

Rise & Fall of the Canton Trade System - II

Macau & Whampoa Anchorage

by Peter C. Perdue

Pearl River Delta

Macau

Bocca Tigris

Whampoa Anchorage

Sources & Resources

The Pearl River Delta: South China's Trading Ports


The Pearl River (Zhujiang), the third longest river in China, flows into the South China Sea through the southern Chinese province of Guangdong. The estuary of the river, called the Bocca Tigris (Humen), allows easy access by seagoing vessels. The provincial capital, the city of Canton, or Guangzhou, 75 miles from the coast, has long been a major trading city and strategic outpost in south China. The islands and shallow waters of the Pearl River protected Canton from most foreign attacks, but allowed trade under government regulation. The settlements along the coast, however, could not grow large, because they suffered frequent pirate attacks. When the Portuguese arrived in the mid 16th century, the Chinese government granted them a permanent settlement in Macau, at the mouth of the river, in order to promote foreign trade and ward off pirates. Foreign ships went first to Macau, then to Lintin Island and the Bocca Tigris, and up to the Whampoa anchorage before sending goods on smaller boats to Canton.



Map of the Pearl River Delta with rollover descriptions related to the Canton Trade System (1700–1860s)

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