

Acknowledgements

My interest in Chinese maritime trade was sparked in 1970 when my husband, who was posted to the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, returned home from a trip to Sarawak with a small parcel wrapped in newspaper and tied with pink plastic string. Inside was a small celadon saucer decorated with two raised fish at its centre that, according to the shopkeeper of the antique shop in Sibuluan, had ‘come from China hundreds of years ago’. Further research revealed that it did indeed date from the thirteenth or fourteenth century and was one of the thousands of Chinese ‘Song fish plates’ exported throughout maritime Southeast Asia at this time. Thanks to this plate, my interest expanded to include later categories of Chinese export porcelains, culminating with a fascination for those wares brought to Britain during the eighteenth century at the height of the *chinoiserie* period. A further interest in the Canton trade, the British East India Company and British society during the Georgian and Regency period was a natural progression.

The opportunity to formally pursue my interest opened up with a return to academic study after a lapse of over 40 years through the Master of Studies program at The Australian National University (ANU) in 2009. I wish to thank my daughter Alex for bringing this course to my attention, and to its academic advisor, Anna Robinson, for her guidance and friendship during the four years of the degree.

The most stimulating course at this time concerned Western views of China conducted by Benjamin Penny at China in the World (CIW). Ben’s invitation to study for a doctorate at CIW and his suggestion that the Amherst Embassy required serious research struck a responsive chord. I had come across references to the embassy in my readings, but its details remained unrecorded due to the predisposition of scholars to gloss over

its importance as a significant event in Anglo–Chinese relations in the early nineteenth century. I was delighted to be given the opportunity to research the embassy in depth and this book is the result.

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