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Front cover Detail from Daqing Wannian Yitong Dili Quantu' [Complete Map of the Everlasting Unified Qing Empire] China, c. 1814–16. After Qian-ren HUANG. 132 x 253 cm HKUST Library 1814 G7820 1814.D3er



FROM ‘FANCHIN CHOW’ TO ‘OLINCHY HARBOUR’

Alexander Dalrymple’s charts and views of the coasts of China

Peter Geldart

Alexander Dalrymple (1737–1808) was the most important and prolific British cartographer of Asia in the eighteenth century. Over his long career with the Honourable East India Company (EIC) and the British Admiralty, he compiled, wrote, edited and/or published over 1,350 marine charts, plans, sheets of views, sailing directions, memoirs and books covering parts of Africa, India, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia, the Pacific, Northwest America, the east coast of South America, and islands in the Atlantic and Indian oceans. Of these, close to forty are of the coasts of eastern China, Hainan, the Pearl River Delta and adjacent islands, including the first chart to show and name Hong Kong Island (see Appendix I and Appendix II).

Dalrymple’s opinions were strongly held and sometimes controversial, but his contributions to cartography were outstanding. To quote Dr Howard T. Fry: ‘Dalrymple’s great work ... was of particular significance for the expansion of British commerce. Before his time British charts were most inadequate, whereas at the time of his death Britain led the world in the science of hydrography ... due to Dalrymple’s life-long and indefatigable endeavours in this field’.¹

From Madras to China

Born in 1737 at Newhailes near Edinburgh, Dalrymple was the seventh son and one of fifteen children of Sir James Dalrymple, 2nd Baronet. He was educated at a school in the nearby town of Haddington. At the age of 15, he was officially appointed as a writer (clerk) in the EIC and sailed for India, arriving at Fort St. George in Madras in May 1753 on board the *Suffolk* (Captain William Wilson).

Because his handwriting was not up to the standards of legibility required by the EIC, Dalrymple was initially given a post as Assistant Storekeeper. However,

through a family connection he had the support and encouragement of George Pigot, the new Governor of Madras Presidency. In 1755 he was lifted out of the Company’s office routine, moved to the Secretary’s office, appointed to learn assaying gold and silver to facilitate the EIC’s trade in the export of bullion to the Far East, and was taught to write ‘a very good and fluent hand’.² In May 1757 he was promoted to Deputy Secretary to the Madras Presidency government.

Two years later Dalrymple stepped aside from the promotion ladder to make the first of his three voyages to the eastern seas, using the new route from Madras to China pioneered in 1757–59 by the recently-promoted Commodore Wilson in the *Pitt*. This so-called Eastern Passage, also known as Pitt’s Passage, went south of the Equator (via Batavia, the Spice Islands, and the northwest coast of New Guinea), then northeast to the east of the Philippines, and finally around Luzon and northwest to Macao. The passage was to be used increasingly by East Indiamen keen to avoid the dangers of the China Sea, especially at times of war. Dalrymple also wanted to explore opportunities for British trade in the East Indies, especially a scheme (which he had discussed with Pigot) to establish a trading settlement in the Sulu Archipelago.

Dalrymple left Madras in April 1759, travelled to Malacca on the *Winchelsea*, and embarked on the schooner *Cuddalore* (Captain George Baker), where he took charge of the ship with Captain Baker retaining control of navigation and management of the vessel. They reached Macao in early July, where Baker surveyed the anchorages to the south of the island of Taipa. The resulting chart, ‘Plan of the Typa near Macao in China by Captⁿ. George Baker 1759’, would be published by Dalrymple on 30 April 1780.

The *Cuddalore* then spent two months exploring the islands to the north of Luzon. The ship returned to Macao in October 1759. Although Dalrymple and Baker remained friends for life, in order to avoid the continuation of dual control of the ship, which was considered ‘incompatible with the public service’,

Fig. 1 Alexander Dalrymple at Newhailes, wearing the uniform of a sea-officer of the East India Company, in a painting of c.1765 attributed to John Thomas Seton. © National Museums of Scotland. <https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/science-and-technology/alexander-dalrymples-portrait/>

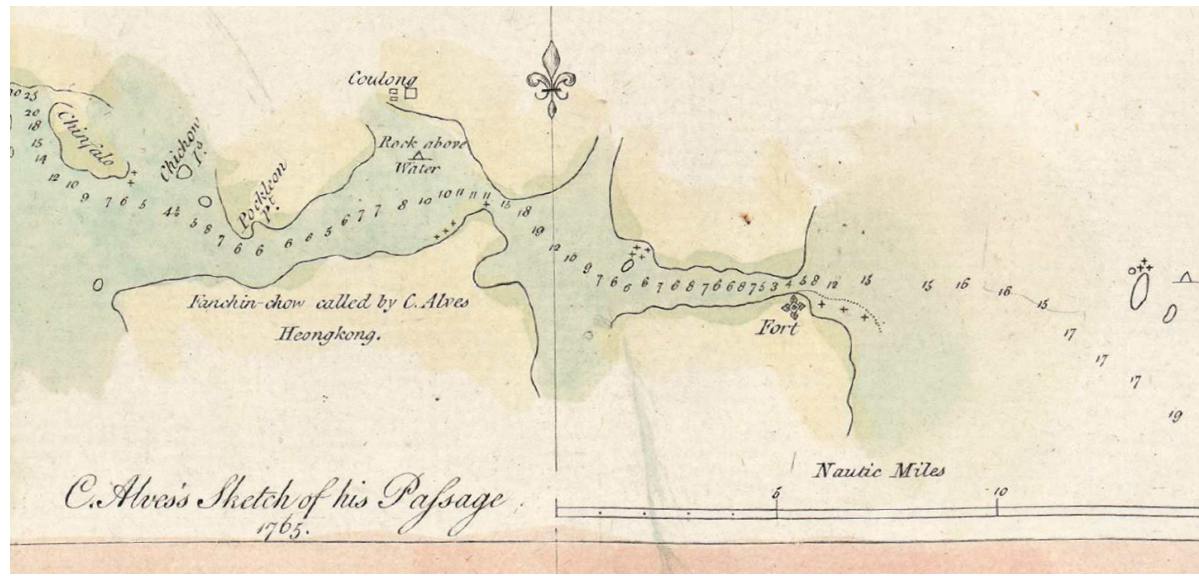


Fig. 3 Inset from 'Chart of Part of the Coast of China By Felis Mendocça 1760', published by Dalrymple in 1771, showing 'Fanchin-chow called by C. Alves Heongkong'. © Biblioteca Nacional de España MR/6/I SERIE 53/86. <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000062426>

islet – 飯甌洲 “Cooking Pot Island” – that appears on English-language charts as Conic Island but is sometimes Romanised as Fan Chin Chau. Given that a known name for Hong Kong Island was Hung Heung Lo (Shan) – 紅香爐 (山) or “Red Incense Burner Island” – a plain old cooking pot might be a possible variant.¹³

Later in 1771 Dalrymple published a 'Chart of Part

of the Coast of China By Felis Mendocça 1760', which shows the entrance to Daya Bay. The main chart has an inset chart by Walter Alves, the captain of the *London*, titled 'C. Alves's Sketch of his Passage 1765'. This shows the passage from Fat Tau Mun to Kap Shui Mun through Victoria Harbour, between Kowloon and Hong Kong Island (Fig. 3), and carries a note on the island that reads: 'Fanchin-chow called

by C. Alves Heongkong' – the first appearance of that name on any map.

In 1771 Dalrymple published two more charts of the southern coasts of China. His 'Chart of the Coast of China, adjacent to Honghai Island, from Observations in the Schooner Cuddalore, 1759', published in *Journal of the Schooner Cuddalore*, Oct. 1759, *On the Coast of China*, shows the coast of Honghai Wan to the north of Pedro Blanco. The 'Chart of the S.E. Coast of Hainan from a Swedish Chart made in 1742, by Captⁿ. C.G. Ekberg, with additions & alterations, Laid down from Observations in ye Schooner Cuddalore in May 1760', published in *Journal of the Schooner Cuddalore On the Coast of Hainan 1760*, shows the coast of Hainan Island to the northeast of Yulinkan Bay.

Together with his charts of the coasts of China, Dalrymple also published five sheets of coastal views. Of these, the most interesting is view No. 4 in 'Views of Coast of China by AD Plate 1'. The profile shows 'Fanchin Chow' from 'Chinfalo' to 'Typak-howe' (Green Island), Lamma, and a series of islands to the west (Fig. 4). This is the first known drawing of Hong Kong Island, and shows the Peak and High West as the most prominent features. In *Memoir of the Chart of the Coast of China*, Dalrymple describes how, on 19 November 1764, he drew the view after climbing a hill on the island he named Cowhee (now Ma Wan), as follows:

Having set out, about 11 AM, in a Chinese Boat for

Cowhee, we rowed in with the Hill near the L[eft] Extreme, where we landed at a Net-hut, and walked up the Hill, but not having a distinct View of the Islands without Lantao, we went across the Island to the highest Hill, which is near the southern Part of Cowhee: There are several Vallies and some Houses, the Land well cultivated and extremely pleasant: The Chinese Man, belonging to the Boat, accompanied us, and, before we reached the Hill, we were attended by a dozen of the Country People, who shewed great Curiosity, but no Rudeness; on the contrary, one voluntarily held the Top of the Compass-box, whilst I drew a View of the Islands upon it; this View is No. 4.¹⁴

As with Fanchin Chow, Cowhee would have been the Romanised version of a name Dalrymple was given by a local fisherman or pilot. Stephen Davies notes the name's similarity with the island of Kau Yi Chau (交椅洲), sometimes called Dai Kau Yi Chau ('Great Chair Island') and suggests that Cowee / Ma Wan could have been 'Little Chair Island'. Most eighteenth-century navigators and cartographers would name places they had 'discovered' after a ship, a patron, or a reference to the indigenous inhabitants, but Dalrymple would always prefer to use local toponyms when these were available or, if not, a name descriptive of the topography or a prominent local geographic feature.

View No. 5 on the same Plate 1 is also of interest. Mariners sailing into the Pearl River Estuary would

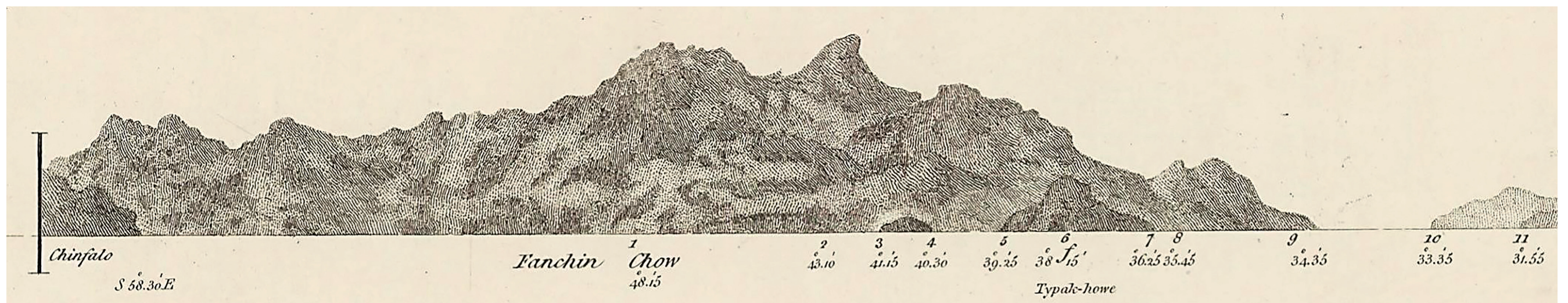


Fig. 4 Detail of view of Fanchin Chow from 'Views of Coast of China Plate 1' (No. 4), published by Dalrymple on 6 November 1783 © Bibliothèque nationale de France – <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b5963035f.r=Dalrymple?rk=21459;2>