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WHO AND WHAT WERE THE CATHAYANS?

By Y. Z. CHANG

On two separate occasions Shakespeare referred to a "Cataian." Disreputable Nym in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* and noble Olivia in *Twelfth Night* were alike called by that name. George Steevens, Gifford's "Puck of commentators" and Garrick's "pest to society," suggested in his edition of *Merry Wives* that the term was used to "signify a sharper," from "the dexterous thieving of those people." "The Chinese (anciently called Cataians) are said to be the most dexterous of all the nimble-fingered tribe; and to this hour they deserve the same character."¹ Robert Nares followed Steevens in his *Glossary*, 1822. As Nym is a shady character, it seems that Steevens might be right; and his suggestion has been almost universally accepted. But when applied to the high born maiden in *Twelfth Night*, it does not fit so well. The absurdity of a man, though somewhat intoxicated, calling his own wealthy niece a sharper or crook, is apparent. Furness, in annotating the New Variorum *Twelfth Night*, found it hard to accept,² though he was unable to refute it.

(I)

The question of who and what were the Cathayans and whether they had the reputation of thieves and sharpers is a difficult one. In their intimate contact with the Tartars of Cathay, their conquerors and rulers, the native Cathayans were all but completely neglected by the western travellers. The work of Marco Polo, the principal source regarding Cathay, contains several chapters dealing with the Tartars, but not a single chapter about the Cathayans, outside of the account of the conspiracy to rebel, planned by certain Cathayans at Cambalu during the absence of the grand Khan, Kublai.

As the country was a part of the Tartar empire, Heylyn placed it among the nations of Tartaria in his popular *Cosmographie*.³ He

¹ *Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. Malone and Boswell (London, 1821), p. 66.

² *Twelfth Night*, ed. H. W. Furness (Philadelphia, 1901), p. 119.

³ Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes* (London, 1652), part III, p. 186. Heylyn says that Tartaria is divided into five parts: Tartaria Precopensis, Tartaria Asiatica, Zagathay, Cathay, and Tartaria Antiqua.

also took it for granted that they were Tartars, though "more honorable than the rest."⁴ Marco Polo repeatedly mentioned the fact that the Cathayans were suspected and distrusted by the great Khan.⁵

As far as the English Renaissance is concerned, the Cathayans constitute one of the Tartar nations. But with the rest of Tartaria presenting an appearance of vast wildernesses dotted with the tents of their nomadic inhabitants,⁶ the civil urban life of the Cathayans indicates a degree of civilization much superior to that of their conquerors. An almost beardless race of people, they first appeared in Polo's account as being kept in subjection by force, and distrusted by the Khan, their new ruler. Even then, they attempted to rebel. "Gambling and other modes of cheating" were the vices, "to which the people of this country are addicted more than any others upon earth"; and the Khan gave strong orders to prohibit such malpractices.⁷

Johannes de Plano Carpini⁸ says:

The men of Kytay are pagans, having a special kind of writing by themselves, and (as it is reported) the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. . . . They love Christians, and bestow much alms, and are a very courteous and gentle people. They have no beards, and they agree partly with the Mongals in the disposition of their countenance. In all occupations which men practise, there are not better artificers in the whole world.⁹

Anthony the Armenian states:

The Cataians do so much differ from other nations in their fashions and manner of living, that it were tedious to treat of the manifold diversity and strange variety found amongst them. They acknowledge and confess one Immortal God, and they call upon his name: yet they neither fast nor pray, nor any ways afflict nor humble themselves, for fear or reverence of him, nor do any good works. The killing of men they hold to be no sin: but if they happen to leave their bridle in their horse-mouth when he should feed, they think therein they offend God mortally. Fornication and lechery

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, p. 199.

⁵ *Travels of Ser Marco Polo*, II, chap. vii and viii.

⁶ *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (London, 1905), p. 214. The information is from Carpini. See below.

⁷ *Marco Polo*, II, chap. xxvi.

⁸ Carpini's account is in the 1598-1600 edition of Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*.

⁹ *The Voyage of Johannes de Plano Carpini*, in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, p. 225.

is held by them as no sin. They marry many wives, and the custom is, that the son must marry his stepmother after the death of his father: and the brother is married to his brother's wife after his decease.¹⁰

The Cathayans of this account were Tartars.

Friar William de Rubruquis identified them with the Seres, mentioned the skill of their physicians, and the Nestorians who lived there. He says:

Beyond Muc is great Cataya, the inhabitants whereof (as I suppose) were of old time, called Seres. For from them are brought most excellent stuffes of silk. And this people is called Seres, of a certain town in the same country. . . . They are excellent workmen in every art: and their physicians are well skilled in the virtues of herbs, and judge exactly of the pulse; but use no urinals, nor know anything concerning urine. . . . The Nestorians inhabit fifteen cities of Cathay, and have a Bishopricke there, in a city called Segin. . . . They are great usurers and drunkards, and some of them also who live among the Tartars, have many wives, as the Tartars have.¹¹

Like Marco Polo, in discussing the customs of the country under survey, the author of *Mandeville* entitled the chapter, "Of the Law and the Customs of the Tartarians dwelling in Cathay. . . ." ¹² So that, outside of Carpini's brief account, it was certainly very hard for the people of Shakespeare's day to tell from the accounts of Polo and Mandeville, who and what the Cathayans were, and what their relation to the Seres and Tartars was.

Peter Heylyn, confronted with the difficult task of describing the Cathayans in his section on Cathay, concocted his account out of his various sources:

The people are generally very warlike, strong of body, quick of action, fearless of the greatest dangers, patient both of want and labours: of mean stature, little eyes, sharp-sight, and thin beards. Industrious they are in several manufactures, of a good wit for dispatch of business: more honorable than the rest of the Tartars, as loving to dress themselves gorgeously, to fare sumptuously (if there be occasion), to live in handsome houses, and to frequent the most populous and best-traded cities. They account not any for a wife till she bear them children, nor till then do meddle their dowries; but repudiate them at a certain time, if they find them barren. They reverence their Cham, or Emperor, even to adoration: not suffering any

¹⁰ S. Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (Glasgow, 1905-1907), XI, 361-362.

¹¹ S. Purchas, *op. cit.*, XI, 67-68.

¹² *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, p. 162.

stranger to come in his presence, except he be first purged: if any otherwise presume, it is present death.¹³

Outside of the industry and the sumptuous manner of living, the other features, such as the strange marriage custom, the warlike character, and the "purging," came from different sources relating to the Tartars who dwelt in Cathay.

Correct in his assertion that they practised polygamy, a common practice in many parts of the east, he was, nevertheless, mistaken in saying that the religion

publicly allowed and countenanced, is that of Mahomet, but so that they obey the Pentateuch of Moses, and observe many things there commanded. . . . But finding by the Mahometan agents, who then labored to bring them to their superstition, that Mahomet allowed of many wives, and other things more agreeable to their fleshly lusts, they conformed to that. . . .¹⁴

This was what happened to the Tartars outside of Cathay, and its attribution to the Cathayans is without foundation.

The Cathay of Heylyn consisted of two provinces: Cathay proper or Serica, and Altay or Scythia Extra Montem Imaum. The people of different parts of Altay were quite dreadful:

Camul, an idolatrous country, the people whereof account it a great honour to them to have their wives and sisters at the pleasure of such as they entertain. From such brutish custom when restrained by Mango Chan, they petitioned him at three years' end to be restored again to their former liberty; protesting they could never thrive since they left that custom. Which desire of theirs was at last granted, and is still in use. . . .

About Caidu, he says, "the women of this tract [are] prostituted unto every traveller."

Carazan, inhabited by a barbarous and savage people, who in the day time live in dens for fear of serpents, with which . . . they are much infested; and in the night go forth to prey upon wolves and lions. They have an use, that when any stranger cometh into their houses, of an handsome shape, to kill him in the night; not out of desire of spoil, or to eat his body, but that the soul of such a comely body, might remain amongst them.¹⁵

The people of Cathay proper or Serica were "very industrious in their times, and amongst other things in the making of silk

¹³ Heylyn, *Cosmographie*, III, 199.

¹⁴ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, III, 201. The material probably came from Marco Polo.

(made of a fine wool growing on the leaves of trees) from hence named Serica." Nor were their women "very industrious only, but chaste and temperate."¹⁶ Quoting from Ammianus Marcellinus, he says, "they are a frugal nation, lovers of quiet, nor troublesome unto their neighbours, without the use of arms, and the knowledge of battles, declining the company of strangers, and so far from covetousness, or curiosities, that when any merchants come unto them to buy their silks, without much beating of the price, they let them have such things as are bred amongst them, without looking after the commodities of other countries."¹⁷ Not only had Serica been long civilized, but parts of Altay also. "Tangut, the greatest and most potent of all the rest (in Scythia Extra Imaus or Altay), inhabited by an industrious and laborious people, amongst whom the art of printing is said to have been extant a thousand years."¹⁸

The original Tartars were not very cultured people.

In behavior [says Heylyn] they are rude and barbarous, as before was said; eating their enemies when they take them, as in way of revenge, first letting out their blood which they receive into cups, and use it as wine unto their feast. Though swift of foot, yet generally they love to ride though it be but on oxen; about whose necks, as about their horses, when they travel, they use little bells, with which music they are much delighted. . . . Their speech, even in their common talk, is a kind of whining; and their singing little better than the howlings of wolves. They eat commonly with unwashed hands, the dirt and grease from their fingers serving as a sauce for their meat, which they devour greedily, and with little chewing; and for their ordinary drink use mare's milk.¹⁹

This account is corroborated, to a certain extent, by Friar Johannes de Plano Carpini, ambassador of the Pope to the court of Cuyne Khan, emperor of the Tartars. "With whom [emperor of the Tartars]," says he, "we continued for the space of one whole month in such extreme hunger and thirst, that we could scarce hold life and soul together. For the provision allowed us for four days, was scantily sufficient for one day."²⁰ This probably was

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, III, 199.

¹⁷ *The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus*, Bk. XXIII, ch. 6, tr. C. D. Yonge (London, 1902), pp. 341-342.

¹⁸ Heylyn, *op. cit.*, III, 202.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, III, 185.

²⁰ *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, p. 256.

not done intentionally to distress the friar-ambassador; nevertheless, courtesy to foreigners was not their dominant characteristic.

But towards other people [says Carpini] the said Tartars be most insolent, and they scorn and set nought by all other noble and ignoble persons whatsoever. For we saw in the emperor's court the great Duke of Russia, the king's son of Georgia, and many great soldans receiving no due honor and estimation among them. . . . Moreover they are angry and of a disdainful nature unto other people, and beyond all measure deceitful, and treacherous towards them.²¹

This was how the Tartars acted, and such was their nature, about the year 1246.

In less than fifty years' time, the Tartars had come into Cathay, Cuyne Khan was gone, and the grand Khan Kublai was wearing the crown of the Tartar empire. Instead of the harsh treatment of strangers, and injuries and indignities offered to envoys from foreign countries, we hear of "large and handsome buildings, having several well-furnished apartments, hung with silk, and provided with everything suitable to persons of rank," along every principal highway of the empire; and that "ambassadors to the court, and the royal messengers, go and return through every province and kingdom of the empire with the greatest convenience and facility."²²

Instead of extortions and niggardliness, we hear of the extensive charities of the grand Khan. Instead of contempt and ill-treatment of foreign priests of another religion, we hear of toleration and respect given to different religions, at court as well as in the provinces. "Their style of conversation is courteous; they salute each other politely, with countenances expressive of satisfaction, have an air of good breeding, and eat their victuals with particular cleanliness."²³ Friar Carpini, had he lived until the return of Polo, would certainly have found it difficult to believe that the precious stones bestowed by the Tartar emperor brought wealth to the lucky recipient, and that no attempt was made to rob him and his company while they were travelling through the Tartar empire on their way home. The fierce and clownish Tartar that Carpini knew was transformed into a cultured and civil gentleman, though

²¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 217-218.

²³ *Ibid.*, II, chap. xxvi.

²² *Marco Polo*, II, chap. xx.

still retaining some old cherished customs of his nomadic ancestors. And in the difference between the old and the new Tartar can be seen the influence of Cathay, its people and its civilization.

We are not to suppose that this difference can be perceived only in the light of modern research, and therefore, was beyond the reach of the readers of the Renaissance. A specific mention in *Marco Polo* points clearly to such a difference.

It should be known [he says] that the Tartars, when they followed their original customs, and had not yet adopted the religion of the idolaters, were not in the practice of bestowing alms, and when a necessitous man applied to them, they drove him away with injurious expressions, saying, 'Begone with your complaint of a bad season which God has sent you; had he loved you, as it appears he loves me, you would have prospered as I do.' But since the wise men of the idolaters, and especially the baksis (Buddhist priests), already mentioned, have represented to his majesty that providing for the poor is a good work and highly acceptable to their deities, he has relieved their wants in the manner stated, and at his court none are denied food who come to ask it.²⁴

Polo mentions "gambling and other modes of cheating," as the wicked pastime of the Cathayans; Carpini mentions their courtesy, ingenuity, and industry; Rubruquis, their physicians; and when we add to it Polo's "wise men of the idolaters," who were instrumental in bringing the grand Khan to see the importance of charity, and probably exerted their influence in shaping the monarch's other governmental policies, we have reproduced a fair picture of the Cathayans that was before the eyes of readers in the English Renaissance.

But, as far as Steevens's theory that Cathayan stands for a sharper or thief is concerned, we cannot very well take Polo's "gambling and other modes of cheating" as an evidence to support the "sharper" side of the definition. It apparently refers to gambling and other forms of pastime, of a doubtful moral value, and not approved by Polo. The sharper in *Merry Wives*, whom Steevens had in mind, was one who lived by his wits, not to be confused with the man who "sporting" away his estate by gambling, which the grand Khan sought to prohibit.²⁵

The author of *Mandeville* says, "there be neither thieves ne rob-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, chap. xxiv; S. Purchas, *op. cit.*, XI, 252.

²⁵ *Marco Polo*, II, ch. xxvi.

bers in that country.”²⁶ The name of thief was not known in Heylyn’s *Serica* or *Cathay Proper*. Even in the less civilized part of Cathay, *Scythia Extra Imaum*, where among the people were numerous idolaters, enchanters, evil spirits, whoresons, murderers, and adulterers, there were no thieves.²⁷

(II)

The Chinese, as far as he was known in the English Renaissance, was certainly neither a thief nor a sharper. What is more, he appeared in many respects different from the Cathayan.

According to Gonzalez de Mendoza, the Chinese were “well proportioned” but “somewhat tall.”²⁸ “Though that the Chinas commonly are ill-favored,” says Gaspar da Cruz,

having their faces and noses flat, and are beardless, with some few hairs in the points of the chin: some notwithstanding there are which have very good faces, and well proportioned, with great eyes, their beards well set, and their noses well shapen; but these are few, and it may be they are of other nations.²⁹

In complexion, some are swarthy, and others fair. “In Canton and all other places of that coast, they are tawny, like unto those of Fez and Morocco, but all within the land are of the colour like unto those of Spain, Italy, and Flanders, white and red, and of good growth.”³⁰ “The Chinese race is of an almost white color,” says Nicholas Trigault, “but some from the southern provinces, on account of the nearness to the torrid zone are somewhat brown.”³¹ “A beard,” he continues, “is rare among them. The beard and the whole head (hairs?) is of a black color, and red hair is a shameful thing among the Chinese.”³² Amusing legends regard-

²⁶ *Mandeville*, p. 164.

²⁷ Heylyn, *op. cit.*, III, 201-202.

²⁸ J. Gonzales de Mendoza, *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China*, tr. R. Parke [1st ed. 1588] (London, 1853), I, 29.

²⁹ S. Purchas, *op. cit.*, IX, 511.

³⁰ Barnardine de Escalante, *Account of the Empire of China*, tr. by John Frampton between 1577 and 1596, in J. Osborne, *Collection of Voyages* (London, 1745), II, 38, 42; see also A. Samedo, *History of that Great and Renowned Monarchy of China* (London, 1655), p. 22.

³¹ N. Trigault, *Regni Chinensis Descriptio* (Lugd. Batavorum, 1639), p. 85.

³² *Ibid.*

ing the Chinese were in circulation,³³ but when Heylyn came to describe them, he gave a brief and accurate picture: "The people are for the most part of swart complexion, but more or less, according to their nearness to the heats of the sun; short-nosed, black-eyed, and of very thin beards."³⁴

What struck observers most about this heathen country was its virtue. Baudier in France gave utterance to this feeling most eloquently:

That which hath drawn me to the texture of this work, are the rare and eminent qualities of the spirits of China, who, in the particular world wherein they are inclosed, furnish wise counsels, and true maxims to reform the disorders of other nations. . . . The wise and judicious reader may see, in the relation of China, two powers always working, by the which that great and vast kingdom is happily governed; that is, the assured recompense for virtue, and the infallible punishment of vice. . . .³⁵

Englishmen were not quick to catch such unbounded enthusiasm. Yet as early as 1588, Robert Parke, the translator of Gonzalez de Mendoza's *History*, made admiring comments in the course of his translation. "The Chinos most upright in all their judgments and in execution of justice." About the public charities he says, "I would the like were with us": and again, "A mirror for us to look upon."³⁶ John Webb, the young contemporary of Milton says:

As for moral philosophy, their ancestors had these five cardinal virtues, Piety, Justice, Policy, Prudence, Fidelity, in such high esteem, as that all their most ancient and fundamental laws were framed out of them.

And to bring it up to date to his own time, he adds, "neither are they in less account amongst them at this day, than in times of old."³⁷

³³ For instance, according to Baudier, the Chinese purposely "crush and make flat the noses of their children when they are born; so as all the Chinese have flat noses; which makes a stranger in their country seem to have a different countenance." M. Baudier, *History of the Court of the King of China* [1st ed. Paris, 1631] (London, 1745), p. 4.

³⁴ Heylyn, *op. cit.*, III, 207.

³⁵ M. Baudier, *op. cit.*, author's preface.

³⁶ J. Gonzalez de Mendoza, *op. cit.*, I, 66, 68; II, 153.

³⁷ John Webb, *An Historical Essay, Endeavoring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language* (London, 1669), p. 99.

Conscious of the doubt which his high praises might excite, Alvaro Semedo says:

I do not say they are exempt from vices, proper to all pagans, and indeed to all mortals; but that they esteem those which make profession of virtue; and particularly of some virtues, which are despised by other gentiles; as humility, virginity, chastity. . . .³⁸

There was no difference of opinion regarding the chastity of Chinese women.³⁹ But their filial love impressed foreign observers most strongly. "Truly there is nothing in China, so worthy to be imitated by Christians, as their piety towards their parents, and God having given to this nation such knowledge and inclination to virtue, it is a great pity, that they should only want the foundation of faith."⁴⁰ No wonder the enthusiastic Webb burst into high praise. "Thus for fatherly affection and filial piety," he says, "China may give example to all nations of the world."⁴¹

Artillery, printing, and the compass, which revolutionized the military and civil life of the western world, were known in China long before they became known to the west.⁴² Silk and China-ware were products which spread the name of this newly discovered country far and wide. But the most wonderful object was their wagons driven by wind and sails,⁴³ referred to more than once by Jonson and Milton.

We have surveyed the favorable side of this picture of the Chinese that was laid before the eyes of the Renaissance readers. On the other hand, it must have been rather shocking to a foreigner to see the empty coffins kept at the homes of old people, ready for use when they were called to the other world.⁴⁴ It must have been amusing to see mature, intelligent people falling victims to quacks and alchemists, who claimed to have the secret recipe of long life

³⁸ Semedo, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

³⁹ J. Gonzalez de Mendoza, *op. cit.*, II, 293; M. Baudier, *op. cit.*, p. 8; Bartholomé Leonardo de Argensola, *The Discovery and Conquest of the Molucco and Philippine Islands* (Madrid, 1609), p. 196; Manuel de Faria e Sousa, *The Portuguese Asia* (London, 1695), II, 465, 467-468, III, 195; Heylyn, *op. cit.*, III, 207.

⁴⁰ Semedo, *op. cit.*, p. 83; Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁴¹ Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁴² J. Gonzalez de Mendoza, *op. cit.*, I, 129-131; II, 37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I, 32.

⁴⁴ Semedo, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

for those that would patronize them.⁴⁵ Women led a retired and quiet indoor life, partly from their chaste and discreet desire of retirement, partly from their foot-binding, a cruel practice which they followed out of a desire to have tiny, pretty feet.⁴⁶

Contradictory to the virtues mentioned above, the Chinese were also reported in early accounts to be very proud and conceited. Escalante says:

They make so great account of their own wisdom, after the manner of the Greeks, that they say that they are those which have two eyes, and the people of Europe but one; and that all the rest of other nations are stark blind.⁴⁷

Several other grave charges were laid against the Chinese, among which were cruelty in whipping criminals, selling children into apprenticeship, and suicide.⁴⁸ Gluttony was another: "the Chinese," says Perera, "are the greatest eaters in all the world, they do feed upon all things, especially on pork, the fatter that is, unto them the less loathsome." Frogs, dogs, cats, snakes and many other unclean meats, were eaten with pleasure.⁴⁹ Far more objectionable was the practice of sodomy, "the greatest fault we do find in them," according to Perera.⁵⁰ Lack of courage and even cowardice were also generally charged to the Chinese, particularly to the soldiers.⁵¹ Yet Escalante maintained the contrary:

The people of China [he says] are very prompt of wit, and stout in all the feats that doth appertain to the wars. And although they are stout men, and of great courage for to abide and to give battle to the enemy, yet they always use strange policies, and all kind of fire-works in their battles, both by sea and land. . . .⁵²

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24; N. Trigault, *op. cit.*, pp. 227, 231; Faria e Sousa, *op. cit.*, II, 464.

⁴⁶ Escalante, *op. cit.*, p. 42; Semedo, *op. cit.*, p. 31; N. Trigault, *op. cit.*, p. 86; Faria e Sousa, *op. cit.*, II, 467.

⁴⁷ Escalante, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁴⁸ Purchas, *op. cit.*, XII, 455; Gonzalez de Mendoza, *op. cit.*, I, 144-147.

⁴⁹ Richard Eden (tr.), *The History of Travayle in the West and East Indies* (London, 1577), pp. 239-241. Escalante, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43; John Gerard, *Herbal* (London, 1636), p. 1617.

⁵⁰ Eden, *op. cit.*, p. 242; Purchas, *op. cit.*, XI, 562; M. Martini, *Sinicae Historiae* (1658), p. 288.

⁵¹ Gonzalez de Mendoza, *op. cit.*, I, 85; Semedo, *op. cit.*, p. 231; Baudier, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁵² Escalante, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

Escalante also made one statement which seemed to support Steevens's charge that the Chinese were noted for their alleged thievish activities. "And by reason," he says, "there are many people, and there is little alms given, the poor people do give themselves to steal."⁵³ Moreover, Perera mentioned the severe punishment given to thieves in China.⁵⁴ It would seem, with these two statements before us, as though Steevens's case was well-founded at least in this respect. We may here, however, point out the fact that Escalante's statement was in conflict with the generally admired public and private charities of the Chinese, well known through the account of Perera,⁵⁵ published first in Eden's translation and later by both Hakluyt and Purchas, and also the account of Gonzalez de Mendoza.⁵⁶ It is also very doubtful whether Frampton's translation of Escalante was published early enough to reach Shakespeare's eyes before he wrote *Merry Wives*. Besides the reference to China dishes, Shakespeare made no mention of China or the Chinese. What is more interesting, is the fact that neither Hakluyt nor Purchas seemed to be aware of Escalante's book or Frampton's translation. Also, strictly speaking, to have poor people compelled to steal, is not the same as to say that "the Chinese . . . are said to be the most dexterous of all the nimble-fingered tribe."

The widely accepted charge, that could most plausibly be taken to support the "sharper" side of Steevens's theory, was to the effect that Chinese merchants employed very sharp practices in their business dealings. They adulterated the silver, which was the currency of the country, to "increase it with the mixture," and caused the indignant Friar Gaspar da Cruz to say, "The merchants are commonly false and liars."⁵⁷ After discussing the unsatisfactory business relations of the Chinese and Portuguese merchants, "through the fault of both nations," Semedo goes on to say:

Nevertheless, the nature of the people, and inclination of the whole nation (Chinese), as well as those who sell, as those who buy, is much inclined to guile and deceit, which they put in execution with admirable subtlety.⁵⁸

⁵³ Escalante, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁵⁴ Gonzalez de Mendoza, *op. cit.*, I, lxiii.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, lxxv.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 66-68.

⁵⁷ Purchas, *op. cit.*, XI, 508.

⁵⁸ Semedo, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Yet for two reasons, Steevens's theory is still untenable. In the first place, this opinion about the Chinese was caused only by the sharp practices of unscrupulous merchants who had business with the Portuguese in Macao. Semedo himself testified to this fact:

But returning to our Chinese [says he] they are affable, courteous, and of good conversation; and therefore in this particular our men are not to be believed, which dwell only in Macao and Canton, because they are there, as it were, in a continual war, by reason of the daily contracts and contentions, which are betwixt the servants of the Portugueses and Chinese; . . . But in the other provinces, and innermost parts of the kingdom, as we have said, they converse with us with so much respect and decorum, that in all meetings with them they give us the first place, upon no other pretence, but that we are strangers, and as they call us, guests of a remote climate. In cases of necessity, (which we have many times proved) they will not fail to lend us what we ask, although it be more worth than the pawns we give them; and that without interest.⁵⁹

There was no question of a universal dishonesty throughout China. Discoursing on the business practices of Kiamsi, now called Kiangsi, Semedo says:

the merchandise is all put in one store house, and is received by weight into another with so much fidelity, that it is not necessary the owner (of the goods) should be present because upon all accidents the hosts (of the store house) are bound to make good whatsoever is wanting.⁶⁰

On the strength of this, Faria e Sousa says, "In matters of trust they are most faithful, but in selling the cunningest of cheats."⁶¹

In the second place, the sharp practices of unscrupulous merchants is, as a matter of fact, different from living upon one's wits as Nym does in *Merry Wives*, which was Steevens's idea of a sharper. I am afraid, in those days merchants everywhere loved to put a "fast one" over on their clients; and we cannot after all accept this as an evidence for Steevens's charge. It now remains for us to examine the various ways in which the term Cathayan was used in Shakespeare's days.

(III)

The discrepancy between the Cathayans of the *Twelfth Night* and the *Merry Wives* set scholars to a search for analogies, and the following have been discovered at different times:

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁶¹ Faria e Sousa, *op. cit.*, II, 464.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

1555. William Watreman, *Fardle of Facions*, II, chap. 8.
 1577. Richard Eden, *History of Travayle* (London, 1577, p. 260).
 1604-15 (?). Beaumont and Fletcher, *Woman's Prize* (*Works*, ed. Dyce, London, 1843, vol. VII, p. 193).
 1611. Thomas Dekker, *Match Me In London* (*Dramatic Works*, ed. Pearson, London, 1873, vol. IV, p. 156).
 1605-30 (?). T. Dekker, *Honest Whore* (*Dramatic Works*, II, p. 143).
 1649. Sir William D'Avenant, *Love and Honour* (ed. Tupper, Boston, 1909, p. 30).

Several of these references offer no difficulty. The statement in Eden's *History*, based upon Perera's account, that "the Cataian Kyng is woont to graunt free accesse unto . . . forreiners," needs no comment. In the *Woman's Prize*, Maria says to Petruchio:

And when I hear not from you once a quarter,
 I'll wish you in the Indies or Cataia:
 Those are the climes must make you.

The implication is also clear. Cathay is the distant land of exile, where the solitude of a lonely traveller is sufficient to make him homesick and desirous of seeking consolation in letter-writing. The store-keeper in Dekker's *Match Me In London* says, "The musk, upon my word, Sir, is perfect Cathayne." This is no doubt a reference to the musk produced in Cathay.⁶²

But when, in the *Honest Whorse*, the "brave" Matheo says:

Shallow Knight, poor Squire Tinacheo; Ile make a wild Cataine of forty such: hang him, he's an asse, he's always sober; ⁶³

another shade of meaning appears beside the geographical one. The note in the 1873 edition of Dekker's *Works* is worthless:

forty such shallow knights, etc. would go to the composition of a dexterous thief. See the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, act II, sc. 1. . . . A Cataian came to signify a sharper, because the people of Cataia (China) were famous for their thieving.

This merely is a case of being misled by Steevens.

Whether Matheo thought it would take forty shallow knights and poor squires to make a Cathayan, or that he desired to, or thought he could, make a Cathayan out of each of the forty knights, the meaning of the disputed term is fairly clear, and is

⁶² *Marco Polo*, I, chap. lii; II, chap. xxxvii and xxxviii.

⁶³ Thomas Dekker, *The Honest Whore*, Part II, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Pearson (London, 1873), II, 143.

certainly not sharper or thief. Lodovico, whom Matheo is anxious, it seems, to turn into a Cathayan, happens to be a busybody knight, who has been thoughtful enough to present him with a new "suite of sattin"⁶⁴ which Matheo is in sore need of and therefore very glad to accept. Before he talks of making "a wild Cataine of forty such," he remarks:

It's a generous fellow,—but—pox on him—we whose pericranions are the very limbecks and stillitories of good wit, and flie hie, must drive liquor out of stale gaping oyster. . . .

Lodovico has a serious fault, in Matheo's eyes; "hang him, he's an asse, he's always sober."⁶⁵ That being the case, it will be easy to gauge Matheo's Cathayan. He wants to reform Lodovico, and make a Cathayan out of him. In order to become that, Lodovico must first not be an ass, and not always sober. Also he must be wild. But I don't think Matheo will want him to be less generous; though he may wish him less shallow. Such is Matheo's or Dekker's Cathayan, a character too well-to-do and generous to be a thief or sharper.

D'Avenant gave us another Cathayan. In his *Love and Honour*, Vasco says of Prince Leonell:

Hang him, bold Cataian, he indites finely;
And will live as well by sending short epistles,
Or by sad whisper at your gamester's elbow
When the great by is drawn, as any bashful
Gallant of them all.⁶⁶

To say, in this case, that D'Avenant meant by Cathayan a sharper, as the editor of the Belles Lettres *Love and Honour* did,⁶⁷ is also absurd. Furness justly pointed out that the "Cataian" was "a valiant high-souled Prince of Parma," though held captive at that time. The fact is, Prince Leonell of Parma happens to be the man destined to marry in the end Evandra, "heire of Millaine" and heroine of the play. What Vasco means is a person whom he does not like, a handsome and by others well-liked gentleman, whose refinement and attraction for others have earned his jealousy and resentment.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 137.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 143.

⁶⁶ Sir William D'Avenant, *Love and Honour*, II, i, 24-28, ed. Tupper (Boston, 1909), p. 30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

Only the reference in Watreman's *Fardle of Facions* is left. This was brought up by H. C. Hart, editor of the English Arden edition of *Merry Wives*. It reads as follows:

Aitone the Arminian writeth of them in his storie. . . . Their wittnesse is greate, but their boastinge greater . . . thei are all voyde of the true knowledge which is in Jesus Christe. . . . Thei knowe not what we meane, when we speake of faithfulnessse or trustinesse . . . thei have in all handi-worckes a passing subтите of witte. . . . A cowardly people and very fearful of death.⁶⁸

This condemnation can be summarized under five headings: (1) wittnesse, (2) boastinge, being very conceited, (3) non-Christian, (4) could not understand the "faithfulnessse or trustinesse" of the Christians, (5) cowardice. Of these five, only the fourth one can have any bearing, when subjoined as a foot-note to prove Steevens's definition.

Because the sentence is placed not far from that relating to Christianity, it is suspected that both "faithfulnessse" and "trustinesse" may refer to the faith of a Christian in the scheme of Salvation. This conjecture is strengthened by the *New English Dictionary*, which glosses "trustiness" by "trustfulness, faith, confidence." But as an alternative for this, "fidelity, faithfulness, loyalty, trustworthiness" are also given. In either case, it is difficult to read into this a charge that the Cathayans were sharpers or thieves.

Another tantalizing suggestion was made by Steevens,⁶⁹ who quoted from the *Pedler's Prophecy* (1594):

. . . in the east part of Inde,
Through seas and floods, they work all thievish.

He could have made it very plausible indeed if he realized that at least part of China or Cathay had been called Upper India.⁷⁰ But the evidence is spurious, because Steevens purposely omitted an important word in the quotation, which when accurately given, should read:

Pedler (to Traveller):
By my troth you say very truth,
The truth with your owne mouth is verified,

⁶⁸ *Merry Wives* (London, 1904), p. 73.

⁶⁹ *Merry Wives*, ed. Malone and Boswell, p. 66.

⁷⁰ By Friar Odoric, see Hakluyt, *op. cit.*, IV, 422.

The most of your sort are idle from their youth,
 Yea, so I say, because they are never well occupied,
 As touching that in a booke of latin of late I did find,
 Which doth the maner of Travellers publish,
 The quicke Marriner saith, that travellers in the East part of Inde,
 Through seas and flouds they worke all theevisish.⁷¹

That in this case, the pedler was only abusing the traveller, and that there is no hint in it at the "tricks of the Cataians," as Steevens would have us believe, is clear. It is now necessary only to point out the fact that these two words, Cathay and Cathayan, as used in the places mentioned before, have nothing in common with one another, except that they all pertain to the distant country of Cathay. In no case, be it reiterated once more, is the definiton "sharper, or thief" applicable.

In like manner, the two references from Shakespeare differ radically from each other. The intoxicated Sir Toby says in the *Twelfth Night*:

My lady's a Cataian; we are politicians; Malvolio's a Peg-a-Ramsey, and
 'Three merry men be we' . . .⁷²

This is no doubt a drunkard's fooling; and "Cataians," "politicians," and "Peg-a-Ramsey" are probably not terms of respect. But certainly, intoxicated as Toby might be, he could not very well call his wealthy niece a sharper or thief. Furness seemed to have hit upon the right solution for this Cathayan, when he said that Toby

was in that stage of drunkenness when mere sounds connects words having no relationship to each other; he had heard Maria accuse the whole party of 'caterwauling,' and straightway the sequence was clear to him that if he was a 'caterwauler,' his niece was a 'Cataian.'

H. C. Hart reached the same solution three years later.⁷³ Whether we are to accept this explanation or to make a new one of our own, it remains clear that none of the glosses that fit the Cathayans discussed before, will fit this one.

The wicked Cathayan appeared in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Nym informs Page that Falstaff is after Mrs. Page. After the informer has left, Page comments:

⁷¹ *Pedler's Prophecy* (Oxford, 1914), ll. 676-683.

⁷² *Twelfth Night*, II, iii.

⁷³ *Merry Wives* (London, 1904), p. 73.

I will not believe such a Cataian, though the priest o' the town commended him for a true man.⁷⁴

In a note to this passage, the learned Steevens says:

It is remarkable that in Shakespeare, this expression—a true man—is always put in opposition (as it is in this instance) to—a thief. So in *Henry IV*, part I. ‘. . . now the thieves have bound the true man.’⁷⁵

Our answer is that “always” should be cut out from Steevens’ statement. Among the instances of true man listed in Bartlett’s *Concordance*, four, not counting the one under discussion, are opposed, not to thieves, but to traitor, villain, rogue, and robber. Not denying that the opposite of a true man is, and can only be, a disreputable person, we refuse to admit that it is always a thief.

Steevens cited D’Avenant’s *Love and Honour* and *The Pedler’s Prophecy* as evidence. The worthlessness of the mangled quotation from *The Pedler’s Prophecy* has been discussed before. Whether he had not read D’Avenant carefully or could not understand his writing, we need only say that Cathayan does not there stand for a “sharper or thief.” In explaining the Cathayan of the *Merry Wives*, Steevens made a bold guess. Judging from the fact that Nym, for whom Page employs the term, is in fact a disreputable rogue, and probably a pickpocket and thief, we are not certain that the guess was wrong. But he caused mischief when he tried with his doubtful quotation to show that in those days “Cathayan” always stood for thief or sharper. In their edition of *Twelfth Night* (1930), Sir Arthur Quiller Couch and J. Dover Wilson were led to say, “Cataian, a cheat, lit. an inhabitant of Cathay. The Elizabethans had news of the wiles of ‘the heathen Chinees’ before Bret Harte.”⁷⁶ In the case of “Cathayan,” it is important to remember that in the “literary” works, no two references agree in their connotation beside the geographical meaning, while in travel and geographical books, no charge can be found that they were universally thieves and sharpers.

Steevens knew that the Cathay of Marco Polo was identical with China. He did not know that to Shakespeare and his contem-

⁷⁴ *Merry Wives*, II, i.

⁷⁵ *Merry Wives*, ed. Malone and Boswell, p. 66.

⁷⁶ *Twelfth Night*, ed. Quiller Couch and J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge, 1930), p. 182. Practically the same thing appears in their edition of *Merry Wives*. See *Merry Wives* (Cambridge, 1921), p. 140.

poraries, Cathay was a different country situated to the north of China.⁷⁷ In 1588, Robert Parke wrote:

It is now above five and thirty years passed . . . since that young, sacred, and prudent prince, King Edward the Sixt of happie memorie, went about the discoverie of Cathaia and China. . . .⁷⁸

In those days, they were regarded as two countries. The discovery that the two are really the different names of the same country was made in 1603, when Benedict Goes (1561-1607), a Portuguese Jesuit, following the overland route to Cathay, found himself in China. But it was quite a while before the news reached England; Shakespeare was dead when the discovery was reported, probably for the first time in England, in 1617.⁷⁹ Steevens's definition was built upon the assumption that between 1598 and 1601, or slightly later, the identity of China and Cathay was known. For that reason, it is unsound and therefore untenable.

In a note to the term "Trojan" in *Love's Labor's Lost*, Dyce long ago remarked that it is "a cant term used in various meanings, sometimes as a term of reproach, sometimes as a commendation."⁸⁰ "Cathayan" apparently is another such term. Besides its geographical meaning, it did not seem to have a fixed and definite connotation; and it acquired a new one every time it was used for a specific purpose. It had been employed to indicate an upright and honorable character as well as a disreputable person.

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⁷⁷ See the maps of the world made in the sixteenth century. The identity of China and Cathay was an interesting question to Milton; it will be discussed in a paper to be published soon.

⁷⁸ J. Gonzalez de Mendoza, *op. cit.*, I, Dedicatory Letter.

⁷⁹ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1611-1618*, p. 427. The entry reads: "Oct. 1617. The *Commentaries* of Matteo Riccio, a Jesuit, printed, amongst which are reports of the travels of Benedictus Goesius in the Mogul's country, China, etc. in 1603."

⁸⁰ *Love's Labor's Lost*, ed. Furness (Philadelphia, 1904), V, ii, 706, 746. Also quoted by John Phin, in *The Shakespeare Cyclopaedia and New Glossary* (New York, 1902), p. 342.