The Smuggling of Onions and Men in China

By EDMUND W. SCHEDLER

My conception of smuggling, as carried on today, has been largely formed by the advertisements of the Jewelers Protective Association which appear in the Sunday magazine section of the New York *Times*. I have learned that a friend of mine purchases a diamond solitaire for his wife in Amsterdam on their second honeymoon and the proud wife takes it into the United States with the stone coyly turned to the palm of her hand, I can receive personally a good portion of the penalties imposed upon my friends should I anonymously "squeal" on them to the U. S. customs authorities, or to the vigilant Jewelers Association. And then we have all read about the false heels on the shoes, the hollow umbrella handle, the false bottom in the trunk, and the tricky books.

Continuous smuggling goes on today in all of the China ports. It involves new commodities and is accepted as a common everyday practice by participants, observers, and customs officials alike. Everything from human beings to onions is smuggled, probably more baskets of onions than human beings.

Last May, my wife and I made the round trip out of Hongkong on the Douglas liner *Hai Yang* to Swatow, Amoy and Foochow, calling at the same ports on the return, a nine-day trip in all. We were greatly interested, and at times amused, at the flagrant smuggling which any casual visitor can observe, if he keeps his eyes open for it.

Our first contact with the age old practice was in Hongkong. The boat was delayed an hour in sailing while the compradore staff searched the boat from prow to stern, between decks and amongst the cargo for third-class passengers who were hiding aboard without tickets or means to pay for one. We did not see any of the would-be-passengers, but were told that several were aboard. We found that in each port, after all the documents were in order, the first officer and part of the Chinese staff, scoured below decks for elusive non-paying passengers, before the ship sailed. This was part of the regular routine.

We arrived outside Swatow early the following morning, but were not in the Han River harbor until well after sun-up, as the Chinese authorities will not let ships enter except during specified hours. The ship worked its way up the channel, passing swarms of fishing boats, each boat propelled by two or more men, working one oar from a standing position on the extreme edge of the boat. They pushed the oars and seemed, at a distance, to resemble Egyptian bas-reliefs. We were met near the anchorage by many sampans, both freight and passenger, as the cargo and passengers are all lightered ashore, some 200 yards away. I noticed that on deck there were several lengths of hose connected to the water pumps, the same hose that the sailors use for washing down the decks.

Presently I saw the reason. A huge empty sampan with about 20 chattering, gesticulating Chinese women, tried to come alongside. The bosun repeatedly warned them to stay off, but they optimistically edged in. As a last measure, the hoses were brought into play and a shower bath was given to the oncoming Amazons who retreated, adequately and forcefully berating the sailors in good Swatow.

I turned to the ship's officer for an explanation.

"Those are women smugglers who are trying to get aboard and smuggle out sugar. They have some friends in the crew or among the passengers, and if you could watch them closely, you would see that each has a vest underneath her jacket. This vest has many pockets and she will manage to fill each pocket with loose sugar. If those 20 women got aboard, in a half hour's time you would see them going ashore the "fattest" Chinese women in Swatow. Their "fat" would be sugar.

A 100% duty on sugar explains this illegal enterprise.

Sure enough, late that afternoon, I saw two Chinese women get off the ship on to a passenger sampan from the gangway. One of them flung open her outer jacket to adjust an inner garment, which was one of the vests the ship's officer had told me about. The pockets were swollen with sugar. The bulging garment reminded one of those close fitting cork life saving jackets.

I was told that there is a considerable amount of smuggling of sugar in the package form and in small sacks by the sampans meeting ships outside of the harbor. They estimate that if they start with three sampans and can land a cargo of two out of the three, having only one sampan confiscated, that the expedition shows a nice profit.

Returning to the ship after strolling around Swatow, we had to walk the length of the customs pier, to reach the tender. Midway down the pier, we came on to a group of Chinese surrounding a uniformed official, his two assistants and a very voluble would-be-ship's passenger. One did not need to understand Chinese to follow the scenario. The passenger had been caught with several hundred silver dollars in his possession, wrapped in rolls of about 40 dollars each in old newspapers. The Customs official in his peremptory search had discovered the bumps on his person, made him dig up the silver, which is not exportable as there is an embargo on it. The passenger was doing a great deal of talking to free himself but was not having much success so we passed on to the tender leaving one smuggler in the coils of the law.

The price of silver varies between any two towns. An Amoy dollar and a Hongkong dollar have different values. Normally, a Swatow and a Canton dollar have the same value, and the Amoy and the Foochow dollar have the same value. The number of copper cents of "small money", payable for one dollar "big money", varies from town to town, and is the cause of much actual interchange of copper cents. While we were in Amoy, the copper cents in Canton were very cheap, the cheapest in years and the newsboys, bootblacks, and roadside vendors were having a very great difficulty in making a living as their medium was the copper cent. Foodstuffs were high, cents were cheap. In Amoy the copper cent was more valuable as a result and the smart merchants were smuggling copper cents out of Canton, taking them in to Amoy, and there buying Amoy dollars "big money". I did not see the actual smuggling of copper cents but the Chinese ashore told me that it was a common coastwise custom.

The harbor of Amoy is a narrow channel between two islands, Amoy and Ku Lang Su, the latter being the foreign concession and the home of many wealthy Chinese. This channel is very deep, some 75 feet, and has a 23 feet rise and fall of the tide. One company, Butterfield & Swires, has an accommodation for ships to tie up alongside, all other ships tie up out in the stream to buoys, and all freight and passengers are sampanned ashore.

While we were watching, the stevedores unload structural iron for the new water front, we saw a passenger sampan slip up alongside the cargo sampan, hook on a mooring rope and then float idly. Presently one of the ship's mess attendants glided out of the opening in the side of the ship from which the cargo was being unloaded and furtively made his way to the sampan, carrying several small packages under his arm. These were quickly concealed in a secret compartment of the sampan. Five minutes later the same incident was repeated, and we stood there for 20 minutes watching this attendant smuggle cube sugar, Jacob's crackers, cigarettes, and other tinned commodities to the sampan man. I took several feet of movie film of this daylight violation of the law.

"Pigeon Cargo"

The most amusing occurrence of the trip was in the Pagoda Anchorage of the Min River, where all sea going vessels accept and discharge Foochow cargo. There is an import as well as an export tax on most products of China. The Foochow exporter must have his bill of lading approved by the customs office in Foochow before it can be cleared, and the sampan carrying the cargo is then sealed. The large freight sampans make a 12-mile journey downstream and on arrival at the Pagoda Anchorage, the sampans are unsealed and the cargo placed aboard the ship, the customs official checking it against the approved bill of lading.

A part of our cargo consisted of 50 baskets of onions, bound for Amoy. The Chinese Maritime Customs officer, a white Russian, on checking the cargo discovered that instead of 50 baskets, there were 60 baskets of onions, and to add insult-to the injury, two jars of lacquer had been shipped in with the onions. All of which brought an export tax and "seizure fee" of $125 Foochow on the head of the luckless shipper. The shipper tried to compromise with $50, but the customs officer stood pat. He wanted all of his money or the onions and lacquer were going ashore. There was much argument, much walking back and forth on the ship, then the customs launch moved forward from the gangway to the forward hatch. Presently one jar of lacquer was snubbed over the side, dropping the last two feet with a resounding thump into the customs tender. The tender stood the thump but the lacquer jar didn't and shortly red lacquer was streaming over the bottom of the tender. The customs sailors decided to unload onions next, as the lacquer was too much of a job.

Noticing the lacquered bottom of the tender, the white Russian decided to preserve his nice clean tender, overboard he went and steamed back to shore for a large sampan. Twenty minutes later he was back with the sampan and more stevedores. All this time the ship's officers were standing by ready to sail, everyone had said their goodbyes, and it was getting hotter and hotter on the river.

When the customs tender returned, the Foochow merchant had been able to scrape together 75 dollars more from the passengers and was able to satisfy the demand of the customs officer whom he paid, and his several baskets of onions and the half empty jar of lacquer came up over the side and into the ship.

The ship's officers were philosophical about "pigeon cargo", as they called it. They knew and expected a certain amount of cargo to be carried not listed on the ship's papers and free of freight charges. Their worry was to allow the ship to carry only enough "pigeon cargo" to keep the crew happy and at the same time, allow the owners to make a profit. After years of experience, that seemed to be the happy medium to take in dealing with freight smugglers and the crew.

On the return trip to Amoy, the chief officer made a fine catch of 11 Chinese trying to beat their way to Hongkong. He managed to get the 11 on deck with the aid of the Sikh guards, but getting them over the side and down the gangway and off the ship was another problem. Some of the "dead heads" would lie on the floor and try to hold on to his feet begging him for mercy and free passage. Others offered supplications on their knees. Several held on to the gangway rails and withstood all pushing until the Sikh rapped their knuckles with his stick.

The Chief Officer seemed to bear no malice towards them, taking the whole proceeding as a matter of course and part of his day's work. He told me that they had to be very careful and not hurt any of the stowaways or let them fall into the sea, or the ship would be in for a lot of trouble.

I asked him if they could prosecute them in Hongkong for beating their passage. He said yes, the stowaways would probably get three weeks hard labor, but somebody from the ship would have to spend several days in court and that would cost more than the punishment was worth.

(Please turn to page 15, col. 3)

Japan Seeks More Trade with Philippines

TVT Photo

Recent Delegation of Japanese Peers to Manila

Front row, left to right:—Kischichiro Oka, Katsutaron Inabata, Dr. Yasushi Hijikata, Masanosuke Kato, Viscount Kiko Okochi, and Shintaro Kumetu. *Back row, left to right*:—Tobukei Tanaka, Baron Yoshishisa Saki, Baron Masatane Inada, Jiro Kobayashi, Mr. Inabata, Jr., and Mr. Oka, Jr.

Chairman of the delegation of Japanese peers who visited the islands late in June and early in July was Dr. Yasushi Hijikata. Following is a portion of an interview with Dr. Hijikata from the Manila Daily *Bulletin* of July 6:

"Any trade agreement that may be entered into between Japan and the Philippines must be in accord with existing treaties between Japan and the United States and must have the sanction of the United States," declared Dr. Yasushi Hijikata, chairman of the delegation of Japanese peers who left Manila yesterday afternoon.

Dr. Hijikata gave a special interview a few hours prior to the departure of the delegation, which left on the Dollar liner *President Jackson* for Hongkong. The ship sailed at 3 p. m. A number of prominent persons in the city, including Gregorio Nieva, secretary of the Philippine legislative trade commission that visited Japan last April, and several local Japanese residents, went to Pier 7 to bid the party goodbye. From Hongkong the delegation will go to Japan direct on a Japanese steamer.

In the course of the interview, Dr. Hijikata pointed out the great latent and potential resources of the Philippines. He said for many years yet to come this country will remain agricultural. He visualized the tremendous possibilities for development. For this purpose, he said the Philippines needs capital and labor.

"It would be advisable," he declared, "if corporations jointly capitalized by Filipinos, Americans and Japanese could be formed for investment here and for the development of the vast resources of the country. As to labor, Japan can furnish all that the Islands may need. It is for this reason that Japan is encouraging the emigration of her people to the Philippines.

"With the development of the agricultural industries of the Islands, there is no doubt that the greater portion of their products can be easily absorbed by Japan. Our industries in the empire are in great need of raw products, and these can be supplied by the Philippines. Thus will the two countries be mutually benefited."

Among the products that Dr. Hijikata believes are greatly needed in Japan are mineral products, lumber, hemp and tobacco. He said that, according to information furnished him, the Philippines is rich in mineral resources. Greater effort should be exerted to develop and utilize them, he said.

Smuggling...

(Continued from page 13)

The average Chinese has no inclination to pay customs duty because he sees no direct return for himself from the money so paid. And for that he can hardly be blamed. For centuries their public funds have been misappropriated, squandered and converted for personal uses. The money paid into the public coffers has been a donation to some overlord. While this situation is not true today of the modern coastwise cities, it is going to take much time to educate the people to take a cooperative and sympathetic view towards the necessity of meeting legitimate tax payments. A good portion of the customs tax now collected goes to the maintenance of light houses, ships for taking care of the light houses, and for the marking and charting of coastwise waters. Neither are most of the Chinese in favor of the taxes on foodstuffs, tobacco and the necessities of life. It hits them close to home. Such taxes are as unpopular as the Volstead Act was in the United States and are evaded as frequently as Americans evaded the Volstead Act, with even more reason for doing so.