Bound from New York to Canton in India" (qtd. Smith 8). The fact that even the captain mistook Canton for an Indian city suggests that the geographical boundaries of Asia were unclear to Americans at the time. Such geographical ambiguity inevitably led to a convergence of social imagery across Asia, rendering the image of each individual country chaotic. However, this was not due to American knowledge of Chinese geography being outdated but rather because Americans were accustomed to examining China within the context of Asia and the world. American scholar Frank contends that, while Americans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had fairly precise geographic information available to them in the form of maps, atlases, and published travel descriptions about the regions of the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, and the Far East, they, like most Europeans, nevertheless persisted in maintaining an imagined cultural geography contained in the term "East Indies," which lumped together all these regions within one category (4).

Since the colonial era, the United States had traded indirectly with China through the British East India Company, and the term "East Indies" became a hypothetical concept of a "pan-Asian region" in America.

The fervent coverage and glorification of Far Eastern trade by the press, despite not rectifying geographical misconceptions for American readers, considerably invigorated American merchants. This led to an atmosphere where seemingly every tiny village near a creek with a sloop capable of holding five Yankees planned to engage in trade with the East (Greenbie and Greenbie 34). While an exaggeration, this sentiment captures the exuberant era's spirit. Influential figures such as Samuel Shaw paved the way for new shipping routes to China, inspiring ships such as *Experiment*, *Canton*, and *Hope* to follow suit. Ebenezer West, captain of *Grand Turk*, even sought Shaw's advice on trading with China in Canton (Peabody 90; 76). Encouraged by *Empress of China*, an increasing number of American merchants ventured to China to pursue rapid fortunes. Between 1786 and 1833, 1,104 American merchant ships sailed to Macau and Guangzhou, culminating in a peak of American trade with China in the nineteenth century and the American fast ships even surpassed Britain in monopolizing tea transportation from China to major global ports (Liang 75–79; Huang 23–24). The Chinese market during this time mirrored the United States under eighteenth-century British mercantilism, where wealth generated in China primarily fueled American domestic industrial development (Huang 25–26). This flourishing trade not only bolstered American national pride but also fostered a predominantly positive perception of China among the American public. As Jonathan Goldstein observed, "the China trade was of unprecedented economic importance for the new nation; and because of that great commercial value, the Chinese people as a whole were to be held in esteem" (Goldstein, *Philadelphia and the China Trade* 31). Nonetheless, respect based solely on commercial value without genuine understanding proved to be superficial. The myth of the Chinese market merely reflected American self-perception, and the voyages to China symbolized the American pioneers' expansion into the Pacific and the extension of American commercial influence across mountains and seas driven by commercial interests (Dulles 4).

### The Impact of Samuel Shaw on United States Policy Toward China

The significance of American images of China in shaping and justifying Sino-United States policy has often been underestimated in scholarly discourse (Turner 22). In the correspondences authored by Samuel Shaw and exchanged with distinguished American authorities, a sanguine perspective on the potential for trade with China was communicated. This outlook significantly contributed to the impetus for the United States government to fervently pursue the establishment of commercial connections with China. Though not explicitly involved, numerous United States political leaders were keenly aware of the significance of trade with China and openly expressed their support. Upon Shaw's return, he communicated the voyage's details to Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Jay, stating that "To every lover of his country, as well as to those more immediately concerned in commerce, it must be a pleasing reflection, that a communication is thus happily opened between us and the eastern extremity of the globe" (*Journals* 341), enclosing two pieces of silk

presented by the governor of Guangzhou (Fuen) in his letter. In response, Jay asserted that the success of this voyage serves as a source of honor for both the principals and the participants (qtd. Shaw, *Journals* 341), reiterating the connection between the maiden voyage to China and national glory. *Empress of China's* inaugural voyage to China coincided with President Washington's 52nd birthday, and seven years later, on the same date, the ship sank off the Dublin coast due to being unseaworthy, underscoring the voyage's profound link to the nation's founding father. In Shaw's early correspondence with friends and relatives, he frequently expressed his admiration and respect for Washington as the wisest man ever to illuminate our hemisphere, a military commander of exceptional character (*Journals* 50). Correspondingly, Chinese products captivated the attention of the American supreme commander. Washington personally instructed his adjutant Tench Tilghman to purchase Chinese Nanking cloth, large porcelain plates, Xichun tea, and silk handkerchiefs, among other items (Washington 223). Furthermore, Washington purchased "the most famous and recognizable examples of Cincinnati porcelain" (Borst 14–23). Another United States president, Thomas Jefferson, sought to establish a distinct image of the United States, separate from that of Britain, by leveraging the influential "other" of China to further affirm the independent sovereign identity of the United States and bolster Sino-American collaboration. In correspondence with the Secretary of the Treasury, Jefferson expressed the intention to engage a distinguished individual in China to advocate for the United States, elucidate the contrasts between the United States and Britain, and facilitate the Chinese government's discernment of these distinctions in their policymaking, which he believed could generate lasting advantages for commercial interests in both countries (134). Moreover, President Clinton regarded *Express of China's* visit to China as the genesis of the friendship between the United States and China. In a speech welcoming Premier Zhu Rongji, he stated, "Before this city even existed, even before our Constitution was signed, China granted our newly independent nation equal standing with the powers of Europe" ("Remarks by the President"), underlining the strategic importance of China in America's earliest attainment of international political status. Undoubtedly, Shaw's influence ignited a fervor in the American political domain for the procurement of Chinese goods and the advancement of Sino-American trade, subsequently fostering aspirations to bolster United States–China relations and secure international political recognition.

Shaw's meticulous analysis of European commerce in the Chinese context, with a particular focus on the British East India Company, supplied the United States government with valuable empirical insights and strategic counsel on matters pertaining to China. John Jay, with whom Shaw closely collaborated, anticipated that Sino-American trade would exert significant influence if appropriately guided by a robust and sagacious government (153). Concerning specific policy support, United States authorities initiated the implementation of protective tariffs to enhance the competitive advantage of American merchants. In 1789, the United States enacted its first tariff legislation, imposing a reduced tax on tea transported by American vessels and imported directly from China. Two years later, the United States allowed American merchants to defer payment of the tea tax for 2 years and levied an additional tonnage tax on foreign bilges transporting Chinese goods to the United States. This preferential treatment posed challenges for other countries in shipping tea, the most critical commodity in Chinese trade, to United States ports (Latourette 31).

The United States government fostered trade with China through domestic tariff policies and pursued diplomatic strategies aligned with American interests on the global stage. Shaw's critical engagement with and active participation in addressing human rights issues in China served as a foundation for the development of United States ideological biases and interventionist policies directed toward the nation. His travel accounts' negative depiction of the Chinese legal system was adopted by Western racists to create the terrifying notion of "Yellow Peril" (Wu 45–47). This perspective influenced the approach of subsequent American merchants in China when dealing with the "Terranova Incident" and other similar cases, ultimately leading to confrontations with the Qing government. As Charles Howland contends, "In the China experience of Samuel Shaw appeared two principles which have been followed more or less consistently in American relations with respect to Pacific and Far Eastern countries: the policy of cooperation, and that of demanding for Americans most-favored-nation treatment" (7–8). Adhering to the precedent established by Samuel Shaw in the "Lady Hughes Affair" in 1784, Americans supported the Far East policy of amicable collaboration with the UK, seeking to obtain "most-favored-nation treatment." The strategies employed by

Shaw also foreshadowed the diplomatic path taken by the United States during the Opium War, which seized the opportunity of the UK's conflict with China to demand the exercise of extraterritoriality in the Treaty of Peace, Amity, and Commerce between the United States of America and the Chinese Empire.

### Publication of Samuel Shaw's Journals and Its Impact

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the United States Congress released early diplomatic archives, and the correspondences between Samuel Shaw and American dignitaries began to circulate domestically and internationally. In 1836, *Chinese Repository*, founded by American missionary Elijah Bridgman, introduced the story of Samuel Shaw, offering readers in the West and American expatriates in China a renewed appreciation of the man and his accomplishments. Subsequently, Robert Shaw, Samuel Shaw's nephew, entrusted his collection of Shaw's wartime letters and voyage journals to a friend, Josiah Quincy Jr., the former mayor of Boston and president of Harvard University, as well as an influential early national biographer. As an educator, Quincy skillfully revised and employed Shaw's early business adventures with China to inspire and enlighten the contemporary audience, writing, "from the unchangeableness of Chinese habits and policy, they undoubtedly contain much information, which, even at this day, is both useful and attractive" (Quincy vi). Utilizing the manuscript, Quincy edited and published *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the First American Consul at Canton with a Life of the Author*. In the biographical section, Shaw is portrayed by Quincy as a steadfast veteran of the Revolution, a national commercial hero of the early Sino-American trade, and a most worthy patriot who combined the qualities of a gentleman, a warrior, a scholar, and a cleric. Shaw's journey to China is also depicted as an "inspiring national romance" (Johnson, *Narratives* 34). Published amidst the United States' involvement in the 1847 Mexican War, and in the ideological context of "Manifest Destiny" and the annexation of the Oregon Territory, Quincy's work assumes a heightened significance. The readers, confronted with the Mexican War, the economic crisis of 1837, and localized anti-slavery uprisings, could find solace in Quincy's biographical portrayal of Samuel's experiences, for the narrative continuity successfully aligned with the editors' intentions to provide reassurance and calm to the hearts and minds of the public (Johnson, *The New Middle Kingdom* 9). Due to the delay in publication, the book's impact on the general American readership was deferred. However, its publication not only satisfied the public's desire for knowledge and curiosity about this period but also became an essential source for the studies of early Sino-American relations and the history of international trade between China and the United States.

In addition to its high historical value, the literary nature of this work should not be overlooked. It stands as one of the earliest blossoms in the literature of travel writing in China, emerging from the course of American commercial exploration in the East. The work contains not only detailed descriptions of the routes to China, but also summarizes the most intuitive information about the political, economic, and legal fields of late eighteenth-century China in an understandable and clear style with skillful rhetoric. Samuel Shaw, having grown up studying at the Latin School under the renowned educator James Lovell, was always "a man of fine talents and considerable education," (Delano 21) both to his shareholders and to his family and friends. In 1790, he was awarded an honorary Master of Arts degree by Cambridge University and elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The vividness of his writing, the frequent use of allusions in his voyage diary and letters, and the recurrent references to Horace's poems and Shakespeare's plays in his lines, all attest to the author's classical literacy and the literary value of this work. Chinese scholar Jiang also acknowledges the book's dual significance in American studies of the image of China and in American literary history, stating, "Although no American literary history mentions Samuel Shaw's name, his journals deepened Americans' understanding of China and became a major source of references to China in various publications of the time" (20).

In summary, the successful return of *Empress of China* was actively publicized by the media and the arts, bolstering Americans' sense of national identity and confidence in the country's future development. However, their understanding of China remained shallow and limited due to the biased information they received. American politicians were also encouraged to engage with China and protect American merchants

through tariff policies, while their diplomatic strategy continued Samuel Shaw's diplomatic principles by collaborating with Britain to pursue an equalization of interests. The manuscripts from his voyages to China have been widely circulated through the series of *Foreign Relations of the United States, the China*, the introductory article in the *Chinese Repository*, and the biographies edited by Quincy. These works have become important materials in the history of United States–China relations, American literature, and the history of America's image of China. Their literary and historical value warrant further exploration.

## Conclusion

In light of the scholarly discourse surrounding the dynamic image of China in the American imagination and the forces driving these changes, this study posits that Samuel Shaw's manuscript established the foundation for a multifaceted American perception of China – a complex fusion of admiration and criticism, interests and anticipations. Shaw's depiction of Chinese society unveils an intricate interplay between American values, historical realities, and strategic considerations.

Shaw's writings indeed capture his experience with a declining Qing Empire, marked by political corruption, legal harshness, military backwardness, and artistic inadequacy, contributing to the emergence of negative perceptions about an uncivilized China and the concept of the "Yellow Peril." Nonetheless, such depictions might stem from an amalgamation of historical veracity, ideologically influenced misapprehensions, and predispositions arising due to the circumscribed experience encountered within the interaction area. Simultaneously, it is essential to acknowledge that Shaw's representations frequently serve as value judgments informed by American national interests and honor, with China functioning as a strategic instrument for the burgeoning American presence on the international stage, seeking to construct a liberal and democratic national image for the United States by challenging China's utopian depiction of the Other.

Motivated by economic rationale and commercial interests underlying trade with China, Shaw still conveyed positive remarks in communications with high-ranking American politicians, aiming to enhance national confidence and entice more explorers to China. Shaw's voyage not only fostered commerce between the United States and China, acting as a model and reference for future American merchants, but also laid the groundwork for initial diplomatic relations with China and significantly influenced the evolution of subsequent American trade and foreign policy in the area. Spearheaded by Samuel Shaw, the United States adopted a cooperative policy with Britain in managing relations with Pacific and Far Eastern countries, while concurrently seeking international recognition – especially from European powers – for the United States as a newly established independent sovereign nation, and pursuing privileges, such as extraterritoriality in China, to maximize American interests.

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