

EAST INDIA COMPANY FACTORY RECORDS
Sources from the British Library, London

Part 1: China and Japan

Part 2: China

Part 3: Fort St. George (Madras)

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Publisher's Note - Part 1

Introduction

This new microfilm series of Factory Records of the East India Company from the Oriental and India Office Collections at the British Library, London will enable scholars to follow the growth in trade of the English with Japan, China and India and will also offer opportunities to learn more about life and society in those countries.

The Factory Records are some of the most interesting of the early papers of the East India Company, detailing as they do the work of their Agents and Factors in establishing factories (trading posts) and promoting trade in the East. Many difficulties had to be overcome, not only the opposition of the native traders but also the other two trading powers of the period, the Portuguese and the Dutch. The seventeenth century was a time of huge establishment of factories by the East India Company and the eighteenth century saw even more expansion as territories acquired by the English grew in number. The major Company factories were situated at Bantam, Surat, Fort St George (Madras), Bombay and Calcutta.

The East India Company was established in 1600 as a joint-stock association of English merchants trading to the "Indies" and it was to continue trading until 1833 when an Act of Parliament opened the trade with the East Indies to all shipping.

Visits of the first Company ships, such as those commanded by James Lancaster, were exploratory with a view to establishing connections and obtaining permission for merchants to settle and set up factories. Factories were run by a chief factor and a council of factors. If an area was particularly successful a group of factories was established known as settlements and governed by an agent and a council. Settlements might then develop into centres known as presidencies administered by an agent. The first factory established by the Company was at Bantam, with several voyages there taking place between 1604 and 1613. The kingdom of Bantam covered most of western Java and southern Sumatra. The market at Bantam was visited by traders from all over Asia and, in addition to pepper which was one of the most important goods on sale, was an incredible range of exotic goods from the East. All the English had to offer was silver and broadcloths and the latter was not a priority for people living in the heat of Asian countries!

Soon the Company's operations spread to neighbouring islands, such as Polaroon, Rosengin and Amboyna where in 1623 the members of the factory were murdered by the Dutch who objected to the English trading there. However by this time the Company had established factories at Achin, Tiku and Priaman in Sumatra; at Bantam and Jakatra in Java; at Sukadana and Banjarmasin in Borneo; at Siam and Patania on the Malay peninsula; at Hirado in Japan; at Surat, Calicut, Cranganore, Patna, Agra and Masulipatam in India. They also had factories at Jask and Gombroon and at Mocha in the Red Sea.

Most employees lived communally, taking their meals together and spending all their time in each other's company. Relationships with Asian women occurred on a regular basis and drink came high on their list of priorities. Many also succumbed to diseases such as cholera, typhoid and malaria. Salaries were very low and the only means of obtaining some sort of fortune was to partake in private trading which the Company in time did make legal. Merchants were allowed to trade from port to port in Asia in all but a few goods which were reserved for the Company and were also allowed to send precious stones, carpets and textiles back to England.

Japan Factory Records, 1600-1702

Trade with Japan started with the visit of "The Clove", the ship of the Company's eighth voyage on its visit to the port of Hirado in 1613. The ship was commanded by Captain John Saris and he established Richard Cocks as Chief of the factory. The six other factors were: Tempest Peacock, Richard Wickham, William Eaton, Walter Carwarden, Edmund Sayers and William Nealson. These factors were sent to develop trade with neighbouring islands and ports including Nagasaki, Edo, Osaca, Shrongo, Miaco and Tushma.

One of the reasons for the Company's choice of Japan was the presence of William Adams. It is well documented that he enjoyed favour with the Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu and his special position with officials in Japan may have influenced the East India Company's decision to send an expedition there.

The aim of the Company was to sell English woollens, ivory, pepper, gunpowder, lead and tin to the Japanese market. But trade did not flourish. The market was already flooded with broadcloth and ivory, tin was as cheap as in England and there was no demand for pepper and spices. William Adams advised against these commodities but his advice was disregarded and over the years disastrous voyages were made to Japan. Many of the goods were left for years in the warehouses of the factories and rotted away.

Another problem was the logistics of trading with the Japanese. They were used to credit trading and Adams tried unsuccessfully to persuade the factors to allow merchants to hold goods on a sale or return basis.

The other possible cause of the Japanese venture was the decision to settle at Hirado. The Dutch already had a factory there and it was the custom for the English to have to give substantial gifts to the "daimyo" of the town. If they had settled near Edo (Tokyo) as Adams suggested this would not have been necessary and it would have been a much easier journey to the Japanese markets than from Hirado which was very remote from the main cities of Japan. Another reason was very probably the English merchants' lack of education, discipline and organisation.

Eventually the conflict with the Dutch and the unwillingness of the Japanese to trade with foreigners led to the closure of the factories in Japan in 1623. After their closure the Company decided to concentrate on trade with China and India and Japan was largely forgotten.

Even though the factories in Japan did not trade for a long period the documentation in the records gives us a vivid insight into their workings and into contemporary life in Japan. The documents will help researchers to reassess the role of Captain John Saris who led the expedition with the "Clove" to Japan in 1613 and whose failure to reach an understanding with William Adams may have been one of the reasons why the Japan factory failed. They will also provide the researcher with an opportunity to decide whether Richard Cocks was successful as a factory manager.

The records for Japan include:

- Miscellaneous papers for Japan, 1600-1702 collected together in one volume (G/12/9), including: Instructions to captains of the Company's ships on how to proceed on arrival in Japan; journals of Company ships; proceedings of the factories; accounts of dealings with the Emperor and the King of Hirado; reasons for the closure of the factories in Japan; a narrative of William Adams on his arrival in Japan in 1600, letters from him to the factors at Bantam, a letter from him to the Japanese court in 1611.
- Richard Wickham's copy books of letters (G/12/15) written in Japan and at Bantam in Java (the site of the first English factory in 1602) for the period 1614-1617. These give much detail on business and negotiations and contain very helpful indices and a précis of contents.
- Invoices and accounts books and miscellaneous papers (G/12/16). The accounts books give details on the overall pattern of sales against expenditure and show that an overall deficit was the norm.
- Copies of miscellaneous material for Japan, 1664-1674 together with material for China (G/12/13 and G/12/195)

All of the material on Japan is covered in Part 1 of our collection.

The following is an extract from a letter from Richard Wickham, 23 April 1614, Edo to William Neelson at Hirado:

"Mr Neelson.... The tedious expectation I have had for the arrival of our barke anytime this 2 monethes hath so wearied my mind that I have had no time to gather matter to write unto you.... Capt' Ad; & myself came to Surungo where the Emp bought 3 of those broadclothes I carried overland w'ch amount to 665 taves. From thither (having ended our business for the p'sent) we came to Edow where had the bark arrived in any re(asonable) time, I had sould most of the goodes...."

The following is from a letter from Richard Wickham at Edo to William Adams at Shizuoka, 4 June 1614:

"Capt' Adams

I most hartely commend me, etc. Having occasion of conveyance I thought it not amisse to make use thereof, being enforced for want of soe good meanes to send Coytes unto you of purpose with letters for Osacay & Firando, which I hope before these come unto your handes that you shall have them, wherin I pray you let all the expedition that may be used of for the dispatch of Jno Febe for Osacay for some more black cloth. For, as I sayd, I make acco' that all I have heere is sould, & I pray you dispatch Coytes away with Sibio's goods, and whatsoever mony he wanteth for his jorney I pray give it him and put it to acco'...."

China Factory Records, 1596-1840

From an early date the East India Company had made efforts to trade with China to obtain silks and porcelain. Voyages were made to the East intermittently in the first half of the seventeenth century and at first the Company was represented in East Asia by factories in Taiwan and Tonkin (North Vietnam) which were opened in 1672. But the first foothold on mainland China was not gained until 1676, when Company merchants were given permission to trade at Amoy, Canton and Chusan. East India Company trade with China started in earnest in 1762 with the establishment of a factory at Canton.

Up to 1680, the trade with China was conducted by country ships freighted by the Company's factory at Bantam, but it was then decided to employ ships freighted direct from England. By 1715, ships were despatched yearly with a supercargo appointed to each ship. Their role was to look after the cargo on the ship and to manage commercial operations on shore in China. Until 1754 the supercargoes did not stay there but travelled back and forth on the Company's ships. But from the latter end of the eighteenth century some of them did remain in China. The supercargoes sometimes formed Councils, either one for each ship, or two or more to supervise two or more ships and sometimes these Councils were combined into one Council while at Canton. In 1755 there were three Councils at Canton, and one of them remained until 1756; similarly another Council resided from 1756 to 1757 and another from 1757 to 1758. Thereafter there was always only one Council of Resident Supercargoes for all ships.

Until the mid nineteenth century the factories at Canton were based on a stretch of land between the city walls and the river and Europeans were not allowed into the city. The ships anchored and received their cargoes off the island of Whampoa. The three main commodities were tea, silk textiles and porcelain. But tea was the most important. It was adopted by the upper classes as a healthy drink and by the late eighteenth century accounted for more than 60% of the Company's total trade. Porcelain for everyday domestic use was also imported into England in massive quantities but very little profit was made on this commodity.

In the eighteenth century opium was highly sought after by the Chinese and in 1773 the Company assumed the monopoly of opium growing in Bengal. Company ships were not allowed to carry opium so it was smuggled into China by traders and agency houses. Cash received from Chinese drug-runners at Lintin was paid into the Company's factory at Canton and by 1825 most of the money needed to buy tea in China was raised by the opium trade. The Opium War of 1840 with the Chinese, fought over the trade in opium, resulted in the English seizing Hong Kong. The Company's monopoly on the China trade was abolished in 1833 with an agent remaining in Canton until 1840.

The Factory Records for China can be found in Parts 1 and 2 of our publication and the following information has been annotated to show which records can be found in which part.

• Diaries of the Council in China (records of daily activities)
Part 1: 1721-1815 and Part 2: 1815-1834

• Consultations of the Council in China (records of administrative decisions, purchases and sales and of correspondence)
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EAST INDIA COMPANY FACTORY RECORDS: Parts 1 to 3

- Diaries of the supercargoes of the ships
Part 1: 1737-1751

- Papers of the Board of Control
Part 1: 1753-1822

- Canton Diary of Chinese debts
Part 1: 1779-1781

- Miscellaneous papers – journals of voyages, diaries of factors such as James Naish at Canton and Macao, letters including copies sent by the Court of Directors of the Company to the factors and instructions to ships' captains
Part 1: 1596-1815

- Canton Financial Consultations
Part 2: 1834

- Canton Commercial Consultations
Part 2: 1832-1834

- Canton Factory Consultations
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- Canton Agency Consultations
Part 2: 1834-1840

- Despatches to China
Part 2: 1829-1832

- Letters received from China
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- China Select Committees Secret Consultations
Part 2: 1793-1832

- Superintending Committee's Consultations
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"In a world where long-distance communication was only as fast as the speed of a sailing ship, the Company Directors in London faced two problems – how to take and manage decisions, and how to keep their servants [...] industrious, sober and honest. The first was perhaps less of a problem than the second. All business at all stages was carried out in writing... The result survives today as the massive East India Company Archive, deposited in the British Library."

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Just some of the interesting items in the China Factory Records include:

- A memoir of the East India Company's trade with China
- Lists of commodities for sale to China
- Instructions from the Company to captains of the ships on where to trade
- Descriptions of business meetings with the Chinese
- Instructions to ships and to the supercargoes
- Narratives of ships' voyages with details of their cargoes such as that of Captain James Wilkinson on board the "Essex" bound to Canton in 1718
- Details on proceedings with the Dutch
- Letters to the Directors of the Company from the factors at Canton
- Notes on meetings with local contacts
- Letters to the Emperor of China
- Lists of ships at Canton
- Canton diary of the Chinese debts
- Catalogues of presents given by the Company to the Emperor
- Watercolour drawings of harbours in China
- Papers relating to Lord McCartney's Embassy to China
- Papers relating to Lord Amherst's Embassy to China
- Lists of goods imported into and exported from China
- Maps of China and its coast
- Notes of a plan to supply the Company with silver at Canton
- Details of the proceedings of the Dutch under the Treaty of Defence
- Notes on the conduct of commanders and sailors on Company ships
- Copy of an edict by the Viceroy of Canton
- Consultations on the provision of tea
- List of foreign residents in China

EAST INDIA COMPANY FACTORY RECORDS: Parts 1 to 3

The extract below is taken from the journal of the "China Merchant", 1685 contained in the Miscellaneous Papers for China, 1682-1686. It describes negotiations with the Chinese which took place on the ship's arrival:

"... A third boat brought the Tanco (the Interpreter) and several Mandarins. Tanco gave them hopes of obtaining a Settlement... Between 3 and 4 o'clock anchored about a quarter of a mile from the town, when a great Mandarin came on board, accompanied by Secco, formal Linguist to the Company. This Mandarin would not allow them to salute him; because 'the second great man was coming on board whom it would be better accepted of'. This personage shortly afterwards arrived with a great retinue and was saluted with seven Guns... After being regaled with wine, Dates etc and remaining an hour on board he took his departure under the same salute as on his coming on board..."

The following is an extract from the journal Captain Goodlad of the "Loyal Adventure" on a voyage to Minidanao in the Philippines:

"Emoy Dec 17 1685 Weigh'd and packed up the Raw Silk bought last; and being advised by our Linguist to hasten away lest the Great Men should find some new pretence to trouble us, we were forced to send it on board in double Bags. In this state it was put into the Bread Room until it could be repacked. Here a few bundles sustained some damage from Rats, which it was hoped the over weight would compensate..."

The following is taken from the Consultations for 1805/6:

"15 July 1805 St Helena

"Gentlemen

Our last address to you was dated 3 July 1804, since when we have received your despatches of 28th December 1804, and 19th January and 2nd March last, with their accompanying consignments, all of which agreed with the respective Invoices..."

The extra ship "Experiment" which sailed from Canton with the "Becan" parted company on the Passage & has not yet arrived.

We are sorry to mention that the Plants which you had the goodness to Ship for us on the first division of the China fleet, had all died previous to arrival here.

By the present conveyance, we transmit you a list of arrivals and departures and an Indent for stores for the ensuing year;"

The Factory Records of the East India Company for Japan and China are an invaluable research tool for scholars interested in the history of the maritime trade, the origins of global commerce and the establishment of trading networks in Asia.

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Publisher's Note - Part 2

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In the eighteenth century opium was highly sought after by the Chinese and in 1773 the Company assumed the monopoly of opium growing in Bengal. Company ships were not allowed to carry opium so it was smuggled into China by traders and agency houses. Cash received from Chinese drug-runners at Lintin was paid into the Company's factory at Canton and by 1825 most of the money needed to buy tea in China was raised by the opium trade. The Opium War of 1840 with the Chinese, fought over the trade in opium, resulted in the English seizing Hong Kong. The Company's monopoly on the China trade was abolished in 1833 with an agent remaining in Canton until 1840.

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Part 2: China Factory Records, 1817-1832 includes topics for a wide spectrum of research. Each of the volumes generally incorporates a very useful index to the contents.

- Details on the arrival and departure of EIC ships at Canton, Malacca and Macao
- Lists of stock held in the factory at Canton
- Instructions from the Select Committee of supercargoes to captains of ships regarding the amount of tea of different types to be purchased
- Canton Treasury Reports showing monies received and expenses
- Details on the opium trade with an analysis of the consumption and value of opium in China for 1832
- Seamen's and officers' wages
- The decrease in the sale of broadcloth and of cotton
- Instructions from the Select Committee on how to deal with damaged goods
- Estimates for the rebuilding of factory warehouses
- An inventory of the crockery and silver being used by the Canton factory
- Papers relating to Lord McCartney's Embassy to China
- Papers relating to Lord Amherst's Embassy to China
- Details on private trade carried out by ships' officers
- "Tea Reports" - statistics showing merchants, the type of tea and whether it was accepted as being in good condition or rejected

The extract below is taken from correspondence relating to Lord Amherst's Embassy to China:

"22nd Feb 1815

The Chairman communicated to the Court a letter... from John Barrow Esq ... suggesting for the reasons therein stated, a

Mission to the Court of Peking in order to announce the restoration of general peace in this quarter of the world; and of congratulating the Emperor upon his recent escape from assassination...."

The next extract is from the Secret Commercial Drafts to China, November 1813-March 1832:

"26 Nov 1813

From the best information we can obtain of the merchants and indeed from our own observation, the consumption of Tea is gradually but regularly increasing in Great Britain & Holland and it is said to be in greater use than formally upon the Continent of Europe. In the United States of America and the British American Colonies, Tea is in general use...."

The following extract is from the Select Committee's Secret Consultations, March 1820-April 1822:

1820 Altho' it may be hoped that the Mahore Opium may ultimately be obtained of a quality little inferior to the Opium of Behar and Benares, it will yet be proper that the purchasers of Opium in China, and the Custom Markets, show to have the means of distinguishing the two descriptions...."

The last extract is from Letters received from China, March 1823-March 1825:

"Experimental Consignment of Emerald Green, Bright Crimson & Pale Yellow. The Consignment noted in the paragraph under reply consisted of an abaoenment? Totally unfit for the Canton Market being colors to which the Chinese can attach no use...."

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Publisher's Note - Part 3

Fort St George (Madras) Factory Records, 1655-1704

The East India Company arrived first at Surat, India in 1608 in the ship *Hector* commanded by William Hawkins and within a few years had established a permanent factory there. Surat was the port used by the textile manufacturers of Gujarat and was the most important centre for the overseas trade of the Mughal Empire. However the Portuguese already had trading arrangements with the Mughal authorities and supremacy on the seas and it would take several years for the English to gain control. A factory was eventually established at Surat in 1612 when the Portuguese fleet was defeated by the English.

On the other side of India the East India Company had since 1611 been based at Masulipatam on the Coromandel coast of India. By 1626 it had extended its activities further south and established a settlement at Armagon taking advantage of the cheapness of cloth there. However the new site had disadvantages and the Company accepted an invitation from the ruler of the district around Madraspatam to establish a factory there in 1640. The factory was called Fort St George and rapidly grew in importance as a centre for the Company's trading activity in the east, replacing Bantam in 1682 as the headquarters of the eastern trade.

The textile industry in the main production areas of Coromandel, Gujarat and Bengal employed hundreds of thousands of skilled weavers, dyers and washers producing enormous quantities of muslins, chintzes, cotton and quilts which found a ready market in England. As early as 1620 50,000 pieces of chintz were imported and even as late as the 1750s Indian textiles accounted for sixty per cent of the total value of the Company's sales in London.

In 1746 Madras was captured by the French and East India Company operations were transferred to Fort St David. Madras was eventually restored to the British in 1748.

The Factory Records for Madras (Fort St George), 1655-1704 are divided into two groups, Consultations of the Governing Council of the Factory and Copies of Letters despatched by the Factory.

Consultations of the Governing Council of the Fort St George (Madras) Factory, 1655-1704

Early records for 1676 cover topics such as the Council's problems with possible attacks by the Rajah Sevagee including details of plans to reinforce the fort; details of the cost of calico; lists of ships sold with their sale price; lists and sale prices of "Europe goods" including bales of cloth and plates of copper. Also included is an interesting catalogue of books belonging to Sir William Langhorn, the Governor.

The following are just some of the subjects covered in the records for 1702:

- notes of letters dispatched to the Councils of other factories such as Fort St David
- letters received from other factories including Surat, York Fort
- details of the arrivals of Company ships from Bengal including the names of the Masters of the ships
- details of the departure of Company ships and their destination with the name of the Master
- details of customs paid on goods and bills of exchange
- accounts of money paid to the Paymaster, Thomas Marshall for work carried out on fortifications of the Fort
- accounts of the Paymaster, Thomas Marshall showing money owed to him for the purchase of items such as cattle
- notes on money paid to washers for curing cloth
- orders from the Council to the warehouse keeper to sell goods for the highest price possible
- details of money paid by Thomas Wright, warehouse keeper for goods sold
- much detail on troubles with the local Nabob at St Thomas, gifts sent him by the factory and discussions with his Mulla
- orders from the council to sell all surplus naval stores held in the Company's "shorehouses"
- details of goods unloaded at the factory – on one day in April 1702 150 bags of salt petre from Bengal were received
- notes on the appointment of Company staff in the warehouses
- notes on plans to build a grainery
- details on the disposal of raw silk and tea brought from China

Copies of Letters despatched, 1661-1704

Letters, some short and to the point and some consisting of many pages, were sent by the Council to a wide range of persons including the Council of other factories, the French and local Nabobs and Duans. Many of the letters give instructions to the Masters of the EIC ships on their destination and goods to be carried.

Included are letters concerning:

- the activities of the French in the Fort St George and Surat areas
- the transport of goods such as cotton from the factory to other locations
- requests to the local Duan for help recovering goods from EIC ships run aground
- instructions to ships' Masters on what goods to purchase and how much they should pay for them
- the arrival of new factors at Goodulloor
- the safe arrival of EIC ships at Fort St George
- panic and alarm concerning the forces of the Rajah Sevagee threatening the fort, followed by thanks to the General of the Mogul's forces, Mahomet Sedick Braug for sending his army to help
- thanks to Sir John Child, General of the English forces in the East Indies for the use of his troops
- the ill treatment of Europeans at Surat
- bills of lading and ships' invoices
- an imminent attack on the Royal Danish Council at Trincombarr by the King of Tanjore
- ammunition and provisions sent by the Council to Trincombarr
- pirate attacks at Surat
- contracts with merchants
- the Council's displeasure at the carriage of pepper and elephant teeth on EIC ships

- the shipping of salt petre to the West Coast

The extracts below will give an idea of the richness of the material. The first is taken from the Consultations for February 1702 and concerns the difficulties the Council encountered with the Nabob of St Thomas. Shortly after this letter was written the Council sent the Nabob two hundred Chinese oranges as a gift!:

"This day the Governor summoned a General Council to acquaint 'em with what messages the mulla had brought from the Nabob at St Thomas...if we were merchants what need had we of such fortification and so many Guns.... It was agreed that no answer be returned to this message as not being worth our taking notice of, but tacitly to defie their Threats...."

The following two extracts are taken from the Copies of Letters despatched concerning problems with the local Duan and the French.

The first is from the Council to the Duan, Mahmood Shaffee, April 1696:

"I recently rec'd a letter from you and answered it by yr Servant with whom I sent two pair of crystal glasses and plates yesterday the same brought me your letter wherein you desire me to assist him in procuring what he wants for your service he tells me that whenever he has occasion he will come to me.... Seven days ago the Great Storme drove six ships from our Road to the Shoar... and they were all broken and destroyed, so that many will never be fit for service again some are broken all to pieces. However what remains belonging to the ship, will be of use for other ships and there are also Goods to the value of 20,000 Pagodas...."

The second is from the Council at Fort St George to Charles Eyre, the Agent in Bengal:

"We have heard nothing concerning the French since our last itt hath been thought probable by some that they are gone directly home from Surat but it is Generally supposed that they are still in India & that they will visit Bengall before they leave India. Pray faile not to send us all necessary advices as they come to your knowledge concerning their arrival in Bengall and their designs...."

The Factory Records of the East India Company for Fort St George (Madras) are an indispensable tool for researchers interested in the history of early trading networks in South East Asia. Further records for Fort St George will be covered in Part 4 of this publication. Parts 5 and 6 covering Calcutta and Bombay will be published in due course.

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