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ARTICLE

The Global American Civil War and Anglo-American Relations in China's Treaty Ports

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Abstract

Taking a global approach to the American Civil War from the vantage of China, this article explores the nineteenth-century transnational connections and disconnections that linked the American community there to distant diplomatic crises unfolding in the Atlantic. Such episodes as the raiding of the Confederate privateer *Alabama* and the *Trent* Affair reached China's Americans through newspaper articles and correspondence that described an Atlantic theatre dominated by the spirit of war. Such reports had an ambiguous effect in China. On the one hand, they undermined American mercantile enterprises that had been poised to expand into China's interior. On the other, they created only ephemeral ripples of discontent amongst a wider Anglo-American community ultimately bound together by common interests and a sense of racial and cultural solidarity. I argue that while rumour and speculation were powerful forces capable of crippling the United States' merchant marine, colonial society in ports such as Hong Kong proved surprisingly resistant to metropolitan socio-political crises. Through the central case-study of the *Alabama* and related debates sustained in 1860s China, this article accordingly explores the extent to which (semi)colonial societies were susceptible to or insulated from metropolitan crises.

'The term "Chinese" is in general use', declared an 1863 *China Mail* article, 'in the building-yards of the Clyde and the Mersey.' The 'Chinese', indeed the 'Emperor of China' himself, were evidently 'striving' to construct and outfit a fleet of iron-clad vessels. As the Hong Kong newspaper confided, these terms were a smokescreen; a fabricated ruse masking the widely known fact that Liverpudlian shipwrights were disregarding British neutrality to craft steamships for Confederate use against the Union merchant marine. The term 'Chinese' was code for the Confederates, and the 'Emperor of China'

was none other than Confederate President Jefferson Davis.[1] Overtly linking China, Britain, and the American Civil War, the article played upon concerns pervading China's American mercantile community that a British-made fleet of Confederate privateers would destroy what shipping remained under the American flag. Responding to the same rumours, the Confederate paper the *Daily Intelligencer* gloated

> the Emperor of China seems to be a great friend of ours. He has vessels built and then gives them to us. The Yankees will have to declare war against him...the poor Emperor of China will never be allowed to build another vessel we fear! The Yankees will close all the ship-yards against him.[2]

The root of this discourse could be traced to July 1862, when Messrs. John Laird, Sons & Co. launched a sleek steamer known throughout its construction by its shipyard number: '290'. Slipping out of the Mersey, 290 – now christened '*Enrica*' – arrived off Terceira Island in the Azores on 10 August.[3] The British *Aggripina* arrived on 18 August bearing munitions and coal, and two days later the *Bahama* brought *Enrica*'s future captain Raphael Semmes.[4] Semmes took command on 24 August and, hoisting the Confederate ensign, re-christened the ship the Confederate States Ship (CSS) *Alabama*, declaring his mission to 'cripple the commerce of the enemy'.[5] Secrecy had, to this point, been paramount, for in launching the steamer Laird, Sons & Co. tested the limits of the British government's 1819 Foreign Enlistment Act, which prohibited furnishing foreign nationals with 'vessels for warlike purposes' in conflicts towards which Britain was neutral.[6] Over the next two years, Britain was cursed throughout the Union as, under Semmes's command, the *Alabama* became the Civil War's most successful and notorious commerce raider, capturing or destroying sixty-four merchant ships and one warship, the *Hatteras*, in its twenty-two months of voyaging.[7]

The *Alabama*'s true impact, however, was not the physical damage inflicted upon Union shipping but the threat to commercial systems and

[1] 'Who is "Old Beeswax"', *China Mail*, 7 May 1863, p. 2. Such rumours circulated widely throughout the Union and the Confederacy. See 'Diplomatic correspondence', *New York Times*, 14 Dec. 1862, p. 5; 'The Anglo-rebel privateers', *Sentinel*, 7 May 1863, p. 3; 'What is Mr. Adams about', *Daily Intelligencer*, 28 Apr. 1863, p. 2.

[2] 'Another vessel afloat', *Daily Intelligencer*, 15 May 1863, p. 3.

[3] George Townley Fullam, *Our cruise in the Confederate States' war steamer Alabama: the private journal of an officer* (Cape Town, 1863), pp. 3–5.

[4] Philip Drayton Haywood, 'Life on the "Alabama"', *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 31 (1886), p. 901.

[5] Fullam, *Our cruise in the Confederate States' war steamer Alabama*, p. 8.

[6] J. P. van Nierkerk, 'The story of the CSS (Daar Kom die) *Alabama*: some legal aspects of her visit to the Cape of Good Hope, and her influence on the historical development of the law of war and neutrality, international arbitration, salvage, and maritime prize', *Fundamina*, 13 (2007), p. 178.

[7] Van Nierkerk, 'The story of the CSS (Daar Kom die) *Alabama*', p. 192.

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Anglo-American relations that the privateer, the Civil War, and British support for the Confederacy represented in such distant ports as Hong Kong and Shanghai. Indeed, the Civil War was a crucial part of American commercial failure in China which historians of Sino-Western trade have largely neglected.[8] Along the China coast, an incendiary local press with delayed access to news often amounting to little more than rumour fanned Civil War anxieties.[9] In the short term, such rumours could be destructive, undermining the foreign community's commercial, political, and social stability in China. But there were also strong local ties, built upon shared experiences in a foreign land and Anglo-American ideas of racial and cultural solidarity, that proved difficult to unbind.

I aim to provide a broader understanding of such nineteenth-century transnational connections and disconnections, arguing that while rumour and speculation were powerful forces capable of crippling US commerce in China, the colonial context cushioned the socio-political impact of metropolitan crises. This article uses the case-study of the *Alabama* to unpack the complex ways the Civil War affected Americans' social and commercial standing in China, exploring, in the process, (semi)colonial susceptibility and resistance to metropolitan influences. I first consider the *Alabama*'s creation and the ways such incidents were communicated to Americans in China. I then explore how metropolitan debates about British neutrality evolved within the British (semi)colonial contexts of Hong Kong and Shanghai. Finally, I assess whether the *Alabama* and wider Civil War rumours undermined American commerce and social stability in China. I question how Civil War tensions were experienced in Hong Kong and Shanghai, whether such tensions threatened the socio-commercial position of merchants there, and to what extent these (semi)colonial spaces were insulated from transnational crises.

China might not seem the obvious place to look to understand the Civil War's wider impact, but its effects upon the small American community trading along the China coast nuance a broader discussion of the US' changing interest in the Pacific.[10] Emphasizing Sino-American commerce's bearing over how the US imagined its global economic ascendency, Dael Norwood argues that economic changes following the Civil War prompted a shift from "'China trade" thinking to "China market"' thinking amongst Americans.[11] Such a conceptual shift swept the legs from under China's American firms, for whom the remote war's destructive effects had initiated the dismantling and recalibrating of a commercial system eighty years in the making. Although not necessarily apparent in the moment, for China's Americans

[8] See Liu Kwang-ching, *Anglo-American steamship rivalry in China, 1862–1874* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), pp. 13, 38, 67; Stephen Platt, *Autumn in the heavenly kingdom: China, the West, and the epic story of the Taiping Civil War* (New York, NY, 2012), pp. 262–3.

[9] Norman Etherington, 'Colonial panics big and small in the British empire', in Harald Fischer-Tiné, ed., *Anxieties, fear, and panic in colonial settings: empires on the verge of a nervous breakdown* (Cham, 2016), p. 202.

[10] See Gerald S. Graham, *The China station: war and diplomacy, 1830–1860* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 12, 281.

[11] Dael A. Norwood, *Trading freedom: how trade with China defined early America* (Chicago, IL, 2022), pp. 12, 158–9.

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the war's impact upon the domestic economy and their enterprises helped redefine a political–economic relationship that had long been integral to the US' global ambitions.

Prior to the Civil War, American enterprises in China had been poised to take off. The conclusion of the Second Opium War (1856–60) between Anglo-French forces and the Qing provided Americans an opportunity to procure a second Sino-American treaty without conflict; an opportunity to, as Yao Tingfang describes it, 'look on, sitting idly and enjoying the fruits [of British imperialism]' (*guanwang zuoxiang qicheng* 觀望坐享其成).[12] Following Britain's lead, William Bradford Reed, Guiliang 桂良, and Huashana 花沙納 signed the 1858 Sino-American Treaty of Tientsin, expanding Americans' commercial and legal privileges in China.[13] The treaty's 'most favoured nation' status guaranteed the US any concessions other powers gained in their respective and subsequent treaties.[14] Without firing a shot, Americans benefited from China's defeat and from all future concessions. Emboldened by the new opportunities the treaty promised, American merchants in Hong Kong and Shanghai fixed their gaze upon the China coast and up the Yangzi, preparing for the opening of China's interior ports that the 1860 Convention of Peking treaty ratifications would surely secure.

Yet, by the decade's end, the Yangzi enthusiasm that had gripped China's American merchants abated and many established firms began to fail. There are various local reasons behind these merchants' failure to generate the envisioned returns. Robert Bickers describes, for instance, how the British firm John Swire & Sons outmanoeuvred its American competitors to monopolize Yangzi shipping, while Michael Hunt identifies how changing monetary exchange rates and incentives for investing in the US deflated American efforts in China, but the Civil War also unexpectedly influenced the state of trade in China.[15] News of events such as the 1861 *Trent* Affair, when Union Captain Charles Wilkes of the United States Ship (USS) *San Jacinto* seized Confederate diplomats James Murray Mason and John Slidell from a British mail packet, could have surprising ramifications for American commerce and society in distant China.[16] The *Alabama*'s privateering was no different and, despite never sailing further east than Borneo, the Confederate raider became a recurring

[12] Yao Tingfang 姚廷芳, *Yapian zhanzheng yu: Daoguang huangdi, Lin Zexu, Qishan, Qiying,* 鴉片戰爭與：道光皇帝，林則徐，琦善, 耆 英 (Taipei, 1970), p. 298; see Li Ding-yi, *Zhong Mei waijiao shi yi ce,* 中美外交史第一冊 (Taipei, 1960), p. 278.

[13] William B. Reed et al., Treaty of Tientsin, 1858.

[14] Knight Biggerstaff, 'The secret correspondence of 1867–1868: views of leading Chinese statesmen regarding the further opening of China to Western influence', *Journal of Modern History*, 22 (1950), p. 123.

[15] Robert Bickers, *China bound: John Swire & Sons and its world, 1816–1980* (London, 2020), pp. 62–6; Michael Hunt, *The making of a special relationship: the United States and China to 1914* (New York, NY, 1983), pp. 143–4.

[16] For the *Trent* Affair, see Kenneth Bourne, 'British preparations for war with the North, 1861–1862', *English Historical Review*, 76 (1961), pp. 600–32; Duncan Andrew Campbell, *English public opinion and the American Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 61–73.

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topic in China's English-language newspapers and in American correspondence.[17]

Such Civil War tensions were keenly felt in Hong Kong and Shanghai, where the American community's socio-political standing was ambiguous. The former was a British colony and the symbolic and administrative centre of American and Anglo-European society and commerce in China. The latter was China's most important treaty port; a semi-colonial entrepôt whose International Settlement was administered by the surprisingly autonomous multinational Shanghai Municipal Council even if the port's inhabitants technically remained subject to their respective consuls' authority.[18] Together, these ports provide natural points of comparison to study Anglo-American conflict and cohesion. Hong Kong's Americans were conscious of living and operating in an effectively British space, while Shanghai's comprised part of a complex socio-political environment with ambiguous power structures in which national rivalries were often suppressed to preserve racial hierarchies.[19] A holistic study of the *Alabama* would suggest its privateering never 'seriously interrupted' Union trade, but for American merchants in Hong Kong and Shanghai the situation's ramifications were accordingly more complicated, spilling beyond the realm of commerce into the socio-political sphere.[20] Civil War anxieties threatened – if only briefly – Anglo-American social harmony in China, while the threat of *Alabama* privateering and the conflict's appropriation of ships intended for the China trade immobilized trade at the precise moment it was predicted to grow. Overextended firms heavily invested in the infrastructure to sustain a new Yangzi trade found themselves without vessels to ply the river and unable to ship cargoes home. They would never fully regain their footing. The 1860s marked the beginning of a steady decline, and by the 1880s not one of the major American firms in China remained.

I

Throughout the Civil War, privateering, and by extension British neutrality, filled papers and letters on both sides of the Atlantic, prompting a public outpouring of speculation over the future of Anglo-American relations and impending war between Britain and the Union. Commenters' opinions in American and British papers in turn fuelled gossip shared with American friends and family abroad and were reprinted extensively by local newspapers in Hong Kong and Shanghai. For those Americans in China who cared to read the news, such articles carried bleak predictions of further conflict.

[17] John McIntosh Kell, 'Cruise and combats of the "Alabama"', *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 31 (1886), p. 913.

[18] Isabella Jackson, 'Who ran the treaty ports? A study of the Shanghai Municipal Council', in Robert Bickers and Isabella Jackson, eds., *Treaty ports in China: law, land and power* (Abingdon, 2016), p. 44.

[19] Refer to the concept of semi-colonialism described in Byrna Goodman and David S. G. Goodman, 'Introduction: colonialism and China', in *Twentieth century colonialism and China: localities, the everyday, and the world* (Abingdon, 2012), p. 6.

[20] Van Nierkerk, 'The story of the CSS (Daar Kom die) *Alabama*', p. 193.

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One of the earliest such crises during the Civil War, the *Trent* Affair, caused American and British commenters to speculate on the shape an Anglo-American conflict might take, constituting the first real threat to peace within China's treaty ports.[21] In November 1861, Wilkes of the *San Jacinto*, a vessel familiar to Hong Kong's Western community for its service in East Asia and involvement in the Second Opium War, boarded the British mail packet *Trent* and seized the Confederate diplomats it was transporting.[22] Reactionary responses to the episode in the US and Britain speculated an Anglo-American war would follow. Adopting a tone similar to later responses to Confederate privateering, Union commenters claimed Britain had breached its neutrality by transporting belligerent diplomats, the British responding that the boarding of a neutral vessel had transgressed British sovereignty.[23]

Just as Ronald and Mary Zboray argue of intranational Civil War correspondence, frenetic news reporting and telegraphs accompanied letters to Americans abroad, exporting rumours that painted a metropolitan 'social setting dominated by the spirit of war'.[24] Writing to her sons in Hong Kong, Elizabeth Ann Farley of Ipswich, MA, described how the British press and people '[broke] forth with violent denunciations and abuse' of America following the incident. The British government, she continued, was rumoured to be pouring 'troops and munitions' into Canada 'with every demonstration of hostility'. Farley's letter, and a later one from her husband George W. Heard, related how the event 'produced a profound sense of scorn and disgust' in America.[25] Her brother Augustine Heard Sr, writing from Boston, likewise informed his nephew Albert Heard that one 'cannot find a man or woman [in America] that does not pray for a time when' the North might 'punish [Britain] as she deserves'.[26] The 'virulent Anglophobia' the *Trent* inspired was slow to abate and, as Duncan Andrew Campbell argues, its memory affected anti-British and anti-Union sentiments for nearly two years following the episode.[27] Building upon these sentiments, the *Alabama*'s launching would rekindle concerns about British neutrality and the threat of conflict that China's Anglo-American community would discuss at length, the privateer's rumoured exploits further undermining confidence in American shipping between East Asia and the West.

[21] Don H. Doyle, *The cause of all nations: an international history of the American Civil War* (New York, NY, 2015), pp. 74–8; Platt, *Autumn in the heavenly kingdom*, p. 263.

[22] William M. Wood, *Fankwei: or, the San Jacinto in the seas of India, China, and Japan* (New York, NY, 1859), p. 427; Elizabeth Ann Farley to her sons, 20 Jan. 1862, Heard Family Business Records, Baker Library, Harvard Business School (HBS), HN-5-3. For legal arguments, see Howard Jones, *Blue and gray diplomacy: a history of Union and Confederate foreign relations* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010), pp. 83–111.

[23] Bourne, 'British preparations for war with the North', p. 601; D. W. Brogan, 'The remote revolution: a British view', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 106 (1962), p. 3.

[24] Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, 'Cannonballs and books: reading and the disruption of social ties on the New England home front', in Joan E. Cashin, ed., *The war was you and me: civilians in the American Civil War* (Princeton, NJ, 2002), p. 244.

[25] Elizabeth Ann Farley to her sons, 20 Jan. 1862, 3 Feb. 1862, HBS, HN-5-3; George W. Heard to John Heard, 8 July 1862, HBS, HN-5-3.

[26] Augustine Heard Sr to Albert F. Heard, 17 May 1862, HBS, HN-6-2.

[27] Campbell, *English public opinion*, pp. 93–4.

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The circumstances behind the *Alabama's* creation are well known and deeply mythologized. Depending on the 'first-hand observer' quoted, the accessed newspaper's loyalties, and too often the historian's political sensibilities, the episode is infused with tilted sentiments about the Civil War. For some, it was the world's most successful commerce-raider, launched through the guile of its builders and commissioning agents, captained by a shrewd yet brilliant lawyer, crewed by brave Southern patriots and British sympathizers, and engaged in a form of chivalrous privateering.[28] For others, it was a symbol of British hypocrisy, its captain a cruel and arbitrary man, its crew unskilled and mutinous; a ship that owed its success to duplicitous tactics and that, when put to the test in a real naval battle, came up wanting.[29] Such mythologizing forms an important part of the *Alabama*'s story, however, because it helps explain why rumours surrounding the ship's exploits found such purchase amongst China's Anglo-American community. The mundane issue at the heart of the *Alabama* scandal was one of imprecise law and diplomatic posturing; an issue bearing limited relevance to remote and autonomous colonial administrators in China. Yet, for Americans and British abroad, the scandal's true impact lay in the ship's mythic exploits – Semmes being compared to Blackbeard or Francis Drake, and the *Alabama* to Vanderdecken's *Flying Dutchman* – and the threat its creation posed to commerce and Anglo-American relations.[30]

The *Alabama* was one of several war vessels that British shipwrights built for the Confederate States. In theory, such construction was clandestine, but all concerned parties recognized the practice and Britain's failure to end it chafed the Union public and administration. In 1862, *The New York Times* reported that the Union's Secretary of State William Seward accused the British of producing a fleet of steamers 'expressly to run the [Union] blockade' and prey on Union shipping.[31] Further articles charged shipwrights in Liverpool, 'the most pro-Confederate place in the world outside the Confederacy itself', with outfitting a number of vessels including the *Labuan*, *Emily St Pierre*, and *General Miramon* for Confederate buyers, but the sister sloops-of-war *Florida* and *Alabama* bore the brunt of Union outrage.[32] These two ships, known by various names and often mistaken for each other, soon sparked panic over Confederate privateering and the Union merchant marine's vulnerability. Such confusion further entrenched their British origins, as the *Florida* was often mistakenly identified by the *Alabama*'s shipyard pseudonym 'Gunboat 290', or by its own: *Oreto*.[33]

[28] See Fullam, *Our cruise in the Confederate States' war steamer Alabama*; Kell, 'Cruise and combats of the "Alabama"', pp. 911–15.

[29] See Haywood, 'Life on the "Alabama"', pp. 903, 904, 907, 910; 'Limits of English neutrality', *New York Times*, 14 Apr. 1863, p. 4; Historicus, 'The Alabama', *New York Times*, 4 Feb. 1868, p. 5.

[30] 'Log of the Alabama, from the *London Times*', *Mobile Evening Telegraph*, 19 Aug. 1864, p. 1.

[31] 'From Great Britain', *New York Times*, 9 Dec. 1862, p. 2.

[32] Sven Beckert, 'Emancipation and empire: reconstructing the worldwide web of cotton production in the age of the American Civil War', *American Historical Review*, 109 (2004), p. 1416; 'Diplomatic correspondence', p. 5.

[33] George Henry Preble, *Chase of the war steamer Oreto by the blockading force off Mobile, September 4, 1862* (printed for private circulation, 1862), p. 5.

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Confederate agent James Bulloch, acting as a private individual, had commissioned Laird, Sons & Co. of Merseyside to build '290'.[34] Discretion had been paramount, as the British Foreign Enlistment Act 'prohibited "equipping, furnishing, fitting out, arming...any vessel with the intent that such vessel should be used to commit hostilities against any state"' with which Britain was at peace.[35] As with those vessels nominally for the 'Emperor of China', builders employed a range of deceptions including false names and red herrings about the ships' intended destinations. The Italian government, for example, supposedly commissioned the *Oreto*, and 290 was for either a Spanish company or the Spanish government.[36] Neither lie weathered scrutiny, and as 290 took shape, its true purpose became obvious.[37] Technical consideration for the Foreign Enlistment Act 'prevented the guns &c., being placed on board in Liverpool', but the sleek form betrayed 290's function and, upon arrival at Terceira, the British ship *Aggripina* provided equipment as it would on multiple occasions throughout the steamer's career.[38]

Across the Atlantic and in China, such vessels' British origins inspired debates over the laws of neutrality, and accompanying these debates came fresh stirrings of Anglo-American war. The issues of maritime neutrality and privateering's legality could be traced back to the 1856 Declaration of Paris, drafted during the Crimean War. The declaration abolished privateering, made provisions to protect enemy goods shipped under neutral flags and neutral goods shipped under enemy flags, and stipulated that for blockades to be binding they must effectively block all access to the enemy's coasts.[39] The US, seeking to protect all private property from enemy warships, regardless of belligerent status, refused to sign unless such protection was guaranteed. Americans contended that, 'if private property might still be seized by warships' then why not by privateers, which they considered 'another branch of the public armed forces of the state?'[40] Britain opposed the amendment, and so by refusing to sign unless these conditions were met, the Americans technically endorsed privateering's legality.[41] The *Alabama* debates pivoted around this impasse. Americans vocally opposed privateering as well – almost a moot point during the Civil War, as they considered all Confederate privateers pirates – but in abstaining from the transnationally recognized declaration against it, their protests against British shipyards outfitting privateers and

[34] Renata Elay Long, *In the shadow of the Alabama: the British Foreign Office and the American Civil War* (Annapolis, MD, 2015), p. 33.

[35] 1819 Foreign Enlistment Act, as cited in ibid., p. 25.

[36] Ibid., pp. 59, 74.

[37] Kell, 'Cruise and combats of the "Alabama"', p. 911; Fullam, *Our cruise in the Confederate States' war steamer Alabama*, p. 4.

[38] Fullam, *Our cruise in the Confederate States' war steamer Alabama*, pp. 6–7, 21–2.

[39] Charles H. Stockton, 'The Declaration of Paris', *American Journal of International Law*, 14 (1920), p. 356.

[40] Sir Francis Piggott, *The Declaration of Paris, 1856: a study* (London, 1919), pp. 144–5.

[41] 'Rich prey for the Davis privateers – the India and China merchant fleet of England at sea', *Daily Intelligencer*, 25 June 1861, p. 2.

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against British vessels running the Union's blockade had tenuous legal footing.[42]

The nuances of maritime law and this legal duel between British and American politicians are too numerous to discuss here and are, besides, the subject of many excellent studies.[43] What is important to consider is that British and American commenters' portrayals of the *Alabama* amplified the threat of its privateering in China. Confederate papers, for example, celebrated the damage Semmes inflicted upon Union shipping and Union–British relations. An early *London and China Telegraph* article reprinted in Atlanta's *Daily Intelligencer* gloated that as the US had not signed the Paris treaty, cargoes bound for the Northern states would be easy pickings for Confederate privateers.[44] Later reports continued to laud Semmes and his 'skill', alongside the *Florida*'s efforts, likening Northern ships to a defenceless 'school of herrings chased by two sharks', and congratulating both ships' crews for 'pretty well cut[ting] up the East India and China trade'.[45]

Despite the brevity of the *Alabama*'s East Asian voyage, Confederate reporting fixated on damage to the Union's China trade. Playing upon the privateer's *Dutchmanesque* image, Captain Sedgewick's article, published in the *Sentinel* of Richmond, VA, provided an atmospheric account of the *Latona*'s encounter with one of the *Alabama*'s victims – 'a cotton ship from China' – off Java Head. The victim, encountered on a 'dirty, rainy sort of night', had been left standing aflame, 'not a soul aboard her', the light the fire emitted 'doubly dim and black'. Sedgewick then witnessed 'a long, low craft' glide 'out of the darkness' past the *Latona* and slip again into the night.[46] Another account recollected how the *Alabama* had, at the time, 'seemed ubiquitous', and 'if suddenly on the Indian Ocean a red light was seen in the distance' and 'dim clouds of smoke' rolled 'before the wind', then 'men knew Semmes was at work'.[47] Such accounts perpetuated myths of the *Alabama*'s Eastern exploits and its wraith-like potential to appear unexpectedly off any Asian port.[48] The circulation of these reports, whether fact or fancy, contributed to anxieties in China about Union commerce's security and impending Anglo-American hostilities.

Responding to frequent news of the *Alabama*'s success, Northern commentators redoubled their denunciations of Britain, even invoking China's ongoing Taiping Civil War to suggest Union raiders raise the Taiping flag and 'prey on

[42] Charles Francis Adams, *Seward and the Declaration of Paris: a forgotten diplomatic episode, April–August, 1861* (Boston, MA, 1912), pp. 60–1.

[43] See Howard J. Fuller, *Clad in iron: the American Civil War and the challenge to British naval power* (Westport, CT, 2008); Peter J. Hugill, 'The American challenge to British hegemony, 1861–1947', *Geographical Review*, 99 (2009), pp. 403–25; Stephen C. Neff, *Justice in blue and gray: a legal history of the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

[44] 'Rich prey for the Davis privateers', p. 2.

[45] 'Foreign items', *Daily Intelligencer*, 15 May 1863, p. 2; 'Very late from the United States', *Sentinel*, 15 June 1863, p. 2.

[46] 'The Confederate war vessels', *Daily Intelligencer*, 26 Feb. 1864, p. 3.

[47] 'Log of the Alabama', *Sentinel*, 19 Aug. 1864, p. 1.

[48] 'The "Tuscaloosa"', *Sentinel*, 14 Oct. 1863, p. 5; 'Our gallant little navy', *Sentinel*, 14 Oct. 1863, p. 6; 'The Confederate States and China', *Daily Intelligencer*, 12 Aug. 1864, p. 1.

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British commerce, *a la Florida, Alabama, &c.*'.[49] The episode fanned Anglo-American outrage across the Atlantic and in China, *The New York Times* reprinting London articles alongside its own diplomatic reports to track the deteriorating relations.[50] Yet many reports remained measured, arguing that given the Union's domestic crisis, war 'would not be expedient'.[51] Correspondents in London confirmed such sentiments, and while reporting that British popular opinion favoured the South, a strong desire to 'avoid a war' with the Union prevailed.[52] Rather than force a conflict, Northerners – a loud component being the China merchants – demanded indemnification for British damages to American shipping, which they received through the 1871 Treaty of Washington.[53] Still, as commenters debated the expediency of Anglo-British conflict in the Atlantic, fears of piracy and the immediate question of lost commerce threatened to drive a new wedge between China's British and American communities.

II

Historians championing integrative methodologies increasingly frame events such as the American Civil War within transnational or global contexts to assess the extent to which global and national historical narratives were intertwined.[54] Applying such an approach to the study of China's Taiping Civil War (1850–64), Stephen Platt's *Autumn in the heavenly kingdom* emphasizes the connection between America's intranational developments and their international relationships with Britain, the Qing, and the Taiping in mid-nineteenth-century China.[55] Focusing on China's internal crises, Platt flags the link between the American Civil War and developing concerns about the cohesiveness of Shanghai's Western community in the 1860s. The conflict – particularly the *Trent* and the *Alabama* episodes – sparked widespread processes of national reaffirmation, forcing Americans in ports such as Shanghai and Hong Kong to reconcile local interests with national sympathies.[56]

Rumours about Confederate privateering and Anglo-American conflict during the Civil War found such purchase in China because of the American community's tenuous position. Americans may have comprised China's second largest Western community, but since their first arrival they had been far

[49] 'Affairs in England', *New York Times*, 25 Oct. 1863, p. 4; see also 'The Confederate States and China', p. 1.

[50] 'From Great Britain', p. 2; 'Diplomatic correspondence', p. 5.

[51] 'Limits of English neutrality', p. 4.

[52] 'Affairs in England', p. 4.

[53] Amity: Treaty of Washington, 8 May 1871; 'Williams v. Heard', in J. C. Bancroft Davis, *United States Reports, vol. 140: cases adjudged in the Supreme Court at October term, 1890* (New York, NY, 1891), p. 530.

[54] David Armitage et al., 'Interchange: nationalism and internationalism in the Civil War', *Journal of American History*, 98 (2011), p. 455.

[55] Platt, *Autumn in the heavenly kingdom*.

[56] For the role of rumours in frontiers and borderlands, see Gregory Evans Dowd, *Groundless: rumors, legends, and hoaxes on the early American frontier* (Baltimore, MD, 2015), p. 8.

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outnumbered by the British and Chinese communities – only 1,043 of Hong Kong's 24,157 inhabitants in 1845 were 'non-Chinese', and of these eighty-four were American – and lacked the same domestic political and martial support that the British enjoyed.[57] Moreover, as Stephen Tuffnell and Nancy Green observe of American expatriates in London and Paris respectively, eighty-odd years living and trading in China had caused the American community's aspirations to diverge from those at home.[58] While metropolitan letters described a breakdown in Anglo-American relations, China's Americans shared deep socio-political and commercial interests with the British that insulated them from domestic troubles.

One such interest revolved around the progression of China's ongoing Taiping Civil War.[59] While British and American diplomats had initially raced to make contact with the Taiping leadership at Nanjing, the prospect of establishing normal relations proved dismal.[60] With trade prospects looking grim, the mercantile community growing impatient with the instability blocking the Yangzi, and foreign policies of strict neutrality becoming harder to enforce, the British and French together elected to back the Qing in the conflict. Following the Anglo-French lead, Seward directed that American minister to China Anson Burlingame do the same in 1862.[61]

Their reasons for doing so echoed those of 1855 when Shanghai's Anglo-American community begrudgingly consented to stop smuggling goods to Small Sword rebels who occupied the city on 7 September 1853. Months prior, the instability of this smaller insurgency had prompted the foreign community to band together to form a militia, the Shanghai Volunteer Corps (SVC), to defend foreign interests.[62] As with the Taiping, the foreign community initially entertained a positive, if profiteering, relationship with the rebels, the Small Sword leader Liu Lichuan 劉麗川 doing his utmost to garner foreign support. There was, by contrast, general derision for the Qing forces, driven by suspicions that the Shanghai Intendant Wu Jianzhang 吳健彰 was deliberately antagonizing Anglo-American relations. The SVC's first test was, accordingly, a battle on 3 April 1854 against Qing forces rather than the rebels to establish the International Settlement's 'inviolability'.[63]

[57] *An Anglochinese calendar for the year 1845, corresponding to the year of the Chinese cycle era 4482, or the 42nd year of the 75th cycle of sixty; being the 25th year of the reign of Ta'ukwa'ng* (Victoria, HK, 1845), pp. 17–23.

[58] Nancy L. Green, *The other Americans in Paris: businessmen, countesses, wayward youth, 1880–1941* (Chicago, IL, 2014), p. 16; Stephen Tuffnell, *Made in Britain: nation and emigration in nineteenth-century America* (Oakland, CA, 2020), p. 17.

[59] Xu Guoqi, *Chinese and Americans: a shared history* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), p. 27.

[60] See Robert Bickers, *The scramble for China: foreign devils in the Qing Empire, 1832–1914* (London, 2011), p. 122; Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful ties: a history of America's preoccupation with China* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), p. 26; Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping revolutionary movement* (New Haven, CT, 1973), pp. 274–6.

[61] Xu, *Chinese and Americans*, pp. 31–4.

[62] Frances Wood, *No dogs and not many Chinese: treaty port life in China, 1843–1943* (London, 1998), p. 66.

[63] Linda Cooke Johnson, *Shanghai: from market town to treaty port, 1074–1858* (Stanford, CA, 1995), pp. 268–9, 289.

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Such skirmishes aside, the foreign community concluded in both 1855 and 1862 that stability would better suit their agendas. With both the Small Swords rebels and the Taiping, the prospect of lost commerce convinced the British and Americans to adopt a unified policy of standing with – or at least out of the way of – the Qing government. Regardless of their opinions regarding China's internal struggles, the foreign community's impulse was to form a united front that protected and advanced their political and private interests, a sense of shared purpose in China thus binding Americans to their British rivals.

Yet when faced with Anglo-American conflict in the Atlantic, the mostly Northern American treaty-port community encountered new incongruities between national loyalty and reliance upon the British for the expansion and preservation of their interests in China. These distant diplomatic crises were accordingly double edged in a manner distinct from anxieties attending China's ongoing Civil War. While alarming that the *Alabama* might suddenly appear off China's coast to prey on American ships, the understanding that should an Anglo-American war erupt, Northerners in the predominantly British treaty port of Shanghai or the British colony of Hong Kong would be at the mercy of their former peers further compounded the issue. The situation was thus primed for conflict between the two communities, but closer examination of local discourse suggests that the wider foreign society, when prudent, resisted external pressures.

Despite occurring over 8,500 miles away, the *Trent* Affair soon filled the pages of Shanghai's *North China Herald* and Hong Kong's *China Mail* newspapers, and the *Alabama* would likewise become a matter of concern for British and American traders and diplomats. Testament to its notoriety, the *Alabama*'s eastern voyage, lasting little over two months from November 1863 to January 1864, spawned rumours spreading from Singapore to Hong Kong and up the China coast of it taking the *Fokkien*, recently sailed from Shanghai, or more harrowing still, making for the Huangpu river to lay up shipping in that port.[64] Through such channels, the ripples of the American conflict and its impact on Anglo-American relations reached China, the *Trent* and the *Alabama* threatening to destabilize the socio-commercial cohesion of China's foreign community.

From the reports, rumours, and misinformation circulating the China coast one would assume the foreign community conformed to metropolitan attitudes about British neutrality and the Civil War. Editorials reprinted in local British-run newspapers and letters from home supplied Americans in Hong Kong and Shanghai most Civil War information. Each contained a volatile mixture of nationalist and personal sentiment that threatened to antagonize China's Anglo-American community, importing a stream of reactionary speculation about the inevitability of Anglo-American conflict. Such sources

[64] Kell, 'Cruise and combats of the "Alabama"', p. 913; see 'Shipping charters & settlements', *China Mail*, 3 Dec. 1863, p. 3; 'Shipping news', *Singapore Free Press*, 21 Nov. 1863, p. 1; 'The Confederate steamer *Alabama*', *Singapore Free Press*, 31 Dec. 1863, p. 3.

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predicted war, blaming commercial failings on British interventions, and threatening to degrade the Anglo-American relationship.

China Mail articles in Hong Kong reveal how Atlantic tensions polarized China's Anglo-American communities, the newspaper publishing numerous articles about relations between the two English-speaking nations. The paper's London correspondent reported 'great excitement' in Britain as both sides armed for conflict, articles encouraged Britain to support the Confederacy, and one commentary reprinted from the *Economist* even dared the Union to attack Canada.[65] *The China Mail*'s editors compiled most articles from metropolitan papers, publishing various stances to capitalize upon local interest in the debate, their selections representing an array of opinions about the war and Anglo-American relations. The 29 August 1861 supplement reprinted from *The Spectator*, for instance, educated readers on the cause of American bitterness towards Britain, citing the problem of Southern recognition and American beliefs that the British, possessing 'false pretences of liberality', took 'wicked delight in the suffering of the states'.[66] A counterpoint, taken from *The Times*, gloated that 'the pedestal on which Americans have been placed has been knocked from under them'; that they were not 'the paragons of enlightened rule that they had been constantly made out to be'.[67]

Cutting to the underlying matter, a 6 February 1862 *China Mail* editorial discussing the *Trent* Affair requested both parties consider each other's perspectives and find a peaceful solution.[68] Even as the editors preached moderation, they reprinted reports from Britain describing preparations for war.[69] This is far from an exhaustive sample, and contrary to Platt's findings that tensions in Shanghai defused following the winter of 1862, Hong Kong's *China Mail* periodically published incendiary materials from British newspapers throughout the war, the resulting anxieties bleeding into everyday life. The 1862 Fourth of July, for example, prompted Shanghai's *North China Herald* editor to publish articles criticizing America's patriotic vanity, and months later a British commenter's caustic *China Mail* editorial rejoiced at the mutual destruction of the slaveholding Confederates and the 'ignorant and debased' Union.[70] Within the pages of local newspapers, at least, Anglo-American rivalries found a platform.

As the war progressed, the tone of local reporting mellowed. Although *The China Mail* provided a public outlet which could only have served to remind Americans of their British neighbours' bitter sentiments, much of its 1863–4 reporting on the conflict was moderate. One such article reprinted from London's *Saturday Review* calmly laid out the causes of Anglophobia in the Union. Maintaining the stance that Britain had broken no laws in launching

[65] '"Manifest destiny" of Canada', *China Mail*, 9 May 1861, p. 3; 'From our London correspondent', *China Mail*, 27 June 1861, p. 3; 'Reprinted from Punch', *China Mail*, 15 Aug. 1861, p. 3.

[66] 'Supplement: the causes of American bitterness', *China Mail*, 29 Aug. 1861, p. 2.

[67] 'Supplement: English opinions of America and the Americans', *China Mail*, 24 Aug. 1861, p. 1.

[68] 'Editorial relating to the *Trent* and the *San Jacinto*', *China Mail*, 6 Feb. 1862, p. 2.

[69] 'From our London correspondent', *China Mail*, 10 Dec. 1861, p. 3; 'The naval position in the event of war', *China Mail*, 13 Feb. 1862, p. 3.

[70] 'The Fourth of July', *North China Herald*, 4 Sept. 1862, p. 1; 'Editorial on America', *China Mail*, 27 Nov. 1862, p. 2.

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the *Alabama*, the author conceded that a hostile American press might find through this supposed transgression of neutrality further reason to denounce Britain.[71] Local articles could be more balanced still, sympathizing with the Northern cause even as they decried Union violence and cheered the *Alabama*'s exploits.[72] Some, still, consciously labelled the *Alabama* a pirate.[73] This last point was especially significant as it implicitly supported the Union stance that the South was a rebel force and that, regardless of the Treaty of Paris, Confederate raiding was illegal. Reflecting shifting attitudes about Britain's complicity in the affair, further articles cast the *Alabama* as a sobering lesson for maritime trade, cautioning that the US may retaliate in kind should Britain find itself warring with its European neighbours.[74]

Regardless of their stance on British neutrality, such muted articles furnished Hong Kong's Westerners with a balanced perspective of Anglo-American relations calibrated to diffuse tensions within the Anglo-American community. Indeed, while only five of the twenty surveyed *China Mail* articles preached moderation, four of these were locally written. The remaining twenty articles were reprinted from foreign papers. Prescott Clarke and Frank King have noted that while Americans were a 'favourite target' in *The China Mail*'s pages, the editors were typically 'pro-American'.[75] For the purposes of the paper the editors preferred incendiary pieces, but the communities – and even the editors themselves – when in dialogue, demonstrated a capacity for level-headedness in the face of baiting journalism. Hong Kong's social dictates mitigated metropolitan tensions and transnational political conflicts, the inhabitants preferring to keep peace within their community.

Local *China Mail* articles reflected a widespread predisposition towards upholding the status quo in China, which found further purchase through colonial officials' and foreign consuls' activities. During the war, Hong Kong's and Shanghai's American and British officials handled reports of Anglo-American tensions rationally, but their activities still reflected unease about the diplomatic relationship between the Union and Britain. In Shanghai, as agitated reports arrived, the British Admiral James Hope made pragmatic preparations to seize the American community's 'homes, ships, and assets'.[76] Circulars sent from London suggest such eventualities were anticipated. To preserve peace, they instructed colonial officials that, while no foreign consul could act belligerently in British waters, officials too should not interfere with or bar Union or Confederate vessels seeking provisions in their ports.[77]

Hong Kong's officials, however, reinterpreted these orders into an even stricter policy of neutrality extended to Union and Confederate supporters

[71] 'Anglophobia – from the *Saturday Review*', *China Mail*, 15 Aug. 1863, p. 3.

[72] 'Editorial', *China Mail*, 4 Feb. 1864, p. 2.

[73] 'Shipping charters & settlements', *China Mail*, 12 May 1864, p. 2.

[74] 'The protection of maritime commerce, from the Economist', *Supplement to the China Mail*, 11 Aug. 1864, p. 2.

[75] Prescott Clarke and Frank H. H. King, *A research guide to China-coast newspapers, 1822–1911* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), pp. 6, 62.

[76] Platt, *Autumn in the heavenly kingdom*, p. 263.

[77] Van Nierkerk, 'The story of the CSS (Daar Kom die) *Alabama*', p. 184.

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alike. In March 1864, Hong Kong's colonial secretary W. S. Mercer wrote to the US Consul Horace Congar that the Union screw-sloop *Wyoming* had abused British neutrality by refuelling within the colony's jurisdiction and that its arrival should have been 'intimated to the government of the Colony'.[78] Contrasting the antagonistic rhetoric politicians in the metropole deployed, Hong Kong's officials maintained a respectful correspondence about the *Wyoming*, it being both the British Governor Hercules Robinson's desire to underscore the port's absolute neutrality regarding the American conflict, and Congar's to dutifully and lawfully observe said neutrality.[79] While crises such as the *Alabama* sparked outrage in the metropole, Hong Kong's intimate context begged a more diplomatic touch.

The *Trent* Affair, the *Alabama*, and American fears of British interference gradually faded in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Although letters and news articles from home conveyed hostile rhetoric, China's American inhabitants rarely voiced concerns about their relationship with their British neighbours. Instead, George Dixwell described Shanghai dinners ruined by gaudy musicians; John Murray Forbes mentioned how all talk revolved around the coming horse races and 'nothing else'; James Murray Forbes related days of 'very good sport...at which almost every foreigner in Hong Kong was present'.[80] Others described China's political instabilities, problems with Taiping rebels, Yangzi navigation, and Japan's opening.[81] Reports home carried a life-goes-on tenor. The relationship between the writer and recipient did, granted, determine content, and circumstances may have been embellished to avoid causing stress.[82] Still, these letters described overwhelmingly active lives. Whatever anxieties afflicted the community, Anglo-American inhabitants in Hong Kong and the treaty ports shared common socio-cultural values and interests in China which repaired the rifts Britain's and the Union's volatile relations created.

Social life rebounded following these episodic Civil War crises, with few references to local unrest appearing in merchant letters home. Augustine Heard Sr's 1862 reply to his nephew in Hong Kong suggests that while merchants such as Albert Heard once shook 'from fear of a war with England', recent updates showed the situation in China had relaxed.[83] Dixwell wrote from Shanghai, October 1863, that the port's cosmopolitanism afforded a

[78] Colonial Secretary's Office to Horace Congar, 5 Mar. 1864, General Records of the Department of State, US National Archives (NARA), vol. 5, RG:59.

[79] Horace Congar to W. S. Mercer, 8 Mar. 1864, NARA, vol. 5, RG:59; Colonial Secretary's Office to Horace Congar, 9 Mar. 1864, NARA, vol. 5, RG:59; Hercules Robinson to the duke of Newcastle, 10 Mar. 1864, The National Archives (TNA), CO 129/97.

[80] George Dixwell to John Heard, 3 May 1863, HBS, FM-13-1; John Murray Forbes to his father, 14 Feb. 1864, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS), MS N-156; James Murray Forbes to his father, 14 Nov. 1863, MHS, MS N-49.

[81] George Dixwell to John Heard, 8 Nov. 1862, 5 June 1863, HBS, FM-13-1; see John Heard, 'A trading trip up the Yangtsze', HBS, FP-3.

[82] Andrea Salter, 'Someone telling something to someone about something? Stories in Olive Schreiner's letters and Nella Last's diary', in Liz Stanley, ed., *Documents of life revisited: narrative and biographical methodology for a 21st century critical humanism* (Farnham, 2013), p. 102.

[83] Augustine Heard Sr to Albert F. Heard, 17 May 1862, HBS, HN-6-2.

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balanced view of the troubles, and with access to papers from Boston, New York, and London, Americans there were not 'liable to the influence' of reactionaries.[84] That month, James Murray Forbes reported a similar thaw in Hong Kong, where arriving war news was 'so very old' that he found 'little interest reading the papers'.[85]

Yet, despite the apathy of these merchants and the resiliency of Anglo-American social ties, the potential threat of the war spilling into the East Asian theatre caused China's Americans considerable commercial anxiety. Although debunked as rumour, reports about Confederate privateers visiting Shanghai trickled in as early as 1861, producing a general 'indisposition' to ship under the American flag.[86] Such rumours fanned local unease about the state of Union shipping in China and abroad. China's foreign society may have been placid, but as Americans soon realized, their trade networks remained vulnerable to transnational influences.

III

If transnational politics instilled imaginary divisions, the (semi)colonial cultural and racial landscape helped China's Anglo-American community overcome disparities that, as Ann Laura Stoler suggests, 'would in other contexts separate and often set [their] members in conflict'.[87] Domestic politics clashed, but as Bickers argues of Shanghai's British and German communities during the First World War, China's foreigners did not want war; 'they were partners, colleagues, friends'.[88] In such an environment, political differences, social slights, commercial failings, and even transnational conflicts were re-evaluated against local circumstances. National influences were weighed against Anglo-American socio-cultural ties and discarded when prudent. But while interests in China subordinated distant tensions to preserve socio-political cohesion, there remained tangible effects of these Atlantic crises that altered local commercial systems.

The years preceding the Civil War's outbreak had been ones of commercial optimism for China's American community. In November 1860, after the Convention of Peking formally ended the Second Opium War and opened the Yangzi to foreign navigation, Shanghai-based Albert Heard wrote his uncle describing the river as 'a promised land' for trade.[89] With the treaty resolved, his brother John Heard prepared his steamer *Fire Dart* for an exploratory voyage up river to assess the state of trade in the newly opened treaty ports and with the Taiping rebels invested at Nanjing.[90] There had been scattered trade

[84] George Dixwell to John Heard, 5 Oct. 1863, HBS, FM-13-1.

[85] James Murray Forbes to his father, Oct. 1863, MHS, MS N-49.

[86] 'Supplement: Hong Kong', *China Mail*, 29 Aug. 1861, p. 2; 'Supplement: shipping report', *China Mail*, 12 Sept. 1861, p. 1.

[87] Ann Laura Stoler, 'Rethinking colonial categories: European communities and the boundaries of rule', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1989), p. 137.

[88] Robert Bickers, *Getting stuck in for Shanghai, or putting the kibosh on the kaiser from the Bund; the British at Shanghai and the Great War* (Sydney, 2014), p. 50.

[89] Albert Heard to Augustine Heard Sr, 18 Nov. 1860, HBS, EM-3-1.

[90] Heard, 'A trading trip up the Yangtsze', p. 50.

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with the Taiping in the 1850s, but John Heard's voyage signalled a sustained American commercial interest in the Yangzi, spurred by visions of profit.[91] These visions prompted the remodelling of American companies from commission agents to shipping firms, as partners ordered steamships from New England and New York to ply the river. Before these ships reached China, the Civil War broke out and many were sold instead to the Union government to carry troops and supplies along America's inland waterways.[92] By the war's 1865 resolution, American commerce had stagnated, Yangzi enthusiasm had deflated, and, facing loss, China-trade merchants looked to jettison their steamships where possible. The 'disruption of American trade during the Civil War years' and the 'failure of commerce in the Yangtze valley to increase as expected' would eventually lead to retrenchment and bankruptcy for China's established American firms.[93]

As Americans struggled to make the Yangzi profitable, Congar's May 1862 report from Hong Kong outlined the grim situation for Seward. The Taiping Civil War, now firmly opposed by the foreign powers, had proved 'disastrous to trade and commerce'.[94] And if the China trade seemed anaemic, America's own conflict and the subsequent Anglo-American tensions crippled American mercantile enterprises the world over.[95] Four months earlier, Congar had reported:

> the entire stagnation of shipments and trade at this port on account of rumors which are in circulation in regard to hostilities between the United States and Great Britain. Some of our American vessels are changing owners, some are seeking security in Chinese ports, and all are anxious for intelligence from home so that they may act with prudence and discretion.[96]

Already concerned over meagre returns from the Yangzi, American merchants became especially conscious of how their war's progress might affect relations with their British neighbours and their ability to turn a profit in China. Unverified rumours surrounding the *Trent* Affair and the *Alabama*'s privateering compounded these concerns, producing imagined conflicts within China's Anglo-American community.[97] I use, here, the term 'imagined' because

[91] 'A report from the North China Herald', *North China Herald*, 15 Jan. 1853, p. 2.

[92] 'Naval news', *New York Times*, 16 Apr. 1863, p. 8; 'Dai-Ching', 'Fuschia', 'Tulip', 'Dictionary of American naval fighting ships', *Naval history and heritage command* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center) (www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs.html) (18 Apr. 2020).

[93] Hunt, *The making of a special relationship*, pp. 143–4.

[94] Horace Congar to William Seward, 26 May 1862, NARA, vol. 5, RG:59; see also Frederic Wakeman Jr, *The fall of imperial China* (New York, NY, 1975), p. 156.

[95] Dael Norwood, 'Trading in liberty: the politics of the American china trade, c. 1784–1862' (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge, 2012), p. 21.

[96] Horace Congar to William Seward, 15 Feb. 1862, NARA, vol. 5, RG:59.

[97] Archibald Duncan Blue, 'The China coast: a study of British shipping in Chinese waters, 1842–1914' (Ph.D. diss., Strathclyde, 1982), p. 142.

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the threats sensationalized in the papers were never realized in Hong Kong or the treaty ports.[98] Still, the war existed in foreign minds as a construct with immediate ramifications.[99] While the previous section argued that (semi)colonial society proved resilient to metropolitan opinions, these distant crises – the *Alabama* being the most notorious – posed real threats to American shipping that would alter the commercial landscape of Sino-Western trade in the coming decades.

The *Alabama*'s ability to paralyse American shipping in China played upon two inter-related anxieties. The first was piracy's historical prevalence in East Asia and the widely acknowledged dangers of shipping in the Nanyang 南洋 region. The second, stemming from the first, was American reliance upon British military and naval strength in China. This reliance could be traced to the 1840s and the First Opium War, when Americans deferred to British authorities to secure indemnification for damages to their private enterprises and protect their vessels in the Pearl River Delta.[100] Culturally embedded understandings of the numerous personal and commercial risks attending global trade, amplified by the great distance between China and the US and the perception that the Union merchant marine was effectively defenceless, stoked such anxieties.[101] Thus, while the decline in American shipping from East Asia was substantial, it was part of a historically justified global trend that saw prospective clients with little faith in the safety of Union vessels transfer goods to ships sailing under more secure flags.

Rumours about the *Alabama* operating in China were especially concerning as they mirrored regional fears predicated upon Chinese pirates' historical success. Exploiting the Ming and Qing Empires' loose maritime authority, regional pirates had grown syndicated, entrepreneurial, and enjoyed moderate success 'carving out spheres of influence'.[102] To foreign merchants active in the early to mid-nineteenth century, piracy represented a major impediment to trade that they believed the Qing incapable of managing.[103] The irony, Wang Wensheng notes, was that Anglo-American smuggling, opium importation, and blatant schemes to support pirates and rebels against the Qing contributed to the region's lawlessness.[104] Such irony was lost on China's American traders,

[98] For 'invasion literature', the media and vulnerability in the treaty ports, see Bickers, *Scramble for China*, p. 306.

[99] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 1983), p. 14.

[100] Joseph Coolidge, 'Correspondence', *Canton Press*, 7 Aug. 1841, p. 3.

[101] Dane Morrison, *Eastward of Good Hope: early America in a dangerous world* (Baltimore, MD, 2019), pp. 87–8.

[102] Tonio Andrade and Xing Hang, 'The East Asian maritime realm in global history, 1500–1700', in Tonio Andrade, Xing Hang, Anand A. Yang, and Kieko Matteson, eds., *Sea rovers, silver, and samurai: maritime East Asia in global history, 1550–1700* (Honolulu, HI, 2016), pp. 5, 8, 12.

[103] Nathan Kwan, '"Barbarian ships sail freely about the seas": Qing reactions to the British suppression of piracy in South China, 1841–1856', *Asian Review of World Histories*, 8 (2020), p. 84.

[104] Wang Wensheng, *White Lotus rebels and South China pirates: crisis and reform in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), p. 248.

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whose letters home betrayed both concerns and indignance about the insecurity of shipping in such a 'lawless' region.

Vulnerability remained a persistent anxiety for the American community and, leading up to the Civil War, American traders despaired at their navy's 'disgraceful condition' at Hong Kong.[105] Their discontent inspired appeals to domestic contacts, Albert Heard begging in an 1860 letter to New York that the city's influential magnates lobby on the China traders' behalf for more protection.[106] If New Yorkers did, they failed and instead, by the war's 1861 outbreak, the sole sloop *Hartford* that Heard had mentioned was recalled for Union service. The US navy's commander-in-chief in China, Cornelius Stribling, and Commander William Radford of the *Dacotah*, scrutinized as Southern-born Americans but well regarded amongst China's predominantly New Englander community, were reassigned to America where they fought for the Union. With theirs and the *Hartford*'s departure, China's Americans found themselves 'without either protection or a minister'.[107] The only remaining war steamer in the east, the *Saginaw*, floated crewless off Macau and Congar begged Seward to send forces 'able and willing to defend American honor and interests'.[108]

As Anglo-American relations in the Atlantic deteriorated, British and American officials such as Shanghai's Admiral Hope and Hong Kong's Congar prepared for trouble, but the foreign community's common interests helped soothe enflamed tempers. Anticipating the sentiments that would prevail, an 1861 *China Mail* article declared that, should Americans in China require protection, British naval commanders were duty-bound to 'stand by [their] brethren'.[109] As the American Josiah Tatnall had declared at the Bai He in 1860 while disregarding American neutrality during the Second Opium War to rescue stranded British forces, to many foreigners in China 'blood [was] thicker than water'.[110]

Still, assurances published in local newspapers did little to protect American shipping. Despite implicitly understanding that they could rely upon their British neighbours, American traders soon realized the Civil War was undermining their trade. Rumours of Anglo-American hostilities spread through articles and letters from home froze shipping and even already-chartered vessels remained in port.[111] The situation worsened in autumn 1863 when local newspapers reported the *Alabama* had rounded the Cape of Good Hope heading eastward. Such rumours panicked American traders, reducing confidence in 'the use of American tonnage' as vessels in Hong Kong busied themselves changing flags.[112] Unproven reports of the *Fokkien*'s capture in December that year seemingly legitimated such caution.

[105] Albert F. Heard to Augustine Heard Jr, Hong Kong, 14 Feb. 1860, HBS, HL-33A.

[106] Albert Heard to Gray, Hong Kong, 13 Feb. 1860, HBS, HL-33A.

[107] 'Extract of a letter from John Heard', 25 July 1861, HBS, FM-17-1.

[108] Horace Congar to William Seward, 15 Feb. 1862, 26 May 1862, NARA, vol. 5, RG:59.

[109] 'General news', *China Mail*, 25 July 1861, p. 2.

[110] George Heard, 'USS "Powhatan", off the Peiho, 27 June 1859', in Gillian Bickley, ed., *Through American eyes: the journals of George Washington (Farley) Heard* (Hong Kong, 2017), pp. 97–9.

[111] Albert Heard to Augustine Heard Jr, 14 Feb. 1860, HBS, HL-33A.

[112] Horace Congar to William Seward, 10 Oct. 1863, 26 Oct. 1863, 26 Dec. 1863, NARA, vol. 5, RG:59.

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With the flag even 'less in demand than before in Chinese waters', *The China Mail* recommended Americans sell their ships.[113] A reprinted *New York Times* article, guessing incorrectly that four Confederate steamers were operating in East Asia, confirmed that such uncertainty gripped a transnational market, counting only one ship in Liverpool 'loading under the American flag'. Others had swapped flags for those of 'Peru, Prussia, and Portugal', as Eastern insurance offices 'point blank refused' American risks.[114] James Morris estimates that the Union lost one third of its total shipping tonnage as American ships reregistered to escape Confederate raiders, high insurance rates, and Union service.[115] Widespread and damaging as they were, *Alabama* rumours in China barely lasted longer than the ship's eastern voyage. The following spring *The China Mail* reported the *Alabama*'s departure from the region and its subsequent defeat by the *Kearsarge* off Cherbourg, France.[116]

The *Alabama*'s defeat dissipated fears of privateering but made little difference to American merchants who had poured capital into what had, by 1865, become a bloated Yangzi trade. Although Americans maintained some confidence in the river's promised riches, John Heard's exploratory voyage in 1861 had uncovered few viable markets thanks to the Taiping Civil War's destruction.[117] Still, when the Qing restored stability and opened the river to regular commerce, American firms invested heavily in steamships.[118] Appeals to patriotic duty, however, encouraged merchants to sell these steamers to the Union at a loss before they could turn a profit in China.[119] Russell & Co. redirected the *Antelope* and *Flambeau* to the war effort, Olyphant & Co. only ran *Ta-Kiang* two years before chartering it to the Union Navy in 1864, and the Union appropriated other ships including the *Fahkee* and *Howquah* in 1863.[120] Even the *Dai-Ching*, *Chih-Kiang*, and *Kiang-Soo*, commissioned from America by the Qing, were sold instead to the Union.[121] These steamships remained slated for the China trade as soon as they should be freed from military service.

With the war's end, decommissioned vessels flooded East Asia, but China's market for steamships had cooled. Without vessels to dominate the river during the war, or the confidence and security required to sustain an international trade, Americans faltered at a crucial moment. Augustine Heard & Co.'s

[113] 'Shipping charters & settlements', *China Mail*, 3 Dec. 1863, p. 3.

[114] 'Extracts from our foreign files', *New York Times*, 29 Jan. 1864, p. 2; see also Blue, 'The China coast', p. 132; Benito J. Legarda Jr, *After the galleons: foreign trade, economic change and entrepeneurship in the nineteenth-century Philippines* (Manila, 1999), pp. 296–8.

[115] James M. Morris, 'America's stepchild', *The Wilson Quarterly*, 11 (1987), p. 122.

[116] 'Shipping charters & settlements', *China Mail*, 12 May 1864, p. 2; 'Local interests', *China Mail*, 4 Aug. 1864, p. 2.

[117] Heard, 'A trading trip up the Yangtsze', pp. 24–6, 28, 33.

[118] Anne Reinhardt, *Navigating semi-colonialism: shipping, soveriegnty, and nation-building in China, 1860–1937* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), pp. 29–30.

[119] Liu Kwang-ching, 'Financing a steam navigation company in China, 1861–1862', *Business History Review*, 49 (1954), p. 167.

[120] Liu, *Anglo-American steamship rivalry in China*, pp. 22–4; 'Fahkee', 'Howquah', 'Ta-Kiang', 'Dictionary of American naval fighting ships'.

[121] Bickers, *Scramble for China*, p. 179; 'Naval news', *New York Times*, 16 Apr. 1863, p. 8.

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struggles demonstrate how, facing a saturated market, offloading these now unneeded vessels to recover the expense of their construction, outfitting, or purchase became a real challenge. When the firm's steamer *Suwonada* was discharged following two-year's Union service, John Heard wrote his brother Augustine at Boston that 'if she could be sold on the way then all the better'.[122] Heard was optimistic, however, and acting as brokers for the sale of the former gunboats *Pawtuxtet*, *Kankakee*, and *Asheulot*, the firm scrambled to find buyers, only selling two of the ships between January and July 1868.[123] Assessing the situation in 1871, Dixwell complained that shipping and speculation had ruined the company, that Chinese customers had disappeared, and that the firm's capital was frozen in real estate and the ships *Venus* and *Suwonada* – still in the Heards' possession seven years later.[124]

The *Alabama* and the Civil War provided convenient scapegoats to explain American shipping's decline, but there was some truth to such claims and following the war the old merchant houses realized the China trade had changed.[125] The war had come at a promising time for China's foreign firms, and although American merchants were well situated to exploit the Treaty of Tianjin, their domestic conflict claimed the steamships they had built for the Yangzi, temporarily reduced confidence in their firms, and threatened relations with China's British community. In the following decade, George Heard would inform his brothers that their firm's coastal trade and China Sea business had 'about played out'. Like other Americans, Augustine Heard & Co. was 'hard up' for funds, and even their unwavering rival Russell & Co. was conceding the Yangzi to the British Butterfield & Swire.[126] The sociopolitical turmoil Anglo-American tensions caused during the American Civil War quickly faded but, having lost their footing, merchants continued to struggle. The depressed period between the mid-1860s and 1880s would see widespread commercial failure amongst China's American firms.

IV

Hong Kong's 1871 Fourth of July celebration was a jubilant affair. American houses and ships in the harbour were 'lively in their bunting', a cosmopolitan collection of flags adorned the US consulate and, amongst these, those of the US and Britain 'were intertwined'. *The China Mail* congratulated the new US Consul David Bailey for bringing together Americans and non-Americans alike 'in the most friendly manner possible to celebrate the day held in honour'. Bailey attributed the 'good feeling', so different from the previous decade's celebrations, to the 'happy adjustment of all differences between Great

[122] John Heard to Augustine Heard Jr, 24 Apr. 1864, HBS, GM-1-5.

[123] Augustine Heard & Co., Shanghai, to Augustine Heard & Co., Yokohama, 13 May 1868, Jardine Matheson Archive, Cambridge University Library.

[124] George Dixwell to John Heard, 5 June 1871, 19 Oct. 1871, 8 Oct. 1872, HBS, FM-13-1.

[125] Stephen C. Lockwood, *Augustine Heard and Company, 1858–1862: American merchants in China* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), pp. 110–11.

[126] George Heard to Albert F. Heard, 28 Mar. 1870, 5 Apr. 1873, HBS, JL-2; George Heard to Augustine Heard Jr, 19 Feb. 1873, HBS, JL-2; Bickers, *China bound*, pp. 62–6.

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Britain and the United States'. The Anglo-American Treaty of Washington's signing that May had 'cleared away' the difficulties existing between the two nations, establishing 'an *entente cordiale*…welcomed in no part of the world more thoroughly and sincerely than in Hong Kong'.[127]

The Treaty of Washington resolved many outstanding issues related to the *Alabama*'s privateering that plagued China's Anglo-American community. By now, Britain's complicity in the *Alabama*'s creation was well known, and compensation had been sought for the damage Semmes had inflicted upon Union commerce. Whether through action or rumour, such privateers – and the Civil War generally – had frozen Union shipping in ports as distant as China; these crises in turn threatening to incite Anglo-American conflict in the Atlantic and abroad. In signing the Treaty of Washington in 1871, the British agreed to pay a $15,500,000 indemnity to the US, acknowledging and making reparations for their role in allowing the *Alabama* and 'other vessels' to 'escape' their ports, and reaffirming the meaning of neutrality for both parties.[128] Commerce had suffered, but the exigencies of colonial and treaty-port life had mitigated Anglo-American conflict's threat to the socio-political order in China. With the treaty's signing, Bailey hoped a co-operative spirit could return to China's Western community.

Examining the Civil War's global impact through the *Alabama* and China's American community, I have argued that even as rumour and speculation undermined US commercial efforts in East Asia, colonial society proved resistant to the antagonistic sentiments gripping the metropole. Distant anxieties over flashpoints such as the *Alabama*'s and *Florida*'s construction or the *Trent* Affair spread rapidly to ports such as Hong Kong and Shanghai through private letters and newspapers. These reports' effects were manifold, threatening to destabilize Anglo-American society, politics, and commerce in China. Still, while commercial systems proved fragile, crumbling in the face of such distant crises, society rebounded, strengthened by ideas of racial and cultural solidarity and shared experiences in a foreign land.

Adopting a transnational approach to Civil War tensions through the case of the *Alabama* offers an opportunity to assess the wider impact of such events, and the extent to which colonial spaces were susceptible to or insulated from metropolitan influences. Such an approach demonstrates that the colonial context diffused transnational tensions; that even as their enterprises suffered, Americans abroad were less reactive to Civil War panic than might be supposed from metropolitan letters and news reports. When measuring the global impact of any case-study, it is vital to consider not just the ways distant regions were interconnected but the ways in which they remained separate. Throughout the conflict, Anglo-American tensions remained concerning, American commerce struggling to rebound from lost opportunities on the Yangzi and the ephemeral crisis of a distant Civil War, but local affairs and

[127] '"Extract", *The China Mail*, 5 July 1871', in David H. Bailey to Bancroft Davis, 4 July 1871, NARA, vol. 7, RG:59.

[128] Geneva Arbitration Tribunal, *Papers relating to the Treaty of Washington*, V: *Geneva arbitration* (Washington, DC, 1872), p. 8.

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the immediate contexts of Hong Kong and the treaty ports competed for the attention of China's American community. According to their letters home, life went on.

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