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An Analysis of Voyaging in Ships of the East India Company from 1750 – 1833

From 1750-1833, the East India Company underwent a tumultuous transformation. Shortly after 1750, the Company changed, from being solely a commercial organisation, to an imperial agency that conquered and ruled large swathes of India. This eventually moved the equilibrium of the British Empire from the west to the east. In 83 brief years, the Company gained imperial power, but ultimately lost commerce, although these two factors were not directly linked, and its monopolistic trade was lost with India and China in 1813 and 1833 respectively.

This dissertation analyses the effects of this metamorphosis on the Indiamen's voyages, and shows that China was the increasingly dominant trade route, although India remained important until 1830. Non-trade factors that affected the routes, such as the power struggles between the European empires, are considered in addition. The changing types of passengers on the Indiaman, and the need to drastically increase the numbers of European soldiers voyaging east to strengthen Indian military weaknesses are studied. Further examination is given to other parts of British society that sailed to India to re-create a facsimile of home. The experiences of travelling east are analysed, and show that this improved with the introduction of formal agencies, larger ships with cheaper and better accommodation, and more entertainment. Shorter voyages, better water, and the prevention of scurvy's contributions to this amelioration are also evaluated. Finally, the Indiamen's design variations are studied as to how they met the pressures of trade and passenger carrying. Snodgrass' innovations and supervision in improving safety and health are discussed, as is the investigation by the Company into the vessels' design faults.

This study is important as it shows a clear link between imperial and maritime history, and the synergistic effects that British imperial expansion and the Company's maritime world had on each other.