## April 1981

## The China Connection

As travelers, we all bring back momentos from the places we visit. The motive is probably to remind ourselves of the places we have been, and to prove to others that we were really there!

Salt water taffy from Atlantic City, cowboy hats from the West, or replicas of the Eiffel Tower from Paris are the souvenirs we bring back from our travels.

Man's desire to travel and explore and experience new lands, of course, goes back to the dawn of time. His need to discover what was just over the next hill was originally motivated by the need for food. Our nomadic ancestors had a basic need to forage for fresh water, berries, nuts, and for animals for food and raiment.

As our civilization grew in the Middle East and spread to Southern Europe and North Africa, the need to forage diminished and people living in those areas

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Indeed the strength of our "Western" civilization (which is not truly western and certainly not always civilized), may lie in the fact that people concentrated on what was at hand and developed a civilization as we know it based on towns and city states and agriculture. Except for Alexander's conquests in Asia Minor and as far as the western edge of India, the Greeks and Romans did not venture very far from the Mediterranean basin.

Although there was probably some trade between the West and such distant places as China in very early times, the Greeks and Romans knew little of the Far East, or much about Africa and certainly nothing about the other continents.

Greek and Roman sailors never ventured beyond the southern tip of India. Even Herodotus, the Greek historian and traveler, never went further than Turkestan on the Asian continent. The first mention of silk material is found in a journal of one of Alexander's lieutenants who explored the lands of the Indus River and the Persian Gulf in 326 B.C.

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in 326 B.C. At the time of Augustus, historians and geographers for the first time wrote of the land of Silk or Seres - meaning China. Both Horace and Propertius wrote of Serious-the people of China, as those who caused trouble and needed to who must be held under control by Rome like the German tribes beyond the Rhine.

The first book to mention the regions lying to the north of the Ganges was written by an unknown merchant of Alexandria. He put the country of China to the north of India. Chinese history tells of an ambassador from the Roman Empire and of an envoy of Marcus Aurelius Antonius who is said to have reached the Chinese capital in 166 A.D.

The journey to the Land of Silk must have stirred the blood of the Romans and quickened an excitement akin to our contemporary race for the Moon and last week's thrilling launching and recovery of the first space shuttle.

From 166 A.D. to the present, there have been an unending flow of tales and stories and adventures coming out of China. World history is filled with the endless fascination

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which Westerners have had with China. Era after era has had

its own saga to tell of the adventures of those who have

ventured to the Far East. One of the interesting events of

the last ten years has been the reawakening of diplomatic,

cultural and economic ties with China. Our current Vice

President George Bush, was our first post-war emissary to

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Chinal gave him a Special aura as he campaigned

for office last year.

of even more importance than the tales of adventure through the ages, which most of us can only read about, has been the constant stream of goods—silks, spices, and especially porcelains, which touched the lives of most western peoples over all the centuries. Indeed, the generic hame for the fabric first manufactured in China was silk from the early name for the Land of Silk, and the generic name for the dishes used for food in everyday living is "china." Hence the name of this talk: The China Connection.

The China trade-the exchange of Western goods and money for the fruits of Chinese civiliation has been unique

goods of lasting value to other countries and civilizations. The only disappointing thing about our trips to the Moon has been that the astronauts could bring no artifacts or examples of another culture, back with them. This is not to say the scientific knowledge acquired on those voyages of exporation all the silks and porceclain brought back from China in the last 1,000 years!

The Romans delighted in silk garments and at least one

Emperor wore silk gauze robes in the summer. Examples of Chinese

Clothing including Such warm weather robes,

such robes are in the current magnificent exhibit of

Chinese clothing at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.)

Roman

That this trade with China was costly is shown by the fact that some historians have said that the enormous cost is one of the reasons attributed for the decline of the Roman Empire. Because of the cost, after a time, Roman mariners no longer sailed to the Far East.

The trade abandoned by the Romans was soon taken up by Moslem merchants on behalf of Byzantine and Greek clients In the 9th Century A.D., Moslem merchants left records of their journeys from Egypt through the Persian Gulf to India. They stopped and took on fresh water somewhere along the coast of Malabar and sailed to Ceylon. After rounding the Malay peninsula, the ships reached Canton and sometimes even went as far as the mouth of the Yangtze River. One of these merchants talked of the fine "china" he brought back. Fragments of chinese porcelains dating from that period have been found in Cairo and other middle-eastern sites. They also brought back pearls and magnificent shells which the jewelers of Europe used in making fine jewelry. There is a record of 40 pieces of fine Celadon ware brought back from China to the Sultan of Damascus in the year 1171.

Despite occasional forays to the Far East by the Moslems, the image of China left by the Greeks and Romans had so faded from European consiousness that a Dutchman who

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ventured as far as Mongolia in 1252 was surprised to meet

Chinese prisoners at Kublai Khan's Court. He described them

as both ingenious and civilized! On returning to Europe, he

declared their skill as craftsmen to be excelled nowhere on

earth. He also said that they produced silk of the highest

quality and made good wine from rice.

As you know, Kublai Khan, his father, and his grandfather, Genghis Khan, were the rulers of Mongolia. They
invaded China and conquered it in-1272, after fifty years
in 1272.
of warfare, In doing so, Kublai Khan brought the Sung

Dynasty to an end, and became lord of the East. He then
moved his court from Mongolia to China near what is now
Peking. His domain stretched from the eastern borders of
Poland to the Yellow Sea, from the Siberian Steppes to
India.

Nicolo and Mafeo Polo set out from Venice in 1260 on a trip to find new markets for the products they hoped to sell in the East. They traveled the so-called Silk Road, the caravan route across hostile mountain ranges

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harsh as its torrid summers, to China's northwest wilderness. They expected to return to Italy with products they could sell on the way back and in Venice. They went as far as the Court of the Great Khan, the ruler of the Mongols.

They evidently met Kublai Khan who asked them many

questions about their country and especially about their The Great Khan was noted for his tolerance of all religions. religion. MHe asked them to go to Rome for him and ask the

Pope to send 100 missionaries when they returned. They then when they reached they of Kublai Khan's invitation returned to Venice and sent word to the PopeNwho instead of Reflecting the West's image of the East, the Pope 100, sent two missionaries to convert all of Kublai Khan's territory which consisted of Mongolia, China, Tibet,

Siberia, Turkestan, and Persia. When the older Polos and the missionaries set out, they also took the young 15 year old Marco Polo with them. (The two missionaries soon left

By the time they got to Mongolia, Kublai Khan had moved his capital to China, so the Polos traveled to (now Kambalu (temping, Peking). Marco Polo seems to have been

the travelers and returned to Italy.)

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employed by the great Khan as some kind of emmisary, for he traveled all over the Khan's domains for about 17 of the 24 years he lived there. In order to get along in China, he must have learned at least four languages.

Upon his return to Italy, while a prisoner in Genoa, he dictated a book about his travels to a fellow prisoner. Parts of his book were not believed by his contemporaries. Many of the places he described were not visited again by Europeans until the 19th Century. None of his discoveries in Asia were incorporated in maps of the continent until many years after his death. Some of the events he described in his book are authenticated by Chinese annals which were his tales later found, but/were certainly not believed by his Italian contemporaries at the time. How could any European believe that a tarta chieftan ruled a bigger, richer, and better-qoverned geverned empire than Rome had ever seen?

Marco Polo seems not to have been concerned about the ordinary life and habits of the people with whom he lived for so many years, but instead, he chose to record the mar-

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vels he had seen and heard about.

To Marco Polo and his stay-at-home contemporaries, the wealth of the East made the strongest appeal. He remarked that the Tartar conquerors dressed in Cloth of Gold and Silks, with skins of sable, ermine and other animals.

Throughout his book he stresses the prodigious wealth of the orient in gold, silver and precious stones.

Upon their return to Venice in 1295 after an absence of 26 years, his father, his uncle and he found they had and given up for dead, been almost forgotten. Their clothes were coarse and tattered, the bundles they carried were bound in old cloth.

Of course, they had almost forgotten their native tongue!

It took some doing to convince people that they really were the Polos, who had been gone so long. When they, their families, and friends were gathered around them, the Polos began slitting open their old tattered clothes and bundles.

Revealed were silks, satins, velvet, damask and other fine cloth, hidden in the linings. Their bundles were filled with quantities of rubies, sapphires, diamonds, emeralds and

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pearls.

marvels of the orient introduced into European life by

Marco Polo or voyagers who were there soon after he was,

were paper money, spaghetti, use of coal for fuel, astrology, astronomical instruments, and spices. Printing was

then used in China, but neither Marco Polo nor those who

(The Chinese first invented paper in the 1st Century H.D., block followed him seem to have recognized its worth. Despite the 11th

In the San Marco museum in Venice is a ceramic bowl

believed to have been brought back by Marco Polo. Among the

Despite

dwindling trickle of emulators and none after 1340. The
West had less contact with the Far East during the Century
1350-1450 than it had in the previous 100 years.

many tales that Marco Polo told, he inspired only a

Within 50 years of Marco Polo's return to Venice, the dynasty of Kublai Khan fell, and the succeeding Ming dynasty embraced a rigidly Xenophobic policy. The curtain that had been raised at the beginning of the 13th Century to disclose an intriguing picture of China, fell once more. Not until travelers could again go to China at the beginning of

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the 16th Century, could westerners see for themselves the riches of Cathay.

However, enterprising Arab seamen and merchants continued trade with oriental merchants along the sea route to the Far East, the Middle East and India. Spices, fine textiles, ceramic goods and metal wares continued to reach the hear east and Europe. The famous Topkapi Museum in Istanbul is filled with Chinese porcelains of this period and latter, which were collected by the Sultans over the Centuries.

European knowlege of all but the northern fringe of

Africa was just as scant as that of China. Portuguese mariners gradually began exploring the coast of Africa as far

as the hump and brought back yellow gold and slaves - so
called black gold. Unlike those who went to China, they

brought back none of the culture of the lands they ex
plored. Under Vasco da Gama the Portuguese pushed on

further around the African Continent and up the East coast

and across the Indian Ocean to India. Despite the efforts

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of the Arabs to prevent it, da Gama was able to trade with Chinese merchants in India and get a full cargo and his ships, of Chinese spices, silks and pottery. The value of that cargo when sold back home was enough to pay for the cost of the trip sixty times over!

The riches of the East were what motivated Christopher Columbus' explorations. He died believing he had discovered islands that were off the coast of China and Japan and that he was within easy reach of Cathay. From the places he visited, he was not able to bring back much of value to the Europeans of his day.

Cortez, and later Pizzaro made major discoveries along the way as they discovered and then plundred and destroyed the civilizations of the Aztecs and the Incas. They took back to Europe much gold and silver and platinum, but little of the highly developed civilizations of the tragic peoples which they conquered.

Later voyages of discovery throughout the World resulted in lands to conquer and ultimately settle, human and

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only in China and the Far East, have those voyages and contacts provided the basis for a continuous trade in the fruits of a civilization far greater than that of the other partner (China presents the largest unbroken to the transaction. tradition of cultural achievement in the history of man.)

One of the few references Marco Polo made to the magnificent porcelain of his day was when he remarked at its small cost. Today, one of the pieces of porcelain or bronze made in China during his era, brings hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of dollars on the art market.

By the 15th Century porcelain was included in gifts

from the Sultans of Egypt to the Doges of Venice. After

Vasco da Gama's voyage of 1498 reopened the European sea

route to the Far East, porcelain was brought to Europe in

ever-increasing quantities and soon even the poorest mon
archs could boast a few specimens in their treasuries. The Four Raman

Emperor Charles V, and Philip II of Spain and Henry VIII and

This known that

Queen Elizabeth all had rare examples of porcelain (Philip of Spain of porcelain in his collection.)

II had 3,000 pieces (1)

By the 17th and 18th Centuries the mania for things Chinese and Far Eastern was so pronounced among leaders that every princely palace or Grand ducal mansion had its porcelain cabinet glittering with chinese plates, bottles and jugs. The best beds were hung with chintz from China and every lady of fashion had an Indian shawl. Many books were published of oriental travels - many written by arm chair travelers who never left turope. Tea seems to have reached Europe and England about 1650 and became almost a necessity of life soon afterwards. And of course, one needed Chinese tea cups - really bowls without handles to drink it from.

King Louis XIV in 1670 erected a little pleasure house in Chinese style for Mme: de Montsepan called the Trianon de Porcelaine in the park at Versailles. Not long after, many exquisite little building in the same style were built at other courts all over Europe. Soon there were Chinese pagodas, latticed tea-houses and "Confucian" temples in every corner of Europe. Inside, these little temples, and palaces Themselves,

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and indeed in the

Arooms in the palaces themselves, were filled with Chinese

lacquer and fine porcelains. That these buildings had can be attributed to the

little to do with true Chinese architecture was unimpormany accounts of China travels then being written by arm chair authors who had never been there.

tant. The vision of Cathay - an imaginary place, has had a

pronounced influence on Western viewpoints at least since

the time of Marco Polo. Chinoiserie, as it is called, has western

influenced, decorative styles from the 16th Century onward.

It is still prevalent in some of the decorative arts today.

There are still Chinese and oriental gardens all over the oriental world. I know of one fine Japanese Garden and magnificent collection of 17th and 18th Century Chinese furniture within fifteen-miles of Columbus.

So great was the demand for Chinese porcelain in

Europe that before the end of the 16th Century, Chinese

potters were producing large quantities of Blue and White-ware

ware for the European market. In the 17th Century, Queen

Anne in England decorated the rooms in her various palaces

and plates

with porcelain vases/on every shelf and surface - even on

the ledges above doors and windows.

A passage in Marco Polo's book, later embroidered by others, indicated that true porcelain manufacture was somehow connected with the art of magic. As late as 1640, Europeans were still ascribing magical properties to porcelain. The origin of the Delft potteries in Holland, is still uncertain but by 1614 a factory was built for the production of blue and white wares in imitation of those

from China because of the enormous cost of the real thing.

Medici had tried to encourage porcelain manufacture in

Italy but failed. in 1527. In the 1680's factories sprang up in France for the manufacture of pottery. All over Germany the rulers imitated the Sun King's Court, manners and taste. Thus, much effort went into the discovery of hard paste porcelain. Soft paste porcelain or pottery as we know it did not achieve the splendid lustre and brilliance of hard paste porcelain from China.

The story of how the secret of oriental porcelain was discovered at Dresden in the early eighteenth century is as fantastic as any fairy tale by Grimm. Augustus the Strong,

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(and incidentally the sire of over 350 bastards).

Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, was so fanatical a devotee of oriental porcelain that he was supposed to have swapped a whole regiment of Saxon dragoons for 48 of the King of Prussia's porcelain vases. (They are known to this day as the Dragoon vases in the Green Vaults at Dresden.)

The Elector's collection grew at an even more alarming rate than his bastards (350 children are recorded). His courtiers count realized that he would bankrupt the state in they did not learn how to make porcelain. Two alchemists

Augustus established the Royal Saxon Porcelain Manufactury

at Meissen, 12 miles outside Dresden. True porcelain of

fine quality was made there for the first time in Europe.

It was a combination of the right clay and of high temperature firing,

ture firing, which achieved the long-sought-after equiv-

alent of the Chinese product. Although the secret of porce-

lain was guarded with care, it soon leaked out and other

factories were started in many other parts of Europe.

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Meanwhile, the Dutch East India Company had been formed to trade in spices, porcelains, teas and other Chinese products.

The British East India Company which was chartered in 1600 only came to life in 1662 after Charles II married Catherine of Braganza. In her dowry was Bombay (Imagine province getting a whole country by marriage!) When the advantages of access to the harbor of Bombay were realized, trade with India and the Far East really increased as did the interest of the British in products from those countries. In 1699, a particularly rich shipment of teas and porcelains increased the Company's interest in trade with Canton. By 1715, the British East India Company had a highly organized trading station at Canton, with a regular schedule for shipping throughout the rest of the eighteenth century, the Company dominated the China trade.

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Other nations had entered the trade earlier with minor success, if not lasting importance. The Swedes, Danes, Prussians, Austrians, Hungarians, Italians and the Parsees from Bombay, all sent ships to China. The Russians also engaged in China trade, but they used overland caravans where there was no competition with other Europeans.

The Spanish do not seem to have had any direct contact with China, because after 1571 they had no need to go there. Chinese junks traveled to Manila and the Spaniard shipped the goods to Acalpulco and transhipped them across Mexico and then on to Spain. So many Chinese migrated to Manila that much of the trading business passed into the hands of the Chinese, which angered both the Filipinos and the Spaniards. In typical Spanish colonial fashion, they met the problem by simply massacring the Chinese merchants every few years. This further increased the Chinese Government's hostility to foreigners generally, and the Spanish in particular.

The Initial experience of the Chinese with the lawless

Portuguese, arrogant Spaniards and to forceful British sea Captains

captains, not only increased their disgust with the

"Barbarians" but also impressed on them, the necessity of pulling limits on their

dealingswith the foreign traders. When the Manchus had

taken over China in 1644 after the fall of the Ming dynasty, they found it convenient to maintain the old tribute system, and foreign traders had to conform to this, although they were not always aware of the reasons for all the restrictions that so often irked them. In 1757, the

Chinese bureaucracy decided to limit all foreign seaborne

A Very Small area of Common

trade to Santon. There the business was placed in the hands

of local officials and supervisors who were instructed to

treat all foreigners as if they were representatives of

vassal nations who were bearing tributes to the Chinese

Emperor. A The Chinese bureaucracy reflected the Confucian

attitude of favoring agriculture over commercial activity.

The ruling class in China down through the ages has always

viewed manufacturing of goods as a less desirable activity.



It has been suggested that this is the reason why China has still not had a successful transition from an agrarian economy to become a modern industrial state. Whereas Japan which had no such Confucian tradition or bias against commercial activity has made the transition so easily and spectacularly!

When the first Americans arrived in Canton in 1784, the French and British merchants were helpful in smoothing the way for the Americans with Chinese officials. However, an intense rivalry soon developed between the British East India Company which was still a monopoly, and the independent Yankee shippers. In a short time, the Americans became second only to the English in the Canton trade.

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genseng nost regeted to have medicual gratited the Chinese, a sind

of China, backed by Robert Morris of Philadelphia and

Daniel Parker of New York. They outfitted the ship at a

cost of \$120,000. It sailed in February, 1784 and the

vessel arrived at Macao on August 23, six months later. A

cargo of Ginseng was exchanged for tea and other goods, and

The Empress of China returned to New York on May 11, 1785.

Soon after, Congress sent the first United States Consul to

Canton.

After only six years of trade, the United States was from China.

buying from China one-seventh of our total imports, The trade increased dramatically through the years prior to the War of 1812, when it ceased entirely for three years. Thereafter, 30 or 40 American vessels arrived every year. Pause Remember, all this shipping was between America's East Coast and China! For the most part, the route was via the West Indies, Europe, Africa and India because we needed to trade our American goods along the way, for products which the Chinese wanted, since they didn't have need for most of

the things we could trade. Basically after a while, we learned that they wanted Ginseng, furs and silver! It was estimated that we had shipped over \$180,000,000 in silver specie to China in the years 1784-1854. Opium was also sent to China. In return, the traders brought back sugar, tea, silk and other textiles and chinaware. Later, lacquerware, camphor, firecrackers, fans and grass cloth were added to the list of products which the ships sold at various world ports on the way home or in America once they got here.

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The American shipowners, their representatives, and the captains who managed their ships were men of tremendous enterprise and initiative willing to take huge risks for possible profits. Unlike the men of the British East India Company, they owned their own ships, for the most part, f-ree of monopolistic restrictions. When the rest of the Western world was deeply involved in the Napoleonic Wars, the Americans, as neutrals, benefited by carrying Oriental cargoes for the beligerents. With their strong commercial ambitions, the Americans competed so successfully with the British East India Company in the 1820's and 1830's that the British crown withdrew the Company's monopoly in 1834, but the Americans still dominated the trade even in competition with independent British traders.

The British finally broke the old imperial tribute of system by defeating China in the First Opium War of 1839-1842, which marked the first step toward obtaining from China, the recognition of the equality of other

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nations. Because of the violent acts of aggression by the English in starting this war, and the Second Opium War which followed soon after, additional Chinese ports were opened and Canton's importance for foreign traders declined.

Why did the Americans enter the China trade in the first place? For one thing, after the Treaty of Paris, ending the War of Independence, British navigation laws prevented American trade in the West Indies and with Turband. England, both of which areas had been of fundamental importance to colonial commerce. Blocked temporarily from these prime sources of commerce and not as yet a manufacturing country, the United States was in need of trade. In the Orient, she had nothing to fear by way of English domination, for the British East India Company's monopoly no

longer applied to Americans. Moreover, a market for Chinese products had already developed. Tea and other Chinese products were popular in America, and American--raised Ginseng was popular in Canton.

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China, much porcelain was brought back either as ballast in the holds of the ships or as a speculative cargo. Antique stores still sell fairly large quantities of this kind of china made for the export market in extensive "factories" north of Canton and shipped down to Canton for sale through the merchants. Generally, these were made in shapes acceptable to European and American customers. There are plates, platters, bowls, cups (generally without handles) pitchers and various serving pieces. Mostly they were utilitarian objects. All of this ware was hand decorated and some of the patterns are easily recognized as tobacco leaf, fitzhugh, star border, etc. In addition, there was a rather extensive business in custom decorated ware, which usually carried a family crest or family motto or full coat of arms. Each country trading in China developed products suitable to its own market. These are easily recognized. Next month, there is a sale scheduled at Christie's in New York of several pieces of Chinese Export Porcelain made for the

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Spanish market in the 17th and 18th and the spanish market in the 17th and 18th and the spanish market in the 17th and 18th and the spanish market in the following fantastic prices—into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Since many of the products of the China trade were more perishable than porcelain, this product more than any other remains as the tangible reminder of this important trade. It is estimated that over 60,000 pieces of chinese pottery, stoneware and porcelain were made and exported by China through the centuries!

The most renowned examples of Export Porcelain in

America are the complete dinner services made for George

Washington and other officers of the Order of the

Cincinnati that group of Washington's officers who fought

in the Revolution. There are a few pieces of Washington's

Cincinnati service at Mt. Vernon and many examples are in

the Henry Frances duPont Museum at Winterthur near

Wilmington, Delaware. These pieces are literally priceless.

After about 1840, the superior quality of the product made in China declined and there was far less world-wide demand for it. After the Civil War, the China trade almost entirely died out. After that, the potteries and porcelain manufactures of Europe became increasingly popular in supplying American markets formerly dominated by Chinaware. Later, American factories developed porcelain comparable to that of Europe. Only recently have Chinese goods begun to appear in American stores in very limited quantities.

As I said earlier, the distinction between the trips to China through the centuries is that on each of those numberless trips, goods, things: silk, spices and above all porcelain, was brought back from the strange place which was the source of so many dreams and daydreams. Our own quest for the Moon and the recent explorations to Jupiter and beyond are for pure knowledge or science. We conly hope that man will profit as much from the knowledge acquired on these trips as it has in all the years of the China trade.

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