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*William Nelson Lovatt in Late Qing China: War, Maritime
Customs, and Treaty Ports, 1860–1904* by Wayne Patterson
(review)

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Wayne Patterson. *William Nelson Lovatt in Late Qing China: War, Maritime Customs, and Treaty Ports, 1860–1904*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020. 239 pp. Hardcover \$95.00, ISBN 978-1-4985-6646-9.

Scholars have long studied the history of China's maritime customs, as John King Fairbank's exemplary scholarship proves. Related historical figures, such as Robert Hart, who served as the Inspector General of China's maritime customs for about half a century, were exhaustively examined. However, the large number of employees under Hart still demands inquiry; unfortunately, the lack of primary sources is a reason why so little has been written on them. Wayne Patterson makes full use of diaries, family letters, and archival documents to present the British customs employee William Nelson Lovatt (1838–1904) and his odyssey in nineteenth-century China. As shown in the book, Lovatt ventured into East Asia as an expatriate and worked in China for decades. In many ways, his personal experience discloses the mechanism of customs management. By adopting a bottom-up approach, Patterson offers a persuasive discourse of this unknown historical figure, which should be respected as an addition to the existing literature.

Patterson's book is partitioned into fourteen chapters, besides the introduction and conclusion. Following chronological order, he narrates Lovatt's life since 1860, after which Lovatt spent most of his time in China with short interruptions during which he went to the United States for his marriage or traveled back to Britain. Chapter 9 is an exception though, as it deals with Lovatt's life in Pusan, Korea. His American wife lived with him in China and Korea for a long time, but they resided separately in two continents for years, during which Lovatt developed a habit of writing letters to her. In addition, Lovatt kept a diary for a while. These firsthand documents were acquired via serendipity in the 1980s by Patterson whose further research at Harvard, Berkeley, and other institutions enabled him to retrieve more useful materials. His interviews with Lovatt's descendants and relatives enriched his scholarly inquiry. His visit to Chinese cities where Lovatt worked allowed him to obtain additional information. His inclusion of nineteen original photos and three maps helps visualize Lovatt's life.

As Patterson displays, Lovatt led a special life. Being a descendant of Horatio Nelson, Lovatt longed to be a soldier. Indeed, he arrived in China in 1860 as part of a British troop. After the Second Opium War, he stayed in China to assist the Qing Empire in suppressing the Taiping Rebellion in the Shanghai area. Then, he entered the customs service in Hankou and Zhenjiang. After 1865, he was hired in Tianjin to train Chinese soldiers to fight the Nian rebels. He went to the United States in 1869 to get married and then brought his wife to China, where some of his children were born. In 1874, Lovatt was

assigned by Hart to a secret duty in Taiwan to train Chinese troops to fight against Japan (p. 50). When China did not openly engage in hostility, Lovatt returned to his customs post in Jiujiang, Wuhu, Hankou, and Tianjin. By becoming a commissioner at the Pusan customs in Korea, he offended Hart, who regarded it as disloyal. Upon resigning from his commissionership in Korea, Lovatt went to the United States to live with his family. Unfortunately, his realty business there failed. Subsequently, he returned to China to resume his job at the customs in Fuzhou, Jiujiang, Chongqing, Yichang, Guangzhou, and Hankou. It was in Hankou where he died in 1904.

Patterson offers detailed information about Lovatt's life, yet the limited space here only allows a few aspects to be highlighted. First, Lovatt's work as an employee under Hart reveals the diurnal management of customs. Without a college degree, Lovatt was never promoted to be a commissioner in China. This shows Hart's value of higher education and explains why Lovatt went to Korea. Yet Lovatt taught himself by reading widely. He stayed in China for so long, perhaps, just for the relatively high salary. With his pay, he could hire Chinese cooks and servants for his comfortable life (p. 161). His daily routines included his duties as a customs employee, his hobbies for sports and reading, his interactions with the Chinese, and his ties with foreign nationals. At customs, he worked as a tide surveyor in charge of buoys, beacons, and other facilities; but he also served as harbor-master, inspector, examiner, duty collector, and so forth. He was afraid of Hart, whom he portrayed as "Henry VIII" (p. 139).

Second, Lovatt's relationship with the Chinese deserves our attention. He praised diligent Chinese people, relished Chinese foods, and sympathized with the suffering local residents. He was interested in international affairs, in particular China's ties with foreign countries. His use of modern weapons in front of Li Hongzhang influenced the latter to launch the Self-Strengthening Movement. Although he could fluently communicate with the Chinese, he emphasized the hardship in mastering the language, which he considered more difficult than Greek (p. 168). Even worse, Chinese dialects baffled him. He lamented over the ineffective Manchu troops and wondered how they could have conquered China. The corruption of Chinese officials was what he hated. Out of his religious conviction, Lovatt deemed the Chinese as "sinners" and "heathens." During the clashes between the Chinese and the church in the late nineteenth century, he portrayed the Chinese as "brutes" (p. 180). Lovatt harbored racism, as he used "Chinaman" and "John Chinaman" to refer to the Chinese people (pp. 167, 187).

Third, Lovatt's interactions with the foreign community must be noted. As China opened up after the Opium War, several groups of foreign nationals arrived. Lovatt's colleagues from the West at customs were under Hart's supervision, although in name they were employees of the Qing Empire. Lovatt

extolled some upright employees but criticized those dishonest ones. According to him, a lot of British soldiers were drunkards, which posed a serious military issue (p. 10). Alcoholism was a problem among other Westerners, including customs officials and even missionaries. Interestingly enough, Lovatt praised the Jesuit missionaries for their conduct and acclaimed American pastors for their effective sermons. In spite of speaking highly of these evangelists for their holy enterprise, he condemned their leaders for arrogance and misbehavior; for example, he denounced Hudson Taylor as “a regular tyrant” (p. 176). He did not like young Western women being dispatched overseas as missionaries; rather, he thought that they should “work amongst the poorest classes of their own countries.” He amusingly noticed that “not a pretty girl in the whole crowd” could be found among the female missionaries (p. 178).

Patterson’s monograph looks like a Lovatt biography, as a flurry of his activities is included. Yet it is an incomplete one, as gaps can be spotted. In particular, the last chapter remains inappropriate, as Lovatt’s activities are not detailed due to the shortage of sources. A few misspellings could be found. For example, “Juijiang” should be “Jiujiang” (p. 49) and “Liu Bingjang” should be “Liu Bingzhang” (p. 180). The alternative use of the Wade–Giles system and the Pinyin system has caused confusion. It would be better if the author had provided a table to exhibit the differences between the Wade–Giles spellings and the Pinyin renderings. A glossary of special terms in English and Chinese could be helpful. For instance, Lovatt’s Chinese name is mentioned as Lu Fu, but the author does not provide the two characters. Long quotes could be better paraphrased along with in-depth and insightful comments.

Overall, Patterson offers a sound analysis and provides an interesting narrative. His writing style is lucid and smooth. This book supplements the existing scholarly literature on the history of Chinese customs. For those who study Chinese customs, Sino-Western relations, Christianity in China, foreign expatriates in port cities, and other related issues, this monograph, which merges several strands together, is a useful source. Lovatt’s journey is marginal to China’s long history, but his odyssey was a unique personal adventure that traversed multiple cultural realms. In a particular sense, this book is a transnational and transcontinental history within the special context of East–West interactions. For this very reason, this monograph is a benefit to anyone who desires to learn modern Chinese history and China’s relationship with the West.

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