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The Junks and Sampans of the Yangtze

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President Nixon's recent trip to China provided the American viewers with their first public view of China in 20 years, and in the course of the extravaganza there was revealed a new, modern, and efficient China. Admiral Tolley's book describes an entirely different face of the Middle Kingdom. As well as recounting the lives and work of American navy men in China, *Yangtze Patrol* presents an interesting study of the struggle for control of China, particularly between the first revolution in 1911 and the outbreak of World War II. Within this time period China was the scene of almost ceaseless warfare; between the warlords, between the warlords and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and between Chiang and the Communists. How did the nation survive?

Battles took place in China only when the contending forces were of equal or nearly equal strength. When one side outnumbered the other, it was customary for the smaller force to surrender or to join the larger. Foreigners found this philosophy to be very comic, whereas it was in fact proof of the profoundly pragmatic nature of ancient Chinese civilization. Had the ground rules not been such, the loss of life during the generally senseless civil wars from 1911 to 1926 would have been frightful. (p. 128)

The author also describes the confrontation between the Communists and the Nationalists, but the book is not entirely of war. *Yangtze Patrol* is essentially a story of the men and ships of the Chinese river patrols, with all the humor and horror that was the lot of the gunboat crews and their officers.

There is even something in the book for the Marines, with brief descriptions of the actions of the Fourth Marines. Yet, perhaps more interesting is the account of the time that "Brute" Krukak made a slight "miscalculation"; how-

ever, he managed to recover with the aplomb for which he was famous.

Yangtze Patrol is an excellent history of an era of naval warfare that is most often the subject of sea stories. The book contains a wealth of material that reads like a novel, yet is fact. It is the type of light history that is easily read and highly interesting.

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Worcester, George R.G. *The Junks and Sampons of the Yangtze*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1971. 626p.

Americans generally tend to consider China as a great landmass probably because their impressions of that country are gained from small-scale maps in geography textbooks. Rather, it is a region of great rivers that open this heart of Asia to the sea. These rivers and a long coastline are what make this vast land area a maritime country.

The Jesuit missionary Gabriel Maillaens, in 1688, reported that there were more vessels in China than in the rest of the world together. This is probably still the case. Passenger traffic and the movement of freight is still mainly by junk which, except for the Arab dhow, is the world's only remaining commercial sailing vessel. The dhow is usually an open deck craft with a single lateen sail and is incapable of complex navigation and piloting. The junk, on the other hand, is a sophisticated, unique vessel with battened lug rigged sails, watertight compartmented hull, and, in many cases, balanced rudder. It is a universal type that has been adapted to almost every transport function on sea and river from railroad ferry to live fish carriers; flower boats and the fufu junks were essential and kept a malodorous balance between city sanitation and rural agriculture in a country that cannot afford domestic animals. Oddly, "junk" is not a Chinese term but a Portuguese adoption of the

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Javanese word for ship, "djong." The Chinese term is "ch'uan." The Chinese small boat, "sampan," also has many distinctive functional types. Flat-bottomed, with very shallow draft, about 14 feet long and 4 feet wide, it is propelled by a single scull over the stern or by poles.

Junks and Sampans of the Yangtze has over 900 illustrations, most of them drawings to scale of these craft performing their many functions. There are also charming sketches like that of the five-masted Pechili trader (page 167) and several of the crooked stern junks of the Upper Yangtze. All were drawn by the author himself during his years of field research. Informative footnotes are tastefully placed at the side of the page together with many small photographs and model drawings of seagoing tools and parts. All contribute to making a beautiful book.

This large, folio-sized volume, however, is far more than a definitive work on these unusual sailing vessels. It is also a study of Chinese philosophy in which one gets a sense of this timeless land "just before time there ceased to stand still." It is also a detailed geographical presentation of the world's fifth largest and one of its foremost rivers, the major lifestream of a great continental country. One can follow the river from its estuary near fabled Shanghai to Ping-

shan, 1,700 miles from the sea, where the Min River joins after its 12,000 feet descent from the plateau of Tibet. A colorful discussion is devoted to the 200 miles from Ichang to Wansien, and the passage of the famous gorges that divide the Upper River from the rest of the Yangtze. The Chinese proverb warns: "It is more difficult to ascend to Szechwan than to ascend to heaven."

George Raleigh Gray Worcester left the British Navy in 1919 at the age of 29 to become River Inspector in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. For 30 years he surveyed the Chinese coast and rivers and assisted in opening the Yangtze to steam navigation. He was released from other duties during the last 8 years to devote his time to Chinese nautical research, the result of which is this book, revised from five earlier works of limited circulation. His research was done during one of the most critical periods in China's tumultuous history, and he and his wife spent 3 years in a Japanese prison camp. After World War II he returned to England and served for 7 years as editor of the famed scholarly nautical publication, *The Mariner's Mirror*. He died in 1969, happy in the knowledge that his work would appear in its present form.

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There is only one way to read a book, to give yourself up to it, alone, without instruction as to what you should be finding in it, without the necessity of making it into a series of points, but enjoying it, coming to know in personal terms what is in the mind of the writer.

Harold Taylor, "The Private World of the Man with a Book," *Saturday Review*, 7 January 1961