

Article

The Reasons and Influence of the Establishment of One Port Trade System in Guangzhou during Qing Dynasty

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Abstract: Guangzhou is located in the southern part of China, near the South China Sea, belongs to Guangdong Province. It serves as China's southern gateway to the world and was historically called "The Southern Treasure of the Emperor", playing a crucial role in China's maritime trade history. Throughout Chinese history, Guangzhou underwent several cycles of "closure" and "opening", policies that severely impacted trade. However, foreign merchants never ceased to request permission from the Chinese government to engage in trade. In 1757, Emperor Qianlong decreed Guangzhou as the only one official port for foreign trade. This edict led to the establishment of the one port trading system in Guangzhou, as the Qing government aimed to counter foreign influences and local uprisings while maintaining a self-sufficient small-scale agricultural economy. Western nations and their traders sought opportunities within this system, aspiring to expand trade to other regions of China, even the inland areas. The exclusive status of Guangzhou as China's only one trading port persisted until 1842, following the defeat of the Qing government in the Opium War against Britain, the Nanjing Treaty was signed. This treaty opened Guangzhou, Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, and Xiamen as trading ports, bringing an end to the one port trading system. The reasons and impacts of the establishment of this system have not been comprehensively analyzed to date. Therefore, this paper based on historical archives, analyzes both the direct and underlying reasons behind Emperor Qianlong's decision and elucidates the system's diverse impacts on various aspects of Qing-era China.

Keywords: Guangzhou Port; Qing Dynasty; One port trading system; Emperor Qianlong; Sino-Western trade

Introduction

On December 20th, 1757, Emperor Qianlong issued a decree stipulating that all national import and export commodity transactions could only take place in Guangzhou, making Guangzhou the only one trading port recognized by the Qing government. The immediate reason of this decision was the insistence of British East India Company merchants on breaking the restrictions imposed by the Qing court on trade locations and the extortion by the Guangdong Customs. Despite a doubling of tariff rates at Zhejiang Customs, these merchants continued to trade in there. However, this move raised concerns and alarms within the imperial court. In a royal decree, Qianlong wrote: "Traditionally, foreign ships all dock in Guangdong, subject to inspection and taxation by Guangdong Customs. Occasionally, a ship may arrive in Ningbo in Zhejiang Province. In recent years, unscrupulous merchants have sought profits, and many foreign ships have arrived in Ningbo. If left unchecked for a long time, it will become another Macau in Guangdong Province. This is of great concern in the maritime frontier, as it is related to local customs and traditions. Therefore, a new set of regulations is needed. If Guangdong is not emphasized, foreign merchants will have no incentive to come, not to mention

increasing taxes. The intention is not to raise taxes but to restrict trade, making it clear to those who are informed."

At present, the academic world generally interprets the motivation behind Emperor Qianlong's policy of restricting trade to Guangzhou through this edict, opine that the Qing government was based on the lesson of losing control of Macau's trade management. They hope to prevent Western merchants from colluding with the local Chinese people and fueling uprisings through the one port trade system in Guangzhou, because if one wants to enter Guangzhou, they must pass through Huangpu and Humen, where there are officers and soldiers, It can ensure safety. However, through the organization of historical documents, this research found that the above reasons are only a part of it. There are more underlying reasons that forced the Qing government to make this policy, not only on the military level, but also more closely related to the mentality of the Chinese people towards foreigners and merchants in the Qing Dynasty, which also includes the facilitation of an accidental event.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to re interpret historical archives, analyze the reasons for the establishment of the one port trading system in Guangzhou during the Qing Dynasty from multiple perspectives, and explore the impact of this system on the political, economic, and social aspects of China during the Qing Dynasty. It aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth perspective for understanding China's trade policies and international exchanges during the Qing Dynasty, and to provide a new historical perspective and theoretical support for academic research on China's economy and foreign relations during the Qing Dynasty.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research method, aiming to collect, organize, and analyze rich historical archives and literature, and deeply explore the reasons for the establishment of the one port trading system in Guangzhou during the Qing Dynasty, as well as the impact of this policy on various aspects of politics, economy, society, and culture in China during the Qing Dynasty. Through the analysis of historical documents, it aims to comprehensively understand the background, implementation process, and profound impact of the one port trading system in Guangzhou during the Qing Dynasty on Chinese society at that time. At the same time, this research will also compare the one port trade system in Guangzhou during the Qing Dynasty with the trade systems of Western countries, in order to better understand the position and role of this system in the international trade pattern.

Regarding the data collection process, this study will begin with an extensive literature review to gather relevant documents and historical archives concerning the Qing Dynasty's Canton one-port trading system. This may include official documents from the Qing Dynasty, business records, diplomatic correspondence, and the like. The next step involves visiting archives and historical libraries located in Guangzhou or other relevant locations to search for archival materials pertaining to that era. These archives may encompass local government records, documents from trade associations, merchant diaries, and similar sources. Finally, the collected literature and archival materials will be organized into an analyzable format, such as establishing a database or creating summarized notes. Subsequently, qualitative analysis methods, such as content analysis or thematic analysis, will be employed to delve deeply into these materials.

Findings and Discussion

Through the analysis of historical documents, this research contends that the establishment of the Guangzhou one-port trade system in the Qing Dynasty resulted from the combined effects of various factors. These factors include the Qing government's control over foreign trade, vigilance against foreign powers, maintenance of domestic stability, and protection of small-scale agricultural economies.

The research asserts that the Guangzhou one-port trade system had profound effects on various aspects of Qing Dynasty China, encompassing politics, economics, society, and culture. Specifically, the system reinforced Qing government control over Guangzhou, facilitated monitoring of foreign visitors to prevent collusion with local residents, and economically enriched the region through substantial customs duties, contributing significantly to imperial revenue. Culturally and artistically, the convergence of Eastern and Western craftsmanship in Guangzhou led to vibrant developments in painting and handicrafts.

This research conducts a comparative analysis of the Guangzhou one-port trade system and the trade systems of Western countries during the Qing Dynasty. It acknowledges the system's significant role in the international trade landscape of the time but also highlights certain limitations and shortcomings. This paper provides an in-depth exploration of the establishment reasons of the Guangzhou single-port trade system in the Qing Dynasty and its impact on various aspects of Qing Dynasty China. It offers a new historical perspective and theoretical support for academic research on the economic and foreign relations of Qing Dynasty China. Furthermore, the paper provides insights for the development of the current international trade landscape, emphasizing the need to consider diverse interests and impacts when formulating trade policies to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

1. Reasons for the Establishment of One Port Trading System

In the beginning, Emperor Qianlong did not intend to make Guangzhou the only one port but rather hoped that the majority of foreign trade could take place there, not all of it. He aimed to force foreign merchants to choose Guangzhou for trade by increasing tariffs at Ningbo, doubling the Zhejiang Customs tariff rate. This artificial situation would favor Guangdong and burden Zhejiang with higher taxes. However, foreign merchants did not favor this decision. They believed Guangzhou was too distant from the origins of some goods. Moreover, as long as the trade volume was high, the additional taxes wouldn't necessarily reduce profits. The extortion by Guangdong Customs also troubled them. Therefore, Qianlong's plan did not succeed, and foreign ships continued to frequently trade in other ports.

However, a legal lawsuit solidified the Qing government's determination to make Guangzhou the only one trading port. In 1759, the British East India Company sent James Flint, who was proficient in Chinese, to conduct trade activities in Ningbo. After facing numerous obstacles and extortion from customs, Flint, skilled in Chinese, decided to sail north to Tianjin, filing a complaint against Guangdong Customs and the foreign firms in Guangzhou. On July 18, 1759, Flint submitted the petition to Fang Guancheng, the Governor-General of Zhili, accusing: "Our party of twelve, with three followers and eight sailors, consists of officials from England of the fourth rank. We engaged in trade in Guangdong's harbor, and due to the merchant Li Guanghua's debt of over 50,000 taels of silver, we sought justice at the customs office but were denied. We also filed a complaint at the governor's office, but it was rejected. We even presented our case at Ningbo in Zhejiang but were again denied. Now, our country has dispatched me to Tianjin to seek justice in the capital."

Unexpectedly, Flint's actions enraged the Emperor, and he nearly lost his head. On September 13, 1759, upon learning of the situation, Emperor Qianlong immediately dispatched imperial envoys to Guangdong, directing an investigation into Guangdong Customs alongside Li Shiyao, while detaining Flint and examining individuals related to the case. In his instructions on Li Shiyao's report, Emperor Qianlong remarked, "They must uphold justice for the country's stability. The officials managing the customs cannot be compared to the provincial governors. The use of family members in tax matters is unavoidable, but family members' extortion is equivalent to the master's extortion, and we cannot overlook or absolve them of guilt. Regarding the excessive prices charged by foreign merchants, we cannot open this door, and those who write statements on behalf of locals should be strictly punished. Handle everything justly to prevent future issues. You must put forth your utmost effort."

Flint overestimated the Qing judicial system. His lawsuit embarrassed the ruling elite of the Qing dynasty and even harmed the national image. Those involved in the case were to be severely punished. The outcome was astonishing: the unfortunate Liu Yabian, a Sichuan resident who wrote statements on behalf of Flint, lost his head for the crime of "conspiring with foreign merchants". The accused official Li Yongbiao was dismissed, and his assets seized. Flint himself, charged with "colluding with local traitors" and "violating the Qing's trade laws", was sentenced to three years of confinement in Macau, with deportation upon completion. Shortly after this incident, Qianlong issued a decree stating, "Foreign merchants are only allowed to anchor and trade in Guangdong; they are not permitted to go to Ningbo. If they do, they must be compelled to return directly to Guangzhou and are not allowed to enter the sea mouth of Zhejiang..."

The primary reason for the Qing government handling this case in such a way was a suspicion that foreign merchants and Han Chinese were colluding, leading to local rebellions. During the Qianlong era, China was not in a peaceful state. The situation worsened at the borders, with frequent rebellions led by Han

Chinese. Foreign merchant ships, to ensure their safety at sea, often carried cannons and firearms, raising the court's alertness and caution. There was a fear that foreign merchants might collude with Han Chinese. In his memorial, Li Shiyao wrote, "There are English barbarian merchants like James Flint who repeatedly defy prohibitions, eager to open a port in Ningbo. When their desires were not fulfilled, they boldly sailed foreign ships directly to Tianjin. While ostensibly reporting the deficiencies of the customs, they were actually using public matters for private gain, vainly seeking special favors. A close examination of the root cause reveals that it stems from the instigation and seduction of local traitors, unbridled merchants, and agents who are not subject to proper supervision and inspection. The faraway foreign people are inherently unable to communicate in the Chinese language. When they come to Guangdong for trade, they rely on merchants and agents familiar with foreign languages. Recently, barbarian merchant James Flint is proficient in the spoken and written Chinese language, and even the meanings of Chinese characters are clear to him. Furthermore, among the barbarian merchants, there are several individuals like James Flint who understand the language. If not for the covert instigation and seduction by local traitors, how could they become so familiar? For instance, traitor Liu Yabian first taught foreigners to read books to deceive them for wealth, and then he masterminded and incited lawsuits, acting as a proxy for complaints. Following this pattern, there is no situation where collusion and seduction cannot occur, significantly affecting the localities."

Subsequently, the Qing government approved and promulgated Li Shiyao's proposed "Regulations for Preventing Foreign Barbarians", including provisions such as: firstly, prohibiting foreigners from staying in Guangdong during winter; secondly, allowing foreigners in Guangdong only to reside within commercial guilds, with merchants responsible for supervision and inspection; thirdly, prohibiting local merchants from borrowing capital from foreigners and foreigners from hiring Chinese servants; fourthly, forbidding foreigners from hiring people to transmit information; fifthly, deploying troops where foreign ships anchor. Soon after, these regulations were expanded to nine more, including prohibiting foreign warships from sailing into the Humen waterway; women from entering foreign guilds, and all lethal weapons as well; foreigners from leaving debts unpaid; foreigners from employing Chinese maids; people from riding in sedan chairs; foreigners from boating on rivers; foreigners from appealing directly to higher authorities, requiring them to go through merchants for communication; foreigners residing within guilds needing to be under merchant supervision, purchasing goods through merchants, and thereafter, not freely coming and going to avoid association with traitors; after the trading season, foreigners not allowed to stay in the province for winter; during the period of trade, if goods are purchased and sold, they must return to their home country with the original ship, and even if foreign goods are temporarily unsold, preventing them from staying in eastern Guangdong requires them to relocate to Macau."

The James Flint case was only the direct trigger for the Qing government to implement the one port trade policy. Prior to this, the Qing government had not strictly enforced this policy, turning a blind eye to foreign ships visiting ports outside Guangzhou that did not comply with the rules. However, the underlying reasons for the one port trade system were very complex and needed careful consideration to understand why the Qing government decided to implement such a policy.

Firstly, the Qing government considered itself the Celestial Empire and had no intention of engaging in trade with foreign merchants. Emperors of various Chinese dynasties perceived China as the central empire, with other countries considered as distant lands beyond the cultural center, belonging to the realm of barbarians. If foreign merchants desired trade with China, they had to submit to the Chinese emperor, offer tributes, and, upon the emperor's satisfaction, receive rewards far exceeding the value of their tributes. They would also gain an opportunity for trade in China, with the next tribute submission required after one, three, five, or eight years. This set of procedures was known as the "tribute system", where "the presence of tribute ships allows for mutual trade; without tribute, mutual trade is not allowed." Each country had specified tribute routes, and failure to follow these routes would result in rejection and repatriation. For instance, in 1489, envoys from Samarkand passed through Malacca by sea for tribute. Upon hearing this, officials from the Ministry of Rites reported, "The South Sea is not the route for Western regions' tribute; please send them away." Emperor Xiaozong agreed. In 1490, due to lax restrictions on tribute routes by local officials in Guangdong, envoys from Turpan landed in Guangdong. In response, Emperor Xiaozong punished the negligent "officials of Guangdong, Dudu, and Anfu, as well as officials at key points along the route", and

expelled the envoys. The main reason for this practice was to prevent collusion between internal and external forces. After the Manchu rulers of the Qing Dynasty gained power, in order to garner support from the Han Chinese, they maintained many aspects of the previous dynasty's systems and culture. Some emperors even made efforts to learn Han culture. In their attitude toward foreigners, the rulers of the Qing Dynasty, like their predecessors, aimed to establish a "Sino-barbarian" relationship that included a significant degree of discrimination and arrogance. Within this unequal power dynamic, economics became a subsidiary to politics. Regarding foreign trade, the rulers of the Qing Dynasty shared the same attitude as those of the Ming Dynasty. They were not concerned about the development of Sino-foreign trade but prioritized "pacifying distant people", making "all four barbarians submit, and all nations come for tribute", ultimately achieving the goal of "making them fear authority, cherish virtue, and all willingly submit." This involved replacing military expansion with cultural influence, where trade was merely a benevolent favor.

Secondly, to prevent collusion between foreign merchants and Han Chinese or Japanese pirates. After the Qing Dynasty established its rule, anti-Qing movements and disturbances by Japanese pirates occurred intermittently, particularly in border and coastal areas where tensions between the Manchu and Han populations persisted. The Qing government distrusted the loyalty of the Han Chinese, especially fearing that they might collude with foreign merchants to rebel. Each suppression effort undoubtedly required a significant investment of manpower and resources. Kangxi once stated, "The intention of imposing bans is specifically to prevent our people from colluding with barbarians to spy on the central territory", and "I have been in reign for many years and have always found the governance of the Han Chinese challenging, due to their inability to unite their hearts." Therefore, the Qing government had to guard against both the Han Chinese and Japanese pirates while remaining vigilant against foreign merchants at every turn. After the fall of the Ming imperial family in Beijing, the Southern Ming regime was established in the southeastern coastal regions, with the Zheng family playing a prominent role. In 1661, Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) led forces to defeat the Dutch East India Company, which had occupied Taiwan, and ruled Taiwan for 23 years until being defeated by the Qing navy in 1683. During the occupation of Taiwan, Zheng Chenggong actively engaged in maritime trade and established relationships with various countries, attracting attention and concern from the Qing government. Consequently, the actions of foreign merchants became a sensitive issue. Despite the Qing government successfully suppressing most of the Southern Ming forces, residents in coastal areas occasionally faced threats from residual forces or Japanese pirates. The Qing government was apprehensive that these forces might collude and strengthen themselves with armed foreign merchants. Therefore, the Qing government believed that to closely monitor these foreigners and prevent them from forming alliances with the Han Chinese or Japanese pirates, restricting them to a location with stationed troops would be the most appropriate. Considering both military and geographical factors, Guangzhou emerged as the optimal choice.

Thirdly, the Qing government believed that China, with its vast and abundant resources, was self-sufficient and fundamentally did not need to engage in trade with foreign nations. Having only Guangzhou as a trading port was deemed sufficient for China. This attitude is evident in a letter from Emperor Qianlong to King George III of England. The British had sent envoys to China multiple times, hoping to persuade the Qing emperor to grant favorable treatment to British merchants, allowing them to establish a permanent presence in Beijing and expanding trade beyond Guangzhou by opening new ports. They also sought to sign fair and equitable trade agreements. Emperor Qianlong expressed his perspective as follows: "We have never set much store by curious or ingenious objects, and have no need of your country's manufactures. The request of your king to send people to reside in the capital is not in accordance with the celestial system, and it is also deemed to be of no benefit to your country." Examining the trade situation between foreign nations and China, it is easy to understand Emperor Qianlong's mindset. Since the Qing Dynasty allowed trade, foreign merchants annually exchanged millions of pounds of silver for Chinese agricultural products and handcrafted goods such as raw silk, porcelain, and tea. The trade imbalance was severe, and with the rising living standards in the British and American regions, the demand for tea and porcelain increased, posing greater risks for the trade deficit. Moreover, the goods brought by foreigners had substitutes in China, sometimes even of better quality and sold at a lower price. Many scholars have studied the flow of world silver into China during the Ming and Qing periods. According to the estimation by German scholar Frank, from 1493 to 1800, 43% to 57% of the world's silver production flowed into China. In the two and a half centuries before 1800, China received

approximately 60,000 tons of silver from overseas, averaging 226 tons of silver per year (One ton of silver = 20,667 taels ($2000 \div 1.2 \times 16$); 226 tons = 602,674 taels; 60,000 tons = 1,602,674,200 taels). In other words, on average, Europeans bought goods worth about 226 tons of silver from China each year. When foreign governments realized they couldn't resolve the trade deficit reasonably, they decided to sell opium to China and use the silver spent to replenish their reserves.

Fourthly, merchants in ancient China held a very low social status, and successive dynasties did not uphold traditions or measures to protect commerce. Instead, they followed a policy of prioritizing agriculture and suppressing commerce, which was the fundamental economic guiding principle of feudal dynasties in China. The emphasis was on agriculture, with restrictions on the development of industry and commerce. In the hierarchical order of "scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants", merchants occupied the lowest social status. The government neither protected the interests of merchants nor ensured their personal safety. Emperor Hongwu of the Ming Dynasty once commented on merchants: "People often talk about agriculture providing clothing and food, but they abandon the fundamentals to pursue the trivial. There are few who rectify their wrongs." During the Yongle era, an official suggested imposing taxes on tribute ships, but Emperor Yongle responded, "Commercial taxes are meant to suppress and expel the inferior people. How could they be considered beneficial? Now foreign people come here admiring our virtue, yet we wish to encroach on their profits. What is gained would be minimal, but the losses and humiliation would be significant." It is evident that feudal dynasties in China did not value commercial interests but focused on the geopolitical aspects and the construction of Sino-foreign relations in international trade. This mindset and approach were opposite to those of Western governments.

From the 14th to the 18th century, due to multiple changes in European society, the ideology of mercantilism began to take root. In the 13th century, absolute monarchy gradually established itself in Europe, and the idea that national interests were paramount emerged. Portugal and Spain successively became nation-states, initiating overseas expansion to enhance national power, providing economic and military support for maritime exploration. Meanwhile, England, from Henry VIII to the Elizabethan era, accomplished the task of building a powerful nation and became a major European power. During the same period, other European countries on the continent strengthened monarchical power, actively opened new maritime routes, and established trade points. All these nations regarded national prosperity and strength as their development goals, actively explored overseas markets, and competed for international trade. Western countries, to gain an advantage in foreign trade, attached great importance to the role played by the state in trade. They actively formulated various policies to assist merchants in expanding international trade, such as monopolizing foreign trade, enacting laws to protect commerce and industry, restricting or prohibiting the export of currency and the import of goods, implementing protective tariffs, and combining commerce with national political power for colonial expansion. Faced with foreign merchants continually requesting trade with China, the Qing government merely aimed to control the situation, allowing these foreign merchants to briefly stay, conduct business, and swiftly depart. Consequently, confining them to a single port was the most convenient way to manage the situation. The interests of domestic merchants and the temptation to open more ports to earn additional customs duties were inconsequential to the Qing government. The court only cared about domestic stability and international reputation, even though this reputation would soon turn into disillusionment.

2. The Influence of the One Port Trading System

Establishment of the Guangzhou system had significant impacts on various aspects of Guangzhou and its coastal areas, including politics, economy, culture, and arts. In terms of the politics, the establishment and implementation of this system strengthened the Qing government's control over Guangzhou, making administrative management in the region more effective. Officials in Guangzhou were cautious in foreign affairs, promptly reporting any developments to the central government and responding to situations as per the Emperor's instructions.

Under the Guangzhou system, foreign traders engaged in trade with China were managed by the Thirteen Factories in Guangzhou. These merchants held official authorized permits, responsible not only for collecting taxes on behalf of the court but also for handling foreign-related security matters. They served and managed these foreign individuals, preventing any frictions or conflicts from occurring. From an international

political perspective, Guangzhou under this system served as the only one official node for the Qing government's interactions with the international community, providing a framework and mechanism for diplomatic relations between the Qing Dynasty and other countries. Through the Guangzhou system, the Qing government could handle affairs from foreign merchants and envoys promptly and effectively, reinforcing norms and control over diplomatic exchanges. The system also contributed to territorial security, given Guangzhou's coastal location along the South China Sea. The establishment of the Guangzhou system strengthened Qing control over the political and military aspects of Guangzhou and its surrounding areas, maintaining stability and security in the South China Sea region and preventing encroachments by foreign powers or pirates. Lastly, and most importantly for the Qing government, this system enhanced the Qing Dynasty's image and status on the international stage—at least that's how the rulers perceived it. Through the regulation of administrative management and trade control, the Qing Dynasty showcased its strength and governing capabilities in international politics, establishing an image of stability and order. However, for the international community, this system was troublesome. It hindered the development of a commodity economy and the endless expansion of capitalism, conflicting with the spirit of free trade. Therefore, they sought various ways to break free from these restrictions.

In terms of the economy, the Guangzhou system brought substantial customs revenue to the Qing government and provided significant income to the coastal residents of Guangzhou. According to Qing palace archives, in the 41st year of Qianlong's reign (1776), Guangzhou Customs recorded 39 foreign ships, collecting a total of 588,479 taels of silver across various ports. In the 42nd year (1777), 33 foreign ships were recorded, with a total silver collection of 5,884,539 taels. By the 50th year of Qianlong's reign (1785), there were 35 foreign ships, contributing a total of 748,125 taels of silver. In the 51st year (1786), 46 ships were recorded, and an additional seven ships from Fujian Province entered Guangzhou, resulting in a total tax revenue of 872,150 taels. By the 19th century, the number of foreign ships reached as high as 200 annually, and tax revenue surpassed 1.8 million taels, constituting 60% of the financial income in the Guangdong region and 40% of the Qing government's annual customs revenue. This extensive trade introduced a plethora of Western novelties domestically, even leading to the Qing palace's long-term dependence on Western private goods acquired through the Thirteen Factories. For the local residents of Guangzhou and the coastal areas, the presence of foreign individuals temporarily staying at the Thirteen Factories meant opportunities to earn money by providing various services. This included procurement, cooking, laundry, clothing repairs, and the sale of everyday items, food, and alcohol to generate profits.

In terms of culture and art, the Guangzhou system undoubtedly fostered a particularly thriving cultural scene in the region. This place attracted merchants, travelers, and envoys from different regions and countries, bringing together people with diverse cultural backgrounds for exchange and interaction, resulting in a rich blend of cultures. Guangzhou thus became a flourishing cultural hub. Simultaneously, the establishment of the Guangzhou system promoted the development of certain artistic industries, especially the painting and handicraft sectors. During that time, many painters and craftsmen gathered in Guangzhou, creating distinctive export products for foreign merchants, such as export porcelain and export paintings. According to statistics from the Guangdong Provincial Museum, there were a total of 47 painters engaged in export painting in Guangzhou from the 18th to the 19th century. Most of these painters owned studios, where they employed apprentices or assistants to engage in assembly-line-style painting production. This count excludes unnamed painters without recorded names and craftsmen involved in complementary industries such as paper, brushes, and pigments. If everyone in related industries is considered, approximately two to three thousand people were involved in the production of export paintings. According to the records of the American missionary Walter Henry Medhurst, "There are two to three thousand painters in Guangzhou producing export paintings." As recorded in Morris's journal, on December 25, 1720, after a grand ceremony, the Guangzhou merchants established thirteen regulations for the Thirteen Factories, with the seventh regulation stating, "Craftsmen engaged in handiwork such as fans, lacquerware, embroidery, and paintings can be sold freely by ordinary households." This regulation remained in place when the Guangzhou system began strict enforcement in 1757, making the profits from engaging in export painting and handicrafts quite lucrative. In a way, it was the existence of the Guangzhou system that facilitated the prosperity of the painting industry in the region, providing hundreds of painters with opportunities to make a living and even become wealthy.

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that the immediate reason for the Qing government's implementation of the one port trading system was the unimpeded entry of the merchant James Flint's ship directly into Tianjin, posing a threat to the Qing government. The underlying reasons include, firstly, the Qing government's arrogance in international relations, showing no interest in doing business with foreigners; secondly, the one port trading system could prevent collusion between foreigners and Chinese civilians, thereby safeguarding regional stability; thirdly, the Qing government believed in the vastness and richness of its own territory, seeing no need to purchase foreign goods; fourthly, China has historically held a disdain for commerce and merchants, hence showing indifference to the inconvenience caused by having only one trading port.

The implementation of the one port trading system had significant impacts on Qing-era China in three main aspects. Firstly, it strengthened the Qing government's control over Guangzhou and its monitoring of foreigners coming to China, preventing collusion between foreign powers and local residents. Secondly, economically, the one port trading system brought substantial tax revenue to the Guangzhou Customs, making the region prosperous, with these revenues ultimately contributing to the imperial treasury as a crucial source of income. Thirdly, in the realm of culture and the arts, the convergence of various Eastern and Western crafts in this region led to vibrant developments in painting, handicrafts, and other artistic endeavors.

This research has conducted a thorough exploration of the establishment reasons of the Guangzhou single-port trade system in the Qing Dynasty and its impact on various aspects of Qing Dynasty China. It provides a new historical perspective and theoretical support for academic research on the economic and foreign relations of Qing Dynasty China. Simultaneously, the paper offers insights for the development of the contemporary international trade landscape, emphasizing the importance of considering diverse interests and impacts when formulating trade policies to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

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