

Cadet Israel Reinius and Finland's first China-dissertation in 1749

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During the past couple of years, I have had the privilege to do a fascinating journey to mid-18th century China onboard a Swedish merchant ship. I have been sailing together with Finnish cadet Israel Reinius, born in 1727. This trip has been possible thanks to a book written by cadet Reinius himself, as well as through various maritime museum collections and archive materials in Sweden and in Finland. The journey has opened for me a wide window for looking at Finland's early connections to China and the encounters of 18th century Finns with peoples along the long sea route from Europe to Asia.

It was in 1744 when two brothers, Israel and Herman Reinius from Laihia, Western Finland, decided to study seafaring in Stockholm. After two years, they enrolled as cadets to work for the Swedish East India Company based in Gothenburg, Western Sweden. The company's ships sailed to Canton, China, to buy tea, silk, and porcelain – luxury goods that were in high demand in Europe.

The Swedish East India Company was the biggest Swedish corporation of its time. Yet it was far smaller than its European peers in England, Holland, and other great maritime powers. However, the Swedish ships were bigger, thanks to new ship technology developed in the Nordics. Also, their role was quite important in merchandise trade during times when other Europeans, such as the English and French were constantly in war and their ships were engaged in battles at the sea.

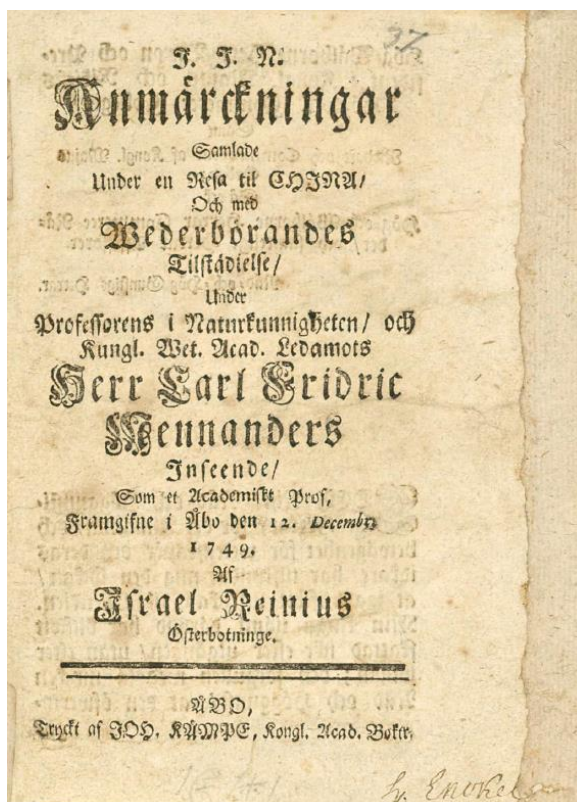
The Reinius brothers stepped onboard the ship named *Cronprinsen Adolph Friedrich* that sailed to Canton and back in 1746–48. The ship sailed from Gothenburg southwards all the way around Africa and through the Indian Ocean towards China. Because Israel Reinius was a cadet, his job was to keep

a logbook, a detailed diary of the whole journey. This book, written in old Swedish, has been reprinted in 2008 and published by the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland.

During the journey, Israel makes detailed notes on his observations in his logbook-diary, whether it is about weather conditions, vegetation, or habitat that he sees on the way and at the various stop-over places that the ship enters to buy new supplies and to fill food and water storages. The first stop is in Cadiz, Spain, then in the Canary Islands, followed by a longer stop in Cape Town. Then, after a long sea trip, the next stop is in Mauritius, and then in Java island, Macau, and finally, Canton.

The diary tells about the hardships of the journey. By our standards, the ships were very small, the lack of food and water was constant for the deckmen, and the work was very dangerous indeed. Accidents were frequent, and the death rate was around 10 per cent. All the time, around one fourth of the crew was either ill or injured, and tropical illnesses were so bad that the ship surgeon could do nothing with them. Working discipline was tough, and life onboard was tightly scheduled and limited especially for the common crew.

However, the diary also tells about the observations that Reinius was able to make in China, in the tightly controlled city of Canton that was the only place where foreign merchants were allowed to enter. The various European East India Companies had their offices next to each other on the shores of the designated coastal part of the city. Trade between the Chinese and European merchants was conducted there, with long-lasting negotiations on the merchandise, the products and prices. Cadet Reinius observes, and writes in his diary, that “the Cantonese are mid-sized people, strong to carry”, and that they are fast-minded, intelligent and merchant-minded people who are interested even in small profits, and, who try to cheat especially the Europeans. Reinius perceives the Chinese as lively, happy, mentally stable and controlled, and as people who do not openly expose their possible setbacks. He also describes the environments in Canton, its geography, and the religions, livelihoods and the trade practices of the local people.



After the Company finishes trading in Canton, the ship is loaded, and it heads back to Sweden as soon as possible, to sell all the valuable and luxurious Chinese products that the Europeans desire. Upon returning back, the Reinius brothers leave the Company and travel from Gothenburg to Stockholm and sail across the Bothnian Sea towards Vasa, the Finnish Ostrobothnia, to head back home. During the very last days of the trip, their boat crashes on the Finnish islands, but they are saved by local fishermen, and they survive.

Returning safely back home, Israel soon continues his studies to become a priest after his father's wish. He therefore finishes his sailing career, and instead enrolls at the Royal Academy of Turku, Finland's first university. There, Israel Reinius writes a dissertation entitled “*Anmärckningar Samlade Under en Resa til CHINA*”, that is, “Notes collected during a voyage to China” based on his extensive diary-logbook. His thesis, in 1749, becomes the first ever dissertation about China written in Finland.

Today, 270 years later, we have gathered here in Turku for the Asian Studies Days, an annual meeting of Finnish Asia researchers and students. Commemorating the adventures of Israel Reinius, and his studies, it is therefore appropriate to celebrate the beginnings of Finnish Asian Studies that came into being here in Turku. May I propose a toast to Reinius and his dissertation! Thank you!

This blog is based on Erja Kettunen's speech given at the Reception of the conference Asian Studies Days 2019, University of Turku, 26 November 2019

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Pictures: [1] Canton, late 18th century (By Anonymous). View of Hoppo (Canton Customs Official) returning by boat on an official call on the East India Company. Source: Wikimedia Commons. http://hkmasvr.lcsd.gov.hk/HKMACS_DATA/web/Object.nsf/HKMACS_DATA/web/Object.nsf/0/00FD4A61E104D5504825706800135806?OpenDocument&lang=e, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=54294316>

[2] Israel Reinius' dissertation, 1749. "Anmarckningar samlade under en resa til China". Åbo : tryckt af Joh. Kämpe, Kongl. Acad. boktr., 1749. [*Notes collected during a journey to China*; in Swedish Turku: Printed by Joh. Kämpe, Printing house of the Royal Academy of Turku, 1749.] Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2014-00003401>