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978-0-521-33527-0 - British Business in Asia Since 1860

Edited by R. P. T. Davenport-Hines and Geoffrey Jones

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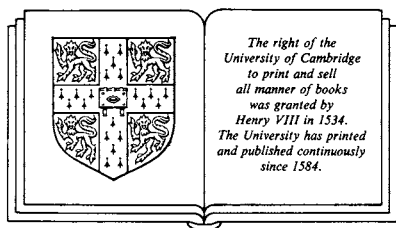
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R. P. T. DAVENPORT-HINES
and
GEOFFREY JONES



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Preface

This book is a study of British business in Asia since the 1860s. The focus is on business enterprise, rather than on trade or investment flows, and the perspective is therefore that of business history rather than macro-economic investment or trade theory. We asked each author to write a survey essay, incorporating the latest research, because our concern in this volume is to offer an overview of long-term trends. Authors were not constricted by editorial controls, however, and the essays in this collection show a variety of methodologies and conclusions as well as chronological periods. Such variety is deliberate: this book seeks to provoke research and debate rather than to enforce *ex cathedra* judgments on any subject. In line with this policy the introductory chapter puts the individual essays in a wider context and identifies some of the more important issues, but does not pretend to offer a comprehensive synthesis.

We hope that this book will attract a wide range of readers: business historians wanting to know how British business performed overseas; Third World specialists concerned with foreign enterprises in their local economies; economists and political scientists interested in multinationals and their antecedents; even – ideally – contemporary Western business people seeking a long-term perspective on current situations in Asian markets. As a result we have felt obliged, especially in chapter 1, to discuss matters and make statements which specialists will regard as elementary if not trite. Our excuse is a belief that most British business historians know little if anything about Asia; most Third World historians know little about current preoccupations in Western business history; and few economists or entrepreneurs have any historical knowledge at all.

The volume is organised on a country by country basis. The diversity of Asian countries justifies this approach, although our selection of particular countries will probably be regarded as idiosyncratic. We believe that the inclusion of Russian Asia and Iran – both of which are geographically part of the Asian continent – is valuable in widening the focus of the volume, and in challenging occasionally narrow Western conventions about what comprises 'Asia'.

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xvi *Preface*

Preliminary versions of the essays contained in this collection were pre-circulated and discussed at a conference at the London School of Economics in September 1986. The meeting was attended by all the contributors except one, together with others who commented on individual papers and general themes. We are grateful to these commentators: Ian Brown, Gill Burke, Clive Dewey and Ian Nish. The footnotes to individual chapters contain more specific acknowledgements by contributors.

Davenport-Hines received a grant of £2,970 from the Nuffield Foundation which eased the preparation of this collection. As a result of this grant, Charlie Wilkinson undertook research at the Public Record Office, the School of Oriental and African Studies and elsewhere which enhanced chapters 1, 2, 6 and particularly 8. Jonathan Smith rendered the disordered holographs of chapters 1 and 8 into typescript acceptable to the printers. Their humour and insight sustained the preparation of this book, and were a joyous discovery amidst the dreary exigencies of academic life. We also thank Susan Crawshaw, Helen Denore and Rosemary Hudson for typing other sections of the volume.

We are grateful to the Hongkong Bank for permission to cite material from their archives in chapters 2, 6 and 8, and also for providing several photographs used in this book. Two of the Bank's officers, Margaret Lee in Hong Kong and S. W. Muirhead in London, have been particularly helpful. Other illustrations were provided by the kindness of R. Glyn Davies of BAT Industries.

We would like to thank the peoples of Asia, especially those of China, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, for their cultures, hospitality and cuisines, which have done so much to inspire our burgeoning interest in the region.