

Finding and Becoming Trustworthy Men

The last piece of the puzzle of everyday life in this global hub is the attempts to form relationships of trust. In any organised trade, the trader must be able to rely on debts to be paid, cargo to be delivered and deadlines to be met. In short: some form of trust is needed. However, in a place as rife with restrictions as Canton or Macao, establishing trust was no uncomplicated matter.

For their everyday life to work, both the foreigners and the Chinese needed ways to work past the changeability and uncertainty in the trade. In research on East India Company trade, transactions in China are often passed over as straightforward exchanges of cargo for money, and focused discussions on trust are limited.¹ As can be gleaned from the sources, however, the process of buying and selling took months and there were negotiations at every step, all of which necessitated trust. Furthermore, such trust – either between groups or individuals – was not something that could be established once, and then called upon whenever needed. Rather, it was the result of a continuous process of trust-forming practices, shaping and being shaped in the daily interactions. Thereby, comprehending the negotiation process of trust illuminates everyday life in an intercultural setting, and the power relations created and recreated there.

To be sure, trust is a recurring topic to approach when studying trade relations, but it has also been connected to studies of everyday life. Sociologist Erving Goffman has shown that trust is both an effect of and a prerequisite for working social relations.² Historian David Sunderland, who has studied the middle classes in eighteenth-century Europe, has developed this theory further. According to Sunderland, trust can be defined as ‘an expectation, expressed in action and disappointed or fulfilled, that a partner will honour his implicit or explicit obligations’. While this definition borders on the mechanical, he then broadens it to include the cultural evaluation of the other person – that is, whether they were trustworthy. Eighteenth-century Europeans evaluated trustworthiness in relation to the capacity for civility, which was always tied to masculinity. In that evaluation, three types of signals were particularly crucial: language, appearance and conduct.³ All of these would be carried out

1 This dearth is clear for the Swedish company, see Frängsmyr, *Ostindiska kompaniet*, 75–76; Kjellberg, *Svenska ostindiska kompanierna*, 105–106; Koninckx, *The Swedish East India Company*, 198–202; for a contrast, see the discussion in Chen, *Chinese Law in Imperial Eyes*, 88.

2 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1.

3 Sunderland, *Social Capital, Trust and the Industrial Revolution 1780–1880*, 1–16.

in daily practices. However, the houses in Canton were not homes, and not all practices were accessible to the foreigners. Then, how was the negotiation of trust affected by the Chinese control?

In Canton, because the traders had to cooperate with agents from diverse regions, religions and cultures, they might have spent more time and effort on establishing trust than in other places. Indeed, ever since the work of historian Philip D. Curtin, studies on early modern traders have stressed the need for trust in multicultural hubs.⁴ Curtin does however oversimplify the groups in these interactions, making trust inherent instead of a process.⁵ Rather, just like gendering something masculine, it was a process comprised of continuous daily practices. The crux of this matter is that in Canton and Macao, while trust was needed for daily life to function there, just as elsewhere, the practices establishing it were restricted in a number of ways.

Theorist Michel de Certeau argues that people unfailingly establish tactics in response to the tension between pursuits and constraints; these tactics are characteristic of the subtle, but stubborn, resistance of groups who must relate to established forces and representations – like the situation that awaited the foreigners in China. Thus, the practices aimed at establishing trust in the foreign quarters were a tactic: a practice with a particular purpose.⁶ By tracing these tactics, this final chapter shows not only how trust was established, and how it was controlled, but also what the reactions were to the control of trust-forming practices.

1 Spaces for Trust

One way of establishing trust is to make tactical use of practices with a close association to a particular space, for example the dinner space. All companies regularly held dinners in their factories or on board their ships, to which they invited supercargoes from some, or all, of the other companies. Sometimes, foreign traders invited Chinese merchants; sometimes, Chinese merchants invited foreigners in turn.⁷ Other times, the interactions were just visits.⁸

4 Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, 1–3.

5 See further discussion in Trivellato, *The familiarity of strangers*, 11.

6 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 35–37.

7 Campbell, *A Passage to China*, 94, 149; Hayne, 'Diaries of Henry Hayne 1797–1828', 118–128; Osbeck, *Dagbok öfver en ostindisk resa*, 169; Reinius, *Journal hållen på resan till Canton*, 204; Torén, *En ostindisk resa*, 98; Van Dyke and Viallé, *The Canton–Macao Dagregisters*, 1762, 12, 100; Van Dyke and Viallé, *The Canton–Macao Dagregisters*, 1763, 10–11, 93–100, 137, 155–168.

8 Campbell, *A Passage to China*, 117, 176–177; Van Dyke and Viallé, *The Canton–Macao Dagregisters*, 1763, 5, 72.