In this engaging new study, John D. Wong examines the Canton trade networks that helped to shape the modern world through the lens of the prominent Chinese merchant Houqua, whose trading network and financial connections stretched from China to India, America, and Britain. In contrast to interpretations that see Chinese merchants in this era as victims of rising Western mercantilism and oppressive Chinese traditions, Houqua maintained a complex balance between his commercial interests and those of his Western counterparts, all in an era of transnationalism before the imposition of the Western world order. The success of Houqua & Co. in configuring its networks in the fluid context of the early nineteenth century remains instructive today as the contemporary balance of political power renders the imposition of a West-centric world system increasingly problematic and requires international traders to adapt to a new world order in which China, once again, occupies center stage.

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Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century

The House of Houqua and the Canton System

John D. Wong

The University of Hong Kong
For Linda
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Acknowledgments

Since its inception, this project has taken more than eight years to reach its present form. Many have accompanied me on this long journey and to them I will be forever indebted. A team of senior colleagues shepherded this project in its first incarnation. Michael Szonyi not only provided a guiding force every step of the way but also assumed the impossible task of helping with the many life problems of this “mature” mentee. Hue-Tam Ho Tai offered generously her insightful comments and helped with the logistical challenges. In addition to inducting me into the study of financial history, Niall Ferguson served as my model of productivity in research and teaching. Elisabeth Köll demonstrated for me time and again how to approach business history when I could not be sure if I was a businessman or a historian.

Many other intellectual creditors have also advanced my work on this project. At Harvard, Peter Bol, Mark Elliott, Henrietta Harrison, William Kirby, Philip Kuhn, and Michael Puett helped with its formulation. In Hong Kong, I enjoyed the warm welcome of the History Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, as well as the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the History Department, and the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Hong Kong. For this, I owe my gratitude to John Carroll, David Faure, Kendall Johnson, and Angela Leung. Paul Van Dyke not only provided invaluable guidance on research in Macao and Guangzhou but also munificently shared with me his data on the Hong merchants. At Sun Yat-sen University, Liu Zhiwei and May-bo Ching, along with their colleagues in the History Department, offered insights on local studies of the Pearl River Delta. Liu Wenzeng facilitated my research in Beijing. In Taiwan, Ch’en Kuo-tung shared with me his tremendous experience researching this topic. Zhang Kan at Xiamen University provided local support for my research in Fujian. In Singapore, I enjoyed the hospitality of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore and the wise counsel of Wang Gungwu. Frederic D. Grant Jr., fellow
Acknowledgments

enthusiast of the Hong merchants, shared with me his collection of U.S. legal cases involving Houqua. During my stay in London, Debin Ma and Kent Deng at the London School of Economics offered me their advice. The Centre for History and Economics arranged for my research at Cambridge University. Thanks also to Patrick Conner, Joshua Derman, James Fichter, Chiara Formichi, He Wenkai, Denise Ho, Loretta Kim, Li Ren-Yuan, Matthew Mosca, Niccolò Pianciola, Winnie Wong, Lawrence Zhang, and the many friends and colleagues who offered comments on this project at various stages.

Spanning three continents and innumerable research sites, this project would not have been possible without the tremendous institutional support I received. My various research visits were funded by a Fulbright Institute of International Education grant, an IHR Mellon Predissertation Fellowship in the Humanities, a Frederick Sheldon Traveling Fellowship, a Mellon Prize Research Grant in History and Economics, a New England Regional Fellowship Consortium (NERFC) grant, as well as study grants from the South Asia Initiative, the Asia Center, and the Fairbank Center at Harvard, and a Hsu Long-sing grant from the University of Hong Kong. In addition to these institutional sponsorships, the project required access to historical materials. Matheson & Co. Ltd. kindly granted me access to the Jardine Matheson archives. I would like to thank in particular the dedicated archivists and librarians at the Baker Library at the Harvard Business School, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the John Carter Brown Library, the Number One Historical Archives in Beijing, the National Palace Archives in Taipei, the Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, the British Library, the National Archives of the United Kingdom, the University Library at Cambridge, and the library at the University of Mumbai. The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited, the Ipswich Public Library, the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), and the Peabody Essex Museum not only facilitated access to their holdings but also granted me permission to include images of their paintings in this book. The team at Cambridge University Press offered critical support during the production stages of this book and for this, I am grateful to Lucy Rhymer, Rosalyn Scott, and Claire Sissen. Nancy Hearst proofread the manuscript. Two anonymous reviewers provided insightful critiques.

My family experienced an eventful period during my work on this research project. In addition to offering encouragement as a fellow journeyman in academia, my brother Andrew also served as a source of mutual support during this time, which witnessed the passing of one
Acknowledgments

parent and the broken leg of the other. My sons Gregory and Ian have provided great impetus to my work as they inquired incessantly about the completion of my “homework.” My wife Linda has been a constant source of support and companionship. To her, my lifelong partner and loyal critic, I dedicate this book.